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Deadly Foes.

A Short Story by Marcus Binnie.

"To see a man beaten not by a better opponent but by himself is a tragedy." – Cus D'Amato

Chapter 1

Prologue

Ma name is Sonny Main, and ahm the man responsible for ma oan worst loss – ever.

I've fought many fights, ye see ... and am a boxer, didnae think you'd ken me so maybe ask yer local boxing man down the pub about me, he might be able tae tell ye a story or two, let you know how Sonny Main did it in the odd bare knuckle fight, back in the day ... Wits a bare knuckle fight? Illegal shit, basically ... don't ever get intae it if you cannae compete properly. Quasi-legal stuff, but still, you need tae train, need tae diet, need tae put in the hoors in the gym ...

I remember the day well, you see, the day when I knew I had lost my biggest ... ah've never felt pain like it ...

It wis a normal day like others. The day started of well. It was the day ah was told by a doctor at oor local hospital that my second stab would be beginnin to heal up, another story altogether, chum, but ah needed to be in proper condition movin forward for another fight. Once I was finished with the Doc, I made ma way over to ma wee princess's school ...

It was just passed 3:15pm, and I remember checkin ma watch, which I shouldae really have done – or should really be doin, period. When I'm driving – to make sure I was on-time – ah tend to do this. Ah absolutely hated bein late for ma baby girl. She didnae deserve that – not at all.

So I got there oan time! Whew! What a relief, she might be glad to see her auld da, I remembered thinkin at the time.

She jumps intae ma car, wee smiles at the back – must have had a good day too – and we start tae make oor wae back hame. I realise ah've left ma boxing gear back at the gym though. Our local is called Boxing Anonymous. This is usually where ah train ...

'I won't be a minute, baby, daddy's just got tae go back to the gym – very quickly!', I remembered sayin. 'Be home soon, to see mummy', I say as I make a u-turn and head back towards the gym ...

So I get back to the gym, where ah train as a boxer. I shouldnae really have been at the gym that day, considering the enormous gash a had across the left side ae ma upper rib-cage. Yeah, it's not a nice place, the west end, or maybe ahm just an unlucky guy at times. Second time ah've ever got stabbed, believe me it wis a nasty one – thought it couldnae possibly top the first, I wis wrong! Stung like a fucker!! But anyway, I wanted tae go in and get back to it, mostly

we just worked on motion, not actually throwing any punches that day. 'Motion is lotion', Benny would say to me that day.

Ah park outside, and I say, 'Daddy won't be long', before I leave. Be quick. Get home. Cause the missus will have supper out, and ah don't want to be late for that, ah remembered thinkin ...

I get out and I make ma way in ...

About ten, maybe fifteen minutes later ah got back to the car. I had just caught up with a friend ae mine, another boxer, at the gym. And then I also bumped into Benny, the lad that ah pay to train me up. We goat into talkin about diets and stuff, before I finally manage tae get back to ma car, as I said, before I realise--

--the car hadnae been locked before ah left, AND MY BABY GIRL WASNAE THERE TO GREET ME WHEN I WAS BACK.

That wasnae a good day for me, Sonny Main, because that was the day ma baby girl, Geraldine, went missin. The day I realised that and am the author of ma oan pain; the man responsible for ma worst loss, ever, despite the ring, despite it all. The disappearance of ma baby girl ...

A fighter cannae lose more ...

Chapter 2

The Night Before

Sonny stumbled through the door. It was dark outside and the pain that seemed to throb throughout his entire body was almost more than he could bear. He'd lost a fight before, he'd lost a lot of fights but somehow this one seemed different. It felt like this fight was the fight that was going to change his life.

Blood dripped down his face, and drops hit the floor and left a little trail of where he had been and where he was going. He was stumbling partially because it was dark and he couldn't really see where he was going. He was also stumbling partially because his face was so swollen his eyes were nearly swollen shut and he stumbled because he couldn't walk straight without stumbling even if he wanted to. Every muscle in his body hurt. He was sure there was a broken rib or two and his face...well his face was so damaged he wondered if he'd ever look normal again. He also stumbled because he was drunk. He'd thrown back way more whiskey than he should have but he was hoping the alcohol would dull the pain but also would dull the throbbing sense of failure that was taking over every fiber of his being.

