

## **BLYTHE Vol 1 – The Trailer Park Knight Rises**

By Dan Wickline

### CHAPTER ONE

Erin took a knee next to the large-nosed garden gnome holding the make-shift mushroom rake. The coarse, white gravel on the ground around it pushed against her kneecap in a most unpleasant way. She was amazed at how the jagged little edges could find the tiny gaps in the padding she wore. She pushed the thought of that out of her mind and focused on the task at hand.

The last trailer in the park sat alone in the far back corner. It had to be over forty years old and whatever color it had been in the beginning was long faded away into a mix of gray and rust. It was a good fifty yards from any other trailer. Robert had told her it wasn't always this way, but once the park changed hands, the new owner allowed this trailer to move in and everyone around it began to leave if they could. Even when you're poor and desperate, you don't want to live too close to a meth lab. The residents feared the people who worked in the trailer and the possibility of an accident. Robert said at least a dozen people had made calls to the police, but not a single squad car came out.

Robert was frustrated. His neighbors were scared. Erin could think of no reason not to get involved. She didn't have a job, a family or anything close to a future. If it wasn't for Robert letting her crash on his couch, she wouldn't even have a roof over her head. She figured the least she could do was scare off a couple of drug dealing morons.

She'd planned it out the night before while having a few beers, her ideas getting better as the 12-pack got empty. She then had the full morning to think of a reason not to, but found none. She waited for the sun to go down and squeezed into her old wetsuit, one of the few things she found in her father's storage unit. The suit still fit but only barely. There was some disconcerting tugging when she moved in certain ways. On top of that she put on the old black and gold paintball gear she'd found in Robert's storage shed — a pair of knee and elbow pads, a chest guard and a face mask. She added her own combat boots. She looked for something to put over her short, blond hair, but nothing she could find would work with the mask. She quickly got bored with looking and decided to just go for it. She took his paintball gun and holster for effect. She found a pair of rattan escrima sticks she wrapped in black electrical tape and slid in between the back of the chest guard and her wetsuit. She thought she looked bad-ass.

Robert said he only ever saw one guy there at night. Erin figured she could sneak up to the place, smack the guy around until he ran off, then mess up the lab a little causing them to find another location. It'd seemed like a good plan the night before. She could see the flaw though. Hard to sneak up over a 50-yard distance. Nothing to cover her approach except for an old pickup with a camper on the back. It was

parked next to the trailer. She realized she could approach from an angle that kept the truck between her and the trailer. She liked this new plan. Had a lot of confidence in it. She gulped down the last of her beer, pulled the hard-plastic visor mask down over her face and followed the row of trailers to the left until she was in perfect line with the pick-up.

Other than tripping over the cinderblock brick that someone had left in the dirt, falling face first and smashing her mask against her nose, making it bleed, the approach to the truck went perfectly. There was even a bandana hanging on the antenna she was able to use to clean up the blood on her face. Her nose didn't feel broken, but she wasn't sure if that meant it wasn't or the beer had dulled the pain. Either way, the plan was still moving forward, and she saw a way to improve it.

Instead of just walking up to the door of the trailer, she thought about going up on the roof and dropping in through a vent. Like in the comics when the hero dropped through the skylight. It always surprised the bad guys and Erin knew surprise would be a good thing. She could climb up the hood of the truck, get on top of the camper and step over to the roof of the trailer. She felt this was a brilliant modification to the plan.

She used the front tire as a step and got onto the hood. From there she pulled herself up the side of the overhead bed space and onto the top of the camper. She completed this move without making a single sound, other than the curse word when her chest guard got caught on the side window and she had to struggle a minute to get loose. Other than that, it was flawless execution. She flopped over onto her back and listened for movement. For a second she regretted not bringing another beer, then reminded herself she didn't have any pockets on her outfit.

