

FOREWORD

Hi there! I'm so glad you picked up this sample book! My name is Matt and I am an independent Australian author. Like you, I also love this game that we all play. That's me in all the gear on the next page. I thought in order to help grow the sport and to get more people interested in it that I could combine my two main hobbies into the one project. That's why this sample is here, wherever you are in the world. Whether it's paintball, airsoft or whatever other action sport you're playing, this is something to show tell your friends and family about. We have legitimate media and passionate people behind projects out there in the real world, all working to grow the sport.

I'm hoping this journey that Connor goes on can expose new people to the sport and potentially even get them involved. As we all know, these games that we play are not only awesome in their own right, but are also an amazing social experience too. Most of the community is awesome, and I'd love to turn this into a community project. Throughout this sample and the full book you will see NXL pro player chapter breaks along with a few of my other favourite people within the community give a short message about their why or an inspirational quote they live by. In the full book there will also be layouts that I have created as well as other little featurettes to give the new people to our sport a real taste of what it looks like. It is my goal to make this book a full paintball experience, one that I'm hoping can remind us all of why we play and the joy that it brings us.

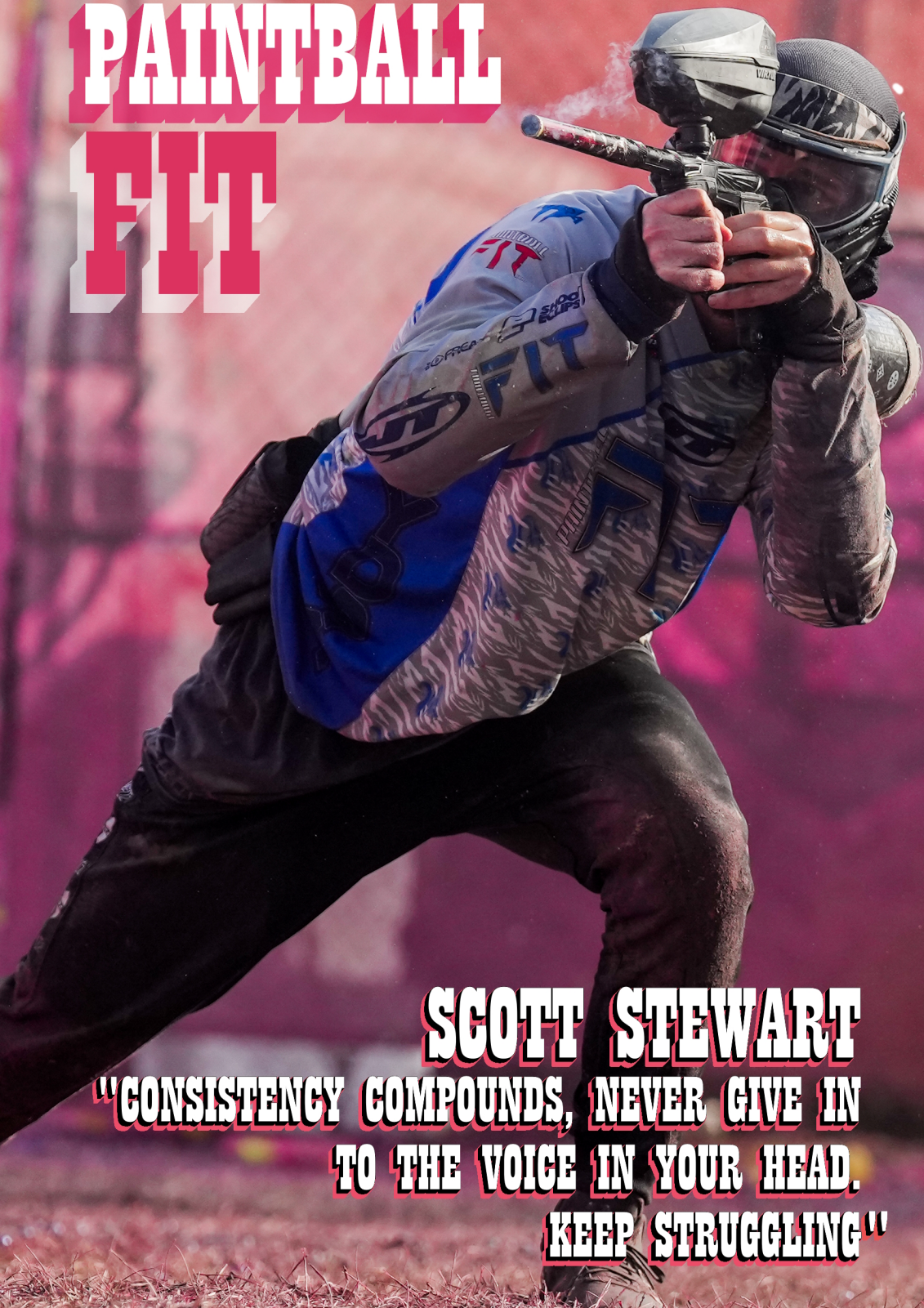
Lastly, if you are interested at all in helping this project get off the ground,

please flick through to the last page of the book for more information! There is a QR code with a link to my linktree where you can also check out all of my other works. Should this book go well, I already have plans to turn it into a trilogy of awesomeness and something that everyone in our community can enjoy! Please note none of the content is finalised yet and what you are reading is subject to change. More than open to suggestions and feedback if you are wanting to help out.

Print media in paintball is back! Happy reading!



PAINBALL FIT



SCOTT STEWART

**"CONSISTENCY COMPOUNDS, NEVER GIVE IN
TO THE VOICE IN YOUR HEAD.**

KEEP STRUGGLING"

CHAPTER ONE

WAR

As soon as the whistle sounded, all hell broke loose. The twenty-nine people that had been standing right beside me were now suddenly gone. They scattered in every direction, looking for the first piece of cover they could find. Apparently, they knew what they were doing. I should've listened better at the briefing. The few acquaintances I had made at the start of the day were split evenly amongst the two teams of thirty people, and I didn't see any of them.

I followed one teammate from the start gate, but I couldn't remember who was on which team. It didn't help that we all looked the same. Each one of us was dressed in matching camouflage fatigues. The only way I could tell anyone apart was by their hair, and even that was a struggle. As I ran forwards amongst the chaos, a war cry went up from everyone around me.

While I was still looking for cover, people started to shout in the distance. I couldn't see the opposing team yet, but I knew they weren't far away. My friends and I had walked the length of the paintball field when we'd arrived. So, I knew it only went back so far, a short distance into the woods.