He wasn't exactly graceful. He walked into the house and shut the door. He tried the hold the blood from dripping down onto the floor because he knew what was coming. He knew his wife would yell at him and carry on like a mad woman if she saw blood all over the floor. She was always on his case about leaving things a mess and nagged him to clean up after his damn self. He walked over to the icebox and pulled out some packaged flank steak to place on his face and sat down at the kitchen table. He looked around the room and wondered if he'd ever be able to get them out of this dump. The one single light bulb that hung over the table did little to illuminate the room and make it cheery or welcoming at all. It was a dark, and dull and depressing in that room and seemed to mirror exactly how Sonny felt.

He heard his wife in the other room flip off the television and start to walk towards the kitchen. "What in the hell happened to you?" She was much more gruff than she needed to be and frankly he didn't want to talk about it. "I lost." That was all he could manage to say. He so badly wanted her to come back with some type of comforting speech or words of encouragement but 10 years of being married to her- he knew better than to hope for some sort of nurturing or loving response from her. "Of course you did. I'm sure you lost money tonight too. Fucking typical." She started to mumble to herself as she walked over to the kitchen sink and filled the teakettle with water. She continued to clamor around the kitchen, slamming doors and talking to herself under her breath. Sonny was about to say something to her about waking the baby but knew that would put her into a tailspin and cause a reaction that he didn't want any part of.

Sonny felt a twinge deep down and was overcome with sadness. He looked over at his wife who had aged a lot in the years since he'd met her. He watched the way her shoulders slumped over like she was carrying the weight of the world on her back. Her hair was pulled back loosely but small wisps hung down in her eyes. He felt both sad and empty when he looked at her. What had happened to them? At some point they had been in love right? He thought back to when he'd first met her and how beautiful she'd been and how much he loved to watch her laugh. Somehow the years had worn on both of them and now when he looked at her, he almost didn't recognize her. He'd wished that he'd been able to provide for her better. He wished that she wasn't so angry with him all the time. He wished they could go back to when things were different. These thoughts were running through his head as he sat there with the steak on his face, finding himself more and more discouraged as the moments wore on.

"I'll fix it," he said. He knew better than to try and argue with her or explain himself. She pattered around the kitchen and almost ignored what he'd said. She poured two cups of tea and brought it over to the table and set it down. She surveyed the sight before her and he thought he saw her eyes soften a little as she saw how badly his face was bruised and broken. "Here, give it here." She motioned for him to hand her the steak. "You never did know how to properly ice your face". She took the steak from him and walked over and gingerly placed it on his face. She gently started to wipe some of the dried blood out of his hairline as she stood behind him. "Let's see your hands". He held up the swollen and bloody knuckles that were almost three times the size of normal. "Are they broken?" He slowly shook his head, "no just sprained I think". She walked over to the drawer and came back with some tape and bandages and sat down at the table and started to wrap his hands. As she touched the palms of his hands something felt familiar but almost like a stranger at the same time. "We can't have you breaking your hands. We need you able to work". He knew his wife well enough to know that in her own way she was trying to show a little bit of affection and concern for him.

They sat in silence. The only noise in the room was the tick tocking of the old clock that sat over on the counter. He wasn't sure if it was because he was drunk or if it was because his vision

was blurry but in this light as he looked over at Geraldine she almost looked like a shell of the person she used to be. He remembered why he'd married her.

Chapter 3

The Match-Up

In the middle of an underground boxing arena, a presenter stands upright. He's wearing a smart black suit and bow-tie and he's holding a microphone in his right hand. He begins to speak ...

'Oan this night...', he says. 'We will spectate wan ae the grandest ae fights. A magnificent encounter that cannae be denied ... boys and girls', shouts the man, he has a sparky Scottish accent.

The boxing presenter jolts his right hand up and points his finger over to the blue corner in the boxing ring.

'In the blue corner, we have Scotland's maest unprecedented champion. At the peak ae his career, and for six rounds in a ring, Glasgow champion Sonny is easily the maest devastatin boxer in his profession ae the moment! Hunners have gone doon here, and shudder at this man's impressive bouts!', declares the boxing presenter.