She got up onto her knees and looked over at the trailer. It seemed quiet, other than a song playing from a radio inside. If you would've asked Erin what music would be playing in a meth lab a few hours earlier, she probably would've said some classic rock like Leonard Skynard or the Eagles. Maybe even some Black Sabbath. What she heard coming through the air vents of the ancient trailer was the unmistakable wailings of Fred Schneider of the B-52's singing about a Rock Lobster. She hated that song with all the fiery passions of Hell. Had she not already planned on going in there and smacking the guy around, she would definitely be going in there and smacking the guy around.

She glanced over to the other roof. From a distance, it seemed like the camper was parked right next to the trailer. From here she could clearly see that it was more like five feet away. A jump she was more than capable of making, but not silently. She would need to land close to the air vent and drop through quickly before losing the element of surprise. She tugged the paintball gun out of its holster, figuring having it in hand when she dropped in would be extra intimidating.

She took a few steps back, then started towards the trailer. After two full strides she leapt across the open space just as Fred belted out, "Boys in Bikinis!" She was thinking how much she hated that song

as her boot made contact with the metal roof of the trailer, and broke through. She fell into the trailer with a thud. Pieces of debris rained down around her. A clump of asbestos insulation clung to her visor.

The man inside the trailer let out a string of curse words and backed away quickly. Though it was hard to move quickly in a trailer full of boxes. It was exactly the effect Erin was hoping for. The part she wasn't happy about was that he had a friend who wasn't spooked at all. Instead he drew a Glock model 40 and pointed it at her.

"Don't shoot!" the cook yelled. "This place will blow sky high!"

The guy with the gun hesitated for just a second. Erin didn't. She fired her weapon and a small gelatin capsule struck the man in the bridge of his nose. The projectile burst open and a spray of gold paint blanketed his eyes, blinding him. His free hand shot up to try and clear his vision.

Erin reached back for her escrima sticks, but found herself being pummeled by a barrage of various small items — bags of meth, scissors, a half-eaten McDonald's Filet-O-Fish. The cook was literally throwing everything at her. It wasn't doing any damage, but it was annoying as hell. She picked up a hammer that was lying on the counter next to her and hurled it at him. He ducked out of the way, but proceeded to hit his forehead on the door, stunning himself for a minute.

By then the gunman had gotten enough paint out of his eyes to see his target, and charged her. She hadn't seen him move and was caught off guard. His shoulder hit her in the chest and lifted her up off her feet. His momentum drove them back into the wall. Being crushed between his shoulder and the wall pushed all the air out of her lungs. She couldn't catch her breath. And he drove his knee up into her stomach.

Pain shot through her body and her lungs burned. He was too close for her to punch with any force, so she slammed her forehead down into the gold painted bridge of his nose. Her mask jammed against her face and she could feel her nose start to bleed again, but the strike worked. He staggered back away, clutching his shattered nose. She stepped forward and drove the toe of her combat boot up into his groin. As he doubled over in pain, she brought the knee of her other leg up hard into his chin. He flew back into the cooking area, sending everything flying.

"Jesus Christ!" the cook shouted. "What have you done!"

Erin glanced over to where the gunman had landed and saw that a fire had started and was growing fast. The cook helped the gunman to his feet. Remarkably the guy had not dropped his gun through any of it. The cook was pulling him towards the door, but he was bringing the gun around towards Erin. He got off three rounds before being pulled out the door.

She had been shot at before and Erin knew the best way to stay alive was to not be in the same place when the bullets showed up. She had already started towards the floor before the first shot was fired. She heard the door slam and knew they were gone. The fire was spreading quickly and though she

knew almost nothing about meth, she did know that meth labs can blow up in spectacular fashion. She scrambled to her feet and got to the door. It wouldn't budge. They'd jammed something up against it. She turned to look for the door at the other end, the fire blocked her path. She looked around for any other avenues of escape, then remembered she had already made one.