Any second now I was expecting to see people with red bands around their paintball markers coming my way. It would be the only definitive way to tell friend from foe; not something I was looking forward to. That was something I did remember from the pre-game briefing. But there was so much I didn't know. What if I got too close and seriously hurt someone?

Then what? But that was the least of my worries. I was still running around out in the open like an idiot.

As I continued to run forward, I heard the faint popping sound of what had to be paintball guns in front of me. I could see the enemy team, making their way out of the tree line. Most of them were in the same camouflaged fatigues that I wore, in the same rental mask that I was wearing. I could see the red bands.

Already, some of my team was shooting back at them. Some of the guys looked like cartel members, running forward with their guns extended in front of their bodies, hoping they weren't going to get hit. Maybe they thought a force field would protect them? I looked back to find some had slowed down, opting to stop behind the cover nearby with their guns raised. I focused on a cluster of trees in front of me as I saw the first paintballs flying towards me.

They zinged past my head, and all I could do was hit the dirt. I landed awkwardly; my left arm caught under my body. I flung it out and pushed myself forward, crawling to safety. Even on the ground, I could still hear some of the balls that flew overhead, but I was safe. Sort of. I made it to the trees and froze. Maybe there was someone nearby who could help me. When I looked around, however, I realized I was trapped. If I lifted my head, I would be dead and out of the game. "Nice job, Connor," I muttered to myself.

There was nobody on my team near me, and I had no idea how close the enemy team was. I didn't have many options. Honestly, I didn't even know what my options were. All I knew was I had to do something. I pulled myself up onto my knees and peered around the tree slowly. More paintballs zinged towards me, but they were flying straight past me. I lowered myself back down and looked over my shoulder. To my relief, one of my teammates was headed straight for me.

The man looked epic. I couldn't see his hair, and his face was covered by his blacked-out lens. He was dressed in all purple and red, the jersey tucked

into his pants. It made a seamless pattern, splotches of crimson and violet all over him. He was running unbelievably fast while paintballs whizzed past him. He looked completely unfazed. He just covered his head with his arm as he moved. A shot connected with his forearm; it ricocheted, flying off somewhere into the distance. Why didn't it burst?

The paintball player lunged forward, both of his arms in front of him. He looked like Superman, his jet black hair flying out behind him. For a moment, the blink of an eye, all his limbs were off the ground as he flew towards me. Clearly, I should've paid more attention during that briefing. He crashed into the ground beside me, and, without skipping a beat, he pulled himself behind the trees onto his knees. In the same motion, he was firing, using two fingers to rhythmically strum the trigger back and forth.

His gun sounded like nothing I had ever heard before, a constant popping that sounded like a machine gun in the background of someone's video game. The gun kept getting faster the more he fired it. I wasn't even sure how that was possible. Within a matter of seconds, he was reloading, putting another pod on the ground beside him.

I had a total of two pods on my back, ones half the size that this man had. He looked like he was carrying well over half a dozen. I thought I'd brought enough paintballs, but if this guy's ammo reserves were any indication, I was severely under prepared. The red and purple player dropped another pod onto the ground after reloading and started shooting again with both of his hands on the gun. His head swivelled around, and he lowered his gun, ducking behind the tree with me. For the first time since he dove in here with me, he stopped firing.

"Hey, why aren't you shooting?"

That was an excellent question. I'd just been sitting there, stupefied as I watched this man's gunplay. I looked down at the gun in my hands. All the lights were on. I was just scared and didn't want to get my head taken off. Unlike this guy, who had just run into open fire and taken shots like they

were nothing. He hadn't even gone out because they'd bounced off him. Clearly, he knew what he was doing.

I wanted to explain this was my first time here, but all I said was, "I don't know."

"Don't want to get shot?" the guy asked. He laughed behind his goggles. I couldn't even make out the lower part of his face because the bottom of it was obscured by a black grill face plate. "Then what the hell are you doing playing paintball?"

"I thought it would be fun," I said. It was a better answer than saying 'I don't know' again.

"It is fun. When you're shooting the bad guys."

Who the hell was this guy? He was sitting in front of me on his knees, with half of his body almost out in the open as I cowered behind the tree. He was pressed up against the tree in front of him, still making himself as small a target as possible. I could hear the paintballs hitting every object around me and could make out the spray that they were leaving behind when they split open on a surface.

"I haven't shot anyone yet," I said. Yikes. It sounded worse saying it out loud than when I'd thought it in my head.

Again, however, my fearless teammate was unfazed. He just shook his head and said, "Well, then how the hell are we going to get out of this? They've got that fort, and they've got us trapped here. We're only going to win if you start shooting people. Do you want to win?"

"Yeah," I said. "Of course I want to win."

"Cool," the guy said. "There's only one way we do it then. You need to get up and shoot your gun. Paintballs aren't bullets. It's not like they're going to kill you. If you get hit, just rub it and the pain will go away. Besides, it's the ones that get you when you're sitting behind a bunker that hurt the most. If you're going out there expecting to get hit it won't hurt anywhere near as bad."

"I'm not worried about the pain," I said. But that was good to know.

The guy turned his tinted lenses towards me. “So, what it is then? You can admit you’re scared.”

I looked down at the ground, but the guy could see my eyes through the clear lenses that were on my rental mask. He reached out and tapped my shoulder, making me look up at him again.

“Come on dude, it’s only a game. We’re meant to be having fun. Let’s go and kick some ass! I’ve got you!”

“Well, I’m not going out there without a plan,” I said. “As soon as we get up, we’re going to get shot to pieces.”

The guy turned his head to the side and laughed. “Yeah, you’re right. But do you see that next tree?”

He raised his hand and pointed to another tree only a few feet away. This guy was crazy. Could I get there? Probably, but I’d be shot half a dozen times before I’d even make the first step. Still, I nodded slowly. “Yeah, what about it? I can’t get there.”

“Yeah, you can,” the guy said. “When I tell you to go, you go. You’re going to have to trust me.”

“Trust you?” I asked.

“Yep, it’s called teamwork. Are you ready?”

I took a deep breath in and out. Who was I to judge? I’d never done this before, and there was no going back now. I’d signed up for this. It was time to do what had to be done. I nodded at this fearless paintball commando, and I saw a white flash underneath his mask. Perhaps he was smiling? I sat up slowly, preparing myself for whenever he gave me the command to go. “Just tell me when.”

“Alright,” he said. He pulled his body up into a full-fledged kneeling position and lifted his gun over the tree in front of him. “Go, go, go!”

