

# **The Smallest War**



**The Smallest War**  
**Mark Sheehan**

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Cover design by: Matthew Revert

To my family.

Good people are imperfect.  
Bad people aren't.



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# Introduction

In 1867, the United States acquired Alaska from the Russian emperor, Alexander II, for \$7.2 million. Despite extensive negotiations, the countries failed to agree on a key term of the treaty: the map projection for the border in the Bering Sea. A subsequent United Nations convention extending Alaska's exclusive economic zone, and the absence of agreement on that key term, put 15,000 square nautical miles of marine resources in issue. After years of heated debate, the countries settled the dispute, signing the USA/USSR Maritime Boundary Agreement in 1990. While the United States promptly ratified the treaty, the USSR, imploding at the end of the Cold War, did not.

Subsequently, the Russian Federation claims the location of the border and the ownership of 15,000 square nautical miles of marine resources is still to be resolved.

The United States considers the matter closed.

**Ready**

# Chapter 1: The Endgame

Fairview, Texas

Present day

The back window of the Pontiac GTO shattered, and Danny Wellington's only thought was *I can't let her win*. Turning, he saw a figure crouched on the trunk clutching an ice pick; a palsied hand crept towards the figure from the depths of the back seat. Danny's eyes dimmed at the realization of what his next move would cost. Jerking the steering wheel, the GTO mounted the curb, and he took a bead on a bollard guarding the entrance to a car park. It didn't matter—*live or die*— she couldn't win.

## Chapter 2: Burgers, Beers and a Bad Idea

Arlington County, Virginia  
1968

**M**ilo's Bar and Grill had it all: cold beer, burgers steeped in umami with crisp, salty fries, and hookers on the side. But for once, General Frank Withers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and Hank Stammers, the President of US Armorers, were all business.

"We've got a problem," General Withers confided.

"Two ex-wives and alimony up the keister is a problem, Frank. Whatever it is, we'll fix it."

"Small War," General Withers offered.

"Come again?"

"Small War. It's in the name: war on a Lilliputian scale; the antithesis of what we do."

"Shit, General," Hank said, leaning forward. "US Armorers could put a gun in the hand of Jesus. Small War ain't going to happen."

"Too late, Hank. It's buried deep in the Charter of the United Nations. Each country nominated a process. We nominated some crazy bullshit to pacify those fucking pricks from the American Indian Movement. No guns at all! And then there's the list: each country has a max of ten combatants."

"Sounds like a pacifist's wet dream. Give the elephant a peanut: why hasn't it been used?"

"Because the US is a permanent member of the Security Council, and we can veto Small War at our absolute fucking leisure. Coldest day in hell we'd jump on that pony."

“Great! Why worry?” Hank crowed.

“Why? I’ll tell you why,” General Withers replied. “There’s a change in the weather. One Cuban missile crisis, and everyone’s afraid of our nukes. And the peace movement! All you need is love? Give me a fucking break. Add in a limp-dick president, who doesn’t have the kahunas for big war, and we got Small War.”

“So, what do we do? I’ve got shareholders to keep happy.”

“One word: outsourcing. I’ll outsource Small War to US Armorers. The Department of Defense won’t know it’s gone.”

“Christ! What’s US Armorers going to do with Small War?” Hank asked.

“*Everything!* You’ll recommend; I’ll approve; the army will spend big!”

“And?”

“First round of budget cuts, we’ll run Small War into the ground, leaving the president with no choice but to veto because we’d lose!”



# Chapter 3: Danny Wellington: Round One

South Boston, Massachusetts  
1988

**T**he bowl was won at a carnival sideshow in '27 by Colleen's grandmother. Despite being made from cheaply produced glass, it became a prized family heirloom—a reliable indicator of the family's fortunes.

During the Great Depression, the potato and onion soup in the bowl ebbed as jobless queues grew, but the Second World War changed all. The slumped and hungry marched proudly to the front with full bellies, and the soup flowed as Colleen's grandfather was put to work in a munitions factory, but the plenty faltered when he stole a .30-06 Springfield cartridge to kill a stray cat.

Had the cartridge been able, it would have counselled against letting a .30-06 loose in a crowded tenement. Instead, it sat quietly while a cold chisel was placed against its base. Colleen's grandfather, his tongue protruding in fierce concentration, lined up the feline and struck the cold chisel.

