

## KILL-MARKET

The veins in the agent's neck bulged like garden hoses and his eyes were shifty and beady, the color of weather-scarred concrete. "You can do it?"

Frazier Walks-Quick nodded. "Yeah."

It was the same agent, again, in the same office: the same bushy eyebrows, almost touching, like some furry thick worm quivering. The same demeanor (business between friends), the same strange smell, (like industrial-strength cleaner and woodchips, combined); the same score of copper chains, hanging heavy around the agent's neck, swaying, brushing the bulk of big steel briefcases, making little metal-on-metal scratching noises, the sound of pocket-change rattling --

"You're still with us?" the agent asked.

No answer.

"Mister Walks-Quick?"

"Yes," Frazier said.

On the desk was a gold bar. It was stamped. *328 oz., Au*. The agent had pulled it out of a leather and fur bag, patched with copper wire weaves.

"Stay with me, Mister Walks-Quick..."

"How long do I have?"

"Well," the agent said, as his spindly, long fingers tapped the gold bar. "Mister Walks-Quick, this is yours, if you can do it in less than five hours." The agent blinked,

eyelids sliding over eyes as big as baseballs -- he was a macro-human, a massive man: his genetic code reverberations from a war one-hundred and twelve standard years before; big proportions all around, his voice so loud it knocked over a half-empty bottle on the desk. "Between five hours, and," here the agent waved his humongous hand, as if in illustration, causing a breeze, "say, ten hours – yes – if you kill'em under five hours, the contract reward will be three hundred troy ounces of gold. If you kill him in over five hours, but under ten, then, well, let's say, we'll give you half of that – market dependent, of course."

Kill-market dependent -- Frazier swallowed. "Sure."

"Over ten hours and --" the agent ran a finger over his neck, a slicing gesture. An ancient-old gesture that Frazier understood.