Hearing the words being yelled at that volume made me jump out of my skin. The guy’s gun started to fire again, sounding just as fast as it had the first time. With a target presenting itself to the people in the fort, I could hear paintballs being fired back at where I had been hiding. I launched out

of my hiding spot and bolted across the open ground to the next tree. I had a feeling that paintballs were flying at me, but I needed to make it to the tree.

I ran faster than I ever had before, even though the next tree was almost within arm's reach. As I stopped, my legs fell out from underneath me, and I ended up sliding in on my ass. My hand hit the gravel underneath me, and I grunted in pain, feeling the skin tear from my palm.

What kind of idiot doesn't get gloves when they have a full body package available? Me, obviously. Still shaking my head at my own stupidity, I rubbed my hand against the camouflaged pants and brought it back up to my gun. I raised the firearm again but heard more shots bouncing off the new piece of cover.

I looked back over my shoulder at my teammate who was now standing and shooting. He dodged a paintball coming at him and ducked back down underneath the tree. The guy looked at me and waved his hand, trying to draw my attention.

"What are you doing? You've got the best bit of cover on this park that isn't that fort! We've got to get airspace and then move again," he said.

"Again?" I asked. "We have to move again?"

"Well, what would you rather do? Sit here taking potshots at the fort or get around behind them and shoot them in the side of the head?"

He had a point. From here, I couldn't see the fort without getting my head taken off. If there was a way that we could take it without either of us dying, it would be best. There were a few more scattered trees between where I sat and the fort, but there wasn't a whole lot of cover. I saw two more stops out in the open that I'd need to make to get in the entrance to the fort.

I poked my head out from behind my cover, just enough to see half a dozen muzzles all pointing in the guy's direction. Every eye and every barrel were trained on him. There was no way he'd be able to survive

the barrage of paintballs flying towards him. But he still was crouching, looking confident like nobody could touch him.

“Are you going to go or what?” he asked.

I nodded and readied myself again. It was do or die. The guy yelled at me again, and I scrambled forwards. Instantly, one of the enemy players spotted me and turned his gun towards me. The gap between this cover and the next was longer than the first had been, and I felt a paintball hit me on the ribs. I took another step and made it to safety. I looked down at my ribs, pulling my shirt up to see if there was any paint on me. Nope! So far so good.

But why did it hurt so much? I rubbed the pain, but the guy was already shouting at me again.

“I’ve got you covered! Don’t stop! Get to the next one!”

“But I got hit!” I said.

“Did it break on you?” he asked. “I didn’t see anything come off you.”

I looked down again and double checked to see if I could make out any paint smears on my body. Where I had been hit was still hurting, aching a little, but it was going away. I ran my hand over where I’d been shot and looked at it, frowning. There was no paint on me, so I shook my head.

“Alright good, let’s get a move on. Game is only going to last for so long! Move again and then get inside the fort! They won’t be expecting you!”

The guy’s gun started firing off again as he poked his head out from behind the cover. He had more empty pods laid down at his feet, a small mound of paintballs growing around his boots, every time he reloaded. I still hadn’t even used one. Maybe I should have tried to help him? But he was telling me to move.

I took a deep breath and hurled myself at the next cluster of trees. Paintballs soared over my head, but this time none managed to hit me. I stumbled behind the next tree and, curious, I peered out to look at the fort that loomed above me. I could see the entrance; it was as far away as my teammate was from me. There was no excuse for me not to breach the

structure. He'd gotten me this far. I'd only been shot once. Surely, he'd get me the rest of the way?

I readied myself again as the guy continued shooting. He was loading his last pod into his gun. Now was my time to go. I darted out from the tree and barrelled towards the door. My feet were heavy, but they carried me the dozen feet that I needed to go. I heard more paintballs whiz past me as I made it inside.

The fort was nothing special. It was constructed entirely of wood, nothing more solid than the average fence panelling. It wouldn't stop a real bullet, but for paintballs it was fine. I couldn't tell what the original color of the wood was. It had been splattered more times than I could count with paintballs, and I was about to add to it. The fort was a T-shape, with one entryway and a room off either side of it. I needed to clear the side that was facing my team first.

I held the gun out in front of my face, my fingers hovering over the trigger, the loader obscuring half of my vision. If my teammate was so good at this, I might as well try to imitate him. I could hear the enemy's guns firing up ahead as I turned the corner. There they were. Eight in total, all of them with their backs to me. Some of the camouflage clad rental players like me were giggling, thinking they were hilarious. I was about to show them what was what.

With the gun up to my eye level and my fingers over the trigger, I fired. Paintballs ripped through the air, straight into their backs. I sprayed the entire bunker, littering everyone with paint, making sure they all got their fair share. At this close of a range, there was no missing. I just had to make sure I got everyone.

The cries of pain that I could hear over the sound of the gun firing were all the validation I needed. As I continued to spray the enemy team, I could see paintballs still being fired into the fort from outside. Finally, my team was doing something. Unless it was just the paintball commando outside. Which was totally possible. As they were hit, the enemy players turned one

by one, raising their hands and calling out that they had been shot. The firestorm was over in seconds, and I lowered my gun once I saw that I'd gotten everyone in the room. It was exhilarating. The fact that I'd been able to march in here and unload on all of them, without any resistance, was just mind boggling. And I was grinning.

"What the hell man! You didn't need to shoot us that much," one red-headed kid said. He only came up to my shoulder and had his hand over his back as he started walking out of the fort.

An older guy with only a few tufts of hair on his head was rubbing his back, but unlike the kids, he was laughing. He wore a grey and black camouflage jersey with CRBN emblazoned in white across his chest and down his arms. He held his hand out in a closed fist, looking for a fist bump. I returned the gesture, and he walked out of the bunker, still laughing. "Good stuff, dude."

Even though the fort was emptying out, the game wasn't over. I followed behind the players exiting the fort, only to see the red and purple player coming up towards the door. He darted inside the fort and lowered his gun.

"Hey, nice work, man," he said. "There were a lot of them in there. Guess you finally shot someone, huh?"

"Yeah," I said. "Felt good."

"Awesome. So, just because we've got the fort, it doesn't mean the game is over," the guy said.

"I figured. What do we do now?" I asked.

He laughed again. "Good to know you paid attention to the briefing."

I could hear his sarcasm. He was right, though. Obviously, I had *not* paid very good attention.

"Well, now that we've taken the fort, we've got to defend it."

"Are you serious?" I asked. "Until when?"

"Until the timer runs out. Hope you've got a few more pods stashed somewhere, because otherwise I'm out of paint."

“I’ve got *a* pod,” I said.

