

**“PREJUDICE AND DISLOYALTY WILL DESTROY AN
ORGANIZATION”**

COACH LEE CORSO

**“TERRORISM IS THE CALCULATED USE OF VIOLENCE,
OR THE THREAT OF VIOLENCE TO ATTAIN POLITICAL,
RELIGIOUS, OR IDEOLOGICAL GOALS BY INSTILLING
FEAR OR USING INTIMIDATION OR COERCION.”**

AR 190-52

**“COUNTERTERRORISM IS THE CALCULATED USE OF
VIOLENCE TO ELIMINATE TERRORISTS.”**

DEXTER DIAMOND

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PROLOGUE

SUNDAY 0318 HOURS – JANUARY - OCOEE, FL

Dexter sat straight up, startling King Tut, who had been sleeping soundly on the floor by his side of the bed. His unfocused eyes instinctively moved around in a figure eight, a military tactic that helps soldiers quickly adjust their eyes to darkness. He looked around the darkened room, first at the bedroom door, then at the windows. Nothing. But something was wrong, he could feel it. He looked over at Monique. She was sound asleep. The air handler hummed quietly as it distributed heat throughout the two-story San Remo Ultra. A cold snap was passing through Central Florida from the North, forcing the normally sun-soaked southerners to temporarily bundle up and turn on their heaters. Next week though, according to the forecast, it would be back to another heat wave.

Everything seemed normal, but Dexter's senses, his animal instincts, continuously developed since humans first walked the earth, were going wild with danger signals. Dexter reached between the night stand and the bed and picked up his Heckler & Koch P-7A13 9mm pistol. He chose it over the Sig Sauer for home protection because the kids could never figure out the squeeze-cocker firing mechanism if they ever got their hands on it, and if they did, they didn't have the hand strength to engage it. But that scenario was highly unlikely since he kept all of his guns in a safe when they weren't in his possession. He quietly removed it from its holster and moved quickly to the Videoman on the bedroom wall near the door.

Dexter, using another military tactic, closed his eyes, opened his mouth slightly and listened for sounds in the house for a few seconds; he heard nothing. He pressed the button on the Videoman and the camera/microphone/speaker system mounted outside the front door activated, then electronically looked and listened for any movement outside.

"Tut. Search," Dexter whispered as he pointed toward the door.

King Tut, who had been frozen in a ready stance next to him, broke into action. His first assignment was to check on Matthew and Morgan. Muscles tensed, ears aimed forward to detect the slightest sound, and teeth partially bared, Tut darted silently down the

hallway to seek out and destroy any intruders.

Dexter checked the alarm panel next to the Videoman. There was no flashing red lights, no screaming sirens, and no signs of intrusion. He looked back at the Videoman. He couldn't see anything on the screen, but he heard something that made his heart jump. Someone whispered to someone else, and then there was a shuffling of feet. Someone was in his yard!

He spun and ducked into the bedroom closet. He put on his bullet-proof vest and jumped into his black coveralls. Whoever was in his yard was in for a big surprise when he and Tut came out to greet them. He put on his jungle boots without any socks and grabbed his short-barrel AR15 out of the gun safe. He slung the combat sling over his body, slapped in side-by-side 30 round magazines and chambered a round.

Dexter stepped out into the hallway and whistled for Tut, who was already on his way back to him. He pointed downstairs. "Search," he whispered somewhat excitedly, then went back into the closet and retrieved a thunderflash grenade out of the gun safe, just in case. He stopped suddenly and laughed at himself. He was being paranoid. The Videoman was probably just picking up his neighbor Chris, who was always walking his dog late at night. He shook his head and relaxed a little as he dropped the thunderflash into his left leg pocket.

He checked the Videoman again. This time he saw a figure move at the edge of the screen. The figure was holding a weapon! His heart jumped again. Someone *was* out there! He looked over at Monique. She was still asleep. He extended the stock of his assault rifle, tucked it solidly into his shoulder, and then moved quickly in a 'GROUCHO WALK' to Morgan's room. He snatched her up and ducked into Matt's room. Morgan began to struggle as she awakened. Dexter shushed her and grabbed Matthew.

Nearly at a full run, Dexter burst back into the master bedroom and tossed the confused children onto the bed next to their mother.

Monique sat up dazed and confused. "Wha...? What's going on Dexter?"

"We've got people outside in our yard! I'm going to check it out!" Dexter looked out of the bedroom windows. There were armed men in his back yard. "Take my pistol and get in the closet!" His heart rate increased and his breaths quickened. Using the *Ibuki*

technique, he started breathing through his mouth and quickly calmed down.

“What is it, Dex?” Monique asked as she dragged the barely awake children toward the closet.

“There are men inside in the yard! Dial 9-1-1, now!” He tossed the cordless phone into the closet with them.

Mr. Tut began barking wildly at the front door.

Dexter punched the panic button on the alarm pad, activating the silent alarm, and then called for his dog. “Tut! Come!”

Eighty-five pounds of canine muscle sprinted up the stairs to his master. He too was excited, having smelled the intruders and feeding off of his master’s nervous energy.

Dexter put him in the large walk-in closet with Monique and the kids and gave him a single command. “Guard!” He closed the door, and then changed the selector switch on his AR15 from Single Fire to three-round burst. He moved to the Videoman again and turned it on. When the screen came alive, several figures in dark clothing were gathered at the front door.

He was about to move down the stairs to get a vantage point on the front door when his cellular phone rang. Dexter looked over at the nightstand, wondering who could be calling at this hour. He looked back at the Videoman. The man at the front door of his house was holding a cellular phone. The S.O.B. was calling him on his cell phone!

Dexter grabbed the phone and moved back to the doorway of the bedroom. He pressed the ‘talk’ button, but didn’t say anything.

“Guess who, brother? It’s time to finish this game, and this time I got your ass for sure!”

“Walker? What the hell...?” Dexter’s mind began racing. THOTH was programmed to alert him if Walker or his men crossed into Florida, California, or Washington, DC. How did he get here without THOTH picking up his ‘tag’ and notifying the team? Why didn’t someone alert him that the NAF was closing in on him and his family?

“I got twenty angry Aryan brothers out here Diamond, and they want your black ass! Now you can come out here alone, and we’ll take only you, or we’ll come in and kill everybody! It don’t matter much to me, just so long as you die tonight!”

Dexter almost considered complying, but thought better of it.

Walker would probably kill them all anyway. The Ocoee police should be arriving soon, so all he had to do was hold Walker's outfit off for a short while. He knew that Ocoee's officers were no match for Walker's men, but a distress call with shots being fired in the background would bring every law enforcement officer within a twenty-mile radius. Yes, all he had to do was hold them off for a short time, and he had the firepower to do that.

Dexter hung up the phone and ran down the stairs to do battle. The very second the front door came into view, he opened fire. The expensive double door shattered as the lethal .223 rounds ripped through it, sending the men outside scattering in all directions. Dexter turned and ran back upstairs as the entire downstairs exploded with automatic weapons fire. Bullets tore through every window, followed by powerful concussion grenades.

Dexter stopped at the top of the stairs and sprayed what area he could blindly, in an effort to keep the intruders at bay. He could hear the sounds of doors being kicked in. The inner perimeter had been breached. There were now killers inside of his house. He backed into the master bedroom and closed the door.

Walker called out to him from downstairs. "You are going to die tonight, Diamond! But not before your family does! You should have come out to me and died like a man!"

Dexter's mind raced. Where in the hell did they come from, and why didn't the Command Center contact him? How did Walker get this close without him knowing? And where the hell were the police? He shook it off. None of that mattered now. His wife and children were in mortal danger and there was no way that Walker and his hate-thugs were going to get anywhere near them. He fired some rounds through the door, then grabbed the mattress and box spring off of the bed and placed them against it to slow Walker down.

Finally, he heard the sweet sound of sirens outside. The Ocoee Police had arrived. Then, there was a brief exchange of gunfire. Dexter hoped that the officers were smart enough to be tactical and keep their heads down. Suddenly, the bedroom windows exploded inward as automatic gunfire from the yard below strafed the house. So much for the police, he thought as he hugged the floor. Simultaneously, rounds began ripping through the bedroom doors and the makeshift barricade. It wasn't like in the movies where the mattress stopped the bullets and saved the good guys. These bullets,

real bullets, were punching through the mattress and box spring as if they were wet toilet paper. Dexter fired back through the useless shield, trying to get Walker's men to back off, or at least slow them down. He couldn't tell what was going on outside anymore. He wondered if the police officers survived the firefight and if so, how long would it be before the cavalry arrived. He started shooting through the walls around the windows and the door. He heard screams from both areas; he had scored blind hits.

Walker cursed as two more of his men went down. That made four Aryan warriors wounded or killed by that damned Diamond. The men on the roof outside that were about to make entry into the master bedroom jumped to the ground to avoid Dexter's gunfire, much like the ATF agents did during the raid on the Branch Davidian compound. Walker got a report from one his men outside that more police were starting to arrive. He didn't care. He was going to kill Dexter Diamond tonight, even if it meant facing the entire Central Florida law enforcement community afterward. Walker ordered his men to toss a grenade next to the bedroom door. He was sure that the door was barricaded, and maybe they would get lucky and kill Diamond with the blast.

Dexter heard the thump as the grenade hit the door. He knew exactly what it was. He opened fire on the area around the door again. He was backing into the closet for a final showdown when the explosion propelled the barricade inward and sent wood and plaster in all directions. Disoriented from the force of the blast, Dexter got back to his feet and was about to close the closet door when another grenade landed in the room, right in front of him. Instinctively, he launched himself backward as it exploded.

Dexter sat straight up in bed with his hands holding an imaginary rifle. Tut, who had been sleeping on the floor next to the bed on Dexter's side, raised his head and growled.

He rolled smoothly out of bed and grabbed his pistol from between the nightstand and the bed. "Search," he commanded quietly, as he pointed to the bedroom door. Tut slipped soundlessly out of the room and headed down the hallway toward the children's room in a pre-designated search pattern.

Dexter checked the alarm panel. None of the zones were flashing red, indicating intrusion. He looked over at Monique. She was sound

asleep. He pressed the button on the Videoman. The camera and microphone on the electronic sentry revealed nothing.

By the time Dexter retrieved his AR15 from the gun safe inside his closet, Mr. Tut was heading downstairs to continue his search, with standing orders to attack anyone who did not smell like one of the Diamond family. Dexter clicked the selector switch to Single Fire, and quietly followed his dog downstairs.

Room by room they searched, quiet as shadows, finding nothing but darkness and silence.

Tut went to the interior garage door for the final phase of the search, just as he had been trained. Dexter turned off the alarm from the kitchen key pad and opened the door for Tut. Dutifully, he went into the garage and quickly checked everything, then waited. Dexter opened the garage door just high enough for him to crawl out, and then closed it. He then went to the Videoman on the kitchen wall and turned it on. If Tut encountered any trouble, he would hear it, even if he couldn't see anything. Two minutes later, Tut appeared in front of the camera at the front door.

Dexter went and let him in. "Good dog! Good boy!" he said as he heartily rubbed Tut's muscular body. Tut followed Dexter back to the kitchen where he was rewarded with his favorite treats, a bowl full of cheese-flavored Beggin' Strips and Snausages.

Dexter reset the alarm and looked outside once more. No Jim Walker and no murderous hate-mongers lurking in the shadows. He went to his office and logged into THOTH's network. He asked THOTH to locate the tagged members of the NAF. His team had managed to tag eight of the men at the church in Atlanta, and five or six at the NAF compound. They had missed the ones that stayed inside the church with the hostages, so there was a potential for some of the NAF to sneak up on him.

THOTH's satellite system located the NAF operatives quickly. Dr. Burns' group was still in West Virginia at the compound. Walker's group was in Garland, Texas. Probably laying low at a sympathizer's house, Dexter thought. He heard footsteps in the hallway. Monique was awake. He quickly severed the link with THOTH.

"What are you doing?" she asked through a yawn.

"Nothing. Just doing a little training with Mr. Tut. Go back to

sleep.” He turned off the computer.

“Only if you come with me. Why do you have your rifle? Are you worried about Walker coming here?” She was gently stroking his neck.

His body tingled from her touch. “Not really. It would be too risky for him right now,” Dexter lied. The truth was, Walker was probably going to come after him soon and he was worried about it. “Come on sleepy head. Back to bed with you.” He swatted her on the behind as they left his office.

“Well, since you have so much energy, I have some *special* training for you,” she said slyly.

He lifted up the short pink silk housecoat that she was wearing and grabbed her naked behind. Tut felt the playfulness in the air and nudged Dexter as they went up the stairs.

Dexter thought about his dream. “Let me check on the kids first.” He didn’t wait for an answer. He turned right at the top of the stairs and went first to Morgan’s room, then to Matt’s. His heart raced slightly as he recalled his all-too-real dream. Or was it a premonition, a warning from God? His mother told him that God always prepares people and warns them of imminent danger. She’d always cautioned him to take God’s warnings seriously, for most people ignore them and walk headlong into disaster, misfortune, and sometimes even death.

That dream was warning enough for him. It was time to settle this thing once and for all. It was time to thin the NAF herd. It was time to eliminate Walker and his men before they came for him in real life.

Monique was already in the bed and under the covers when he entered the bedroom. Her legs were moving slowly, gently, under the comforter, showing him that she was anxious for his touch.

Dexter put his assault rifle away and went into the bathroom to wash his hands. He purposely took his time in order to make her wait. He entered the bedroom, stripped, and climbed under the comforter at the foot of the bed. He crawled up between her legs, reached under her thighs and placed his hands just on the front of her hips. He held his mouth about an inch from her vulva and gently blew warm breath on it, causing her to arch her body upward, as if to force the connection that she so desired. Dexter pulled down on her hips to hold her in place, but kept his mouth away to avoid contact,

and continued to tease her.

