

# Malice at Midnight

By Brandon Quakkelaar



I woke because of the snarling. The bed shuddered as our dog leapt out and tore from the room. Her claws skated on the hardwood as she accelerated. Sixty pounds of Golden Labrador barely made the corner. She thumped down the stairs like a bowling ball, snarling and growling the whole way.

Blinking away dreamland, I stumbled out of bed, and lurched toward the closet. It was the dead of night, and something felt wrong.

I opened the closet door and started going through my home defense checklist. The safe fought me as I fat fingered the combination. After a perceived eternity the door eventually swung open. *Shotgun...fanny-pack with shells...what else?*

My wife, Connie, woke up with a confused groan. “What’s gotten into that dog?” She lifted her head off the pillow.

“I don’t know yet, but I’ll find out.”

The kids named our dog Nugget. We got her as a two month old puppy. She grew into a barrel of a dog and was huge, fast, and comically clumsy. She usually had a big dumb smile on her face. That is, when she wasn’t sounding like she wanted to rip someone’s throat out.

Connie, still half asleep with her eyes closed, was up on one elbow now. She whisper-shouted, “Nugget. Quiet. You’re going to wake the kids.” Forcing her eyes open, she saw me standing there looking like a LARPer. “Really?” she asked flatly without expecting a response.

I shrugged. “I’ll go see what Nugget’s complaining about. Can you check on the kids? They’re probably already awake.”

Together, we headed to the kids’ rooms. On the way, I put on my active hearing protection earmuffs. I switched them on and spun the volume knob. The speakers buzzed slightly as they started relaying the sounds of our clothes rustling with each step.

“Hon, take the kids into our room.”

“What?”

“Yeah. Keep together until I figure out what’s happening. Alright? If something goes wrong, the safe is open. Your pistol and magazines are ready.”

Passing the kids’ bedrooms, I continued down the hall towards the stairs. Connie turned into Leah’s room. She had just turned seven. Kurt, eleven, was in the next bedroom.

The kids didn’t want to leave their beds. Connie’s voice had a motherly edge as she insisted on their obedience. Eventually I heard commotion and shuffling feet behind me as they obeyed.

I knelt at the top of the staircase. Kneeling let me get a better angle so I could see farther downstairs while keeping as much of myself out of sight as possible. That was the defensive strongpoint in my house. Mystery in front of me. Family protected behind me. No one was going to get to my family without coming this way.

I listened for a moment or two. Nothing. Nugget was noisy as ever, but there were no clues about what upset her.

Just in case someone was there, I yelled into the darkness, “You must leave!”

More listening. I turned up the electronic ears, held my breath, and strained to hear any hint of what could’ve made me and Nugget so alarmed. “We’re armed! YOU MUST LEAVE!” I punctuated that last bit by racking my twelve gauge. Nugget was still bothered, but I couldn’t hear footsteps or anything that sounded like an intruder. That’s okay. I can be patient. There’s no need to go exploring.

So, I waited.

“Wouldn’t it be better if we called the police?” Connie’s voice came from behind me.

“Not yet. I don’t know if there’s an emergency.”

“She’s never been noisy like this.”

I nodded, then turned my attention back down the stairs.

I kept waiting.

After several minutes, I knew I had a problem. My family wouldn’t wait forever. Stress would build. Patience would falter. I was ready to defend us, but the house was quiet (apart from our own noises.) Behind me, Connie was getting a little louder as the antsy kids needed more wrangling. Nugget’s fruitless search continued with her claws clicking against the hardwood floors.

Realizing that future Thanksgiving dinners will likely feature stories of how “Dad freaked out that one night,” I decided to be proactive and go investigate. I stood and headed down the stairs which emptied into the foyer. My eyes scanned the room as I checked the front door. It was as I left it: closed and locked. Then I turned toward the living room. It had a big picture window with closed curtains. I tugged on one edge to peek out.

Motion outside.