'Ye'll need tae keep your wits about ye with this wan. A man that has worked his wae up from poverty in the streets ae Glasgow for some years now--'

Growing up in one of Glasgow's most notorious neighbourhoods was never easy, thought Sonny, as he ties and strings together his right-hand with his blue glove; he's also wearing blue shorts as well. He's currently crouched down while he does this. Sonny is a man in his early 30's, tall and well-built, although balding badly. He has no team or coach around him, which is odd.

'--and e's escaped death too, mare than one time as well. Not many men dare huv a goa in the ring again efter bein chibbed, suppose in the East End ye never dae know which wae to look at times', the presenter goes on.

Sonny stands up to reveal two stab wounds on his left rib-cage.

'When ye escape death mare than once ootside the ring, that's enough to get you back init, ah suppose', chuckles the man. 'Wits a body tae dae? Gies the man in blue, ah warm welcome tonight, people', he cheers on, 'It's oanly Sonny 'The Destroyer' Maaaaaain!' He pauses for a moment to let some of the crowd cheer on The Destroyer, 'The BIG question of the night though, in the red corner, can the unbeaten boxer goa head-tae-toe wi The Karate Man?', queries the boxing presenter, trying to get a response off the crowd. The crowd jerk and roar their responses back at the presenter.

'Put wan thousand oan that wee asian basturd', cries out one of the crowd, in a broad Glaswegian accent. 'The Karate Man better deliver tonight!', cries another, whilst lifting up some kind of paper bet in his left hand.

A small asian man cracks his neck and has his coach and team warm him up. He has tattoos running down his left arm: in Chinese letters the first one spells out 'crow', the second is a letter tattoo that means patience, the third is at the top of his shoulder, it's simply just a ball with the number eight inside it. There is a man next to him translating everything the boxing presenter is saying. The Karate Man, he thought angrily, that's not my real boxing name, this is an insult. He's wearing red gloves and shorts.

'Better known as Eight Ball in Thailand, this young'un has seen it aw inside an enclosed ring. Kung Fu, Karate, Jujitsu, Taekwondo, Kalaripayattu, Savate... you know it, he probably kens it', laughs the presenter.

'I've seen him develop his Savate style of fighting in France', remarks a member of the crowd to another man standing next to him. The man answers back, 'You travel the world doin this sorta hing, yer gonny pick up some new moves, surely...'

'That's why it's the best sport around, mate', answers back the first man, as he opens up a can of lager he's brought in with him. In the background there's a man selling paper betting slips to the public around him behind the boxing ring. 'I have 15/1 on the Karate Man, 22/1 on The Destroyer', shouts out the betting man, 'Any takers, please, men ... women?! Please make yer bets now, betting will not take place once the match begins! Any takers?!', he shouts out to the public, with some clambering to get a good bet on before things get underway.

'Best ae luck to Li 'Eight Ball' Wei tonight ladies and gentleman, if there's anythin mare infamous than Li's fighting prowess, then it's his gambling persona outside the ring. That's right, I wouldnae expect anything less than to see Mr Wei oot later tonight for a wee heavy and a night on the slots', laughs again the presenter. The crowd jeer and laugh. 'Can both fighters, when they're ready, please make their way to the centre of the ring, please?'

'It's about tae start', says a women, excitedly, as she holds hands with a man that's clearly took her there as some kind of date.

'First time seein these sorta fights and ye'll bloody love it', he says to her.

Both fighters make there way to towards the centre of the boxing ring. The boxing presenter puts his microphone down for a moment.

'This match isnae your standard bare knuckle boxing fare, boys. Anything goes, people, you have both been made aware of this. Gloves on, these are there to ensure less damage to your respective opponent, you do have the option to take your gloves off, the Quensberry Rules don't apply here, lads, at any time you so wish.' Li Wei's translator is on standby to translate everything the boxing presenter is saying. Li turns around to hear him and turns back. Both fighters shake their heads to signal they are good with wearing gloves and with everything they are hearing. 'You dae have the option to wear mouth guards and other protective clothing, should ye feel they will help you win the match.' The boxing presenter looks back at Li Wei's coach and staff, the coach shakes his head to imply he won't be needing any more protective clothing; he then looks at Sonny who calmly nods his head, suggesting he is fine to proceed. 'Right, then', he says.

A bell rings.

'That's time, Micky!' Shouts a voice from somewhere above.