Monique clenched her teeth and dug into the mattress with her fingers as she squirmed and writhed hopelessly against Dexter's powerful grip. She could feel his granite biceps against her thighs, locking her in place, until he was ready to give her the pleasure she craved. Then, without warning, Dexter placed his mouth fully on her and went to work.

Monique let out a short scream before catching herself. Teeth clenched, she moaned loudly as the first of several orgasms sent her body into a wave of pleased convulsions.

CHAPTER ONE ROUND-UP

MONDAY - 0600 HOURS

The alarm on Dexter's G-Shock beeped, marking the completion of the forty-five minute ride on the Enduro-Cycle 200 spinning bike in his office. He spread a big towel on the floor and completed the workout with what he called the Diamond six hundred, a compilation of eight different exercises that targeted each section of his abdominal muscles. Fifteen minutes later, he turned on the small radio on his desk and stretched to the smooth jazz of local radio station WLOQ.

King Tut came into the room and began hovering over him as he lay on the floor stretching. Dexter pushed him away, which only encouraged the big Doberman to want to play even more. He wrestled with Tut for a few minutes, then got up and turned on his computer. It was time to go to work.

Monique was at a spinning class at Bally's on West Colonial Drive in Orlando. It was a long drive, but she was addicted to spinning and it was the closest class she could find. The children were still asleep upstairs, so he wouldn't be interrupted. He logged onto THOTH's network and requested an update on Walker's location. It was the same as it was on Sunday.

He called Jerry's cellular phone, not really caring if he woke him up.

"Wie gehts, unteroffizier?" Jerry asked.

"Habe ich dich geweckt?" He replied automatically. He'd forgotten that Jerry spent time in Europe and spoke fluent German and Russian.

"No sir, I was up already. Eric and I just finished a five-mile run. Something is up, I'm guessing."

Dexter smiled. "You guessed right. That package that your team delivered on its last mission, is it good to go?"

This time Jerry smiled. "Roger that, sir! All you have to do is say the word and it will be all over but the crying."

"Outstanding. I want you to put the duty team on standby, and then I want you and Eric to get on the Citation and pick me up at Orlando Executive Airport ASAP."

Dexter looked out of his office window and saw Monique's

Mercedes turn the corner to come down their street. “We’re going to take a day trip to Costa Rica. Call me when you’re in the air. Out here.”

Jerry hung up the phone and turned to Eric. “We’re going to Costa Rica today.”

The Force Recon Marine nodded. “Did he say why?”

“No. But he asked about the Op we ran on Burns’ compound. Not the first one, the one when we took him down during the hostage stand-off in Atlanta. What do you think he’s up to?” Jerry asked.

Eric shook his head. “Well, knowing Dexter, he’s getting ready to clean up this mess with the NAF. That means Walker, Burns, and maybe even Sean are about to end up dead.”

Dexter stared off into space after he hung up the phone. He suddenly realized that his covert operations team had no formal name to go by. He got out a piece of paper and started scribbling. Several minutes later, he came up with the acronym S.W.O.R.D., Special Warfare Operations and Reconnaissance Detachment. He smiled. The team will like the name. S.W.O.R.D. it would be then.

Dexter was making coffee when Monique came into the house. “How was your class?”

Monique was still dripping a little sweat from her forehead, and her clothes were soaked, as usual. “It was awesome. We rode hard today. You should come with me sometime.”

Dexter shook his head. “Too easy. Besides, we both can’t go and leave the kids here alone.”

Monique pushed him. “It’s not too easy, mister!” She gave him that familiar and always welcome look. “Um, join me in the shower?”

“Right behind you, ma’am,” Dexter said with a sly smile.

0815 HOURS

Dexter dropped the kids off at their school and sped back home. Monique was gone; good, he thought. Tut followed him into his office and watched. Dexter turned on his laptop, then put on his headset and dialed into THOTH’s interactive system.

The supercomputer’s security system acknowledged Dexter’s phone number and personal identification number. “Welcome Director Diamond. Please verify with voice identification.”

“Dexter Diamond. Director of Special Operations, Urban Justice Research Institute.”

The check took only seconds. “Voice identification verified. How can I assist you, Director Diamond?”

Dexter took a deep breath. “Let’s get this party started,” he whispered. “THOTH, I would like a visual on the NAF compound in West Virginia.”

“Sir, all remote cameras are off-line. Would you like satellite imagery?”

Dexter knew about the remote cameras. He had Jerry’s team remove them when they went after Burns during the Atlanta stand-off. “Yes. How long before that is possible?”

THOTH was silent for a few seconds. “I am tasking COMRADE 7 now. It should acquire its target in approximately one hour, sir.”

“Excellent. I need an update on the location of Walker and Dr. Burns.”

“James Walker is still in Garland, Texas, along with Sonny Liciardello and several other NAF members. Dr. Jonathan Burns is at the NAF compound. He also has several tagged NAF members with him. Since there may be untagged personnel present, I will give you a more accurate count using infra-red sighting when the satellite is in position.”

“Good. I’ll check back in an hour. Out here.”

“Roger that, sir.” The line went dead.

Dexter chuckled. Vernon must have programmed “Roger that” into THOTH’s response library. “Interesting. So it looks like my buddy Walker is going to sit still for a while,” he said to the ever-attentive King Tut.

0900 HOURS - FEDERAL BUILDING, DOWNTOWN ORLANDO

Monique hummed a tune as she read through the massive case file again to refresh her memory of the particulars before she went to her meeting. Jannette Walden, an exotic dancer, part-time high-level prostitute, and supposedly former gluttonous cocaine user, had been arrested by the Orange County Sheriff’s Office Vice Unit, and she wanted to talk.

Jannette was still on federal probation stemming from a drug trafficking charge courtesy of the DEA. She had dodged a lengthy

prison term by rolling over on the men that paid her to transport two kilos of cocaine and \$50,000 to Miami. Now, she was looking at 15 years mandatory federal prison time, and that meant no chance of parole. She had no choice now. She needed to make a deal to stay out of prison, out of hell on earth.

Monique shook her head. “Stupid woman,” she said quietly. Some pimp, who didn’t care that Jannette could go back to prison, probably had her working the hotels on the south end of International Drive picking up horny businessmen who were away from home and on the prowl. Monique shook her head again and read on.

Part of the initial plea bargain deal with the DEA was that Jannette was to complete a year and a half sentence in federal prison before being released and put on probation for the remainder of her sentence. Jannette completed the sentence and was considered a model prisoner according to her file. So what could she possibly have to offer the Bureau of Prisons that would keep her from going back? Monique wondered.

The case read like something out of a best-selling novel. During her 18-month stay at the Co-ed Harrison Federal Correction Institution, Jannette claimed that she kept company with several male guards who ran a prostitution and drug ring inside the female side of the prison. The guards, all white males, belonged to a secretive nationwide group of corrections officers that called themselves The Brotherhood of the Iron Hammer, or simply, The Brotherhood.

Monique sighed. She had heard of The Brotherhood and some of their escapades over the years, but had never really dealt with them face to face, mainly because they were protected by sympathetic wardens and other high-ranking Bureau officials. Even when someone actually dared to testify against them, all they received were slaps on the wrists.

They also had all the elements of an embedded hard-core hate group, which made them extremely dangerous. She thought about Dexter’s recent run-in with Dr. Burns and the NAF. “No, this can’t be that bad,” she said to herself. She went back to reading.

Federal Corrections Officer and key Brotherhood member Dorn Sheppard had taken a liking to the brown-skinned, bright-eyed, voluptuous inmate Jannette Walden the day she arrived at Harrison FCI, a large split-design modern facility that housed both male and

female inmates. Dorn pulled Jannette's file immediately. He liked what he saw and took it to the other Brotherhood members for approval. Her history of drug use and prostitution made her the perfect target, and the perfect tool. Sheppard quickly went to work on Jannette, first by getting her assigned to his work group, then he made his pitch. Work 'extra details' for him, and her time at Harrison FCI would go smoothly. Refuse and something would happen to ensure that she did her time in federal penitentiary hell.

Jannette quickly agreed, and spent her entire time having sex with select prison officials and selling drugs to her fellow inmates. Monique had to read some of the sentences twice just to make sure that her eyes weren't playing tricks on her. Some of the accusations seemed so bizarre that there was no way they could be true, but the details were too exact to be fabricated. But then again, Jannette was a convicted felon looking to save her own hide, wasn't she?

Monique shook her head as she gathered her file. She had a 0930 meeting with her close friend, Major Cassandra Weston, commander of the Orange County Jail, the deputies that arrested Jannette, a federal prosecutor, and an assistant State Attorney. They were all meeting at in judge's office upstairs to work out the terms for the deal.

0930 HOURS - ORLANDO EXECUTIVE AIRPORT

Dexter nodded approvingly as the Citation taxied to a stop. He'd arranged for his mother to pick up the kids from school and told Monique that he would be in Washington for the day. She didn't need to know that first he would be making a slight detour, out of the country. As he boarded, he stopped and chatted with the pilots briefly before taking his seat.

Eric handed him a cup of coffee. "Lots of cream and two Equals, right, old man?"

Dexter nodded and took a sip. "Perfect. Thanks."

The jet lurched slightly as it turned and taxied to the runway.

"So, Sarge, what's on the agenda today?" Jerry looked across the aisle at Dexter.

Dexter noticed that Eric had the same curious look on his face. He smiled. "No, this is not an assassination run. We're going to grab Sean and put him to work. Help him atone for some of his sins."

"So it's clean-up time?" the Delta Force operator asked.

“Yes sir. Time to annihilate the hate,” the former SAS commando said quietly.

**1045 HOURS CENTRAL TIME - PUNTA ISLITA BEACH,
NICOYA PENINSULA, COSTA RICA**

Sean broke into a full sprint during the last 100 yards of his three-mile run. He felt good. He'd lost five pounds already and was training with weights again. He had even started practicing his unarmed combat tactics twice a day, a task that he had never taken seriously. That was, until he met Dexter's crew. The truth of the matter was that they were all true bad-asses, and they scared the shit out of him. They also made him realize how much he had let himself go hanging around Walker and his band of lunatic hate-mongers. The former Green Beret shook his head and began his cool-down. He breathed in deeply and stared out across the Gulf of Nicoya. A ferry was heading back to the mainland to pick up more tourists. He closed his eyes and smiled. He had two young señoritas back at his new beachside condo cleaning up and preparing lunch. They would also assist with his bath when he got home. Fuck the NAF, he thought. This is living. He bent over and touched his toes.

“You run like a girl.”

Sean stood straight up and turned toward the familiar voice, his hands instinctively came up in a fighting posture.

The man kept his arms folded across his chest. “You really want to dance that dance, pretty boy?”

“Fuck! Dex, you scared the shit out of me!” Sean took a step toward him then thought better of it. Dexter might not have fully forgiven him yet. “What are you doing here bro? How did you know where to find me? I know that I never gave you an address here.” He then noticed two figures approaching him from the right. The smile left his face.

“We will always know where to find you bitch! Dex, I say we pop this Gray boy and bury him right here in this beautiful black sand!” Eric said, with intense sincerity.

“I second that motion, Sarge. I do not trust this traitor!” Jerry added.

Sean's heart jumped. Unarmed, he knew that he was no match for either of the martial arts experts. He also knew that even if he were armed, he'd only have a small chance of taking out one of them

before the other one dropped him in his tracks.

Dexter stepped in. “At ease with that crap, Gunny! I don’t want to hear any more racial slurs out of you! We are not the NAF, or CTAC, or the SCV! We are not hate mongers and racists! Now I know you’re upset with Sean, but on this team we don’t do hate! Is that clear?” Dexter looked sideways at his friend as he chastised him.

“Aye, aye sir! It won’t happen again!” Eric stared at Sean. His disposition toward him had little to do with race or even hatred, though he could see how using a racial slur in a moment of anger would make it seem that way. The truth was that Sean had tarnished the honor of the American Special Forces Warrior, as well as that of the American Police Officer, both sworn to protect the weak and the innocent. He’d gotten in bed with people who would seek to destroy the hard-earned social fabric of this great nation, and to him, that in and of itself was punishable by death.

Dexter turned his gaze back to Sean and gave him a command. “Let’s go! It’s time to go to work!”

Sean felt a little more at ease that Dexter had come to his defense. Unlike Walker and his bunch, Dexter’s team was highly disciplined and completely loyal. If Dexter said for them not to lay a hand on him or harass him, they would not bother him.

1057 HOURS EASTERN TIME - ORLANDO

The meeting with the Orange County team had gone well. All parties agreed to let Jannette walk if she testified against the rogue guards. Major Weston agreed to hold Jannette in the Orange County jail for protective custody rather than send her back to Harrison FCI and have her at the mercy of the dirty guards or their friends.

Major Weston was giving Monique the latest jail gossip as they walked through the parking garage to the Major’s car. She screamed when she saw Monique’s new Mercedes. “Girl! When did you get this?”

Monique unlocked the doors so that they could get in and escape the damp cold of the courthouse parking garage. “Just a couple of weeks ago. You like?”

“Oh my God, yes! Monique. This a hundred thousand dollar car! How...? Wait. Dexter’s new job?”

Monique grinned. “Not quite. Although it does pay in the six figures. But no.”

“How? Tell me now!” Weston demanded.

“Dexter invented some type of military device and sold it to a big defense contractor for millions!”

Cassandra Weston screamed again, and then looked Monique straight in the eyes. “So why are you still working? I would have quit after the first million!”

“I don’t know. I love corrections, I love my job.” Monique looked down. It was a weak answer and she knew it.

Weston frowned. “Girl, please. These people don’t care anything about you. You let my husband get rich somehow. I’d be gone so fast it would make you dizzy!”