I’d paid for it, but like hell was I going to use it in this game. It was better off going to someone that had the experience and composure to get the job done. It would have been wasted with me. I handed the pod to him, and he took it. He flicked open the lid on it, that oh so satisfying pop ringing out in the fort. He closed the lid again and slid it into his pod pack.

The guy laughed again. “Well, that’ll have to do. Hope you’re ready to shoot some more people. Keep your head low and look out the window. Let me know if there’s anyone coming.”

“Why? What are you going to do?” I asked.

If he could have winked at me, I’m sure he would have. “You need to hit your target with your first ball. Just make sure I don’t get shot through the window. I’ll take care of the rest. The name’s Leo, by the way. What’s yours?”

A full-page action shot of paintball player Fabian Berggren. He is wearing a black and grey camouflage jersey with the number 43, black pants with 'KINGDOM' branding, and a leopard-print visor. He is holding a paintball marker and a leopard-print helmet. The background is a blurred green field with colorful paintballs scattered on the ground.

**JOY
DIVISION**

FABIAN BERGGREN

**"I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT LUCK,
BUT THE HARDER I TRAIN,
THE LUCKIER I GET."**

CHAPTER TWO

BUNKERED DOWN

“Connor,” I said.

Leo nodded. “Connor. Got it. Watch me forget that in a few minutes.”

Now that I knew the name of my newfound friend, I felt a lot more confident. I wouldn’t just be yelling random things at him to get his attention. What I was concerned about now was what exactly he meant by defend the fort. With the windows on both sides of the structure, it wouldn’t be easy to keep secure. We could get shot from either way. I mean, at least we’d made it in here. Hopefully our teammates would join us soon. However, considering the amount of time we’d spent here already, it didn’t seem likely.

Leo took up position near the main door, looking to the outside on one knee. He now held the pod that I’d given him in his right hand and his gun in the left. He looked comfortable, like it was something he’d done a thousand times before. Leo didn’t even turn his head. “You’ve got to let me know when they’re coming!”

“Right!” I didn’t want to be the reason we died.

I crawled across the floor and poked my head up through the window, that was no higher than my chest. I hoped that nobody outside spotted me. As I looked out at the battlefield, I could see figures moving through the tree line. There were more enemy players coming towards us, and I didn’t want to risk exposing our position prematurely. I could see the eight players

that I'd shot still walking back to respawn, but it would be a few minutes before they got back here. Hopefully by then the whistle would go.

Leo was silent, turning his head every so often to gauge what I was seeing. There was no noise outside the fort, but that didn't mean someone wasn't lurking. I saw movement out of the corner of my eye, and I snapped my head over to look. It was definitely a player. I heard Leo's gun fire a single shot, then it fell silent again.

"Kill one," Leo said.

"What?" I asked.

"Kill one. It's a call-out to let you know how many I've shot. Should only be another twenty something to go."

"Right. Do you reckon you're going to get them all?" I asked.

"Probably not, but we'll see," Leo said. "They've got a couple of old ballers on the squad. It's nothing I can't handle. Just let me know when you see someone. Communication will keep us alive out here. You can be as good at gunfighting as the best of them, but if you can't talk, you're going to die."

"Ok," I said.

I reverted my eyes back to peeping over the bottom of the window. There were plenty of players moving through the woods on the far side of the field, around to where I had seen the pond. Luckily, it seemed like a lot of them were avoiding us, opting to go around the fort. It was probably something that I should have done when I stormed the fort. Then I noticed a small group of players coming towards the fort. I wanted to put my gun up and start shooting, but I didn't have the paint for it.

What if Leo needed more? What if he got shot? Then I'd be stuck here with nothing. It was a no-win situation.

"Hey, Leo. We got company. Couple of people coming this way," I said.

"Couple of people?" Leo asked. "How many?"

Of course he wanted specifics. I checked again. "Just four."

“Just four?” Leo repeated. I couldn’t see underneath his mask, but from his voice, Leo sounded panicked. “Only four! Bloody hell. What, do you want me to take the whole team on by myself?”

“Can you?” I asked.

“No, I’m not that good.” Leo started to laugh. “I’m going to need some help.”

“So, what do you want me to do?” I asked. I had no idea what was going on. We were low on paint without any help in sight. “Shoot a couple?”

“Yes! Shoot a couple,” Leo said. “Take some heat off me.”

“Alright!”

Feeling full of confidence, I almost stood up, exposing my entire torso and head. The group heading towards the fort spotted me and brought their guns around, aiming straight for me. I fired off half a dozen shots before I ducked back down again. Paint exploded above my head on the wall, only inches from where my head had just been. That definitely wasn’t something I wanted connecting with my face. I didn’t see if any of my shots had hit anyone, but I didn’t have long to wonder.

“Here they come! Keep watching that window! If I get shot in the back, it’s your fault, Connor!”

“Tell me something I don’t know already,” I said.

“Fleas can jump three-hundred and fifty times their body length,” Leo said. He was inherently calm under pressure.

Still, after that comment, I glanced his direction. “Fleas?”

“Yeah. Fleas.” He casually shrugged, but otherwise remained still.

“Anything else I don’t already know?”

“About fleas?”

“That wasn’t what I had in mind.”

Leo laughed. “You asked, didn’t you?”

I narrowed my eyes at him before returning them to the field in front of us. “Yeah, but I was being sarcastic.”

“Shh! Shh! Quiet,” Leo said. “Only tell me if you see something.”

There was silence in the fort for a few seconds; the only sounds that reached my ears were far away. A few seconds later, I could hear boots pounding on the dirt outside. There were definitely more than just a couple of pairs. They all sounded heavy. Leo's gun started to sound off, one shot at a time. Sometimes he double shot, but he was getting close to running out. Meanwhile, I still hadn't fired a shot.

"Hit!"

"Hit!"

"Ouch! Hit!"

The opposing players' cries rang out around the fort, some of them a lot closer than I would have liked. I started looking for another target. An older player was making his way up the field in a weird half crab looking crouch walk. He carried a paintball gun that looked just like a real rifle, except this one had a gas tank hanging off the bottom of the grip. He was decked out in some specialized camo, with insignias and logos hanging off him. If he was trying to be stealthy, he wasn't doing a very good job of it.

I raised my gun and fired. The first shot missed him, but the man was too far out in the open to be able to hide. The next three shots hit him, each one of them breaking. Three small puffs of yellow paint spread over his once pristine fatigues. The man looked down at his chest and gave up instantly. He immediately raised his hand high in the air for everyone to see.

"Hit!"

