

## Furious fiction July 2021 THE GLENCOE RUN

There he was.

Deerstalker man.

Evil-eyed. Shifty. Mean. Watching.

I loaded two grand's worth of custom bike onto the chair lift in the cool morning air. The ascent to the starting gate would not take long. The machine was designed to carry me down the mountain at crazy speeds, across gravel, river and looping berms - flat strips of land bordering the river – as we mountain bike racers call them. Every sport has its own language.

Deerstalker man had introduced the language of fixing races.

Perhaps he thought I would run. Hardly.

MacDonalds don't run from a fight, especially not in Glencoe.

As the chair lift shoogled me high above the Glen I rehearsed the course in my head. 1.22 kilometres long with a vertical drop of 402 metres. The ground would be loose gravel out of the start gate to catch the amateurs. Loose stone giving way to rocks and boulders down to the first of several bridges over the river and through the trees - not to mention the tree stumps. Never forget the tree stumps. Under the chairlift cables, pedal crazily through the twin fords along the Weasel Track. Vertiginous sharp left, opening up the valley floor a thousand feet beneath my wheels.

I wondered if I could cycle on prosthetics if my feet really were chopped off.

After a tricky sequence of berms and drop offs I would hit flat ground which would be treacherously slick if it rained.

Slick and treacherous. Pretty good description of Deerstalker man as he monologued in the car park behind the pub last night. Simple demand – just lose. To avoid unpleasant consequences, you understand.

Drop in steep, fast, tight turns to an open river crossing; sweet if I hit it right; lethal if I didn't.

Under the cableway with re-assuring insults from fellow competitors ringing out from above. Let them crow. I would be nearly done. They still had to ride. Hit the pedals for the last jump, get the landing right, veer left onto the banked bridge and fling everything that was left in taut legs at the finish.

Later, locking the bike away in my van, Glengarry man approached.

"You looked quick Mr MacDonald."

"Nah, I'll be down two minutes on the winner."

"Isn't that somewhat obvious?" A scolding tone.

"Nope, that's my best time this year."

"Think me stupid Mr MacDonald?" he chided, semaphore arms flapping, "and you a Scottish Champion."

"Ah." I laughed.

"Champion. Actually, the champion is up there now, cycling next. Funny, he is also called MacDonald."

If looks could kill.

"You?" he stuttered.

"No," I interrupted. "I am C. Macdonald, otherwise Colin. He is C. MacDonald, otherwise Callum. No relation. I forgot to mention there were two C. MacDonalds racing. Then again, you didn't ask. Sorry to disappoint. I did your bidding, I lost. You should have checked numbers."

For a moment worry creased his face.

Under pressure. Stomach churning, I climbed behind the wheel and fired up.

Was I worth more trouble?

I hoped not.