The smile left Monique’s face. “Yes. I know. I used to think that too, but Dexter’s job is transferring to Atlanta. He wants us to move there and I don’t want to go.”

“You must have dropped some weights on your head at the gym! Your man is a prime catch without the money, but now that he’s rich you’d better really watch out!”

“I know that, but I’m not sure I want the kids that far away from my parents. I just don’t know.”

“What? Monique you’d better cut those apron strings and go with your husband. Dexter is a good, solid man who worships the ground that *your* spoiled behind walks on. He’s catered to your every whim, and now you want to play spoiled little girl and cling to your mama’s leg? Remember that the Bible tells us that a woman shall leave her mother and father behind and cling to her husband. I see you don’t have any problem spending his money and clinging to this Mercedes!” Major Weston tapped the dashboard with her finely manicured nails.

Monique smiled and looked away. “I know, but my parents won’t like it. I like having the kids close to their grandparents.”

“I’ll tell you what, Monique; you let Dexter go to Atlanta alone if you want to, with all of those single, pretty women running around. I would have my bags packed already!”

“Okay Cassandra, I hear you. Where do you want to go for lunch? I’ll drive.”

“How about P.F. Chang’s?”

“Winter Park?”

“No. Millennia Mall. We can drop my car at the jail on the way, and then do a little shopping after lunch.”

1800 HOURS - GOPPINGEN, FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

“Bitte Warten!” the young man yelled.

Heidi ignored his request for her to wait for him. She was nearly at a light jog as she began covering the last two blocks to her house. Behind her was her boyfriend, Hans, who was vainly trying to explain why he was talking to his old girlfriend at school today. Heidi didn't want to hear it. She'd listened to as many lies as she could stand and it was too cold to stand outside and listen to any more. Besides, there were plenty of other boys at the University to take his place, as she would prove to him tomorrow.

Hans, frustrated, accepted that he wasn't going to get through to her tonight, turned and trotted back to the bus stop.

Private First Class Michael Brown waited nervously as Heidi approached his hiding place. This Schleck store served as an excellent surveillance point, he thought. He would simply wait until they closed, then park his car in the back and watch her. But no more waiting. Today was the day. It was time to have her. He was about to abandon his plans when he saw Hans walking with her, but now he was free to act.

For weeks now he'd been watching her walk home alone from the bus stop. For weeks he sat behind her on the bus, staring at her, wanting her. He'd even sat next to her once on the bus, just to get a smell of her sweet perfume, and her auburn hair.

Michael could feel his erection growing slowly. He reached down and rubbed himself, and contemplated a full masturbation session. No, he would save it for her. He had to have her; the demon inside of his head could wait no longer. She was just in front of him now. His eyes quickly scanned the area for police or witnesses. No one was out but him, and his chosen prey.

He adjusted the camouflage scarf that covered his sweaty face. He held his breath as Heidi walked past him. His grip on the entrenching tool in his right hand tightened. *“Now!”* his troubled mind screamed.

Like a dark, ravenous predatory beast, Michael lunged from the darkness and reached for his unsuspecting prey. But the beast's lust-driven anxiety made him clumsy and his foot caught the edge of the sidewalk, causing him to stumble. He cursed out loud, knowing that

he had lost the element of surprise. “Don’t let her scream!” the demon inside of him shouted.

Startled, Heidi spun around thinking it was Hans. Instead she saw a stranger reaching for her. She dropped her school books on the wet ground as she began to back away.

“No! Get her!” the demon screamed. Michael still had enough forward momentum to overtake and strike Heidi solidly on the left side of her head. The strength went out of her legs as she instantly lost contact with the conscious world.

Michael grabbed her and fell on top of her as they both crashed to the ground. Blood flowed freely through Heidi’s hair and onto the sidewalk. Michael quickly snatched her seemingly lifeless body up and took her behind the drug store where he was going to put her in the car and take her to a private place where he could take his time and enjoy her. Her short skirt flew up as he tossed her into the back seat, revealing the prize that he had sought and waited so long for. Michael couldn’t stand it; he had to have her right now.

Herr Brenniger looked at his watch and wondered where his daughter was, as he stepped outside for his evening walk. She was usually coming in just as he was leaving, but today she was late. His wife, also concerned, asked him to walk toward the bus stop to make sure Heidi was okay. Halfway to his destination, just in front of the drug store, Herr Brenniger saw a familiar pile of school books, and a dark red spot on the sidewalk. He noticed more of the little spots leading around the corner of the building. Suddenly it hit him. Heidi walked through here every weeknight about the same time, and now she was late. His police instincts kicked in, and though he had long retired, he knew immediately that his daughter was in trouble. His heart raced as he ran to the back of the building while screaming his Heidi’s name.

Michael was already putting Heidi on the ground when Herr Brenniger came around the corner. He calmly pulled his pants up and stared at the small stature old man. Maybe he would kill him, then take Heidi with him, rape her some more, then kill her.

Brenniger temporarily froze in horror as he saw the man dressed in the familiar American Army battle dress uniform standing over his half-naked, motionless daughter.

“Heidi!” Brenniger screamed, and began moving toward her.

Unwilling to give up his prize without a fight, Michael attacked Brenniger with the same blood-stained, metal mini-shovel that he'd used to subdue Heidi and murder several other German women.

Brenniger, however, surprised young Michael when he blocked the blow with his left arm and punched him square on the jaw, knocking the scarf from his face.

Michael stumbled backward into a clump of leafless bushes. He quickly readjusted his scarf and picked up the shovel he'd dropped. His jaw hurt and he was a little dizzy. The old man had clocked him pretty good. Michael didn't want to fight anymore. He backed away, got into his car, and sped off.

Brenniger moved quickly. He ignored the pain in his fractured forearm, picked his daughter up, and rushed toward their house.

1300 HOURS EASTERN TIME - INSTITUTE JET, SOUTHEAST US AIRSPACE

Sean took a deep breath. He imagined Eric producing a pistol and forcing him out of the jet's door, sending him plummeting to his death. No, they would have done that over the ocean, where there was virtually no chance of his body being found before indigenous creatures devoured it. Which brought to mind that night the NAF tried to kidnap Dexter. "So Dex, what happened to the NAF men that were with me at Friday's that night?"

Dexter, who was sitting across the aisle from him, just stared at him and stroked his mustache.

Jerry answered the question. "We let them go. Who knows where they went after that." He smiled. It was the truth. They did let them go; from about a mile over the Atlantic Ocean. All they had to do was survive the fall then swim the 20 or thirty miles to shore and all would be forgiven.

Eric smiled also, but did not comment.

Sean looked back to Dexter. Something about that thousand mile stare made him very nervous. "Look bro, I know that you all don't trust me with all that's happened, but I'm ready to prove myself. What do I have to do? Who do I have to kill?"

Eric stared at him. "Do Walker and you'll vindicate yourself. Hell, I'll even trust you after that."

"Agreed," Jerry said.

"No. Walker's mine. So is his girlfriend Sonny," Dexter said

without looking at him.

“No Dex. You don’t get to do both of them. It’s not fair,” Jerry said.

Dexter thought about it. “You’re right. I am being greedy. Walker is mine, Sean, you take Sonny. How’s that?”

“Hell, who’s left then? Old man Burns? Where’s the challenge in that?” Eric asked.

A light went on in Dexter’s head. “Dammit! I was supposed to call THOTH awhile ago.” Dexter moved to the communication console, turned on the computer, and contacted THOTH’s mainframe by secure phone.

The other three men gathered around him to watch.

“THOTH, send the image that I requested earlier to the computer in the Cessna.”

“Yes sir. I contacted your home but there was no answer. Sending the image now.”

An overhead view of the NAF compound in West Virginia appeared on the screen.

“THOTH, locate and identify all tagged targets on scene.” Dexter ordered.

“I have located Dr. Jonathan Richard Burns and nine other NAF operatives at the target site sir. They are all in the main house. What are your instructions?”

Dexter took a deep breath. “Shut down the NAF compound.”

An electronic signal was sent via satellite to multiple hidden explosive charges in every building on the NAF compound. Jerry’s team had used the NAF’s own stash of explosives to set the charges, just as they had done in Alpharetta with Hagen and the Sons of Confederate Vengeance.

Live, in real-time via satellite, the foursome watched in silence as the entire NAF compound erupted in multiple simultaneous explosions. Within a matter of seconds, the compound was destroyed, and everyone on site was killed.

“Holy shit, Dex! Did you just blow up the NAF compound and kill Burns from here?” Sean asked.

Dexter didn’t answer. He gave THOTH more instructions. “Stay on target for as long as possible. I want you to record the entire event.”

“Roger that, sir.”

Dexter disconnected the call and the computer link. He got up and went back to his seat.

Jerry let out a whistle and shook his head. “Dex, I believe that changes things considerably. You just took out Burns and half of the NAF. So, it stands to reason that it would be unfair for you to get Walker too.”

Dexter turned in his seat. “So what are you saying, Jerry?”

“What he’s saying Dexter, is that you have just disqualified yourself. You are already over your terrorist-killed quota for the week. The rest belong to us. It’s only fair,” Eric pointed out.

“I know I should keep my mouth shut, but I agree, Dex. The rest of the NAF is ours. It’s only fair,” Sean added. He expected a barrage of insults from Eric and Jerry. None came.

Dexter half-smiled. “Fine. Do what you want with them. I want it done quickly though. Find them and get it over with as soon as practical.” He was looking at Jerry as he spoke.

“Roger that, boss. I’ll have something for you by the end of the day. You want the entire team in on this?” Jerry asked.

“You can use a recon team to track and monitor them, but we four will do the dirty work. Anybody have a problem with that?”

“No sir, Dex. We got two Green Berets, a Force Recon Marine, and an SAS commando. I think we can handle this,” Jerry said.

1335 HOURS - ORANGE COUNTY JAIL - ORLANDO

Not wanting to waste any time, Monique followed Major Weston back to the jail after lunch. She wanted a sworn, written statement from Jannette Walden before she changed her mind, for whatever reason.

Monique waited impatiently in the uncomfortable steel seat of the interview room in the female detention building. From what she had read in the file, she expected Walden to look and act, like a typical drug addict. Monique expected to see a haggard, unclean, unkempt, barely literate woman who would do anything, and anybody to get to the next high. She wondered why any man would have sex with such a woman.

Escorted by a humorless female guard, Jannette Walden approached Monique and offered her hand. “Hey, Miss Diamond. I’m Jannette Walden. My friends call me Jan.”

Thoroughly surprised, Monique stood and shook her hand.

Jannette was attractive by anyone's standards. Her short reddish-brown hair looked as though she'd just left the salon. Her nails were manicured and her teeth were straight and white. This was no typical street druggie, Monique thought. Jannette also had a great figure, complete with a round ass and ample breasts. No wonder the guards liked her so much.

"I know, Ms. Diamond. I don't look like a former drug addict or a prostitute, do I?" Jannette asked.

Monique was taken aback by her frankness. "Well, no. Not really."

"That's why the boys like me so much. Especially the boys at Harrison FCI. You know, the Brotherhood. They hate blacks they say, but none of them ever turned down this cocoa honey." She giggled slyly.

Monique turned on her tape recorder. "I'm going to record this conversation. Is that okay with you, Miss Walden?"

"Yes ma'am."

Monique pressed the record button. She gave the date, time and location of the interview for the record, and then got right to business. "Miss Walden, you have alleged that several guards at the Harrison Federal Correctional Institution have engaged in the use and sale of narcotics inside a federal facility, had sexual relations with female inmates, and currently run a small prostitution ring from within a federal facility."

"Yes ma'am."

"How do you know about all of this?"

"I have participated in all of those activities with the guards."

"Tell me about it. All of it," Monique forced back a smile.

Monique listened in disbelief as Jannette precisely laid out her story. It was nearly thirty minutes later when she stopped talking. "Miss Walden. *That* is one hell of a story. The question is; how can you prove your accusations? When those guards find out what's going on, they'll swear nothing happened and it will be your word against theirs. I don't have to tell you that your word doesn't mean a whole lot right now. It would be better if we could get the other women to corroborate your story."

"I can do better than that, Miss Diamond. I have my own proof. I, um, saved semen from everybody that I was with. Plus, I think some of the black male guards will talk. The Brotherhood wouldn't let me

do none of them so they kept notes on everything.”

“Wait a minute. You saved semen from all of them? How?”

“Just like Monica Lewinsky. I saved some in my panties, some on my clothes, and sometimes in my mouth. After I had sex with one of them, they would hurry up and get dressed, and leave me alone to get myself together. That’s when I would put a sample on a piece of cloth. Later, back in my cell, I would label the sample with the name of the person I was with, the date, location, and time. I would give it to this one black guard who liked me, and he’d take it out of the prison and mail it to my momma. Whenever we got a chance, we would slip into a closet and I would let him do me or give him a blow job for his help. Please don’t do anything to him when you bust the other ones. He was the only one who helped me!”

“Yeah right after he helped himself! He broke the rules too, but I’ll see what I can do if he testifies. So where are these samples now?” Monique was sitting forward in her seat.

“Oh. They’re in my apartment, along with my journal. I was thinking about writing a book one day.”

Monique slid Jannette a pen and a statement form. “Well, how about you write me the Reader’s Digest version right now. When we’re done, I want to go to your house to get those samples.”

“Okay, Ms. Diamond. But, I mean...this will help me won’t it? Because if I go back into the system, those guys will put me back to work. They have members in every prison. I’m tired of selling drugs and trickin’. I want a better life, you know. Plus, if they find out that I been talking to you, they’ll probably kill me.”

“Don’t worry, Miss Walden, we’ll take care of you.”

Dexter tossed Sean a black hood as the jet approached the RDT airfield. “Put this on.”