I smiled underneath my mask and turned to see Leo pressed tighter against the wall than he had any right to be. The first pod that I had given him was empty, the green shell open against the dirt floor of the fort. Leo darted back towards me, his knees scraping on the floor of the fort. He extended his hand towards my belt, reaching for my last remaining pod.

"Give me the pod. We've got more coming in," he said.

"I can see that."

"How many have you shot?" Leo asked.

“Just the one guy, but I can shoot more,” I said.

Leo nodded. “Go on. I don’t know if I can hold too many more off! I’ll need that pod, though.”

I saw no reason to argue with him. If I wanted to get out of this in one piece, Leo was my best bet. I slid the pod out of my pack and handed it back to him, my eyes peeled in search of someone else to shoot. A new player had emerged, just where the old man had been. This one was a lot quicker, and he was dressed like Leo. He looked a lot more athletic and was making good progress in storming up to the fort. Instead of a red and purple visage, this player wore green and blue, with random patterns and splotches all over him. The lens in his mask glinted in the sun, a prism hue reflecting back at me.

I raised my gun before he spotted me, and I took the shot. The gun hummed to life as my fingers caught the trigger. I couldn’t keep count of the number of shots that I fired and cut off the volley before I’d even seen one ball hit the player. I ducked as I saw several coming back towards me; they splattered harmlessly over my head.

However, something solid hit the back of my head, and I raised my hand to rub it. It wasn’t as hard as the shot into my ribs had been, but as I looked at my fingers, I saw paint in my hand, with a little bit of shell. It hadn’t broken on me, but this part of the shell had still hit me. Ricochets didn’t count, did they?

I didn’t want to ask Leo. He was still in the middle of a gunfight. Instead, I stood up again and saw that the player in green and blue was heading back towards his respawn point with his hand on his lowered head. His gun was down, pointing towards the ground. I ducked back behind the relative safety of the fort and watched as Leo kept moving ever so slightly on his knees. He continued shooting one or two balls at a time, and it didn’t take long before I heard another hit call coming from outside.

Leo looked down at his gun, and I heard him swear under his breath. He smacked the top of his loader and shot at the wall. The gun responded, blurring to life once again.

The whistle sounded overhead, filling my ears. I breathed a sigh of relief and slumped down off my knees. The game was over, and nobody would be coming after us anymore. Leo stood up at last from his crouching position and I heard one, if not both of his knee's crack. He looked down at his arm. I followed his eyes to where he was looking and saw a round yellow circle on his forearm.

"Did you cheat?" I asked.

"Ah, that's unlucky then," Leo said. "Guess I got hit. Well good thing the game is over. We should go out and reload. That was fun. Don't you reckon?"

"Yeah." I nodded and went to take my mask off. "Never thought I'd be a one-man wrecking crew on my own."

Leo's hand shot out to stop me from removing it. "You really didn't listen to that pre-game briefing, did you?"

"Well, no," I said.

"Never take your goggles off," Leo warned. "Even when the game has ended. Do you want to lose an eye? Wait until we're out in the safe zone."

"Oh really?" Connor asked.

"Yeah, wait until we're in the pits. The field is considered live until it's declared otherwise," Leo said. "Just have some patience. Come on, let's go." He picked up the pods that were scattered at his feet and handed them to me before walking out of the fort. I followed Leo, and we headed down the path we had taken to it.

Coming from this way, and not under the insane amounts of fire, it looked completely different. Paintballs and pods littered the ground where he had first dived over to join me. He picked them all up, slotting them back into his pod pack. I had no pods to contribute, but he handed me back the

single pod that I had given him as well. Once he was done collecting his gear, we started for the safe zone again.

As Leo and I neared the pits, I saw that everyone who had just been out on the field was exiting through the thin green mesh that separated the paintball field from the safety area. The netting made it safe for onlookers to observe the games without the risk of getting pelted with paintballs. Already, most of the players had exited the field, taking off their gear to cool down. Honestly, it wasn't overly hot in the sun, but wearing all the protective gear made me feel like I was trapped in a suit of sweat.

As Leo and I stepped through the mesh, he pulled a small barrel cover from one of the many pockets in his pants. He looked at me and brandished his gun in the air as he put the barrel cover on it. Once the cover was in place, there was a short, sharp hiss as he pulled a lever on his gun.

"What was that?" I asked.

"Just degassing it," Leo said. "Got to make sure your gun is safe when you get back in here. Don't want to accidentally touch the trigger and blow somebody's eyeball out."

I flinched at the visual that instantly popped into my head. "Have you ever seen that happen?"

"No, but I don't want to get kicked out of a field," Leo said with a shrug. "First rule of paintball: Safety first. We look out for each other here. We've got a great community once you get to know us."

I nodded and looked down at my marker. One of the park staff had given it to me fully set up. I didn't know what to do with it now. I held it up, trying to see how to de-gas my gun.

Leo reached over and started to unscrew one of the plugs that was near the air bottle. Once he'd loosened it enough, my gun also hissed. "There you go," Leo said.

"Thanks for that." I looked at the marker in my hands as it stopped hissing. "Is there anything else I should know about it?"

“Yeah.” Leo pointed at the different parts on my gun. “I’d probably turn your hopper and gun off as well. Will save battery power, and you definitely won’t be shooting anything until we go back out on the field. Man, you really didn’t listen, did you?”

“I tried,” I said. “This is all new to me.”

“That’s alright, we’ve all been there before.” Leo chuckled and shook his head gently. “I remember my first time. You’ll be a pro by the end of the day.”

I laughed at him as I removed my mask, lifting the strap up over my head. “You’re hilarious.”

I still couldn’t read Leo’s face underneath his mask. “Yeah, I know.”

“Hey, I’m gonna grab some water.” My mouth was parched. All the excitement and running around had me dehydrated. Leo followed me over to the table where I’d set all my things. It was at the back of the safe zone, near the cafeteria. The field owner’s wife, whose name I had promptly forgotten, was still working the canteen. She was handing out sweets and water to a group of players that were lining up in front of the counter.

The safe zone was bustling with activity. All of the round wooden tables were occupied. Some were simply claimed by guns and gear bags waiting for their owners to return. Others were shared by people sitting and chatting away. People who had observed the game mingled with the players, all happily talking together. I noticed there were some older guys too. Guys who had probably been doing this since they were my age, evidenced by how well acquainted they were with how everything worked.

Everyone was laughing and smiling, instantly amiable off the field. Above the canteen was a sign that stretched over the counter that read ‘Eastern Ranges Paintball Park.’ I picked up my metal thermal water bottle and unscrewed the lid as Leo placed his gun and mask down on the table.