My hair stood on end, and my vision narrowed. A dark figure moved under the trees. My mind raced. *Why would someone be here in the middle of the night?* He could obviously be a criminal. But then again, he was probably just a neighborhood teen playing Capture the Flag with his friends. The blood pounding in my ears betrayed that I didn’t really believe that.

I lost sight of the figure as he darted to the front corner of my house.

More motion. A second figure seemed to follow the first.

The original figure came back into view as he followed my home's exterior. He stayed slightly crouched, and moved smoothly. He paused, right in front of the window, and cocked his head slightly. It was as if he heard something.

Then, without warning, he hit the dirt! He barely dodged a leaping attack from the second figure. The attacker sailed through the air! Glass shattered as my front window was completely engulfed with fur, teeth, claws, and falling drapes. The whole house shuddered and groaned under the weight of the impact. Cold air flooded in. I fell backwards and desperately kicked my legs to create some distance. My foot swiped glass. Blood smeared on the floor.

A beast rose from where it crashed. *What kind of trick was the moonlight playing on me?* My sense of scale broke for a moment and my living room suddenly felt very small, like a backyard playhouse, with a giant beast stumbling in the middle of it. It had thin wiry fur and I could see the joints and muscles move beneath a gray hide that looked stretched to the limit—like a canvas over a pine frame.

A vindicated Nugget attacked. The snarling dog streaked across the room. She sank her teeth deep into the beast's shoulder. It grunted, then grabbed Nugget by her scruff. The beast had claws, fingers, thumbs, elbows... My mind stuttered as I realized that the beast's front leg was actually an arm!

My state of stupor ended abruptly because the stranger, who was still outside my window, stood up and opened fire. The report of his shots clarified what I should do next. Rather than standing there slack jawed and white-knuckling a very effective tool for defensive destruction, I raised my shotgun and the two of us unloaded a deafening volley into the intruder. It literally howled in pain, and its hide rippled as it absorbed every impact. The creature threw my dog into the wall, stunning her, and freeing it's shoulder from her jaws.

Then it turned to the stranger, just to get rewarded with a face full of lead. Six rapid blasts and the beast stumbled backwards. It tripped and fell behind the couch. It was trapped in a corner.

I senselessly racked and fired my shotgun. Cushion stuffing launched out from the couch hiding the beast. Terrified that the monster would get up, I racked and fired again. Then racked and fired again! Each shot propelled more fabric and fluff into the air. The stranger's weapon, a pistol, fired it's last round and fell silent. Glass crunched as he stepped through the empty window frame. He reloaded his pistol. The smoothness of his motions showed mastery over his weapon.

My shotgun emptied as I fired the last loaded shell.

For a brief moment, no one was shooting. The beast was down. I let go a sigh of relief.

The wall behind the couch was full of holes and covered with bits of fur and blood. Then, unbelievably, the beast rose. It was covered in blood but it's eyes fixed on me. It coiled its body to spring.

I scrambled to reload. My mind screamed, "Faster! Faster!" But my reeling brain couldn't overcome shaking hands and frozen fingers. A dropped shell bounced on the floor.

The beast leapt.

The stranger reacted fast. He could have side stepped and left me to suffer all the beast's fury, but instead he sprang forward. He grabbed the coffee table with both hands, and flipped it vertical; like a shield. The beast sailed into it headfirst. Its skull hit with a loud crack. The angle of the table gave the stranger an advantage and the beast was stopped for a moment. The stranger crouched and turned slightly to brace with his shoulder against the table. He looked at me, jerked his chin upward indicating direction, and flatly said, "Shoot it!" By that time I had gotten my act together and had a loaded shotgun again. I was happy to oblige the stranger. The beast's head appeared over the top of my upturned table, and I eagerly unloaded several rounds into its snout. It stumbled in surprise and blindly fell toward the window. It had no nose, nor any teeth left. It fled into the night. By this time, Nugget recovered

from being stunned. To my dismay, she chased the jelly-headed monster into the cold.

The stranger checked his watch. “We have just a few minutes while it regenerates. It’ll come back.”