“Why, Dex? You already have enough on me to get me the death penalty,” Sean protested.

Dexter frowned. He hated repeating an order. “True. But you’re not ready for this yet. Put the hood on.”

Sean complied, and for a moment, firmly believed again that he was going to be killed. No, he thought. Dexter is a man of his word, if he was going to take him out, it would have been done back when the other NAF men got popped.

Eric led Sean off the plane with a tight grip on his right arm.

“Lucky for you Dex is a good man. I would have blown your brains out in that Friday’s parking lot and dumped your body in the Potomac,” he whispered to Sean.

Dexter was about to intervene again, but decided that Sean needed to feel the heat from the team, and work through it.

“Hey, I never did anything to you, Eric. Why do you hate me so much?” Sean asked through the thick black hood.

“I don’t hate you. I just don’t think you paid your dues on the department. You moved to a specialized unit after less than a year on patrol, and you treated people badly. You were especially rude to women and minorities. You and your buddies trampled on anyone who you didn’t think was up to your standards. No wonder you got in bed with the NAF.”

“You were rather cocky and mean to, um, how do I say it, less popular officers?” Dexter added.

“You guys are right. I was a dick. But that was the old me. But hey, Dexter spent less time in patrol than I did. And as for the NAF thing, I personally never seriously hurt or killed anyone. Unlike all of you.” Sean tensed his body, fully expecting to get punched in the mouth by Jerry or Eric.

Dexter smiled, but kept quiet. He did move out of patrol quickly, but he never let it go to his head. However, Sean was also right about them having taken lives. Numerous NAF and SCV terrorists had been brutally and efficiently wiped out by his team.

“Touché’ Sean,” Jerry said.

“Yeah. Good one puke-boy. Good one,” Eric said, as he nodded at Dexter.

“You’re living pretty well, Miss Walden,” Monique said as they pulled into the parking lot of her upscale apartment complex in Orlando’s Metro West neighborhood.

“I guess business is good,” Major Weston quipped. “Girl, you need Jesus in your life right now!”

Jannette smiled at Monique in the rear view mirror. “I do okay, Miss Diamond. And as for Jesus, well, I believe he’s still watching out for me. Oh, it’s that building right there.”

The armed corrections officer, who was following in a marked transport car, parked next to them. He was about to follow them upstairs when Monique stopped him.

“Please wait here, officer. I’m armed so we should be okay.”

The guard looked at Major Weston. “Ma’am?”

“It’s okay. We’ll watch her. Just wait in your car, please.”

The guard grunted and went back to his car. He waited until they were inside before lighting a cigarette. He smiled as he took the first drag. He had a few phone calls to make when he got back to the jail.

Monique once again was surprised. Jannette’s apartment was beautifully decorated.

Jannette saw the look on her face and laughed. “I’m not a crack-head, Miss Diamond. I’m a working girl with a taste for the finer things in life. I don’t use drugs anymore. I’m on probation, remember?”

“So you say, Miss Walden. Let’s get to it.”

Jannette brought out the evidence that she had collected during her numerous encounters with the Brotherhood, all of which Monique photographed, cataloged, and packaged on the spot.

“Miss Diamond, you know they got some Brotherhood at the county jail, too. I don’t know any of them, but I heard talk. Maybe you should give me a bond so I can get out,” Jannette was suddenly starting to realize the gravity of her situation and it scared her.

“No, Jannette. I don’t want you disappearing on me. You’ll be safe enough in the women’s dorm,” Monique said, with a great deal of certainty.

1600 HOURS - SPECIAL OPERATIONS CENTER - MARYLAND

Dexter looked at his watch. He was going to have to call Monique and tell her that he was going to be late getting home. “What do you have, Jerry?”

Jerry was using live satellite images to lay out the plan for taking down the remainder of the NAF. Two of the screens showed the safe house in Texas and the location of all of Walker’s men. “What we have sir, is Walker and company by the balls.”

Sean marveled at what he witnessed. While the main screen showed a live shot of the safe house, a second screen showed a computer-generated diagram of the house, with red dots showing the location of each tagged NAF member. “No wonder you guys kicked the shit out of the NAF. This stuff is more advanced than the set-up at SOCOM down in Tampa. Who funds this operation?”

“You don’t need to know that right now, Sean. What you’re seeing here is just a taste. If you’re successful in Dallas, you might get to see more,” Dexter said dryly. “So Jerry, I want this thing over. When will you be ready?”

“I’ll send a recon team out tonight to get the eyeball. The assault team, us four, can fly out tomorrow night and clean up.”

Dexter nodded. “Just remind them to maintain an aggressive posture. I don’t want them getting ambushed and slaughtered like Ronnie’s team.”

“Dex, I know the layout of the safe house. I’ve been there,” Sean said.

“Good. Then you can build us a mock-up so we can rehearse,” Eric quipped.

Sean nodded. “I can do that sir.”

Dexter looked at Jerry. “Anything else?”

“No sir. Are you heading back to Orlando?”

“Just for the night. I’ll be back first thing tomorrow morning.”

Dexter got up and walked to the door. Al and Ralph were standing at the door about to knock when he opened the door.

“Oh. Dex. Good, we were just about to interrupt you guys.”

Dexter took a step back. “What’s up, Al? You look excited.”

Al, followed by Ralph, moved into the Black Ops briefing room and sat at the computer console. “I just got a call from one of my old informants about a dangerous fugitive coming into the District.”

Dexter followed him with his eyes. “So?”

Al didn’t answer. He typed in some commands and an image appeared on the main screen. “Gentlemen, this is Lee Alfred Taylor. His street name is Steel. They call him that because he’s cold, and hard, as you can see in this photo. His record includes two counts of second degree murder, aggravated battery, attempted murder, flight to avoid prosecution, and a litany of other violent offenses. He killed a guy two months ago over a drug deal gone bad. Then he killed a chef who witnessed that killing. During his escape from that scene, he shot two police officers. What Taylor didn’t know at the time was that the chef’s wife was waiting to pick him up from work and witnessed the murder of her husband. This guy is a true bad-ass Dex, the last time he was arrested it took six officers to take him down, and four of them went to the hospital.”

Dexter moved closer to the screen and stared at the heavily

muscled man. He looked as though he'd killed a few people, and had a strong desire to kill more. "So what's that got to do with us? Let DCPD handle it."

"Dex, we get to keep our reserve officer status with DCPD SWAT by doing some police work every now and then. This is a perfect opportunity for us. Plus, its part of the quiet little deal the PD has with the Institute," Jerry added.

"Dex, he's coming back to kill the wife and two kids of the murdered chef. My snitch says that he's going to make an example out of them by shooting them in the head and burning the bodies," Al added grimly.

Dexter bristled as images of his own family flashed through his mind. "When?"

"Don't have an exact day and time. The word is that he and his crew will show up in the next day or so. I'll get a call when they arrive."

"You and Craig are the experts on fugitives. Form a take-down team and be on stand-by. Have Dawn put together a detail for the wife and kids. Get on that ASAP. I don't want anything happening to what's left of that family!" He turned to leave.

"Hold on Dexter, Ralph has a plan to cover our butts in case we have to kill this guy."

"So what if we do?" Dexter asked with a frown.

"Well, it's not quite like killing terrorists Dex, as you know. We'll be directly in the public eye. We need to document Lee's every move to cover ourselves in case it does go to hell. It's not one of your typical slash and burn operations where you goons go in and spray a room down and hope that you killed the right people. I have a plan that will cover us when your trigger-happy assassins kill these guys. Now listen up, I'll speak slowly and use grunts and small words so that you special ops types can understand," Ralph quipped.

"Whatever, geek-boy. Let's hear what your right-wing; pea-brain has come up with now." Dexter sat down and shook his head. Lee Taylor was going to execute a woman and two little girls just show everyone how dangerous he is. What the hell is wrong with people? He wondered as Ralph began his briefing.

CHAPTER TWO TIGHT JAWS AND LOOSE ENDS

TUESDAY - 0835 HOURS - ZURICH, SWITZERLAND

Conner Swanson, president of GBS bank leaned back in his chair and interlaced his fingers as his elbows found their familiar place on the arm rests. “Would you repeat the question, please?” He’d heard her clearly, and his request was a shameless attempt to stall for time.

Orlando Sentinel financial news reporter Willoughby Carrolton was aware of what he was doing but decided not to comment. “Yes of course, Mister Swanson. Are you aware that there is strong evidence suggesting that the American government is still storing stolen gold here in Zurich, as well as other banks throughout Switzerland?” she asked politely, again.

How in the hell did that information get out? Conner wondered, and it showed on his face. “No, Miss Carrolton, please tell me more about it.” He got up from his chair and walked around the giant desk, finding a spot directly in front of Willoughby. He sat on the edge of the desk and crossed his legs at the ankles in an attempt to look relaxed. He also hoped his perfect styled jet-black hair, stunning good looks, and tall athletic frame that was clothed by a tailored navy blue, Kiton double-breasted cashmere suit, and expertly matched shirt and tie ensemble that cost over \$10, 000, would have its usual effect on the beautiful young reporter.

“I have been doing some research and found that during the war the allies, particularly the Americans, seized millions in gold when they overran Hitler’s strongholds. They also seized millions more when they stopped a Nazi train headed for Germany. To date, none of the gold has been returned to its rightful owners. There are quite a few Jewish families waiting to lay claim to that gold. And, rumor has it that the majority of it is hidden right here in Zurich.” She watched his face closely for a reaction.

“To tell you the truth, I have heard those same rumors for years, but no real proof has been offered. Why do you come to me with these questions?” He wondered if she really knew anything or if she was, as the Americans say, on a fishing expedition. Her answer surprised him.

“GBS is the fastest growing bank in Switzerland and there are talks of a merger with several smaller banks. Now with the Euro in

effect, that could make you one of the most powerful bankers in Europe, if not the world. If I were going to hide tainted money in a bank, this would be the one.” She leaned back in her chair and crossed her legs. Willoughby, a tomboy by nature, took advantage of her beauty and shapely legs to weaken Conner who was well known for his fondness for beautiful young women.

She’d worn a tight sweater to show off her breasts and a leather mini-skirt with a front slit as her battle uniform.

Her smile told him she knew she had hit the nail right on the head. Conner had been a skilled poker player in his college days, winning many a sucker’s money back at Harvard School of Business. But this wasn’t a school boy’s card game. The stakes were much and he struggled to keep his outward appearance calm. “Well, Willoughby, even if we had that gold, which I wish we did, I couldn’t tell you about it. I’m sure you are familiar with our reputation for discretion,” he said with a wink. Maybe he could charm her into backing off, and possible even submitting to a hot sex session during his lunch break.

“Yes I am. I am also aware that international pressure, say from the Israelis or the American Jewish community could persuade you or your board to bend just a little,” she said with her own wink. Checkmate. She had politely let him know that she was willing to spread the word to the world to force his cooperation if she had to.

“Possibly, but since I don’t have any of it in my bank, it is not my concern. Willoughby, you are a stunning woman. You are of Asian decent?”

Okay. Here we go, she thought. “Yes I am. My parents are from the Philippines, but I was raised in America.” She suddenly felt a warm flush run through her.

“Perhaps we can meet for lunch this afternoon.” Conner purposely stared at the smooth brown legs that showed through the slit in her skirt.

She shook her head. “Lunch is no good. I have several other bankers to interview. I am open for dinner if you’re available.” She batted her huge brown eyes several times, then cocked her head to one side and parted her thick lips in a wide smile.

Conner felt the stirring of an erection in his underwear. “I’ll pick you up at eight.”

Willoughby smiled to herself as she walked out of the banker’s

penthouse office, knowing that this story had even more potential than she and her editor had hoped for. Now all she had to do was work on Conner some more tonight and get him to really open up.

When she was gone, Conner paced the office wondering if he should make a call. He looked at the clock. It was 10:00 a.m. That meant it was only 1:00 a.m. in Dallas. He didn't really want to wake his friend up, but he had no choice. A reporter from the Orlando Sentinel had come all the way to Zurich to question him about the gold and that meant this was more than just idle curiosity. He picked up the phone and made the call.

"Conner? What the hell are you doing calling me this hour of the morning? You do know what time it is, don't you?" J.G. McCormick growled sleepily.

"Yes I do. Sorry, J.G., but this *is* urgent!"

McCormick looked over at his wife, who was now awake. "Hold on while I change phones!" His wife pulled the covers over her head and groaned. He rolled out of bed and quickly made his way to his office. "Talk to me Conner," McCormick commanded.

"A reporter from the Orlando Sentinel came to my office today to question me about America keeping gold stolen during World War II stored in Swiss banks," Conner said quietly.

"The Orlando Sentinel eh? That's very interesting, son. Does she know anything?" J.G. began to formulate a plan in his head.

"She's pretty damned close. When I told her we don't disclose any of our clients' account information, she threatened to go to the Jewish community to put pressure on my board of directors. We need to make a move soon, J.G. I'm working on this merger and I don't need any problems right now," Conner half-smiled. He was going to try and kill Willoughby's story and fuck her brains out, all in the same day.

"I hear you, son. I want you to stop worrying and keep your head on straight. I'll take care of this. In the meantime, do not, under any circumstances, talk to anyone else from the press."

"Okay J.G.," Conner said to his American counterpart.

"Just give me the reporter's name." McCormick wrote down the name. Come morning, Willoughby Carrolton would be somebody else's problem.

**0900 HOURS - BISMARCK KASERNE GOPPINGEN-
SCHWABISCH GMUND MILITARY COMMUNITY FRG,
GERMANY**

Sergeant First Class Jason Black Jr. walked into the Schwabisch Gmund military police station expecting a typical Tuesday morning. He was partially right; he was met with the usual warm greeting from his flirtatious secretary, Charlene.

