

CALL OF THE WILD, LINE THREE

Dalton Keane

Savage, wild, the pack of Stockbrokers tracks its prey, loafers swishing in the shifting sands. For eight days they have been on the move without a kill. For eight days they have barely slept. Gray linen slacks keep them cool in the sweltering days, warm during the bone-chilling nights. Old tickertape streams from worn pockets and drifts to the sand, criss-crossing the terrain like icing on a fiery bun.

The pack comes to a rest beneath a butte. Hair is leaping off their scalps, but they use the leading regrowth formula and have a solemn pact never to mention it amongst themselves. The sun beats down upon their bald spots, peeling the fresh skin.

The alpha male, the one they call Johanssen, rises and checks his Patek Philippe. Soon they will be on the move again. They know this like they know the range of corporations that comprise the six major mutual funds which they recommend to all clients with an average investment portfolio of at least one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, adjusted annually for inflation.

Three stumbling dots appear over a dune and a hundred pairs of eyes train upon the newfound quarry. The prey, oblivious to the licking of chops just beyond the edges of their perception, edges closer.

Recent MBAs, fat from early and unearned success. Their skin is unmarked by the harsh realities of the desert. Fresh meat, an easy task, yet the brokers sigh in resignation. Once, the land had been filled with great challenges: the frenzied Commodities Traders, the lugubrious Analysts, the preternaturally successful Junk Bond Kings. No longer.

The MBAs approach, relieved smiles spreading across flushed cheeks. The brokers collectively

Flash
Fiction



Sated, the pack rests before returning to the hunt. For though their profit-participation program is fair and equitable, the kill was not large, and their hunger will soon return.

smile back, toothy Cheshire grins that envelop entire faces.

One young, plump MBA separates from his friends and approaches Johanssen, his voice breaking under the pressure. “We – want – to – in – vest.”

A whip of pens, a clack of keyboards, and the tight desert valley becomes an impenetrable cloud of sand. The startled MBAs hide behind their diplomas – the Kellogg School, no less – as if they are magical shields, but they are outnumbered, outflanked, and outdone within seconds.

Purcell burps and coughs up a shred of a Nicole Miller tie. Dieter wipes his mouth with the remnants of a contact sheet. Caldwell picks his teeth with a fraternity pin. The younger associates fiddle with the ravaged carcasses, rolling them around in the sand.

Sated, the pack rests before returning to the hunt. For though their profit-participation program is fair and equitable, the kill was not large, and their hunger will soon return.

The cool night air lulls them into dreams of doddering investors. Fields, his eyes darting rapidly behind closed lids, churns his legs in his sleep as if hot on the trail of such a delicacy. Coos of delight emanate from his wind-chapped lips.

As the night wears on, a scent materializes, wafting closer upon currents of desiccated desert air. Peterson, a rising young executive who's been with the pack for two years, detects it before the others. He wakes Johanssen, who wakes his V.P.'s. The V.P.'s wake their branch heads, the branch heads wake their partners, the partners wake their associates, and as one, they confer.

The scent is unfamiliar. It is not a herd of Eldery; the aroma lacks the claustrophobic musty brownness of that familiar species. Nor is it the frightening tang of the legendary Commissioners, their only remaining predators. This scent bursts with self-assurance. With the promise of liquidity.

McDaniel hastily suggests that a committee be formed and a report drawn up, and the pack falls in on him with a terrible snarl. Within minutes he is gone, his bones left to dry out under tomorrow's blistering sun, his Rolodex raided. Palmer calls a florist and makes arrangements to have a sympathy bouquet sent to his family.

The odor grows stronger, and soon it envelops the desert valley. A reconnaissance party is formed, a small group of brokers breaking away to make the appropriate phone calls.

No need – shadows break over the horizon and a hundred silhouettes stream across the desert plain, perfectly tailored suits hiding lengthy briefs, stunning torts, and questionable tactics.

Each invader rides atop a tamed Actuary, a once noble steed, now broken and docile, and on some unspoken command they brandish their weapons with a grin sharper than any broker's. Their war cry echoes against the far-flung mountains: *Suuuuuuuuuuuuueeeeeeeeeee.....*

The company of Attorneys quickly flank the feral Stockbrokers, encircling the frightened middlemen. In a blur, the Attorneys kick off their Bruno Maglis and slip on jogging sneakers, and before the brokers know it, they have been set upon, a spiraling noose of lawyers choking away at their protective circle. The brokers fight back, scratching and clawing, ripping and tearing, but for every Attorney that falls, two more replace him. Linen falls in tatters like snowflakes upon the sand. Shrieks of pain and surprise – *how us? never us!* – flash through the night, and then, in silence, it ends.

The Attorneys, when they are done, do not strip the bodies for their contact sheets. They do not loot indexes or snatch address books. Each Attorney simply marks his time – three-tenths of an hour – on a small sheet of paper, then erases the figure and upgrades it to six-tenths. A *hyah!*, and the Attorneys spur on their Actuarial steeds, galloping off in the moonlight.

A cricket chirps.

Hours later, after blood and ink have conspired to mix and stain the whispering sands, there is movement within the battleground. Slowly, the sole surviving broker struggles out from under the pile of his fallen comrades, moving mindlessly in the direction of that cloying, powerful scent. There will be a time for action, a time for revenge, a time to reinvest, but for now he must rest. The next butte is not far off.

The last remaining feral Stockbroker stumbles through the sand. ●

DALTON KEANE



Dalton Keane is 24 years old and hasn't quite figured out exactly what he wants in life. Right now, he's living in Los Angeles, working construction during the day, as a line cook in a Mediterranean restaurant at night, and writing whenever he can find the time. He has no pets, no political affiliation, and just broke up with his girlfriend of 8 months, so if anyone's highly turned on by his story, he's open to invitations.