The boxing presenter lifts his microphone back up and returns to entertainment duty. 'Round one under way, then... Somebody hawn one ae these guys a bat, cause somebody is aboot tae get battered', he jokes. The crowd start to roar and chant in response to this and get riled up...

They tap gloves, and their match begins ...

Chapter 4 Sonny's Story

I didnae mean to wake her up this late ...

'Is that you, Sonny, ah can heir you cominin downstairs...', she keeps moanin away from upstairs. I cannae help it if ah've been at the gym aw night, workin away with Benny – aw night. It's difficult tae walk intae your house when yer that tired and make no noise whatsoever.

Ah take ma trainers aff, and ah chuck'em over to the side of the room where we keep'em when we get inside. Ah am'nae risking making any mare noise, I think ... I couldnae dae with her comin doon here and baterin ma heid for cominin late.

I can start to hear wee baby Sarah wake up from upstairs anaw now. Fucks sake, ah think, as I tip toe my way intae the kitchen, silently. Ah need tae be quick and quiet, here. Back onto my diet quickly, then up tae bed. As long as ahm able to slowly and quietly dae this in the Kitchen, I might be able to escape dunderheid upstairs getting annoyed and comin doon lookin for a skelpin – anyhin but that.

A boxer's diet? Aye it's basically ah whole foods based diet, I eat; definitely the best diet for any athlete, ah hear, or at least that's what ah've been told time and time again by Benny: legumes, beans whole-grains, vegetables, nuts ... that sort of thing. I've been snackin on fruit aw day and ahm in a dire mood for a steak, but apparently ah cannae do that, did you know you canny eat steak when you're a boxer?

It's got something to do with resetting the body's insulin sensitivity, apparently this will lead to increased endurance and energy, or something like that. To be honest I don't really know the inner workings, I listen to Benny and I get oan with what I'm supposed to do; this is how I put food on this family's table, after all! He is one of the best coaches in town, Benny is, he actually reads books – a lot of books – and writes 'em too! Smart lad! People like that are few, and hard to come by! If yer a boxer, and ye havnae bought and applied what he has to say, yet? Get on it! Cause it works! Not like some of the shite you read online, or listening to some other pothead the gym's took on aff the street, mostly some of the young boys cominin from their HNC in Applied Sports Science, where half of 'em sat about for half the year or went out drinking in the pub, then crammed at the last second to get a C average. They don't know shite, better aff investing my money in a hedge-fund Anything to help give you that edge for a fight and Benny's your man!

I'm just going to make myself a vegan protein burrito, here, before I pass out from fatigue. It's been a hard and long day and the gym and all I want is my bed. I can hear wee baby Sarah start to make more noises from upstairs, however ...

'Just what the fuck do you think you're doing cominin' at this hour, waking up our child, again?', she fucking screams behind me. I thought if I only could have been quieter or quicker, as I stuff what's left of my protein burrito in my belly.

'Wh--', she stops for a second. 'Sonny, no, yer face - again?!', she exclaims, clearly she doesn't remember the days when I used to fight in the amateur leagues, battered and bruised, how I earned my nickname, The Destroyer, after all ...

Me and my wife Geraldine have been together for ten years, married for seven, can you tell? And it's easy to see that my mobility for marriage has slowly decreased over the years, and I think if it wasn't for baby Sarah, we would have lost it years ago ...

'Hun, I needed to...', I said. In order to prepare myself for my upcoming fight. My wife, you see, she knows that I pay Benny down at the gym to manage my upcoming fights. Boxing bouts for me come every three to four months, and are held within an amateur ring up in the city, providing I'm in good health and fit, of course. I'm motivated by money, mostly, I need to keep this house and family going somehow. As some fighters compete for the glory, I tend to focus on prize money, and Benny knows some legitimate promoters up in the city who can sort out what I'm after, usually. See recently, with baby Sarah here, that hasn't been good enough no more. Been thinking about retiring, investing in an education ... something; and I don't want her to grow up in the east end like her dad. No, sir, I don't. Not my baby girl, she deserves more than that ...

See Benny's an east end man, like myself, so I got Benny to ask around, recently and he knows a few guys that were willing to up the ante, he said ...

