

**Sample chapters from**  
***Sniper's Day* (Book five in *The Ro Delahanty Series*)**

**Chapter Thirty-Eight / Targets**

*Thursday, September 11, 2008, 9:55 a.m.*

*Bandit's Island*

Skassa was used to waiting. It was not uncommon to wait hours, even days, for his targets to appear. He arrived at Bandit's Island a little after six-thirty, as the eastern sky lightened. It took only a few minutes to deflate the raft, roll it up, wrap it in a camo tarp, and stuff it between two trees to resemble deadfall. Carrying the near thirty-pound Barrett in the crook of an arm, he hobbled to the lower end of the inclined trunk where he intended to hide, his cane and rifle case left in the car back at the barge terminal.

Using elbows and knees for purchase, he shimmied up the trunk – it was about the diameter of a main sewer pipe – to where it rested in the Y of the bigger tree, twelve feet above the sand. He wrapped the second tarp around himself and the trunk, securing it with paracord across the back of his knees and below his shoulder blades.

The daypack was hung from a branch within reach it, but where it would not be easily seen from the mainland.

Finally, he draped the camo poncho over his shoulders and head, extending it out over the rifle's four-foot length. He was now virtually invisible from even a short distance, let alone the nine-hundred yards to the Iowa shoreline.

While, a dreary day, it was a comfortable fifty degrees, the thick woods behind sheltering him from the gusty south winds. Compared to a rocky ledge in the Kush with an icy wind in his face, this was a piece of cake.

For three hours, he patiently watched as an occasional car, pickup, or RV whizzed past on the state highway, as two freight trains rumbled by on the railroad line, and a half-dozen flat-bottom Jon boats with their anglers slowly trolled up and down the slough. He let them all pass unmolested through the reticles of his long-range scope.

A few minutes before ten, an eastbound, medium-gray Ford Crown Vic squad car with a wide horizontal red stripe running from headlights to taillights came into view from behind the island to his left. On the doors in big block letters, it said "Sheriff," with "Makuakeeta County" in smaller letters below, his expected target.

It was moving slowly, fifty miles an hour. When it was in his exact twelve o'clock position, nine-hundred-and-twenty yards out, he centered the crosshairs of his Leupold Mark 4 scope on the front fender above the wheel well and fired.

Even from three football fields away, he saw the car jerk when the .50 caliber's powerful inertia designed to penetrate armored vehicles slammed into the motor. A cloud of white steam billowed from under the hood as the smashed water pump sprayed engine coolant over the hot motor. But then quickly changed over to thick and black as oil from the now cracked engine block began to smoke. The car rolled across the highway's centerline and came to a stop after a hundred feet, effectively blocking the westbound lane.

The sniper watched the deputy glance around, dazed and confused, wondering what the hell hit him. The supersonic bullet reached his car a second before he heard the Barrett's report, so did not yet realize someone was firing on him. He reached forward to grab his microphone and call in.

"Let's give you something to really report," Skassa muttered to himself.

Nudging the rifle a fraction of an inch to his left, he sent a slug through the car's unoccupied backseat, blowing fist-size holes in both the right and left doors and causing a mini-avalanche of ballast stone on the railroad embankment twenty-five yards beyond.

Now finally grasping he was under fire, the driver's side door of the patrol car flew open, and the deputy threw himself down and out. He soon re-appeared peering over his trunk, his semi-automatic sidearm pointed in the general direction of the island. His uniform was charcoal gray, and he had somehow grabbed his campaign-style hat and slapped it on his head.

Skassa smiled at the deputy's ludicrous thought to defend himself with a handgun that wouldn't even reach a third the distance to the island, still with no clue who was shooting at him.

"You're not getting my point," Skassa said aloud, although there was no one in earshot to hear him.

Re-sighting, he fired, this time sending a slug plowing through the width of the patrol car's light bar, blasting it into a thousand shards of glass and shredded metal, and causing a shriek as it ripped a two-foot groove in the roof.

The deputy hunkered down and scurried into the shallow ditch between the highway and railroad embankment on the other side of the car.

"Good move, man," Skassa said, "you're safe if you keep your head down. Now use your belt radio to call in a 10-78" – *officer needs assistance*. "I'll give your backup ten minutes."

He was wrong by half, though, as it took nearly twenty minutes before he heard the faint siren wail of another patrol car approaching from the west, then watched it charge into view at speed from behind the island on his left.

"Finally, a challenge," he muttered at the car, grinning to himself. "But this time, I think I'll blow your ass off."

Which he did, literally, sending his shot through the car's rear deck, taking out both back tires, but aiming high so as not to hit the gas tank. He didn't want any explosions or fires.

Its drive wheels now turned to mush, the squad car noticeably slowed and began fishtailing, the driver visibly fighting to keep from losing control. It stopped a few feet behind and to the right of the first car, the two disabled vehicles now effectively completely blocking the highway.

This time Skassa didn't need another shot to make his point. The first deputy madly gestured for his colleague to exit the car and join him in the safety of the ditch.