The makeshift firing pin proved alarmingly effective, so one blow sent the bullet on its way. It missed the cat by a whisker, taking eight of its nine lives, burrowed through a brick wall, and eviscerated their landlord. The jury took just five minutes to find Colleen's grandfather guilty, and he was sent down, getting three squares a day, until the great state of Massachusetts strapped him into the electric chair and dimmed his lights.

Colleen's grandmother stepped in as breadwinner: turning tricks to replenish the bowl with a greasy broth. Time ticked; batons were passed. Colleen's mother, the oldest girl, was gifted the bowl on her wedding day along with her mother, who joined the newlyweds in their one-bedroom apartment.

The bowl's tour of duty continued under Colleen's mother, surviving a tempestuous marriage, in which everything but the bowl sailed across the apartment. Colleen envied each plate, cup, and tacky souvenir her parents exchanged because for a brief second, they flew free. Which is all she wanted: to soar out the window and fly far away, like darling Wendy. Anything to escape the stealthy creep of her father's boots outside her bedroom.

On her mother's death, the bowl was bequeathed to Colleen, chipped, cracked, and discolored, ready to serve another generation of slum-dwelling shit-kickers. God knows she did her best to break the cycle: marrying outside the close-knit Irish community. Colleen turned down marriage offers from the Breen boys, Tim O'Connor, and Seamus O'Shea, setting up house with Danny Wellington.

But Danny Wellington had stronger Irish roots than she, the last name hiding one thousand years of whisky-soaked, peat-digging poverty.

Danny Wellington.

The man who worked tirelessly each weekend at Trinity Church. The man who danced a jig on the drop of a hat and would give you the shirt off his back. The God-fearing teetotaler who sipped lemonade at the East End Bar, before heading home to his small house: three-kids-to-a-room small. Danny's house was freshly painted, and well maintained, unlike the neighboring houses, which had sprung weatherboards and broken windows, but the neighbors topped Danny when it came to décor. Church mice all, love was their only expense, whereas Danny would have none of it. And that's why his kids called him Chuckles: because there was nothing fucking funny about Chuckles.

The lemonade belied the three bottles of Wild Irish Rose Chuckles drank at home. The first bottle made him belligerent. The second bottle quietened him; his eyes retreating, so they were no more than pinpricks in his slab of a head. The third bottle was most feared: it burnished Chuckles' blade.

That night, the bowl held a stringy stew fit for five. Not counting the cat and dog, there were five more in the house, and all held breath, hoping they'd use it to cool a share of the bounty. With two bottles down, Chuckles ignored the hunger stalking his family, filled his plate to overflowing, and sat in front of the TV.

But that night, the TV was on the fritz, and without the idiot tube to draw the ire of Chuckles' blade, the stew was transformed from sustenance to a coveted boxing trophy. Like any prize, it demanded a contest, so the family famine became a feud.

The twins, Daragh and Darcy, or 'Double D' as Colleen called them, were on the undercard. They were occasional friends, but their mainstay was a sibling rivalry that had seen them scrap from the moment they'd been delivered down the slip 'n slide of Colleen's birth canal. See one, see both, each boy sporting Chuckles' emerald green eyes, but despite nature and nurture, they weren't the same hungry, ten-year-old boy, and it was those differences that would decide the fight.

Chuckles—stopwatch, referee, and judge, rolled into one—struck the third bottle of Wild Irish Rose three times with a knife, mimicking the bell at the start of a round. The boys stood still for a second—each wearing a pair of oversized, red leather boxing gloves—before going at each other like a pair of Rock 'Em Sock 'Em Robots, spitting and snarling in fierce competition for a full serve of stew. One of the gloves had a badly repaired tear, so the occasional horsehair flew as their fists pummeled the air.

Because the twins' boxing lessons were yet to bud, they threw cartwheels, like weak swimmers in the first throes of panic. Most of the blows didn't connect, but it looked the business, so Chuckles was content, sucking the third bottle as the doppelgängers dueled;

Daragh slowly pushing Darcy across the room, until he was pressed against the TV with no more ground to give.

And that's when their differences told.

If life was like a box of chocolates, Daragh would have been a hard centered bonbon encased in layers of bitterness and anger—a tooth-shattering treat, with an aftertaste of despair. As he pressed his brother against the TV, he rejoiced at the look in Darcy's eyes—the same look Colleen gave Chuckles, hoping he'd change his ways.

