

# Scalp Bounty



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**SCALP BOUNTY**  
**Ravaging Myths, Book 2**  
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## PROLOGUE

Man first occupied the Americas over a hundred thousand years ago and has survived events that led to the extinction of many other creatures on the continents. Destined to wander, he traveled in pursuit of food from other continents around the globe and ended up in the Americas like everywhere else mostly by chance. Over the millennia the influx of people migrated from the outer reaches of the Americas to the interior, slowly populating both continents. The people who eventually crossed the ice age Beringia land bridge were only some of the more recent arrivals in prehistory. Assessing this from the present, each successive wave of people could be viewed as either immigrants or invaders on their arrival in the Americas, and we may never know what their impact was on the inhabitants already present. We do know that many complex and unique cultures developed, flourished, and then disappeared over the course of time leaving mere remnants of their prior existence.

By the time the Europeans crossed the Atlantic and landed in the Americas, millions of native people with thousands of distinct cultures already occupied the two American continents.

Unfortunately, the European arrivals had an absolute disregard for the people already present. Even though they were immediately struggling, the new arrivals were determined to claim what they called the 'new' and 'uninhabited' land for their already existing imperialistic countries across the ocean. The Europeans were nothing more than invaders clearly set from the start on taking the Natives' land by any necessary means even to the extent of outright genocide.

Sadly, this is what happened in our own recorded history. But the Americas did not have to evolve in that way. Changes at innumerable points in our history could have led to a tremendously altered world.

The world of Ravaging Myths traveled a different path. The native population was not decimated by European disease. The millions of natives would have fared very differently against 16<sup>th</sup> century invaders.

## CHAPTER 1

The Southwestern wind blew dust devils across the road leading to the ancient native burial grounds. Swirling and whipping small particles into a frenzy, the devils did little more than cloud the otherwise unpolluted air. In mindless desperation and near silence, the sand drifted slowly across the mutilated corpse seemingly trying to bury what had been left in disgrace at the ground's edge. Sand-specked, dried blood covered the body's hairless skull, bringing further dishonor to the memory of the once proud Apache warrior. Her scalp had been viciously stripped from its bony foundation leaving clear grooves deep into the normal architecture. Like so many other killers in the distant past, the executioner had left with a trophy, bloody human flesh that was savage proof of her death. Savagery taught and encouraged by the early invaders from Europe, men who had briefly tried and failed to eradicate the natives before accepting the way of the land or leaving altogether. Savagery not practiced by the Apache, then or now.

Millennia after crossing the Bering land bridge, the Apache ancestors were driven into the North American southwest eight hundred to one thousand years ago by cataclysmic volcanic eruptions in the far north. These same major disruptions in the Pacific Rim's Ring of Fire were serious enough to cause a mass of congruent native migration to many other areas in the Americas in that distant past just as they had done for tens of thousands of years before that. The result was a heavy scatter of people with extremely different cultures to all reaches of the northern and southern continents, and what eventually would be thousands of distinct nations or tribes across the centuries.

When the Apache finally reached the southwest, many other people had already been calling it home for thousands of years, and some of them, such as the Clovis people and the ancient Anasazi had long ago come and gone from the world. The early Apache first existed as nomadic family units, appearing considerably more disorganized than most of the

other people in this new land. They recognized no tribal entity, so to speak, and even within in bands there were no consistently recognized leaders. The small groups all functioned independently and provided for themselves incessantly by whatever means were necessary. They were hard-core survivors who traveled light and lived on anything available to them in their environment. Like most hunter and gatherer cultures, in good times this consisted of large game such as the deer and buffalo readily available in the region at the time. The nomads followed the animals as they moved between feeding grounds, taking what they could on foot. During the worst of times, they were able to survive by supplementing their diet with whatever roots, berries, nuts and seeds they could gather as they desperately followed the game. When their very existence was at stake, they often found it necessary to take from their stationary and agrarian neighbors from other tribes. Stealth and peaceful, bloodless retreats were valued over bloodshed, and other's lives were not taken unless the source chose to seriously resist. Further raids were only undertaken when the need was again urgent. Survival was the driving force, not uncontrolled hostility.