For the first time, I saw his face. He looked a little like me, though probably a bit older. Maybe about twenty-five. He’d already gone through the awkward end of puberty phase that I was still going through at age

eighteen. Leo's dark hair fell around his neck like a mane that complemented his dark green eyes. He had a broad nose that would have allowed his mask to rest nicely on it.

As for the rest of him, it was hard to tell what was underneath the jersey. With the stunts he had pulled out on the field, he had to be somewhat athletic, despite his bulky appearance. Leo was no taller than me, standing at roughly six feet or just under it.

"You did good out there," Leo said, interrupting my assessment of him. "It's not very often you manage to storm a fort and kill eight people on your first try. Are you sure you've never played before?"

I nodded my response. "Yep, positive. My friend Brandon invited me out for a bit of a birthday party. I thought it'd be fun to come for a shoot."

"Yeah, I thought so. You didn't want to get shot, and you had all the rental gear. But you did pretty good. If you'd listened to the briefing like you listened to my directions out there, you would have done even better. Tell you what, since I think you've got a bit of talent, I want to show you something. Have you ever wanted to try speedball?"

"Speedball? What's that?"

LUCKY 15S

SPENCER TILBURY

**"NO MATTER THE OBSTACLE,
YOU ARE THERE FOR A REASON
.PUSH FOR SUCCESS!"**

CHAPTER THREE

SPEEDBALL

“Oh, you’re in for a treat,” Leo said. “Did you come in through the front entrance?”

“Yeah, I’m parked in the big car park.” I gestured towards it. “Came in with everyone else when they let us in.”

“Then you would have seen that other field setup,” Leo said.

“That was a field? But there was nothing on it when I went past. Just a few old sheds around it,” I said. “Don’t know how you’d be playing paintball with no cover? You’d just run into the guns, wouldn’t you?”

Leo pulled back the sleeve on his jersey and looked at his watch. “I reckon there’s something on it now. Why don’t we go see what’s going on?”

“It sounds to me like you know exactly what’s going on.”

Leo winked at me. “Maybe I do, maybe I don’t. Are you curious?”

“Yeah, of course. You can’t give me that bit of information and tease me like that,” I said. “I want to know more.”

“Are you sure your friends won’t miss you?”

I shrugged and looked around at the pit area. All the other players were happy, giggling and laughing amongst themselves, too busy to notice what I was doing. Yes, I was here for a birthday party with Brandon, but if I had this pro player about to show me something cooler than what we were doing, I wanted to see it. Maybe if I liked it, Brandon would enjoy it as well. For now, I was hanging on Leo’s every word; my curiosity was piqued.

Leo jerked his head over his shoulder. “Come on then, this way.”

“I’ve got to ask, Leo. Why did you want to come over in the bush field if you’ve got your own little section you can play on?”

“I just can’t be bothered setting the field up unless it’s one of our training nights, so I come and get a few rounds in with the punters before I go out and play the real game.”

“Punters?” I asked.

“Casuals, rentals, birthday parties,” Leo said. Seeing the inquisitive look on my face, he held up his hands defensively. “No, not that there’s anything wrong with that, but if you want to play *actual* paintball, I’ll show you where we do it. Coming?”

Leo took off, and I followed him, the gravel of the safe zone crunching underneath my sneakers. Some of the other players turned their heads, curious as to where I was going.

When Brandon noticed me, he ran across the safe zone. “Connor! Connor! Hey, where are you going? We’re just getting started.” He grinned from ear to ear as he caught up to me as his blonde hair, covered in blotches of yellow paint, fell into his eyes. For some reason the rest of his fatigues were clean, apart from the mud that he had accumulated on his knees.

“I’m not going far,” I said. “Leo just wanted to show me something.”

Brandon’s eyes lit up. “Am I invited? It’s my birthday after all.”

“Yeah, come on, kid.” Leo waved at me. “Wouldn’t want anyone to miss out on this.”

The safe zone that we were in was surrounded by the field on both sides. The green mesh fence followed us all the way to the car park as we walked down the gravel pathway. Trees overhung the path, giving the impression that we were somewhere far away – in the middle of a jungle or a forest. Nothing was further from the truth. As we made our way down the path, I could hear the sounds from the nearby highway drifting through the trees.

I’d been past this place many times throughout my life. It was strange that this was the first day in almost eighteen years I’d come here. My favorite

gas station, where Brandon and I used to hang out as kids, was only just down the road.

At last, I could make out the carpark. Usually, I'd be concerned with where my car was parked and what was going on with it, but not today. Instead, I was focused on learning something about this new format of entertainment. Earlier, when we'd arrived, I'd seen the mesh protecting an almost football field sized piece of grass, but there had been nothing on it. The lawn had been mowed to near perfection, not a blade of grass sitting any higher than the rest. Now, as we neared the carpark, I could make out noises that weren't from a car or bike. I could hear people yelling in the distance, and the faint popping of paintball guns.

When we rounded the last bend in the path and the trees cleared, my jaw dropped. It had only been a little over an hour since I'd come in from the car park, and there'd been no hint about what was going to take over the vacant plot of land. At least two dozen more cars had gotten here in the time that I'd arrived to play paintball. Now there had to be at least two dozen people, all dressed similarly to Leo, around this new field.

Players were standing all along the mesh, masks on their heads or in their hands, talking in twos and threes. My eyes were hit with every color under the sun, their jerseys were all different, from the colors to the enlarged numbers on their backs. As we walked across the car park, a group of three players nearby raised their hands when they recognized Leo. They were all varying sizes, and each of them wore a different jersey from the next.

"Hey Leo!"

"Gents, how are we?" Leo asked.

"Good, good," the tallest said. He had a wide grin, and his eyes sparkled in the sunlight. "Who have you got here?"

I stuck out my hand assertively. "Connor, nice to meet you. Thought I'd come see what this was all about. I have no idea what's going on."

"I'm Brandon. I'm in the same boat." He gave a curt nod.

The tallest reached out and took my hand in a firm shake. “I’m Desmond. Nice to meet you both. He pointed with his thumb at the man who was shorter than me, but probably twice my bodyweight. “That’s Jordan.” He motioned to the shortest man in the group. “And that is Bruno. They play on my team, the Spitting Firehawks.”

“Look at you go, Leo,” Jordan said. “Always bringing new players to the sport. Yeah, look, new guy. We’ll get you on for a few spins. The Desolation boys are wanting to go out with the punters for a little while in the bush if you want to jump on.”

“Didn’t we only just start?” Leo asked.