My pulse thundered in my ears and I tried to catch my breath. “Dude, what is that?” I jerked my shotgun in the direction it went. “And, what the hell are you doing here?” I squeezed the grip of my shotgun to stop it from shaking.

“Most people call that a werewolf.”

The words hung in the air. I scoffed and sat down to pick glass from my foot. “Right. That explains everything.” The sarcasm dripped.

“Call me Disciple. I’m here to fight things like that.”

Looking up at him, his expression was calm but calloused. He believed every word, and he didn’t seem to care much if I didn’t.

“Regenerate?”

He nodded.

Looking around, I realized it wasn’t the time to figure out whether he was crazy, or whether I was crazy, or whether it even mattered at all. There were bigger things to worry about. Things like: what to do if the beast—well—what to do if the “werewolf” comes back.

My cranked earmuffs relayed tears coming from the kids upstairs. They’re probably terrified—not knowing anything other than hearing the cacophony of noises from the battle.

Disciple must have heard it too, or he saw our surroundings and deduced a family lived here.

“You have family in the house.”

I stood up and nodded, not quite sure if he was stating a fact or asking a question.

“Police are coming!” shouted my wife.

Disciple muttered under his breath, “That’ll complicate things.”

My face must have shown the confusion I felt. Disciple explained, “The cops might not be as much help as you’d think.”

He pulled out what looked like an industrial use phone with extra mass around the corners for drop protection. He swiped,

tapped, and otherwise fiddled with it for a few moments, then he glanced at his watch again.

“It’ll be back before they get here anyway. Keep that twelve gauge ready, and get the family out of here.”

I took stock of our situation; *gaping hole in my house, missing dog, family to protect, oh...and an evil supernatural monster*. All that added up to a really bad time.

I felt particularly vulnerable standing there with a cold breeze coming through the empty picture window, and realized how many other windows were all around me. The house was closer to a fishbowl than a fortress. Saying “we should go” might be the understatement of the century.

I looked upstairs and saw my wife. She had grabbed her pistol while she was up there, a 9mm. I called up, “Connie, this man’s name is Disciple. He’s helping us, so don’t shoot him. We need to leave the house. Kids, get your shoes and jackets on.”

Connie said, “We’d be safer inside. Let’s stay upstairs, or head into the basement.”

“I know what you’re saying, Hon, but this isn’t normal. This is a monster.” Ordinarily I’d agree with her. My home is my castle, after all. But, since we are dealing with something supernatural, I don’t want to risk it. The werewolf doesn’t care about breaking and entering, and several blasts from my Mossberg only managed to slow it down. At that moment we had time to go get in the van, and put miles between us and it.

“Connie, we can’t get cornered by it. If we stay here we’ll be like fish in a barrel. We’re leaving.” I said. Disciple nodded and looked at his watch again.

Connie collected the kids, and Disciple approached one of the windows to peak out. When the kids got downstairs they looked scared. Little Leah was crying.

“Where’s Nugget?” asked Kurt, “Is she okay?” Kurt grew up with that dog, and I knew how much she meant to him.

“Nugget is outside protecting us. Don’t worry about her. You need to protect your sister.” As I spoke Nugget reappeared. Her head was low and she was limping. Her hop back through the picture window was accompanied by pained yelp.

“Time’s almost up. Is your garage attached?” Disciple asked.

“Yes,” I said as I grabbed the kids’ jackets.

A howl pierced the air and the hairs on the back of my neck and arms stood straight. If it’s howling, then its face was probably done growing back. “Come on, guys. Let’s go, let’s go,” I said.

Kurt managed to grab Nugget’s collar as she started growling, and I started leading everyone to the garage door. My house was a typical colonial layout and the garage door was located through the kitchen on the opposite side of the house from where we were.

Disciple checked his pistol as we made our way through the kitchen. He held it in the low ready position as he looked out the window. It was a Glock 20 chambered in 10mm. That’s a big round. I hadn’t ever shot one before. But, I imagined, if I were ever hiking in bear country, that’s the sort of gun I’d carry.