Had the twins' relationship been better, they would have struck a side deal, one of them taking the fall, so they could share the stew and laugh how they fooled Chuckles, but not Double D. Daragh, sensing the TV was a fair replacement for the ropes, punished Darcy with a wheeling sledgehammer that slipped through his brother's slowing defense. The blow caught Darcy on the chin sending him crashing to the floor. A trail of blood snaked from Darcy's lips: the fight fleeing the boy.

Daragh breathed easy, accepting Chuckles' thumping congratulation on his back, knowing it was better than the thumping that accompanied failure. He thought his brother weak, knowing he could beat him at will. The only downside, he'd have to pick his spitting image from the floor and carry him to the bed they shared. Daragh couldn't know his brother was playing the long game, and it would be Darcy who'd have the last pick and carry—down the steps of Trinity Church with the remains of Daragh, who'd die with a needle in his arm, unable to quell Chuckles' legacy.

Daragh performed his duty, carrying his twin to bed, clearing the ring, but the reek of Darcy's desperate defense hung in the air—a fug of fear enveloped the room. The five Wellington girls sat on the couch watching Chuckles strap the still warm gloves on Little Danny. Early on—before she understood—Siobhan, the youngest sister, slipped into her first communion dress and paraded the living room, like a devout ring girl. She held up a sign with 'Round One' in blue crayon mouthing the words she'd written but struggled to speak because Chuckles had struck her deaf. She hid the sign after

the first night, burnt it on the second, and cut her first communion dress into shreds on the third, so she was no different to the other sisters, who sat mute and slack jawed, waiting for it to be over. No different, except she was Little Danny's cheerleader. They were close—so very close—Little Danny learning to lip-read and sign, so they could talk.

Little Danny was eight—named for his father—and as old as the decade. Like his brothers, he was gifted with red hair, freckles and pale skin, making the four boys all but indistinguishable.

Connor, Little Danny's opponent, was as old as the decade plus three, so he was broader in shoulder and chest and three years longer in arm and leg. While Little Danny took after Chuckles with green eyes, Connor favored Ma with a set of bright-blue peepers. Peepers that sparkled when the bowl was full. That night, after two days of not enough, Connor's eyes were dull: he was ready to use the longer reach and heavier punch of plus three.

“Come on, Danny Boy, don't let your da down. You are nineteen—zip, boyo. If you don't make a better show of it, I'll just give the stew to Connor.”

Little Danny dropped his head, knowing any response he gave would be wrong. Instead, his stomach spoke, and it growled all the way to his corner. The same corner he'd masterminded nineteen defeats at the crashing hands of Connor—who was better by three years, twenty pounds of stringy muscle, and three inches of reach. On a good day, it was a hiding to nothing—Connor's vinegar-sweet sneer, from the other corner, said it all.

Connor and Little Danny lacked the wham-bam of Double D, but they were top of the card for good cause: their boxing skills had bloomed. When Chuckles struck the third bottle three times, they stalked each other, shuffling, ducking, and weaving. Connor, eager to eat, sold a dummy, and Little Danny bought all he had. Then Connor jabbed—his left fist powered the distance between them, hitting Little Danny's gloves, sending a strand of horsehair flying, before carrying through and clattering Little Danny's head.

In unison, the sisters averted their eyes.

“Keep fuckin’ watching! It ain’t over till I say!” Chuckles snarled.

Little Danny was lucky, because his defenses washed some of the ferocity from the blow, but there was still enough momentum to crack his nose, tear his eyes, and test his mettle. His head was driven backwards, putting him on his heels, an inch away from being on his ass. Little Danny shook his head to clear his eyes and droplets of blood splattered the TV. At that, the screen flickered into life, and the General Lee sailed through the air accompanied by a “Yeeeeee-Haaa.” But the exuberance of a beautifully executed car stunt couldn’t overcome the noise of Connor stalking his prey: each punch accompanied by a sharp blow of exhaled air. The screen dimmed before the car landed, but the children didn’t care. The entertainment in the living room had it all: mind numbing terror that would beat the rest of their lives.

Little Danny backpedaled around the room, desperate to buy space. Connor followed him at his leisure—showboating to Da. Chuckles looked on with glee, while Ma stood in the doorway to the kitchen, clutching the bowl and a towel.