A half-buried machinegun and nearby bullet-riddled military all terrain vehicle brought the General's attention back to the twenty-first century. She stood over the rapidly desiccating and mutilated Apache soldier's body and tried to identify the remains from her memories of command, not for the Nation's records or the dead soldier's family, but because she felt compelled to do so. Nation, Council, and world politics aside, there would be retaliation for this offense, both swift and brutal. The Apache never ignored the transgressions frequently endured or even tolerated by others. In terms of the Apache code of honor, the soldier's name was ultimately meaningless. The Apache Nation's people viewed themselves as one in the world, and had since the integration of the Europeans centuries before. The Nation's people being its most valuable resource, Nation insults

including the loss of a single Apache life were always avenged in kind.

Following the slow and multistage suppression of the European invasion, the Nation easily evolved with the times, continuing to absorb immigrants and their cultures with the same pride that maintained their own. After all, the Apache were and always had been flexible, utilizing superior ways whenever they presented themselves and still maintaining their own central culture. Over the centuries, this led to major advances in the abilities and holdings of the Apache Nation as well as multiple continued firm alliances with other tribal Nations of the Americas. In due course, other nations of the world also blended in to this massive and growing alliance.

The exponential growth of the Nation started with the suppression of the Spanish in the southwest and the resultant acquisition of their superior weapons and more importantly, their horses. With this greatly enhance mobility the Apache followed the ancient native trade routes that spanned the Americas, absorbing others over time that took to the Apache's nomadic ways. With hit and run guerilla tactics, the Apache gradually aided other tribes in the multi-front battle to keep their lands as they swept to the east and then north. The numbers of the Apache tribe grew with every conquest as they took prisoners instead of lives whenever they could and accepted anyone interested in a mobile and military way of life. Camps of soldiers left strategically behind in their massive sweeps grew over time and eventually became bases.

The Apache Nation now provided unparalleled protection services for its own people and its allies, a commodity invaluable in the world. In this, the Nation was never flexible. Attacks from the outside were always met in kind and without the slightest regard for diplomacy. The world knew the Apache Nation's stance regarding it people and ignorance was never accepted as an excuse. Had the Apache been ruthlessly imperialistic like the early Europeans they suppressed, they would have controlled the world long ago.

Knowing this, the General began to formulate a mental list of those bold, stupid or crazy enough to mess with the Nation. Of these three categories, the bold and the stupid had generally learned their lessons painfully in the past, with the exception of a few (clearly fitting into the combined bold and stupid subcategory). Unfortunately, there was no shortage in the supply of crazies in the world. Crazies usually stirred up the bold and the stupid, and when these efforts failed, did a fair job of behaving bold and stupid themselves.

Overall, the murder, mutilation, and scalping of an Apache warrior, as well as the desecration of sacred grounds, Apache or not, had to be the work of a crazy. No sane person would take or pay bounty for the scalp of an Apache warrior knowing the guaranteed consequences. The acts were a deliberate attempt to rile the Nation. An Apache scalp hadn't been taken in hundreds of years. In fact, the Intertribal Council had deemed the act of scalping punishable by death well over a hundred years before now, and the edict had not changed. The Council would fully sanction the justified Apache retaliation, which would proceed whether sanctioned or not. The General found the implications of this near automatic realization disturbing at best. A single incident would purposefully bring down the wrath of the Apache Nation, the entire Intertribal Council, and every one of its allies throughout the rest of the world. The Council had already been notified, and she, the Apache tribe's Council representative, stood there now to prepare an eyewitness report of the atrocity. All that remained was the identification of those responsible and the bloody aftermath of that identification.

The Nation's surveillance satellites would have captured the killer's acts, probably unbeknownst to the perpetrator. The window of opportunity in the death had already been narrowed down to two hours by the facts that the soldier last reported in approximately twelve hours before then, and failed to report two hours later. A second failure to communicate her status brought

the soldier to command attention, and the third failure immediately and appropriately brought it to the General's. A unit of soldiers had routinely been dispatched to investigate, Apache command not anticipating a serious loss during peacetime and also in their own heavily militarized Nation. The unit's disturbing report brought the General there personally, signifying a major and politically far-reaching event. The Nation's satellite data would be available to her in a few minutes on her chopper. Had she not seen the end results in person, she could have pretty much guaranteed that she wouldn't have believed the satellite data.