However, some of these guys are shady fuckers, maybe not the sort I'm used to dealing with, maybe not the type I want my missus finding out about, anyway. He says these guys are lookin' for an underground boxing match, and fellas running it have a cash prize of up to twenty grand, if I was keen? And it was a difficult offer to refuse, you see, cause I would do absolutely anything for my baby girl. Twenty grand, that would get us out of the east end for sure, maybe start my baby Sarah on a new path ... and God knows I would do anything for my baby. Wouldn't ever let anything ever happen to my baby Sarah, I've always said this. And if I could change her current circumstances for the better? Of course I would. So I couldn't refuse when I had the offer, you see. He says, 'go down to your local, The Armitage, and ask the guy serving you for Todd. Tomorrow night. And we'll keep up the training here, mate.' That was last night. So when the missus goes on about my face, yeah, I needed to, hun ... for our baby Sarah, anything goes. And looks like I'll be paying The Armitage a visit tomorrow.

'His name is Tom Nickleson', says Benny ...

Chapter 5

Round One Begins

A bell rings.

Sonny and Li both tap gloves, and their match begins. Sonny is the first one to lay a punch on Li. Right hook. Smack.

Li, blocks effectively.

'You don't have the same physical training I do, Sonny...', taunts Li.

Li goes in for a spinning kick, countering effectively off Sonny's

hook, and hits him pretty hard in the ribs.

'This fight's going to go a lot quicker than you, think... quicker than you can say round two...'

Li goes in for a few jabs in at Sonny, Sonny managing to evade being hit again, although he has taken one pretty hard to the ribs from before ...

'He's going to be talking as much as throwing', comes a voice in the crowd. 'Seen him fight in a league in Koh Phi Phi, will talk any man he goes down with into submission. Easy.'

'Nah, mate', comes another voice, 'Sonny's got this. Guy's a powerhouse. The guy doesn't go down for no one...'

Micky, the presenter, lifts a microphone up from behind the stage, 'Man. That got to have STUNG!'

Sonny tries his best to turn so that his left-side is turned away from Li ...

'The Karate Kid has won eight tournaments in three different countries!', says the presenter. 'Statistically Li's got experience and fighting prowess over Sonny, but can The Destroyer come back here?', he questions.

'Come oan you beautiful Asian basturd', cries out a member of the public and coming from the man from before, holding the same paper bet as he did, hoping Eight Ball brings him success tonight. 'Daddy needs a new porche!', he shouts. 'I want full Bruce Lee, no slack!' In the background a few upperclass-looking gentlemen, stand and observe the fight from a distance.

'What's your thoughts, Tom?', asks one of the men.

'Feels to me', he replies, 'that this fight could churn out more than the rest of this competition has seen in years...'

'How do you mean?' asks the first man. 'You think they're the best fighters in the competition?'

'No', says the man. 'No, I mean this fight is going to make the most money.'

The man makes an 'ahh I see' sort of expression, before turning back to his colleague and saying, 'What makes you think that, Tom?'

'See The Destroyer, over there...', the man starts to rub his face and chin, 'Sonny 'The Destroyer' Main?'

'Yeah, boss?'

'That name not sound familiar to you? Lost his daughter in his early twenties, with his his wife... she went missing...'

'What's that got to do with anything?', he questions.

'The tabloids went mad over it at the time, you never seen a missing person case go unpublicised in the media, in the east end... especially with a girl?!'

'Sorry, Tom', he says, 'I don't mean to offend you... but what's that got to do with anything, here?'

'Guy that did it never got caught. Guy's a good egg, well-known within the area... I think that's so many of them here turn out for him...'

Tom, who's holding a local newspaper in his right hand, hits him with it, before urging on, 'What's that got to do with anything, guy's a fighter, a local hero... a fucking Rocky Balboa! Clearly you still have much to learn about this business young Brooke!'

The young boy colleague looks over his shoulder, and looks embarrassed for a second, before replying. 'And so, because he is a

fighter, because of his background, as you say... you think that'll be good for business, the people's champion, that sort of thing?' Tom nods his head, 'You are getting it, my boy! It's all very good and well throwing in any old random mucker into the ring, but

someone who's fighting, not just for the glory or the prize money, but for himself... that's worth the admission price alone, never mind anything else we make through betting and what have you...'