## Chapter Thirty-Nine / The Big Fish

*Thursday, September 11, 2008, 10:35 a.m.*

*Bandit's Island*

He waited for the Makuakeeta Sheriff's Department's response. It took only fifteen minutes. A pair of sirens. Two red-stripped gray vehicles, one a standard patrol car in the lead, the other a big Ford Expedition, came into view on his left, but stopped just past the small island.

"Ah," he muttered, "a command vehicle – probably the sheriff."

They were a good nineteen-hundred yards from his position, over a mile. While within the Barrett's range – legendary kills had been made at two miles – he didn't take the shot. Partly due to the iffy distance, but mostly because he didn't want to. He had a different agenda.

Two men emerged from the command vehicle, also in gray uniforms and campaign hats, one clearly older and heavier, with an air of authority – he had seen that look on colonels and generals. The older man took a pair of field glasses from the car and surveyed the island, while his companion – Skassa could make out sergeant's stripes on his arm, perhaps an aide? – held a microphone up to his mouth, probably for an update from the deputies pinned down in the ditch.

"You figured out I'm on the island but have no idea where," he said to himself. "You can tell from the extreme distance I have to be using a high-powered rifle but have no clue why I'm shooting at your deputies. Whether you know it or not, gentlemen, it's your move."

Through his scope, Skassa watched the sheriff continue to peruse the island, then pass the field glasses to his colleague to have a look. He watched the three cops – the two from the command vehicle and the deputy from the other patrol car – engage in several conversations, their expressions grim, a combination of anger, concern, and confusion. There were multiple gestures in his general direction, as well as toward the cornered deputies. A few appeared quite energetic, suggesting a debate over what to do next. There was more talking on the mic by the sergeant.

For the moment, the situation was at a stalemate.

Ever the careful planner, Skassa knew his hide was roughly at the same level as the highway, but a couple of feet below the top of the higher railroad embankment beyond. The ditch next to the highway was shallow, effectively trapping the deputies. They were safe if they kept their heads down and stayed behind the disabled patrol cars. However, they'd be vulnerable if they attempted a dash along the ditch for the three-fourths-of-a-mile to the relative safety of the sheriff's position.

An eastbound minivan appeared behind the Expedition. Skassa watched as the deputy from the patrol car hurriedly flagged it down, then gestured to turn around and leave. He returned to his car and repositioned it behind the Expedition, establishing a roadblock to halt any more highway traffic from the west.

A few moments later, he noticed flashing red and blue lights off to the right. Swinging the scope around, he saw another Crown Vic – this one cream-colored with "Iowa State Police" in

block letters on the door – come to a stop across the highway just past the grove of shoreline trees, establishing a roadblock on the east.

Skassa nodded, muttering to himself but addressing the distant sheriff, “By the book,” knowing the last thing LEOs – law enforcement officers – needed was civvies – civilians – blundering into what they now considered an active shooting situation. Except they didn’t know he had no intention of firing on civilians. Like the deputies in the ditch, they were bait.

“Good move, you’ve called for state back-up,” he said.

But eventually, he knew the sheriff would recognize his people were outgunned and call for the SWAT Unit with, Skassa assumed, their designated marksman.

The “big fish” he really hoped to lure in.

## Chapter Forty / Unknown Shooter

Thursday, September 11, 2008, 10:45 a.m.

Fort Armstrong County, Iowa

After finishing her third shift patrol not quite four hours ago, Ro ate a light breakfast, had gone for a run on the bike path near her apartment, taken a shower, and was now at the desk in her study checking e-mails before taking a midday nap.

Her cell phone screeched; the irritating ring tone programmed strictly for SWAT notifications.

“This is a priority one alert. That is confirmed, shots fired,” the dispatcher announced in a professional monotone when Ro answered. A priority one meant the call up involved an active shooting situation.

She blew out a quick breath. This was their first priority one call in two years, since the DEA goons barged into the hostage exchange her SWAT unit negotiated, resulting in two hostages – one of them her mother – being killed. From time to time, usually at night when her mind wasn’t occupied with the day’s activities, questions about that incident still swirled in her head, questions with no answers because she had nothing to go on yet refusing to be allayed.

Already slipping into warrior mode, Ro forced her attention back to the dispatcher.

“The Makuakeeta County sheriff reports two of his deputies were fired on multiple times by an unknown shooter or shooters along Iowa Rte. 20 about ten miles west of the Fort Armstrong line,” dispatch reported. Ro frowned, *That’s a totally rural part of the county, an unusual location for some kind of cop ambush.* “They are pinned down beside the highway, no reported injuries. He requested Joint SWAT assistance. 10-25” – *report to* – “HQ ASAP.”

Ro’s Joint SWAT Unit served a three-county region: Fort Armstrong County and adjacent Clayton and Makuakeeta Counties. Her headquarters was at the Regional Law Enforcement Center outside of Lee’s Landing, in the opposite direction from her apartment and the shooting scene.

“Dispatch,” Ro said, “I’m closer... I’ll gear-up here, meet the team on site.”