Rage, and amazingly, uncertainty struggled for control of her thoughts as she tried to assess the situation before she had what would undoubtedly be key pieces of data. What was this all about? Who did this, and why? It made absolutely no sense in the context of the current world. The Apache Nation was incredibly strong now, possibly even invincible. Knowingly provoking the Apache Nation was the effective and realistic equivalent of picking up and shaking an occupied hornet's nest, extremely predictable and viciously dangerous. The combined tribal strength of the Intertribal Council and its countless global allies magnified this beyond her comprehension. No person, group, or nation had acted against their united strength in twenty years, and then they had severely regretted it. Considering all of these factors, she reached the same conclusion over and over again. The perpetrators and their incomprehensible acts were insane. An endless list of good and sane people would probably die as a result, and vengeance would do nothing to deter the same senseless behavior in the future until the central figures orchestrating the murder, scalping, and desecration were completely annihilated without the merest fraction of a doubt.

The captain abruptly spoke, pulling her from thoughts she could never have expected to have. "General, the satellite data is ready for your review, Sir."

Turning and quickly attempting to refocus her thoughts on the here and now, she surveyed the

scene one last time. Numerous Apache men and women of a variety of ranks and specialties were scattered about the area and carefully processing every detail of the site. Not even the tiniest detail would be left undiscovered. She knew this as certainly as she knew her own name. The General's unquestioned confidence in the people who diligently served under her aside, she knew without a shadow of a doubt that they all had two things on their minds, duty and vengeance, and not particularly in that order.

A thin cloud drifted over the almost permanent southwestern sun, and the shadow brought an icy chill down her back. The grimace on the remainder of the soldier's face told the General her story in as much detail as she would ever get from the data downlink from the satellite. She died gruesomely, and had still been struggling for life when the killer excised her scalp. Pure and unadulterated evil emanated from the horrendous act, a sickening new dimension added to her quick preliminary analysis. The perp would pay immensely for every second of the soldier's misery. And if the soldier did not have the advantage of warrior kin, she would personally and gladly see to the killer's destruction herself.

She covered the short distance to the chopper quickly with her captain dogging her heels. Even though they were all Apache, and equals in their Nation in that respect, the utility of the current command structure that had been derived from that of the European militaries was clear. Order was absolutely necessary in any large operation, and the Apache Nation's military was now an immensely large interplanetary operation.

Even as a Cochise descendant, the General did not inherit her rank; her name had been professionally meaningless in her military career. She earned her rank by obtaining each and every one of her military objectives with an absolute minimum loss of life. As with her famed Apache ancestors, the enemy had not been so lucky. That being said, her units worked with surgical precision, killing and destroying only when it was necessary. As dictated by her heritage, the General did not value

death or destruction. She would repeatedly back down from a fight if necessary to spare her soldiers' lives. There had never been honor for the Apache in death, only in their ability to survive. As noted before, in the Apache struggle to survive they adapted when necessary, and utilized everything of value without the crippling effect of hesitation. Pride was far from relevant in this respect. Survival was not.

Settling into her seat, she ordered, "Show me the data, captain. Let's get this show on the road."

"Yes, Sir." Was his instant reply.

Quickly adjusting herself to sit directly in front of the terminal, she collected her thoughts and prepared to view the video from the satellite downlink. The link terminal occupied the whole backside of the pilot's seat, and could receive any form of data or communications necessary in the field, whether it was full motion satellite video such as what they expected to see then, or simple text messages. The Apache Nation satellites were capable of capturing digital wide range high definition video data that could be zoomed clearly down to a basic microscopic resolution when conditions were good. As a result, she had visual access to all of the happenings of the world since the time the satellite system had been placed into orbit. The only inputs necessary were the GPS coordinates and the specific time frame. The technology had greatly enhanced Apache intelligence gathering, but had several remaining flaws that significantly reduced the almost limitless amount of potential data they could retrieve. First, video could only be captured in the visual range also viewable by the human eye. This eliminated several useful spectra often used in short-range intelligence gathering, such as infrared. Fortunately, digital enhancement rendered video data usable even in the near absence of light. Second, and far more detrimental, was the inability to penetrate low-level atmospheric disturbances, otherwise known as clouds. The same could be said for any object placed even briefly between the satellite and the target area. Data could be

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