“Yeah, but they want a few spins, and they’ll get some more in this afternoon,” Jordan said. “Why? Have you got somewhere to be, Leo?”

“No, not at all.” He shrugged and looked out at the field with a relaxed sigh.

“Ok, good,” Jordan said. “Sounded to me like you didn’t want to practice with us after last week.”

“Cool it, Jordan,” Desmond said. “This isn’t a team scrim today. This is just a come along and shoot day. Some people are trying it for their first time today.”

“Scrim?” I asked. It was clear these guys had their own jargon for this stuff, and if I had any intention of following along, I figured I needed to understand the language.

“A scrim is usually just friendly matches for training before a comp.” Jordan answered me. “Anyway, you lot can hang out here, but I’m going to go get ready.”

He turned, leaving Bruno and Desmond behind. Desmond just sighed and rolled his shoulders as he watched Jordan walk down beside the field.

“Sorry about him,” Desmond said, turning back to me. “He’s been a bit moody since last weekend.”

Leo laughed loudly. “What? When I spun on him?”

“Yeah, thought you should have copped a major for that?” Desmond said. “Even though he didn’t shoot a ball.”

“He’ll be fine,” Leo said. “He’s whined about more for less. Also, cool jersey, Bruno. You want to tell the new boys what that is?”

Bruno nodded and smiled at Brandon and me. With pride, he held the green and gold jersey off his chest for all to see the massive logo that was emblazoned upon it. It was a blue dragon’s head, depicting the dragon roaring with its mouth open, showing off a mouthful of white fangs. Underneath the dragon was the word *Demolition* in white, bold text.

“Yep, you bet it is. Signed by the one and only Jesse Jones,” Bruno said. He spun around to show off the silver signature next to the massive number seventeen underneath the name.

“No way. How much did it cost you?” Leo asked. “That would have been from oh-eight or oh-nine?”

“Yeah, it definitely was. Chicago oh-eight. Cost me way too much. The girlfriend wasn’t happy, let me tell you.” Bruno laughed deeply. “I slept on the couch that night.”

My brow furrowed as I listened to them, trying to follow what they were saying. They were speaking their own language. Each new thing they said made me want a paintball dictionary I could read through. At least it seemed like they didn’t mind explaining things. So, I asked. “If you’re all on the same team, why aren’t you wearing all the same thing?”

“It’s a casual training day,” Bruno said. “Nobody cares. It’ll only be at comps that we wear the same gear. This way we can show off anything cool or rare we have.”

“Hey, here we go, someone’s coming out,” Leo said, gesturing at the field. “Ah yeah, Desolation.”

I could feel the eyes almost popping out of my head. From across the other side of the field there was movement behind the mesh. Five players, all dressed like Leo and the Spitting Firehawks, walked out onto the field,

guns in hand. They lined up on a short wall at the end of the field. On the side of the field nearest us, another five players did exactly the same thing.

The team that lined up near me all wore and black jerseys and the same type of goggles. I could make out what appeared to be a teeth design on the front of the goggles where Leo's mask had the more open grills. The goggles matched the jerseys, either black or red, for the entire team. The players looked like reapers.

The two players on either end of the line up touched their barrel tips to the edge of the wall and put their heads down. They looked like they were ready to sprint. The three players in the middle of the lineup all stood tall like meerkats trying to see over the bunkers in front of them. It looked like they knew what they were doing, unlike me in the match I'd participated in. These guys each had their barrel tips on the top of the wall, seemingly ready for anything.

"So, what are we looking at here?" I asked. "You told me this was speedball, but I don't know what speedball is. I can see it's a paintball game, but what's the objective?"

"Alright, so this is where we get into the good stuff," Leo said. "I think it's just best if you watch a point rather than me trying to explain it. It's five on five, single elimination."

"Yeah, hopefully someone does something crazy this point," Bruno said. "I want to see Tarven get a three pack."

"Are you on drugs?" Desmond asked. "Tarven hasn't gotten a three pack in months. He blew his knee out and hasn't been the same since."

"We'll see," Bruno said. "He told me he's been training really well. Wants to go hard at the TXBL."

"We all want to go hard at the TXBL." Desmond eyed Bruno. "But you know what? Alright, if you want to bet, I'll take your bet. I'll bet you ten bucks that he doesn't even get one body."

Bruno grinned at his friend and held out his hand. "You're on." Desmond took it, and they shook.

“Oy, shut it you lot,” Leo said. “They’re getting ready. Connor! Pay attention.”

Someone on the field yelled out. “Ten seconds!”

The buzz around the field died out as every eye focused on the field. About ten seconds crept by until a whistle rang out. The field went from a city of statues to a flurry of action, everyone springing into action simultaneously. The two players I’d seen crouched exploded off the ground, running out almost as wide as they possibly could on the field. One of the players who was coming towards me on the lower side of the field didn’t make it.

He flew through the air like Leo had before, diving with his gun and arms outstretched. As soon as he landed, he was stranded too far away from one of the inflatable bunkers. I watched a paintball burst on his pod pack.

One of the onlookers extended his hand, gesturing towards the player that had just been hit. He wore a black and white striped vest over his jersey. “Out!”

The player turned and looked at the referee who had just called him out. He gestured back at his pod pack to get the affirmation from the referee. The referee jerked his thumb backwards, non-verbally telling the player to get off.

Desmond spun and turned, grinning at Bruno. “Didn’t even make it to his primary. You’d better pay up.”

“Yeah, yeah. Whatever,” Bruno said. “I’ll buy your lunch instead.”

While this player, who I deduced was Tarven, had failed to get into his bunker, his other four teammates had succeeded. They were still alive and securely behind theirs. The guns were all firing at different rates, all remaining players hugging their bunkers as tightly as possible. One of them at the very back of the field stood behind a round bunker twice as wide as he was. It towered over him, making him look small. But then he spoke.

“Hey, Logan. We lost Tarven! Hit the snake!” He pointed ahead of him towards a collection of bunkers that ran along the field like a snake.

From here it looked like they were only high enough for someone to crawl behind.

“Yeah, where’s Mikey?” Logan called back.

“Dead!”

Logan, who sat further up the field in a similar looking bunker, ducked his head around the tiny bunker. It looked like he was searching for something, but I couldn’t tell what it was or if he found it. After a moment, he raised his gun. In the next motion, he moved towards the lower side of the field. He flew through the air like his life depended upon it. I could see his fingers moving at a million miles an hour as he pulled a pod from the pack around his waist.