She jumped up onto the counter and reached for the edge of the hole she created with her entrance, hoping the metal was strong enough to support her while she pulled herself up. It held as she made her way onto the trailer roof. Not hesitating for an instant, she quickly leapt over to the top of the camper then jumped down onto the hood of the pickup, and then onto the ground. She glanced around for a second to see where the two guys had gone. She didn't want to suddenly be shot after her daring escape from the burning trailer. They were nowhere in sight.

Not knowing how long she had, she sprinted for the line of regular trailers. The ill-fitting pads shifting as she ran. She could taste the blood from her nose as it had covered her mouth and was sucked in with each breath. Twenty yards away, was that far enough she thought? She couldn't risk being wrong and kept running.

The sound wasn't what she expected. Just a giant, "Whummm", and then she was hit by a tsunami wave of force, hurling her like a rag doll until she slammed into the side of a blue and white trailer thirty feet from where she had started. She heard things crack and wasn't sure which sounds were her hard-plastic gear and which were her bones. But it didn't stop with the impact. She felt the force of the blast continuing to push her against the steel wall as if it wouldn't stop until she passed through to the other side.

And suddenly it was gone. She tumbled to the ground. Not backwards, but somehow twisting as she fell so her face hit first and the metal end of a garden hose jammed into her chest. She wanted nothing more than to move it, but her brain and her limbs weren't on speaking terms at that moment. She laid there for an eternity, or a few seconds. She wasn't sure which it was. Finally, she shook the rattling in her brain long enough to hear a repeating sound.

*Cheet. Cheet. Cheet. Cheet.*

She willed her head to turn and it grudgingly obliged. She looked up and saw an elderly man wearing a robe, slippers and nothing else. She knew the last part because of the upward angle she was looking at him from. He held a cell phone and continue taking pictures.

"Hello..." she said weakly.

"Oh good. You're not dead." The old man snorted. "Mind getting off my petunias?"

Erin glanced down and saw a line of flowers on either side of her and realized she was likely crushing two or three. Her body was sorer than she could remember it ever being, but she didn't think

anything was broken. Or at least she hoped nothing was. She slowly got to her feet, letting her body adjust to each movement before starting the next.

The old man had stopped taking pictures of her and was focusing on what was left of the meth lab. “You know, I personally called the police four times about them. Not once did they bother to show up. A shame it took an accident like this to get them to finally come out.”

Erin wasn’t sure what he meant. “Accident?”

“Well, I can’t speak for everyone here, but I sure didn’t see anything. Must’ve been an accident.” He tucked his phone away. “I think I hear sirens in the distance. You better vanish, youngster.”

Her ears were still ringing, so she couldn’t make out the sirens, but she took the man’s advice anyway. She started back to Robert’s trailer but then saw the first flashes of red and blue lights coming through the front gate. She immediately turned to the right and ran as fast as her beat-up body could towards the side fence.

She had found a spot a few weeks ago where the chain links had been cut and she could squeeze through to the self-storage place the next lot over. This came in handy as her father’s storage unit was near there and she could easily go back and forth instead of going out and around through the front gates.

She made her way through the rows of units until she found the right one. It was a combination lock, her birthday. He told her that in the last letter he wrote to her while she was deployed. It took her two tries, but she got it open, rolled up the big metal door and then pulled it down behind her. There was a battery-operated lantern right where she had left it. She flicked it on and the blue-white light filled the ten by twenty unit. There wasn’t much left in it, but there was a sleeping bag and some of her old clothes. Both would be helpful.

She pulled off the mask and found a rag to wipe up the blood on her face. There was a half-finished bottle of water from her last trip that she used to clear her mouth. She then pulled off the chest guard, the pads and the boots. Her body felt like she had tumbled down a steep hill in a barrel full of rocks. She squeezed out of the wetsuit and saw various patches of discoloration across her arms and chest that were a promise of massive bruises to come. Half-naked, she slipped into the sleeping bag, bundled up the wet suit as a pillow and turned off the lantern.

She laid in the dark, trying to figure out why she had done something so stupid and missing her father.