As those thoughts flashed through my mind, Disciple smoothly raised his Glock and fired a deafening three round string out the window. *I guess the werewolf is back.* The window pane broke and the glass fell to the floor. The shards made splashing sounds as they hit the ground.

Connie, realizing what was happening, grabbed the kids and pulled them to the nearest safe place, which was through the basement door. She reacted so quickly the kids and dog practically vanished.

Clutching my shotgun, I rushed to a window. I peered out through the moonlit yard into the trees and brush beyond. Reflexively I jerked my head away just as a brick flew through the window pane. It missed my head but clipped my earmuffs, sending them to the floor. Disciple raised his pistol again, and fired that cannon three more times. My hands jerked to cover my naked eardrums, but I was too late. Piercing pain and a swimming head were my rewards for not being quick enough.

Another window broke. The werewolf relentlessly threw bricks, rocks, and even firewood. Disciple was fast enough to duck out of the way, but the remaining glass stood no chance.

With the world properly smothered under a blanket of Tinnitus, I scrambled to replace my earmuffs on my head. I made sure the volume was maxed out to overcome the ringing. My



injured foot left bloody smears on the bright kitchen tile as I cautiously returned to the window to get a bead on the beast. If it ventured into the open yard I wanted to blast it, and maybe get it to retreat again. Then we'd have the opening we needed to make our escape in the van.

I looked out the window, gingerly this time. As I scanned for the werewolf, my mind started analyzing. *Okay, if this is a werewolf, what does that mean? Where do werewolves come from? What do werewolves want? What can werewolves do?* I realized I didn't actually know anything about them. Sure, I was familiar with the folklore. But, how much of those stories were taken from reality versus imagination? I shook my head—still finding it all a bit unbelievable.

I did know it was aggressive. Very aggressive. And, it was not dumb. It knew how to stalk and surprise. It also wasn't crossing the open yard where we could get shots on target.

Disciple interrupted my thoughts saying, "You don't need to be that close to the wall." I snapped out of my concentration to consider my position. My shoulder was right up against the wall, under the window, like I'd seen in the movies. "Back up so you can keep your barrel pointed toward the threat, and work angles behind your cover. If you're leaning against the wall with your barrel down, then you're not in a good position to quickly engage." Good tips. I gave him an appreciative nod as I reoriented myself.

I ended up next to the kitchen junk drawer. That was handy. I quickly opened it and slid my hand inside to grab the keys. If the werewolf is keeping its distance then we should make some progress toward leaving.

Disciple fired three more times, tracking the werewolf's movement. Based on the direction of his shots, I could tell that it was looping around the house. I opened the door to the basement. There Connie stood, pistol in hand, guarding the kids.

"Let's hurry. We're gonna run to the van." With one arm I picked up Leah, who was so scared she had curled up into a ball. Kurt still had a firm hold of Nugget's collar, even though she was straining to run off again. Everyone ran swiftly through the kitchen, and into the garage.

Before we could get in the van, a sudden thundering sound made everyone jump. We froze for a moment. The werewolf was assaulting the heavy two-car garage door. Though, it wasn't making much progress. That old creaky door was from back when they still made garage doors out of solid wood. So we had that going for us. If the werewolf wanted to get in, it had panels of nearly two inch thick pine stopping him.

I put Leah down, tossed the keys to Disciple, and herded the kids into the van. Kurt held Nugget tightly. Disciple jumped into the driver's seat and Connie took shotgun. She kept her pistol trained on the garage door in case the werewolf broke through. We were ready to make our escape but the beast was just outside. If we opened the door now, it'd be on us in a heartbeat.

I completely forgot about the garage window. It had a blanket over it rather than having proper drapes or blinds, and I kept enough stuff leaned against that wall so most people visiting wouldn't even know a window was there. Out of sight, out of mind, I suppose. If I had remembered it, then maybe I could have anticipated the werewolf's next tactic.

Glass exploded. Everyone ducked. An evil howl reverberated off the walls. Leah screamed.