“Good morning Sergeant Stud,” she said with a wink. Her light brown eyes scanned him head to toe, noting his brushed –back wavy hair, how his sharply pressed; battle dress uniform outlined his thick, muscular body. The boots, which were spit-shined to perfection, completed the picture. “Damn, I love a man that looks good in uniform.” She wiggled in her chair when she made the comment.

“You mean like your husband?” he said as he looked at her sideways. She was a young, voluptuous woman who wore skirts that were much too short for normal office attire. In his younger days he would have tagged her already, married or not. But those days of playing ‘Jody’ were long behind him now. Treading into another man’s territory was not only a foolish and dangerous thing; it also showed a lack of dignity and honor. This woman had a lot to learn.

“He doesn’t fill out his uniform like you do, baby,” she cooed.

Jason gave up. “Have a good morning Charlene.” He kept walking to his office.

“There’s something on your desk that’s not going to make you happy!” she called after him.

He sat down and took the lone sheet of paper out of his in-box. The letter was from the Post Commander, Colonel B. Haddington. He read it aloud.

“To all African-American, male soldiers in the Goppingen-Schwabisch Gmund military community. As most of you know we have had three “E tool” murders of German national females in the state of Baden-Wurttemberg in the recent past. Now there has been a rape and attempted murder Monday night in Goppingen and the victim’s father identified the attacker as a black male dressed in an America Battle Dress Uniform. Therefore, the German police have requested that all African-American soldiers report to the post gymnasium Friday at 0800 for questioning and a blood draw. I have agreed to this request. This is a direct order; there will be no exceptions.”

Schwabisch Gmund, set in the eastern part of Baden-Wurttemberg, was only twenty kilometers on the other side of a small mountain from Goppingen, so it stood to reason that the suspect could have come from one of the small US military compounds there, Jason thought.

The US Army's 56th Field Artillery Brigade, which was equipped with Pershing II missiles, had a large population of African-American males, making it the obvious starting place for such an investigation now that they had a decent description of the suspect, and a credible witness. The next largest concentration of American military personnel was in the city of Stuttgart about 50 kilometers to the west.

Even though his investigator's mind told him this was a logical step, the rebel in him rejected it. He and his partner had been in Munich at an investigator's conference the past week and had not heard about the new assault. Hell of a thing to walk into on your first day back at work, he thought. He read the letter again, slower this time.

"What?" he yelled. Jason stormed out of his office, and out of the building. "I'll be damned if they think for one second that I am going to submit to this bullshit!" He was talking to himself but he didn't care. The gravity of the implications of the letter had smacked him upside the head like a cinder block the second time he read it.

Jason was nearly at a full run when he reached the gymnasium. What he saw there nearly broke his heart. Every black male officer, non-commissioned officer, warrant officer, and enlisted soldier, nearly one hundred men, were lined up outside of the gymnasium in the cold waiting to be interrogated and have blood drawn.

Jason's left hand curled tightly into a fist. He made a beeline for the gym entrance, but was stopped by Major Kevin Fulton, an officer from the 41st Field Artillery unit.

"Sergeant Black, what the hell is this shit?" The Major looked like someone had stolen his manhood, as did most of the men there. "Is this how you all conduct an investigation?"

"No, sir!" Jason responded quickly. They both forgot about the military tradition of saluting. "This didn't come out of my office. As a matter of fact, I'm on my way to put an end to this right now!" Jason turned and walked away without waiting for a reply.

He couldn't believe that the post commander had signed off on

such madness. What was worse was that none of these officers and high ranking NCOs thought that they had the right to refuse or protest such an outrageous request. “Damn, this is a sad state of affairs!” Jason said to himself as he butted his way through the entrance and saw the rows of long tables with nurses taking blood from the black soldiers. The German police had interview tables set up in the far corner of the gym. Jason walked directly up to his commander, Captain McNair, and the Chief German Detective, Karl Mannhof. He ignored Mannhof, with whom he had worked on numerous cases, and lit into the Captain. “Do you know how improper and illegal this is? Not to mention how Nazi-Gestapo-like this round-up looks! The only things you people are missing are the fucking SS Storm Troopers!” Jason shot a look at Mannhof, who had his head down.

McNair tried to pull Jason aside but he stiffened his body like a stubborn child resisting his father. McNair took his hand away. “Sergeant Black, the German police have requested our assistance on this matter and the Colonel has ordered everyone to cooperate. That order also includes you!”

“Oh, really? Have you people ever heard of basic human dignity?” Jason snapped back.

Chief Detective Mannhof spoke up. “Um, Jason you know the problem we are having with these murders. The community wants an arrest made immediately.”

Jason turned laser-intense dark brown eyes on him. “So you trample on the rights and dignity of every black man here just to please the community? What do you think the community would say if one of your young, German men murdered an American female and we requested that you round up all of the young, German males so that we could question them and draw blood? I’ll tell you what would happen. There would be ten thousand protesters surrounding this base, claiming that the United States Army was trying to violate the rights of citizens of the host country!”

“Sergeant Black, you know damned well that the Status of Forces agreement gives us the authority to do what we are doing!” McNair said sternly. He was struggling to stay calm so as not to stoke Jason’s fire.

Jason turned on the Captain. “So that makes it right? Do you think for one second that the Colonel would have approved this if the

suspect had been white?"

Captain McNair did not answer. Both McNair and Detective Mannhof turned red.

"I know you have a description of the suspect and I know that every man out there does not match it," Jason said, slightly calmer now.

None of the other men responded.

Jason looked around the gymnasium. He bit his bottom lip and smiled. "I'll tell you what. I'm sure somebody in Washington, a reporter, or maybe the NAACP will want to hear about this!" He turned and walked out of the gymnasium.

McNair watched him leave, and then made a call to post headquarters.

Jason's phone was already ringing when he got back to the office. "Provost Marshal's office, Sergeant Black speaking!" He snapped.

"This is Sergeant Major Wilson, Sergeant Black. Just what the hell do you think you are doing?"

"Sergeant Major, there is no way in hell I'm going to let them treat us like second-class citizens. I know you knew about this and like I told McNair, I know the Colonel would never have signed off on this shit if the suspect had been white!"

"Sergeant Black, get your ass over to that gym right now and submit to the blood draw!" Wilson was sure that Jason would listen to him, the post command sergeant major. He was wrong.

"Hell no Sergeant Major! I'm not going! I was at conference in Munich and I have proof! Now if you don't mind, I have to make a call to Washington, D.C.!"

"Dammit Black, that's why I hate talking to you! You think you're so damned smart! Why can't you be like the others and do what you're told?"

"Sergeant Major, if I walk back out there and see those professional United States Army soldiers standing in line to be treated like common criminals, I swear to God I'll have CNN, the NAACP, the Army Inspector General, and anybody else I can think of on the phone quicker than you can say Jim Crow!" Jason warned.

"You arrogant son-of-a-bit.... Hello? Hello!" Jason had hung up on him. Command Sergeant Major Wilson could barely believe, or accept the fact that a lowly sergeant first class had hung up on him, the post sergeant major. His first instinct was to immediately initiate

disciplinary action against Jason. Then, he took a moment to think the situation through. He hated to admit it to himself but he knew that while what they had done was not technically wrong, it wasn't the morally proper thing to do, either. He was also aware of the unfavorable political ramifications the operation could have if the press found out. Reluctantly, he did the only thing he could do; he called and canceled the forced blood draw.

Jason walked back toward the gym to see if the sergeant major had taken him seriously. He already had a list of numbers ready in case the men were still having blood drawn. To his delight, the men were already starting to leave the gym as he neared the main road that wound through the small Army post.

Major Fulton and Captain Briggs stopped next to him in Fulton's new Mercedes.

"Hey Sarge you are one bad motherfucker!" Briggs said with a big grin. "I don't know what you told them white boys, but they sure shut down mighty quick!"

"I just put it to them straight like I always do, sir," Jason said, trying not to show how disappointed he was at how they let themselves be handled like chumps.

"Right on, Sarge. Let us know if we can do anything for you!" Fulton said.

"Will do, sir," he answered, then popped a picture-perfect salute.

"You know those white boys are going to be all over his ass now," Fulton said with a sigh as they drove away.

Briggs' smile faded as he nodded in agreement.

Captain McNair and Chief Detective Mannhof came back to the MP station about thirty minutes later. McNair was beyond pissed when he stuck his furrowed bald head in Jason's office. "In my office! Right now!"

Stubbornly, Jason took his time responding. He didn't want McNair to think that he was intimidated.

Captain McNair didn't bother to look up at him when he walked into the office. "Sergeant Black, I am assigning you and Detective Krantz to assist Chief Mannhof with his investigation." McNair was struggling to control his anger.

"With all due respect, Captain, I have my hands full with the cases going on here," Jason answered. He didn't really have that much to do; he just wanted to give McNair a hard time.

“You’re damned lucky I don’t have you court-martialed for disobeying a direct order, Sergeant! You and your sidekick, Werner, are going to help Detective Mannhof with the E-tool case. You will give him your full cooperation. That’s an order, Sergeant! Dismissed!” McNair nodded at Mannhof and started reading his newspaper.

Jason was about to protest more but decided not to cause any more trouble, for now. “Yes sir!” he said mockingly. “Come on Karl, let’s go find Werner and look over what you have.”

Werner Krantz met Jason and Mannhof just as they were coming out of the Captain’s office. “What’s happening, guys? Chief Mannhof, what are you doing here?” Krantz asked. Werner Krantz was the German police liaison to the Army military police and Jason’s closest friend.

“Where the hell have you been?” Jason asked.

“I decided to sleep in. Did we miss something while we were in Munich?” Krantz asked.

“You’re not going to believe this. Come on. I’ll bring you up to speed,” Jason said, smiling.

After telling Krantz about the blood draw, Jason reviewed the E-Tool file. Mannhof’s men had already done a sweep of the neighborhood. No one else had seen anything. The only thing they had was the crime scene, a description of the suspect and the old blue car he was driving at the time of the attack.

“Did you check your traffic cameras in this area?” Jason asked.

Chief Detective Mannhof didn’t answer. He didn’t have to; the look on his face told the story. They had been so focused on the fact that they had a suspect, they were sure it was one of the men from the military community. All they needed was a DNA match to the hair and semen samples they had and they could seal the case. No one had bothered to check the traffic cameras in the neighborhood.

Jason shook his head and leaned back in his chair while a red-faced Mannhof called his office.

Most major European cities had camera systems set up throughout business or commercial districts. The Germans used an automated traffic control and fine system to help with traffic enforcement. Computer-controlled sensors detected and photographed the license number of any vehicle passing through the intersection after the light had turned red. A copy of the photo and

the ticket were then mailed to the offender with the expectation of payment. The police also used radar-activated detection sensors with high-speed cameras to monitor speeding along major thoroughfares.

Jason had received more than his fair share of speeding tickets during his first tour in Germany as a gifted, but reckless undercover drug agent working with a DEA Joint Task Force in Frankfurt many years ago. He had a hunch that if the suspect had a fight with the victim's father, he would be in a real hurry to get out of the area. Subsequently, he would either activate a speed trap camera, or run a red light, sealing his fate.

Chief Mannhof had the traffic control office pull the cameras in the area of the last attack and check for all small, blue vehicles running red lights or speeding around 9:00 p.m. They found one. The photo clearly showed a young black man wearing an American Army uniform behind the wheel. An hour later, the German police technician was at Jason's office with the photographic evidence.

"This is an American-military-issued license plate," Mannhof noted.

"Bingo," Jason said with a smile. Once again he'd proven McNair and his narrow-minded cronies wrong.

The vehicle was registered to Private First Class Michael Brown of the 3rd Infantry Division based out of Panzer Barracks in nearby Stuttgart. Jason called the Military Police Investigations office there and gave them the information. The MPI agents in turn would pick PFC Brown up and contact the German police, who would transport him to Goppingen and turn him over to Detective Mannhof's people for questioning.

With that done, Jason sent Mannhof on his way and typed up his portion of the case file. On the way out of the office for the day, he and Werner went into Captain McNair's office to tell him about the outcome of the case.

"May I help you two?" McNair asked, with a why-are-you-bothering-me tone in his voice. Mannhof had already briefed him on the findings. Without waiting for a reply, he went back to writing.

Jason and Werner looked at each other and shrugged their shoulders. Jason tossed his report into McNair's in-box and started to walk out.

"Sergeant Black," McNair said putting his pen down.

Jason stopped at the door. "Yes, Captain?" He fought back a

smile.

McNair stood up and pointed at him. “Don’t you ever pull another stunt like you pulled this morning as long as you work for me! You got lucky this time, but I’m telling you that you didn’t make any friends over at headquarters. The next time you disobey an order I’ll bring you up on charges and see to it that you lose those stripes!”

Jason’s temper flared as he prepared to fire back at McNair.

Werner saw the trademark left fist balling up and knew that Jason was about to say something he would regret. “Come on, let’s go, Jason. It’s past lunch time and I’m hungry!” he said as he grabbed Jason’s arm and pulled him out of the room.

DALLAS TEXAS 0745 HOURS

J.G. McCormick’s charcoal gray BMW 740IL glided effortlessly through downtown Dallas to the Center for Democracy and Government Support, which was based in the Trammel Crow Tower, a forty-nine story, autumn-brown skyscraper that neighbored the Dallas Museum of Art. He stopped thinking about Willoughby Carrolton long enough to ponder the NAF’s failed racial holy war and their humiliating defeat at the hands of that mysterious anti-terrorist team. He shook his head. If Walker had just listened to Adam Clark, maybe the entire NAF would not have been almost completely wiped out. Too bad for you Walker, he thought. Clark’s men would soon make the remainder of them a non-issue.