There was too much going on all at once, but at the same time, the game flowed like a beautiful ball of chaos. I couldn’t look away. Logan, the player that had moved out into the snake now stood up with his gun in the air and his right hand on his head. I saw a flash of movement in the cluster of bunkers that Logan had been in. Someone from the enemy team was moving up. The guy at the back was all over it.

“Damien! Watch the gap from snake three! Snake three!”

Damien had been near Tarven when he’d been hit. Hearing the call, Damien turned his gun onto what I could only assume was snake three. What it meant; I had no idea. It could go on the list of terms that Leo would have to explain later.

I watched as Damien stood up in his bunker and started shooting paintballs across the field. They all followed exactly the same trajectory, dropping at the same point. I saw spray flick up off the bunkers and quickly a gun followed it. This time the referee didn’t even need to gesture at the player. He stood up as he copped another few paintballs from Damien all along his body. The player tried to protect himself, turning quickly and wrapping his arm over his chest, but it was no use.

“Oh!” Leo said. “Bonus ball!”

“Yeah, Aiden! Snake out! Gee-one! Gee-one!”

“Yeah! Gee-one!”

Another phrase that I had no idea what it meant. But these guys clearly did. And they were excited about it. The tall player at the back, Aiden, made his move now. He came out from his bunker, darting across the field, looking more agile than he had any right to be. Aiden ducked and slid across the ground, moving sideways on one knee coming out closer towards us. All the while, he watched this side of the field. As he made his next bunker, he stood up out of the slide without missing a step.

How did he do that!?

His gun hadn't stopped firing either. Now that he was standing back up, Aiden started blasting instructions again, his head on a constant swivel.

“Hey Damien, what's the go? What do you see?” Aiden asked.

“Not a whole lot,” Damien said.

“Go for a run,” Aiden said. “Check that dee side. I've got your tape.” Aiden resumed firing, shooting straight down the outside. “Home! Home! Home and snake corner!”

Aiden took a step too far out of his bunker and was caught. I saw paint blast off the front of his loader. Immediately, Aiden threw his head down in disappointment and he stepped off the field slowly, with his hand on his head. Damien turned his head back and saw Aiden walking out. The team of five was now down to just him and he had to do something. Damien moved again, darting up to the next bunker that was a carbon copy of the one that he had been in.

However, almost as soon as he stood up, the other team was alerted to his presence. Already, I could see the nearest player in green and blue moving down the field towards him.

“Chicago! Chicago! Chicago!”

I might not have known much about his game, but even I could see that Damien was fighting a losing battle. He looked inside trying to get a shot on one of the guys shooting him, but as he did so, the run down the outside came. The player in the green and blue stormed past his bunker, his

gun blazing, hitting Damien square in the back half a dozen times. It was violent, messy, and glorious all at the same time. Damien shot up in pain as the green and blue player ran past him, checking the field for anyone else to add to his body count.

He remained vigilant while he waited for his teammates to join him and spun around as they inspected him. When he finished spinning, he touched the top of the wall. The surviving players then turned to walk off the field, pulling covers back onto their barrels.

“So that’s it?” I asked.

“Yup,” Leo said. “One point done and dusted. Have you got any questions?”

“So many,” I admitted. “I don’t even know where to begin.”

“But it’s good, right?” Leo asked.

“Yeah, of course. I’ve never seen anything like it. It seems like you guys take this super seriously.”

“Well, we all want to win, but at the end of the day, as long as you’re getting to shoot your mates and are having fun, that’s what it’s all about,” Leo said. “Do you want to get on the park and have a go?”

“Get on the park?” I asked, pointing at the now vacant field. “Are you serious?”

“Yeah, you came here to play paintball, didn’t you?” Leo asked.

“I mean, I wasn’t entirely ready to get myself into this. I’m more than happy to watch a few more points before I get into it.”

“I’m with Connor,” Brandon said. “This looks so fun, but hard.”

“Alright, it’s your loss,” Leo said. “If you boys don’t have anything on tomorrow, do you want to come to our tryout?”

“Tryout? For who?” Brandon asked.

“My team, the Eastern Death Adders,” Leo said. “We’ve got a couple of spots open and don’t mind taking on new players.”

Brandon raised an eyebrow at me. “I don’t know about you, Connor, but that sounds awesome.”

“Yeah, we could give it a shot,” I said. “But we don’t have any gear.”

“Don’t worry about a thing,” Leo said. “I’ll have you covered. Just make sure you’re here tomorrow night at six.”

AFTERWORD

Hi there, welcome to the end of the free sample! I hope you enjoyed it. If you made it this far, you should definitely pre-order the rest of Pursuit of Glory! As you can imagine a lot of blood, sweat and tears has gone into this, and we're not even at the final publication yet. This is just to give you a taste of what is to come. My goal for this project is to ultimately, reach a new audience for our shooting sports. I'd also love to be able to experience the real mecca of paintball when Pursuit of Glory is set to release, at the NXL world cup. An impossible goal for a little independent Australian author, especially for what would be my first overseas trip. But, we need more media in paintball and more ways to expose people to it.

So naturally with these lofty goals in mind, I am asking for your assistance in turn.

Publishing a book is one thing, but publishing a book where you want to showcase a new community to the broader outside world is even harder. I have a small kickstarter that will run from the end of April until the end of June. Should the kickstarter go well, my dreams can come true and more awesome things will come from this. This not only includes special merchandise for pledgers, but also the availability of things like hardcover editions as well as an AUDIOBOOK.

If it is still active by the time you read this, it would be more than appreciated if you could check out the kickstarter link on this linktree and help me get there. The kickstarter is the best way to **PRE-ORDER** the book, since I haven't had the best experience with Amazon. At this stage I'm also

always looking for more assistance to get this project finalised. If you have any skills in graphic design, editing, or even suggestions for the book, I am all ears. Getting this book written and then being able to experience the paintball mecca through it would be a dream come true and one I've had ever since I got into paintball a few years ago. Any assistance is welcome and any support is truly appreciated.

Lastly, I also just wanted to shout out every player and company, as well as the fields and businesses you are reading this sample at. I have been busy contacting everybody under the sun to send this sample across the world and to get this project off the ground. However, this a marathon, not a sprint and there is a long way to go! If you could post photos of yourself reading this or even a selfie with the cover and tag me, that would be awesome! Believe it or not, sometimes that's all the help an author needs. Exposure, just like our sport. Who doesn't want a paintball best seller? Having a whole bunch of readers knowing and reading about paintball is something that excites me!

Thank you for giving me some of your time with this sample. Please scan this QR code to pre-order or get more information about the project or to contact me on any of my platforms!