'A boxer that is fighting for that, is a boxer that will take less money as well', he smirks with a greedy smile.

'This profession is built on illegal venues such as this and outlawed prize fighting, Brooke... your job is to help me keep that tradition alive...'

The young protégé nods his head.

Back at the ring, Sonny has taken many blows to the face, especially his nose, although he has managed to avoid any to his ribs, which is good. On the other hand, Li has done well this round to avoid being hit much at all ...

A countdown above the ring on a digital clock that started at '03:00', is now approaching zero.

'And... Three... Two... One', shouts the presenter.

A bell rings.

'That's round one over, people', he says, as he enters the ring to break up the pair.

'It's not over yet, wee man....', taunts Sonny from across the ring. Round Two!

'You have one minute to recalibrate, gents', bellows the presenter.

Sonny's nose has been hit pretty bad, and you can tell that it is definitely broken; but with no team behind him, Sonny simply tries to snort the blood coming from his nose onto the ground, as he attempts to get his breathing back and under control. He does attempt once to see if touching his nose will help much. Yup it's definitely broken, thinks Sonny, as he pulls his hand away, and back down again.

'Are you okay Mr Wei, are you hurt, Mr Wei?', shouts one of Li's team.

'I'm, ok', he responds, as another member of his team feeds him water; his coach then leans in, 'You need to keep going for his nose, Li! Failing that, you need to go for his ribs!'

I could sure use Benny right now, thinks Sonny. I don't have a cutman, I don't have shit ...

'Micky, thirty seconds', shouts the man from above.

Sonny starts to rub his hands over his eyes. Focus, Sonny, he thinks. Do it for for your daughter, Sonny, focus. Think about Sarah ... do it for Sarah!

'Twenty seconds, Mick', comes the voice from above, again.

Li's coach clears all other team members aside, so that it is just himself and Li. 'You need to be more clinical with your jabs, Li', says the fighter's coach. He motions with his fist and his leg, 'jab to the face, kick to the upper body'.

'Ten seconds, Mick...'

'Earn your place as Europe's most notorious fighter, remember your roots', he says lastly to his fighter, before ushering his team and himself off the ring.

'Find your positions, lads, it's not over yet...', chuckles the presenter. Both fighters find their way to the middle of the ring again.

'Are we ready for another round in the ring, audienceeeee?' The crowd jerk and cheer for more ...

A bell rings. Ushering in a second round in the ring ...

Chapter 6

The Karate Man's Bad Fortune (Nightmares in Thailand, Koh Phi Phi)

I started to strum my fingers against the edge of the blackjack table, deciding whether or not to stick or fold.

Been at this game for far too long, but as much as I want to fold rather than risk losing more money and leave, I can't. That is what happens when you become addicted to something, unfortunately ...

'The famous cage boxer looks like he can't stop', comes a voice from around the corner.

A man, wearing a smart, black leather blouson jacket and a slouchy suit, typical attire of Korean culture, sits down next to me. 'How are we getting along tonight, Li? Or should I say Eight Ball?'

'In the UK, they call me The Karate Kid...', I answered back, Li.

'In some European countries, The Crow. You can call me whatever you want, old friend, Eun Ae...'

'Old friend, Eun Ae, indeed...', he responds, as he signals for the blackjack dealer to cut him in. 'So you are spending your prize money wisely I see?'

I got a little annoyed as I was right in the middle of my own game, and was enjoying myself as company - alone in the casino, usually where you'd find me - however Eun is, as I said, an old friend and without him I might not even be here. I had to encourage it.

'By all means take a seat old friend...', I said.

The blackjack dealer cuts in Eun Ae. 'I've always thought that in order to win in a game of blackjack, it's all about knowing when to fold ... when to give in, and try your luck or hand at something else.' Eun Ae looks over at Li's cash winnings, 'You're ahead, old boy, give in now ... go home, get some sleep, and be ready for tomorrow.'

Chapter 7

Auld Git

I can explain why my husband, Sonny, is an auld git.

Naw I know, it's easy to side with a fighter over his missus; he's the breadwinner, I'm just some silly wee lassie ...

Chapter 8

Round Three! Last Round

Benny, Sonny's boxing coach and manager bursts through double doors in the background with a woman ... Sonny's wife, Geraldine.

Chapter 9

Epilogue

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