McCormick turned onto Harwood Street from the expressway and entered the underground parking garage, parking in his reserved space on the first level. Outwardly unfazed by the unfolding crisis in Zurich, McCormick strode confidently and purposefully through the lobby, nodding sincerely at the security guard at the kiosk. He made a beeline across the black granite floor of the tower lobby to the elevators, foregoing his usual habit of stopping in the pastry shop for a couple of muffins.

As he waited for the elevator, he made notice of the rose-colored Vermilion granite walls that reached some thirty feet upward to join with the Calacatta white marble rotunda. He smiled, wondering if anyone other than he appreciated that the white marble had come from the same mountain quarried by Michelangelo in the sixteenth century. Probably not, he surmised. Not anymore than they

appreciated the fact that all of the five different stones used at this building were shipped to Italy to be sized and fabricated by the best stone craftsman in the world.

McCormick stepped onto the newly-arrived elevator and pressed the button for the 33rd floor. Riding up alone, he looked into the polished gold panels of the elevator and straightened his tie, all the while pondering exactly what to do about Willoughby Carrolton and her curiosity. But that wasn't his problem, was it? They had people to handle situations like this, didn't they? His job was to run The Center. Make sure information and resources were coming in and going out, to the right people of course.

The elevator opened, revealing a set of large doors. McCormick placed his card into the gold-plated reader, waited for a faint click, and then entered his domain.

Smiling and nodding, even waving at some of his employees, McCormick quickly made his way to his office, cheerfully greeting his secretary, Lucinda. McCormick waited for his long-time secretary to complete her morning ritual of bringing him coffee - heavy cream, no sugar - and the usual pile of paperwork to review, before he picked up his scrambled signal phone and called Washington, DC.

McCormick had to wait for his contact's secretary to track him down.

"J.G., how the hell are you?" The loud, baritone voice on the other end sounded distant and hollow.

"Take me off of that damned speaker phone!" McCormick commanded.

The line clicked and the voice came across clearer. "What can I do for you, J.G.?"

"Got a little problem, Carl. Conner got a little visit from a reporter from the Orlando Sentinel yesterday. She was asking questions about stolen gold being stored over there."

Carl Blakesly leaned forward in his seat and picked up a pen. As a secret member of CTAC, it was his responsibility to maintain security of the gold. "And exactly what did Conner tell her?" he asked, his voice not so friendly anymore.

"Nothing. Just a flat denial. But he thinks that she's getting close to the gold and I have to agree with him. For her to get that far she must have some leads." The ball's in your court now Carl, he

thought.

“Okay J.G., this is not a big problem yet. I can slow her down enough to give us the time we need. Call Conner; tell him to relax and to get the gold ready for shipment. We’re going to get it out of there. Do you have that reporter’s name?”

“Sure do, Carl. Her name is Willoughby Carrolton. She works for the Orlando Sentinel.” McCormick wondered what they would do to her.

“Thanks, J.G. You just go back to doing what you do best. I’ll take care of this,” Blakesly said.

“I’ll do just that, Carl.” The line went dead. McCormick picked up his Wall Street Journal and took a sip of his coffee, having already forgotten about Walker, the NAF, and Willoughby Carrolton, for soon, fate would take care of all of them.

From his corner office in the Federal Reserve Building in The District, Carl Blakesly quickly punched in the number from memory. A split second later a certain phone was ringing in the Special Operations Command section of the Pentagon. The secretary put the call through immediately.

“Morning, Carl. What can I do for you?” Major General Robert Carlisle asked.

“This line secure?” Blakesly asked.

“Yes, go ahead,” Carlisle answered, slightly intrigued.

Blakesly relayed the story to the career Army officer, Green Beret, and also secretly a member of CTAC.

“So you want my people to move the gold, right?” Carlisle asked.

“Most definitely, Bob. We can’t wait for the press to put this story out. And you know that sooner or later, it will come out. Your boys are our best bet for getting it out quietly.”

There was a short pause on the line as Carlisle ran several options through his head. “Okay Carl, I’ll get my people on it right away.” General Carlisle was already scribbling down names on a piece of paper.

“Thanks Bob. Will you let me know when it’s done?”

“I sure will Carl. Take care.”

Carlisle hung up the phone and swore. “Hell of a way to start a day,” he said, thinking about how to move more than a billion dollars in gold from Europe to the US without anyone noticing. And

they wonder why we drink, he thought. The General then made three phone calls. The first went to the US Army Intelligence School at Fort Huachuca, Arizona. The second was to the DEA office over on I Street. The last call went to the First Battalion of the Tenth Special Forces Group, Stuttgart, Federal Republic of Germany.

1405 HOURS - SCHWABISCH GMUND MOUNTAIN, FRG

“Hey, slow down!” Werner pleaded as Jason’s driving neared the point of recklessness as they rounded the tight curves of Gmund Mountain.

Separating Goppingen from Schwabisch Gmund, Gmund Mountain was twenty kilometers of exhilarating yet dangerous curves, awe-inspiring panoramic views, and heart-stopping sheer drop-offs. Along the way there lay several small farming towns and a secluded, hillside restaurant that could only be accessed by braving an unpaved, unlighted, one-car road.

“Can you believe he had the nerve to threaten me?” Jason shouted.

“Well, you did make him look bad,” Werner offered.

“They were dead wrong and they knew it dammit!” Jason squeezed the steering wheel of his trusty old Celica.

“I think you’d better watch your back for a while, man. You pissed off some pretty heavy hitters,” Werner cautioned.

Jason grunted. Werner was right. In one fell swoop, he’d managed to piss off the post commander, the post command sergeant major, and his unit commander. That, in and of itself, was a recipe for disaster. Now add the fact that he was black, they were all white, and that the issue was racially charged, and you had an inevitable nuclear explosion on the horizon.

“Yeah, I know that I have to watch my back for a while, but I’m not too worried about it. Hell, they’re not smart enough to set me up anyway,” Jason said with just a touch of bravado and arrogance, displayed mainly for Werner’s sake.

“Whatever you say, Jason. Just don’t get me fired, I need this job.”

After he dropped Werner off, Jason went home and revisited the events of the day. Though he was feeling good about the way he handled McNair and the Sergeant Major, he began to realize that Werner was right. He had better be careful from now on. He’d

stepped on some pretty big toes and sooner or later, the big foot was going to stomp back.

He called his friend and part-time lover, Sergeant Regina Lang, who also just happened to work in the base personnel office.

Regina already knew the reason he was calling, and it wasn't for dinner or sex. She kept abreast of the happenings in the small military community through a network of sources. The source in this particular case was Charlene, Captain McNair's secretary. "Hey Jason! I heard about what you did this morning! You're crazy as hell! Now you know they're going to get your ass for that!" she yelled into the phone.

"They should have known better than to pull some shit like that with me!" He was letting his cockiness show again.

"Honey, I don't blame you for what you did, but you know you'll be on your own when they come after you. And they will come after you when the time is right." A little of her Alabama accent, which she went to great lengths to hide, crept through.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Listen, none of those so-called brothers, especially the officers, are going to be there when you get in a tight. I mean, I know you meant well, but none of those chumps will risk hurting their careers to help you out."

Her words hurt with the truth they rang. He knew she was right about the officers in particular. Hell, if they wouldn't stick up for themselves, what made him think they would stick up for him in a pinch? Wasn't it always that way with brothers, though? They walk around spouting that 'much love' and 'representin' crap, but when it comes time to stand up, they always fall short. Hell, Werner would stick by him before any of them would.

"You're right. Can you check the system and see if there are any good assignments coming open soon? I probably need to go ahead and get out of here." He hated leaving like this, but, like Werner, Regina was right. Sooner or later they would find a way to stick it to him for humiliating them.

"Come over tomorrow and we'll put together a package to send out to some places around Germany."

"Okay, Regina. I'll see you tomorrow." Always one to keep a paper trail, Jason quickly drafted a letter to the NAACP about the incident at the gymnasium before going out for a long run.

2100 HOURS CENTRAL TIME - DALLAS, TEXAS

The Dallas takedown team, designated 'STRIKER', unloaded their equipment off of the Lear jet and loaded it into the rented Suburban that had been left for them by 'WATCHER', the surveillance/reconnaissance team.

Eric immediately set up his laptop and linked into THOTH's satellite network, while Jerry contacted the recon team via radio.

"WATCHER, this is STRIKER. We have wheels down. Copy?"

"Roger, STRIKER. We have eyes on the target."

"Copy that, WATCHER. I am set up for visual if you have it," Eric added.

"Sending a visual link signal now. Got it?"

"Got it, thanks. Out here, for now."

"What do we have, Jerry?" Dexter asked.

Sean watched again in amazement at the efficiency and technological capabilities of Dexter's team. He wondered if the government was somehow involved.

Jerry keyed his radio mike. "STRIKER to WATCHER, give us a quickie."

"All players are on the field. We can start the game anytime."

Jerry nodded to Dexter. "Get us front row seats. We'll be there shortly."

Dexter's personal cellular phone rang as he put the heavy tactical vest on. He looked at the caller ID; it was Trooper Leslie James. "Hello Leslie, how are you?"

"I'm fine, Dexter. I saw you on TV with the Congresswoman and after that terrorist attack. I want to talk to you about joining your team. I'm just arriving in Washington now. The Latin Kings copped a plea to avoid a trial, so the department released your gun to me. So can I see you tonight and return it to you?"

Dexter smiled. A white female could be just what the team needed. "I'm not in town right now, but I'll be back in the morning. Get a room at the Ritz-Carlton in Crystal City; it's right off the interstate. When you get settled, I want you to call my office and they'll take care of everything. Now are you sure you want to do this, Leslie? You've seen how dangerous our work is."

"Yes, I'm sure. I've been waiting for something like this all of my life."

"Okay then. Call this number and they'll get you set up." He gave

her Dawn's number and hung up.

Sean looked at him. "A new recruit?"

"Yes. It's the Trooper that I rescued last year. She's got a lot of potential. I'm going to put her with you at the downtown office."

"So you're keeping me away from your base?" Sean's disappointment was obvious.

"Just for now. Our entire operation is moving, so there's no need to get you set up in DC. Besides, tonight, you'll get plenty of action. Okay operators, let's get ready to operate."

The men lined up for inspection. Jerry checked each man's gear and weapons. When he was finished, Dexter checked his.

Jerry officially took command of the operation. "Mount up. Sean, you drive since you know where it is."

Sean smiled at the irony of the moment. He was now driving for the men that he was going to help kill the men that he used to drive for. Strange universe we live in, he thought.

2145 HOURS - ZERO HOUR

"STRIKER to WATCHER. We're at the playing field. Can we start the game?" Jerry asked.

"Roger, STRIKER. You are clear to start." Marcus radioed back.

Jerry looked over at Sean and nodded. "Go."

Sean accelerated as they turned onto the target street and began the kill run.

Jerry, Dexter, and Eric opened their doors slightly in preparation for a quick dismount.

"WATCHER to STRIKER. You have three vehicles approaching from the east. Slow down and let them clear the area."

"Copy that, WATCHER." Jerry looked at Sean, who was already slowing down.

Marcus had the WATCHER team ready themselves in case they had to provide back-up or run interference if the police showed up. Then, something happened that made his heart jump. The approaching vehicles, three plain white vans coming from the opposite direction of Dexter's group, stopped in front of the safe house and unloaded no less than fifteen heavily armed men.

"Abort! Abort! Target has been compromised!" Marcus shouted into his radio mike.

Sean slammed on the brakes as the house came into view. He had

spotted the vans just as Marcus sounded the alert.

“STRIKER Team, I count approximately fifteen heavily-armed men entering the house,” Marcus continued.

“Pull over and shut it down!” Dexter ordered. Then, he and the STRIKER team also watched in silent shock as the interior of the house erupted in flashes, but no sounds were heard. He figured the assailants were using silencers. The house went dark, and then four of the men ran out to the vans and began carrying equipment in.

“STRIKER, they’re unloading something from the vans.”

“We got it. Anything on the police scanners?” Dexter asked.

“Nothing yet. They’re using silenced weapons so I doubt that the neighbors heard anything.”

“Agreed. Stay on your toes just the same.”

Adam Clark watched as his men set up the Meth lab. He turned to Carpenter, who was standing over a subdued Jim Walker. “Don’t fret over your dead friends, Captain Walker. You’ll soon be in hell with them. Right now my men are setting up a little Meth lab. And as we all know, the chemicals used to operate a Meth lab are the most volatile on the market. Once we get the methanol mixed with the sulfuric acid, alcohol, red phosphorus, and the explosive ether, we’ll have all the makings of a Meth operation. Unfortunately, it will explode and kill everyone when the dopers get into a shoot-out with rival drug dealers.”

“You just murdered good Aryan stock, you fucking lunatic!” Walker screamed.

“Incompetent mutts is all they were! Might as well be niggers! The movement is better off without them!” Clark retorted.

Carpenter checked his watch. “Let’s move this thing along, men!”

Several minutes later, the assailants exited the house and sped off, passing the would-be strike team as they left.

“WATCHER to STRIKER, they dragged one person out with them. He had a black bag over his head, but I’ll bet it was Walker!” Marcus shouted.

“Copy WATCHER.” Dexter turned to Eric. “Get your laptop and locate Walker. Sean, let’s go. STRIKER to WATCHER, let’s move out.”

The surveillance team pulled in behind Sean just as he completed his U-turn. Both vehicles were approaching the curve when the safe

house exploded.

“STRIKER, the safe house just blew up!” Marcus said.

“We saw it. We’re booting up our computer now so we can track Walker,” Dexter replied calmly.

“I already have that info, STRIKER. Walker is moving in a northeasterly direction towards Dallas. I can give you a street by street if you like,” Dwain said.

“No. Take the lead. STRIKER to CONTROL. You copying this?”