It was not an unusual request. As quick response time was essential, especially for priority one calls, SWAT officers carried their tactical gear and weapon in the trunks of their patrol cars. Except for Ro, it was weapons –her standard SWAT issue Colt LE6930 carbine, as well as the Remington 700P LTR of the unit’s designated marksman.

“10-04,” the dispatcher responded.

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Twenty-five minutes later, Ro spotted three patrol cars a couple hundred yards ahead, blocking Iowa Rte. 20, their light bars flashing. A somewhat beat-up pickup truck was making a three-point turn on the highway to head back in her direction, having been shooed away by the cops.

Switching off the siren that helped her make the run from her apartment across the southwest corner of Fort Armstrong County and ten miles into Makuakeeta County, Ro called her dispatch. “Fort Armstrong One-Nine.”

“One-Nine go.”

“I am 10-23” – *on scene* – “on Rte. 20 in Makuakeeta County. Any updates?” Were there any fresh developments since the initial shooting report?

“Negative One-Nine.”

*Odd, no more shooting... Someone doesn't just shoot at on cops and then lie low for an hour. What's he waiting for?*

“Copy that. What's the team's 10-77?” – *estimated time of arrival* – meaning the SWAT van and the rest of the squad.

“Twenty-five” – *twenty-five minutes*.

“10-04.”

## Chapter Forty-One - Lucky to Still Be Alive

*Thursday, September 11, 2008, 11:10 a.m.*

*Mississippi River Shoreline, Makuakeeta County, Iowa*

A cream-white Iowa State Police car with Five-Thirty-Seven on the rear fender was parked across the highway. Ro knew it belonged to Sgt. Jim Locari; they were both once regular third shift patrol officers. He was probably the first responder to the east end of the scene and established a roadblock to keep civilians from blundering into a shooting situation. A counterpoint roadblock would certainly be set up to the west.

Two other patrol cars parked on the right shoulder were gray Makuakeeta County Crown Vics with a wide red stripe along the side. Makuakeeta and Fort Armstrong Counties shared a common border, appropriately enough called County Line Road. For accidents on the road, a deputy from each county responded and, once on scene, sorted out who would take jurisdiction and cover the paperwork.

Ro swung her car around behind the state car and climbed out, taking a quick glance around. While having previously driven this highway more than a few times, she wanted to orient herself to this particular section. As expected, it was definitely “out in the country.”

She couldn't help wondering, *Why here?*

State Rte. 20, a two-lane blacktop, closely parallels the Mississippi River. Her group of patrol cars was parked beside a thicket of trees and shrubs between the highway and the river's edge, but the shoreline stretching beyond was a featureless mudflat for nearly two miles.

Ro did a mental shrug. *Huh, a wide-open fire zone for whoever's out there.*

She could make out two gray Makuakeeta cars sitting at odd angles blocking the highway a mile ahead, likely the pinned down deputies' vehicles. The flashing lights of another cluster of first responders were visible three-fourths of a mile beyond, probably the Makuakeeta County sheriff and more deputies.

There was a long, heavily wooded island across an open-water chute. It looked to be close to a thousand yards from the Iowa shore; its thick cover the only logical place for the shooter or shooters to be hiding.

*Hmm, a thousand yards, Ro conjectured. Only military snipers get trained for those kinds of distances.*

She also knew a thousand yards was at the very upper end of her Remington's range and had a sneaking suspicion those two facts might not be coincidental.

Ro nodded to the state officer. “Sergeant.”

He smiled. “Sergeant.”

It was the only acknowledgement they knew one another, the circumstances not calling for small talk.



Ro nodded to the two Makuakeeta deputies, their name badges identifying them as T. Wynn and C. Knapp.

Wynn nodded back. "Sergeant."

Ro addressed Wynn. "Neither deputy was wounded?"

"That's affirm... Their cars were shot up pretty bad, but neither was hit."

"Where are they now?"

Knapp pointed to the disabled patrol cars. "Hunkered down in a ditch behind their vehicles. We're assuming they're safe if they stay put. They'd be too exposed making a break in either direction." He glanced at his watch. "They've been pinned down almost ninety minutes."

"No additional shots at them?"

Knapp shook his head.

"I'm curious what you meant by 'shot up pretty bad'?" Ro said.

The two Makuakeeta deputies exchanged glances, like wondering where the SWAT team member was going with this.

Wynn continued the narrative. "The shooter took out the engine of the first deputy's car, then put a slug through the back doors, tore fist-sized holes in both. After it stopped, he blasted its light bar."

*Targeting the engine... Fist-sized holes in the doors... Has to be a big caliber gun, Ro thought, something like a Barrett .50.*

"As the second deputy came on scene, he shot out the second car's rear end," Knapp added, "both back tires with a single bullet."

"Was the car responding at speed?"

Knapp nodded, "Yea."

*Thousand yards... At speed...*

"A lone shooter?" Ro asked, now suspicious.

"As far as we can tell," Wynn said.

"What're you thinking?" Locari asked.

She glanced at the state officer, then the two Makuakeeta deputies. "That your guys out there are lucky to still be alive."