I spun around just in time to fire a single buckshot blast before it smacked the gun from my hands, sending it flying. I dove for the gun but the werewolf was too fast. Its full weight crashed into me, and slammed my body against the tool wall. Shovels, rakes, and hoes dug into my back. It sank its teeth into my left shoulder and my arm went limp. Looking down, it's eyes were glowing red, and the edges of its mouth seemed to be curling into a gleeful grin. Looking for a weapon, I flailed with my right arm. My desperate fingers found an ax. Swinging hard, I buried the ax head into its side. The blow surprised the werewolf and its jaws released me. It stumbled backward and swatted the ax away. I just barely hung onto the handle. Stepping forward I raised the ax for another blow, but the werewolf knew what to expect. Grinning, it dodged my swing. The momentum of the ax pulled me off-balance, exposing my back to the monster. Like lightning, it slashed me.

The van's engine roared and the werewolf turned toward it.

“NO!” I yelled. If the beast was fighting me, then it wasn’t hurting my family.

Disciple and I locked eyes. “Get out of here!” I punctuated the command with a jerk of my head toward the garage door. The werewolf clawed the back of the van and started ripping through the sheet metal. *My family is in there!*

Rather than using the garage door opener, Disciple squealed the tires and the van leapt forward. The supports holding up the door were ripped apart and the van burst out of the garage, pushing the huge wooden door down the driveway. The werewolf moved to follow, but regular date nights at the local ax throwing bar were about to pay off. Before that wretched monster took two steps, I heaved and threw that ax. Thanks to the Almighty, I judged the distance correctly. The ax buried itself into the werewolf’s back. The weight of the impact threw it off balance, and it stumbled, and fell. The wailing howl, full of werewolf pain, was music to my ears. The van made it to the end of the driveway and quickly sped out of sight.

I couldn’t celebrate my victory for very long. Blood soaked my clothes, and the ground around me. My head was getting woozy. I stood there with no weapon, no cover, no working left arm, and a werewolf.

*The shotgun!*

I turned to look for it. But, before I could move, the full weight of the werewolf landed on my back. It pinned me into the concrete. I felt both searing heat and crippling cold. A furious screeching emanated from its maw. A thousand voices screamed inside my head.

“yOU CaN nOt WiN!”

The voices radiated pure hate. I had no strength left. It flipped me over and attacked the soft parts. My whole body shook as its head thrashed from side to side. My blood squelched between me and the pavement as my body rocked under the barrage. The screaming and screeching was deafening.

“wE wiLL tuRn YoU! TeeTH aNd ClawS ArE beTTER ThAN WinGS, aNd SLavErY!”

I managed to just barely posture up. I reached as far as I could and grasped the ax that was still in its back. I yanked it out which interrupted the werewolf's gleeful gutting of my stomach. It dropped me, and lifted its head. The angle was awkward, but with all my remaining strength I swiped the ax horizontally. The blade found purchase under the werewolf's skull, freeing its head from its body.

Even without a head, the demonic screaming didn't stop. It got louder! A dark cloud discharged from the gaping neck. The cloud had dozens, maybe hundreds, of voices. It hissed and screamed hateful threats. As the cloud grew, the body seemed to deflate. It got smaller, and smaller, until just a human body was left. He appeared no different than any other man. The evil cloud evaporated, and all fell silent.

I laid on the bloody pavement. My strength was gone. I couldn't lift my head anymore. My head swam as I tried to focus on the trees above me. I couldn't. It was as if stained glass windows were between me and the rest of the world. I knew what was happening. I knew Connie and the kids were safe, praise God. But, also—I knew I couldn't be with them. At least, not here. Then everything went dim.

“And, when I opened my eyes I was here, talking with you.”  
The listener nodded encouragingly.

I peered around me, not quite comprehending where I was laying. I turned my gaze down, expecting to find my torso disemboweled and bleeding. But my body looked brand new.

The person listening to my story stayed silent for a moment. I think he was letting me grapple with my new surroundings. I turned back to him, and He said, “Well done, my good and faithful servant.”