“Roger, STRIKER. I’m tasking COMRADE 10 to track with visual as we speak. Wherever they stop, we’ll be right on top of them,” Jackie said.

“Good job, CONTROL. Out here.” Dexter watched as the recon team passed them and took the lead. He reached up and touched Jerry on the shoulder. “Sorry, Jerry. I didn’t mean to just take over like that.”

“No, its okay, Dex. I’m turning it back over to you. I love to watch you work, I learn something every time.” Jerry was happy that Dexter was running things. Urban operations in advanced, highly populated areas were not his area of expertise.

“Thanks, Jerry. Sean, what’s going on? Who else knows about the NAF safe house?”

“When we came out here looking for Croteau, some of the CTAC men came with us. I’m betting Clark ordered this raid. I’m willing to bet they killed your Intel guys too. They were at the same meeting we had with Tanner that day.”

“I figured as much. What does Clark want with Walker?”

“They hate each other, and most of his men hate Walker too, for some reason. I’ll bet he’ll be tortured and killed by Clark himself.” Sean made eye contact with Dexter in the rear-view mirror.

“How good are these guys?” Dexter asked.

“A hell of a lot of better than the NAF, um, was. They’re all former Army Rangers, led by a sadistic son-of-a-bitch named Carpenter. He really hates Walker, but I don’t know why. But I do know one thing. Jim Walker will suffer before he dies tonight.”

2355 HOURS EASTERN TIME - 8 SECONDS COUNTRY WESTERN BAR, ORLANDO, FL

Orange County Corrections Officer Andy Jasper spotted the three men sitting in the corner of the club. He didn’t know them, as his

group had never really socialized with anyone from that particular order. Nevertheless, it was his responsibility as a member of the National Order of The Brotherhood of the Iron Hammer to advise them about what was coming their way. The men stood to greet him as he approached. Jasper shook their hands and sat down. "I've got some bad news for you men."

"Tell us a story then. Enlighten us," the leader of the group said.

Jasper told them of what he learned at Jannette's apartment earlier. "So, whatcha boys gonna do? We'll give you any assistance you need."

The men's faces had turned to stone. All of a sudden they were all looking at possibly being fired and even going to prison. There were several minutes of whispering among them before a consensus was reached. The leader stood up. "Thanks for your help. I'll be in touch." He shook Jasper's hand and walked out without waiting to see if the others were following him. He didn't speak again until they were several miles outside of Orlando, heading back to Harrison FCI. "I want everyone to meet tomorrow night. We need to let them know what's going on."

DALLAS, TEXAS

"WATCHER to STRIKER. I have a location on Walker. THOTH has him at 1325 Industry Row. Right in the heart of the industrial district. It's only a few miles from here, just off the 301," Dwain said.

Dexter nodded to himself as he keyed his radio mike. "10-4 WATCHER. Lead the way. Find a spot close by where we can set up." Now things get deadly, he thought.

The three CTAC assault teams regrouped at the CTAC-owned warehouse in the downtown industrial district, and parked the vehicles outside. Carpenter personally dragged a beaten Walker inside and led him to where Adam Clark was standing.

The handcuffs and the hood were taken off, and Walker found himself facing a smiling Adam Clark, who was dressed in black combat fatigues.

"Welcome to my party Captain James Walker. Relax, get your bearings," Clark quipped.

Walker looked around the dimly lit warehouse. He counted fifteen men, all carrying assault rifles. He immediately knew exactly

how Croteau must have felt that night in West Virginia, and he didn't like it at all. Staying true to his Ranger training, he began looking for an escape route.

"Don't even run that escape and evasion bullshit through your head Jim. Every man here has been through the SERES course, including me," Clark said through a smile. "We know all of your little tricks."

Walker just stared at him. No way could a puke like Clark be special ops, he thought.

"I see the little wheels turning, Walker. Yes, I am Ranger qualified, just like you, and the um, late Sonny Liciardello. You see Jimmy boy, I started out with the 82nd Airborne, moved on to the Rangers, switched over to the Green Berets, and then I got recruited by the CIA. Remember when I said that you weren't the only bad ass around? Once again, you should have done your homework. But you didn't. You never do, as was evident in Somalia, and more recently with your failed so-called racial holy war. Now Dr. Burns is dead, killed in an early morning explosion that was probably engineered by your nemesis Dexter Diamond. All of your so-called NAF Special Ops men have been wiped out. Again, probably by Diamond and his people, but we also helped with that. All that's left is you, and I'm going to take care of that in short order."

"Fuck you, Clark! If you're gonna kill me, just do it and get it over with! Just don't let Carpenter and his squad of queers try to have sex with my carcass when I'm dead! Or better yet, you can give me a pistol and give me a fightin' chance! I promise to take at least three or four of you with me!"

"No Jim, I can't do that. You wouldn't last two seconds against real warriors. But I'll tell you what. If you whip me in hand-to-hand combat, I'll let you walk out of here unharmed."

"And if you win?"

"You'll be dead." Clark sprang forward quickly and unexpectedly, front-kicking Walker square in the gut. It was a good first strike technique; quick, powerful, and hard to block.

Walker stumbled backward and crashed into a stack of wooden pallets, then fell to the floor. He doubled over on the floor, gasping for breath. He would never have imagined that a suit-wearing, powder-puff candy-ass like Clark could move so fast and hit so hard. Maybe Clark was right. Maybe he did have an incredibly bad habit

of underestimating his opponent. Or maybe he simply overestimated his own skills and toughness. Helluva time to finally figure it out, he thought.

Clark took a second to gloat as he watched Walker struggle to catch his breath. For a brief moment, he saw Croteau there, on the ground, writhing in agony, waiting to die. For a brief moment, he felt a tinge of sympathy. Then, as quickly as the pity came, it dissipated and anger took its place. For Walker had disgraced the white race with his bumbling and incompetence. What could have been an historic event had turned into humiliation for the entire movement.

Walker was on all fours when Clark drove a knee deep into his rib cage. Four of the ribs broke under the vicious attack, with two of them slightly piercing his right lung. Walker let out a loud grunt, then clinched his teeth together so hard that he was sure they were going to crack. He tried gasping for air in short breaths to keep the pain to a minimum, but it didn't help. He'd broken bones before, but this was unbearable. "Jesus!" he grunted before catching himself. He didn't want to give Clark and his goons the satisfaction of hearing him cry out in pain. Walker lifted his head. "You're a fuckin' dead man, Clark!"

Clark and the other men laughed in unison. "Get up and die like an Aryan warrior! Stop crawling around like a Black mongrel dog!" Clark taunted.

Jerry pulled Dexter aside. "There are at least fifteen heavily armed men in there, boss. If we go in, we *will* take casualties. This is not the NAF we're up against. These guys are real trigger-pullers with global experience. But we can't just leave them be either. What do you suggest?"

Dexter had already run the scenario through his head and had a viable plan that would not put his teams in danger. He put his hand on Jerry's shoulder. "You're absolutely right Jerry, we can make entry and try to take them down, but we'll lose at least two people. On the other hand, we can't allow them to walk away from this situation. Here's what I suggest you consider." Dexter gave Jerry his thoughts and got back into the vehicle.

Jerry called the team together and laid out the operation. "Any suggestions or complaints?" he asked.

Eric spoke up first. "Sounds solid to me. Too bad we don't get to

watch Walker die though.”

Jerry nodded. “I know. Sean, you and Nick go with Eric. Cleo will provide sniper cover. We’ll be standing by just in case. Move out.”

Dexter watched quietly as his team set up their ambush. He timed them, so that he could provide an accurate critique when it was over.

Twenty five minutes later, Jerry, Eric, and Sean climbed back into the vehicle. Dexter pressed the button on his watch to stop the time. “You were a little slow, Eric.”

“That’s because he double-checked my work, Dex. He still doesn’t trust me,” Sean said bitterly.

“That’s right, bitch! But I admit you did the right thing, so you get some points,” Eric shouted back.

Jerry keyed his radio mike. “STRIKER to WATCHER, let’s roll. Move out to your designated position and stand by. STRIKER to CONTROL, we’re setting up surveillance on the CTAC operatives in the warehouse. Do you still have an eye on us?”

“10-4 STRIKER, we have you. Be careful.”

Sean drove several blocks until they found a pay phone.

Eric got out and dialed 9-1-1.

The phone rang three times before an operator answered. “9-1-1 emergency, this line is recorded, my name is Nicole.”

“Hey, you all heard about the explosion over in Garland, right?”

“Yes sir. How may I help you?”

“I saw who did it. I followed them to a warehouse at 1325 Industrial Row. There are about fifteen men in there with automatic weapons. They also have a hostage!”

“The address is 1325 Industrial Row?” The operator’s heart beat quickened as she typed.

“Yes ma’am. The leader’s name is Adam Clark. James Walker is the hostage! You’d better hurry because they’re probably torturing him right now!”

“What is your name, sir? How do you know all of this?”

Eric smiled. He was enjoying this game. “You’ll see three white vans parked outside of the warehouse. Tell your people to be careful. The men inside are heavily armed.” He hung up the phone and got back into the waiting SUV. “Showtime!”

Dexter smiled. This was a risky plan, but a good one. Surely none of his people would get killed, but he had to make sure that none of

the Dallas officers got hurt either. Their timing had to be perfect.

The first dispatched unit responded to the pay phone that Eric used in an attempt to locate the caller. Finding no one, she got her fingerprint kit out and went to work.

The Dallas officers had taken Eric seriously. They quietly approached the warehouse and set up a wide perimeter. Within five minutes, more than twenty units had set up around the warehouse fence line to hold the scene until SWAT and Hostage Negotiators arrived.

Jerry smiled as he dialed Clark's cellular phone.

Clark spit on Walker as two of his men picked him up off the floor. He'd pummeled Walker relentlessly, breaking his nose and cracking several more ribs in the process. He stepped back as he removed his phone from its holder on his belt. "Clark."

"Hey, Adam. Have you killed that pussy Walker yet?"

"What? Who the fuck is this?" He made gestures in the air, directing his men to check the perimeter.

"The same people who kicked the shit out the NAF and their so-called Millennium Strike Force. You might want to take a look outside. I think Dallas PD wants to talk to you about that house you blew up over in Garland. By the way, thanks for finishing off the NAF for us. See you later, Adam." Jerry disconnected the call.

"We got cops everywhere, sir! What do we do?" Carpenter asked.

Clark was furious. That damned Dexter Diamond had set him up. He looked out at the ring of police cars. "We can't afford to wait for the media or the SWAT teams to arrive. We need to get out of here now! Get your men ready. We move out in two minutes!" He walked back over to Walker. "It's your lucky day, bitch! You get to live a little longer thanks to your friend Dexter Diamond!"

Walker laughed in spite of his numerous injuries. "Fuckin' Diamond got you too, huh? So much for your fuckin' super CTAC Rangers! I guess I wasn't the only one who underestimated him!"

"You'd better keep your fucking mouth shut when the cops come get you! You say one word about us and I will slaughter your parents and your boys! You got me, soldier?"

"I hear you! I won't say nuthin', so you leave my family alone!" Walker looked at the ground, quietly thanking God for sparing his miserable life, for the moment.

Carpenter lined his men up on the door. "Go straight for the vans.

Fire only if fired on until we hit the gates, then shoot anything that moves or tries to follow us! Ready some grenades so that we can take out any vehicles that get too close! Let's go!"

"Dex, what makes you think that they won't try to use Walker as a bargaining chip? How do you know they're going to make a run for it?"

"Well, first of all, they can't afford to wait for the SWAT team to show up or they'll have to shoot it out with a team with superior numbers and firepower. Carpenter knows that Dallas has a first rate, well-trained, well-equipped SWAT team, and even his men wouldn't stand a chance against an army of big city cops. They know that the way the warehouse is set up, they can get to the vans without having to encounter any police. Finally, Carpenter knows that if they can get to the outskirts of the city, they stand a better chance of escaping. If it were me, I'd do the same thing."

"What about Walker? What would you do with him?" Sean asked.

Dexter smiled. "Nothing. I'd leave him behind. He's too hurt by now to keep up, if he's not already dead."

"How do you know that he won't talk?" Sean asked.

"Let me answer that," Jerry said. "I would simply tell him to keep his mouth shut or his sons are dead. It's just that simple. Right, Dex?"

"Just like that," Dexter said coldly, recalling that was exactly the threat he used to free the hostages during the Atlanta incident.

Marcus interrupted them. "All units stand by; we have movement at the side of the warehouse. Looks like they're making a run for it!"

Clark's feet seemed to be made of lead as he and his men moved the twenty or so feet to the vans. Everything moved in slow motion. The police officers across the parking lot yelled for them to stop. Not going to happen, he thought. I am not going to jail. He knew that the police wouldn't fire at them unless fired upon or threatened first. Nothing was going to stop them now.

The Dallas officers laid out razor-spiked Stop Sticks and prepared for a vehicle pursuit. The police helicopter was not on scene yet so the bad guys had to be stopped right here, right now.

Carpenter boldly stood and faced the police officers as his men loaded up into the vans, but was careful not to point his weapon in

their direction.

Eric's hasty explosive trap was a simple Daisy chain consisting of small amounts of SIMTEX placed under the driver's seat and fuel tanks of each van. Each set-up was connected to the ignition switch of each vehicle. All three circuits were tied in together so that any one of the vans would destroy the others when their respective ignitions were sparked.

If Clark or his men had stopped to look down, they would have seen the wires running between the vans. But in their haste they didn't, and....

The van closest to the warehouse went up first, incinerating its occupants. The second van exploded and sent the third van tumbling, breaking the wire and severing the deadly chain, saving Carpenter's and Clark's lives.