Little Danny knew the end wasn’t nigh. In the first five fights, Chuckles called it when Ma threw the towel into the ring—it was obvious he had no more to give. That changed at fight six, the towel was thrown, but the fight continued, and Connor was allowed one more swing, before Chuckles waved Connor to his corner—slapping him on the back in congratulations.

Fight twelve was different. Chuckles only called time after Little Danny got one good punch on target. He did it, but closing the three-inch gap cost him dearly. The three-inch gap Connor could have helped him close—so Little Danny could punch the clock. Instead, Connor cycled his arms, dropping one punch after another on Little Danny, daring him to close.

And then there was now. The fight would only end when Little Danny was knocked stupid, unable to stand, despite the steady beat

of Chuckles' belt on his back, as he lay on the floor. He faked it as soon as he understood the rules, but Connor called him on it, angering Chuckles, and Little Danny was beaten to his feet, sobbing, only to be clubbed semi-conscious by Connor.

Connor and Chuckles: *the old one-two!*

Little Danny may have only been as old as the decade, but he knew, some night soon, hunger wouldn't worry him again because the old one-two would beat the life from his green eyes.

Connor's showboating ended abruptly, and he came in like a train. Little Danny gave ground, hoping to create a gap greater than three inches, but a foot caught on a torn piece of linoleum, so he managed just two. The shot caught Little Danny on the gloves, splitting the tired repair, throwing a cloud of horsehair into the air. Connor, expecting Chuckles to call the round, lowered his gloves.

But Little Danny sensed an opportunity: nineteen beatings in the luxury of the living room made him hungry for victory. Boxing lessons forgotten, he lifted his right leg, hopped with his left foot, kicked back his right leg, and drove his right fist towards Connor's face. It was a classic comic book punch—superhero to a T—out of keeping with their boxing lessons, which is why it worked.

The glove peeled apart as it flew, revealing the fist of an eight-year-old boy, clenched, angry beyond those years. Connor saw it coming, but it was for naught—Little Danny's bare-knuckle clubbed Connor's right temple. If he'd responded in kind to the comic book punch, tweeting blue birds would have circled Connor's head, but this was no cartoon, so Connor's vision blackened, and he collapsed.

As Connor crumpled, Little Danny felt a rush, like sugar. Later, when he was paying for Chuckles' despair, he'd compare it to a hit of crank. He stood over his brother; his mouth wet with the thought of the dismal stew in the bowl. Urged on by Chuckles, Little Danny dropped and pummeled the face that had robbed him of nineteen dinners. He saw the towel thrown by Ma, but Chuckles' words drove him on.

Mark Sheehan

Little Danny punched until Connor's life was his, and Little  
Danny was no



# Afterword

If you enjoyed *The Smallest War*, please review on Amazon and goodreads. With enough positive reviews, my writing side-hustle will become my main-hustle, and I'll be able to finish writing the next book in less than five years!

While penning *The Smallest War*, a ton of stuff happened, and some of it wheedled its way between the covers.

Wildfires scoured Alberta, Canada, which became Chapter Twenty-Five 'England Burns'. I watched Danny Green and Anthony Mundine duke it out for the Australian cruiserweight title in February 2017 and wrote Chapter Seventeen, 'Danny Wellington: Round Three'.

I live in Perth and love AC/DC so treated readers to both in Chapter Twelve, 'Matt, Ranga and Dirty Deeds'.

Terrorism has been a constant in the last five years, so Zafira and Latif packed the car and went for a drive in Chapter Ninety-Seven, 'KIA', concluding in Chapter 101, 'Round Three—Johnnie and Vlad'.

Taking inspiration from historical events, Ambassador Chekin's references to hell freezing over in Chapter 23, 'Give Peace a Chance', are based upon Ambassador Adlai Stevenson's fiery confrontation with his Russian counterpart during the Cuban missile crisis.

As I prepare *The Smallest War* for publication, stuff continues to happen, notably the war in Ukraine. Amongst far greater issues, the war gave rise to the destruction of the Antonov An-225 Mriya referred to in Chapters 35 to 38.

At the time of writing, it is unclear how the confrontation will end, or who will be the victor. The only certainties are war and truth are poor companions, and the conflagration will have ramifications far beyond anything I could imagine and reduce to writing.

Mark Sheehan  
Perth, Australia.  
1 June 2022.

## About The Author

Mark Sheehan is married with two children. He was born in New Zealand and lived in England for twelve years before settling in Western Australia.

*The Smallest War* is Mark's first novel. His second is in development.