Stunned and disoriented, Clark and his men fired blindly at the police as they climbed out of the overturned van and scrambled back into the warehouse. "That fucking Diamond is a dead man!" Clark screamed. He looked around. Walker was gone.

"CONTROL to STRIKER. I see two explosions! Is that your handiwork?"

"Roger that CONTROL. Just shaking the CTAC boys up a little!" Jerry answered.

"10-4 sir! By the way, Walker is making a run for the fence line at the rear of the warehouse. Okay, he's over the fence. Looks like Dallas PD is intercepting. Hold on. Okay they got him. Walker is in police custody."

Dexter put his hand on Jerry's shoulder. "Good job. There's no way out for Clark now. Dallas SWAT will take care of them. Let's move on to CTAC headquarters. We're going to check out their operation." He tapped Sean on the shoulder. "So now you've killed terrorists. Welcome to the family."

"So what? It's not like it's the first time I took out some dirtbags. So do I get a Dexter Diamond decoder ring now?" Sean cracked.

Eric leaned forward in his seat. "No, my friend. Now you get to live."

"Let's go, Sean. Take us to CTAC central," Jerry ordered.

Ten minutes later they were parked several blocks away from the high-rise that housed the CTAC offices.

"Twenty-third floor. The CTAC office is immediately to your

right when you get off the elevator. I've only been there once, but I remember that much. There's only one security guard on duty at any given time. He's probably just there to assist the fire department if needed," Sean said.

Dexter stuck his head out of the vehicle window and looked up at the mostly-dark glass, concrete, and steel tower. They could overpower the guard, but he didn't want to risk hurting him or her. They were going to have to break in. "Odds are the CTAC offices will be alarmed, Jerry."

"I agree. Are we worried about the police?"

"No. They may not even send anyone because of the stand-off at the warehouse. But even if they do show up, they'll only do a cursory check as long as there are no signs of forced entry. They'll meet with the guard and maybe come up to check the doors, then leave," Dexter observed.

"So we make entry at the loading docks in the rear?" Jerry asked.

"Right. Odds are there's a door open back there somewhere." Dexter keyed his radio mike. "Drivers with the vehicles. Everyone else with me. STRIKER to CONTROL."

"Go STRIKER."

"Change in plans. Do you have our new location?"

"Yes. I was wondering where you were going."

"Good. Monitor local police radio frequencies and wireless dispatch here. Notify us if they dispatch any police to our location."

"Got their frequencies locked. Do I want to know what you're up to out there?"

"No. STRIKER out." Dexter led the team through the shadows and to the loading docks. They were in luck. Someone, probably the cleaning crew, had left a door unlocked. The six operatives moved quickly and silently to the freight elevator and arrived at the twenty-third floor unnoticed. The team set up the main door of the CTAC offices. Dexter held his thumbs up. The team nodded to him that they were ready to rock and roll. Dexter pointed to Eric. Eric responded by quickly picking the lock. Dexter looked at his G-SHOCK and held up a gloved hand. When the second hand hit the twelve, Dexter dropped his hand.

Eric opened the door, giving them forty-five seconds before the alarm system sent an electronic signal to the alarm company.

Dexter waited at the door while the team spread silently

throughout the offices. He looked at the keypad and thought about disabling the alarm the way the SAS taught him. No, this will be good training for them, he thought. He wanted to see if they could get out of this without a confrontation with the security guard or the police.

Jack Chewning nodded off as he stared at the Closed Circuit Television panel behind the security desk on the ground floor of the CTAC building. Working security here was his second job and he was well into his 16th hour of being on duty. He wanted desperately to go home, but his relief was a no-call, no-show, and he couldn't reach the shift supervisor on the Nextel. The forty-year-old Chewning called his wife and told her not to wait up for him. Sighing, he went outside into the cool Dallas night and lit a smoke.

Their forty-five seconds were up. The alarm system sent a silent signal to the alarm company, who per protocol, called the CTAC offices to see if a worker had set off the alarm. When they got the answering service, they contacted the Dallas Police department.

Sean spotted the security guard and called Dexter on the radio. "The guard is out front taking a smoke."

"Roger that," Dexter acknowledged. He looked down at his watch as the team members started working on the CTAC computers.

"CONTROL to STRIKER. DPD is being dispatched to your location. There are two units responding.

"Copy that CONTROL. We are prepared," Dexter said. He looked at Eric, who was in Clark's office hacking into the computer.

Chewning was still outside smoking when the police arrived, clueless as to what was happening inside the building that he was supposed to be protecting.

"CONTROL to STRIKER, the police have arrived at the scene."

"Roger. Copy that out there, guys?" Dexter's heartbeat quickened slightly.

"We see them. Standing by," Sean said.

"You've got an alarm inside. Mind if we check it out?" the officer asked.

“No sir, not at all.” The guard walked to the glass doors and pulled at the locked door. “Damn.” He reached for his keys. “Shit. My keys are inside. I’m locked out,” he mumbled. A warm flush came over him. He didn’t like looking like an idiot in front of the police, and he didn’t want to have to call the building maintenance supervisor to come and let him in.

The senior officer looked at him. “What’s that? What’s wrong?”

Chewning looked at the ground like a scared two-year-old.

“Umm, I don’t have my keys. We can’t get back in.” They’re going to think that I’m a loser, he thought.

The younger officer looked at him with sort of a sneer. Fuckin’ loser, he thought. “Is there another way in?” His eyes showed his irritation, and arrogance.

“Well, sometimes they leave the loading dock doors unlocked. I leave ‘em notes but they don’t care. It’s always open anyway.” He began shuffling toward the rear of the building, praying that the doors were open.

“We’ll go with you,” the senior officer said.

“WATCHER to STRIKER, you have three coming your way. Two LEOs and the guard.”

Dexter smiled. It was time to test his theory on the Dallas police.

“Okay. Stand by.”

He looked around the room. All of his operators were busy at work, unfazed by the news of approaching police officers.

Chewning prayed and pulled on the door. It opened, to his relief. He entered and rushed to the front desk to get his keys. “Do you want me to come up with you?” he asked the officers as the elevator arrived.

“Yeah. I want you to show us where the office is. Is anyone else supposed to be in here?” the older officer asked.

“No one checked in with me, but sometimes they slip in one of the other doors.”

Chewning led them down the hallway to the CTAC offices. “We don’t have access to this company. They don’t want us going in there for any reason at all.”

The younger officer checked the door. It was locked. “Any other way into this place?”

Chewing shook his head. “No. This is it. Looks like a false alarm to me, guys.”

“Yep. Let’s go,” the older officer said.

Dexter stood at the other side of the door listening to their conversation. He was glad that they didn’t enter the offices. He hated taking down non-hostile law enforcement officers. It always made him feel a little guilty.

Several minutes later, Sean called Dexter on the radio.

“STRIKER, the police are leaving. You all 10-4?”

“We’re good. We’ll be coming out soon.”

Eric walked over to him. “I’m all set. I found the alarm code in Clark’s desk. Boss, you should see some of the names in this database. They’ve got people everywhere.”

“I know. Make sure we don’t leave any signs of having been here.”

Eric turned the alarm off as the rest of the team joined them at the door. “Everyone stand still.” He reset the alarm and waited as the team exited silently into the dark hallway.

“STRIKER to WATCHER. We’re coming down. Pick us up out back at the loading docks.”

An hour later, the Institute Counterterrorist team was airborne and en route back to Washington. Dexter turned on the television and tuned into CNN.

The stand-off had turned into a full-scale event. Dallas SWAT was on scene, as well as the Hostage Negotiation Team, and all of the requisite command staff.

The team and flight crew gathered around the console to watch the action.

“What do you think he’ll do, Dex?” Sean asked.

“You know Clark. He’ll surrender, blame the Garland killings on the dead guys, and hire a top tier attorney via CTAC. It will be hard to convict them.”

“So that means we come and finish them off, right?” Marcus asked.

“Along with Walker,” Nick added.

“We should have killed them back there at the warehouse, Dex,” Jerry said.

“There were fifteen of them and eight of us. The risk was just not

worth it. We'll finish this another time." Dexter drifted off in thought. An interesting idea came to mind. It made him smile slightly.

CHAPTER THREE

SHEEP, WOLVES, AND SHEEP DOGS

2345 EASTERN STANDARD TIME - WASHINGTON, DC-NORTHEAST

Ed turned right off of 24th Street to S Street, and then drove casually through the quiet middle-class neighborhood while Dawn, Simone, and Diana visually checked all of the vehicles parked along the street for occupants. If Taylor had someone watching Linda Kelley's house, they wanted to know in case that person needed to be taken down too.

"Anything?" Dawn asked as they approached the widow Kelley's house. The tan, two-story wood frame house looked so peaceful. The roof, front porch, and windows were trimmed in a nice dark brown that matched the front door. The yard was neatly trimmed with uniformly shaped shrubs on the front and sides of the house. On the front porch was a wrought iron table and chairs where Linda Kelley and her late husband used to sit and watch the girls play with their friends. Dawn unconsciously gripped her sub-machinegun.

"Nothing on my side so far," Simone said.

"Got him! There, we just passed him on the right in the green Explorer. The motor was running and the driver was on the phone. I'll bet he's our lookout. I have the license number," Diana said.

"Call it in to Control and have them run it through the system. Find out who it is," Dawn ordered.

A few seconds later, the response came over the radio. "CONTROL to COVERGIRL." Jackie was running the command center.

"Go CONTROL," Dawn answered.

"That vehicle that your subject is driving is stolen out of Maryland as of this morning. Would you like me to alert the police?"

"No. We'll take care of it. COVERGIRL to TRACKER."

"TRACKER here," Al answered.

"Did you copy that transmission? We have a spotter at the target, 10-4?"

"We copied direct. STRIKER, you copy that?" Al asked Dexter over the radio.

"Roger that, WATCHER. We copy."

"COVERGIRL to BIG BROTHER."

“We copied direct also, COVERGIRL.” Ralph checked his weapons. Just in case.

“I’ll call Miss Kelley and tell her to expect us at the back door. Ed, drop us off on the next street over. We’ll cut through the houses to avoid the lookout. Stay here until we call for you. Any questions?” Dawn put her hand on Ed’s shoulder. This was his first mission since his team was wiped out in Dallas and she wanted to be sure that he was okay.

“I got it, Miss Robinson. I’ll be okay.” Ed put his right hand on the new Heckler & Koch G36 Commando, a 5.56 short carbine with a folding stock and nine inch barrel. He had learned a valuable lesson from Ronnie’s death; never underestimate your enemy or become complacent in the shadow of danger. He also had an H&K USP45 tactical .45 ACP with a 12-round magazine nestled snugly in a drop holster on his right leg. He felt confident that he could protect himself from Lee Taylor and his goon squad.

Dawn, Diana, and Simone, all with large black bags over their shoulders, jumped out of the SUV and moved quietly to Linda Kelley’s back door. She was waiting for them.

“Thank God you’re here. I don’t know what to do! I can’t go to my family and put them in danger too. I want to see that SOB in prison, but I can’t support me and my girls if I don’t go to work because I’m running all of the time,” Linda said as she watched the trio enter her home.

Dawn began putting on her tactical gear as she spoke. “We will provide you with shelter and protection during the trial. Your financial obligations will be taken care of. I’ll personally pay off all of your debt if necessary, so don’t worry about a thing. Now where are the girls?”

“Upstairs in their room sleeping. Why?”

“Pack some clothes for them, but don’t wake them until you’re done. Don’t turn on any lights in the bedrooms. When you’re done packing, wake them and get them ready to leave. Pack light. Hurry!”

Linda stared at Simone as she slung a silenced MP5 over her head. “You would really do all of that for me?”

Simone re-inserted her earpiece and checked her radio. “Yes ma’am. Now let’s go get your girls ready to go!”

Diana checked the night-vision scope on her M16SP. “I’m going outside to look around. Be back in a few.”

“Make sure your radio is on,” Dawn said as Diana disappeared into the night. She moved into the dark living room and peeked out of the window. It appeared to be all quiet. “COVERGIRL to CONTROL.”

“Go COVERGIRL.”

“We are 10-12 and prepping for departure.”

“CONTROL copies. TRACKER, you copy that?”

“TRACKER copies. The WOLF PACK is still stationary,” Al said.

“Roger TRACKER. STRIKER, you copy?”

“STRIKER copies direct, CONTROL. We will be there shortly. Don’t let the party start without us if possible,” Jerry said.

“You guys have had your fun already. Maybe we’ll save you a bone to chew on,” Al answered.

Linda Kelley began to cry as she held her girls close. She hated running away but she knew that it was the right thing to do. This was no Hollywood movie scene where the brave heroine decides to stand her ground against the villain. Lee Taylor was a ruthless killer and would have no compunction about killing them all with a smile on his face. Better to flee with armed bodyguards in the middle of the night than to die at home, proud and brave, she thought.

Diana appeared at the back door. “It’s all clear. The lookout is still on the phone.”

“COVERGIRL to TRANSPORT, we’re coming to you now.”

“10-4 COVERGIRL, I’m ready,” Ed said nervously. He got out of the vehicle and opened all of the doors so that everyone could jump right in.

Dawn looked at the Kelleys. She hoped that Taylor and his thugs would resist violently when the rest of the team took them down. Then, street justice could take its course. “Let’s go. Simone, lead us out.”

Two minutes later, Dawn checked in. “COVERGIRL to all units. We have the SHEEP and are en route to SAFEHAVEN. BIG BROTHER, go do your thing. The back door is open.”

0208 HOURS RDT AIRFIELD

“STRIKER to CONTROL, we are on the ground and running. We should be at the target site in about twenty. Status on the WOLF

PACK?”

“WOLF PACK is still stationary, STRIKER.” Al looked over at Wade. “You hungry?” They were parked semi-illegally a half a block away from Platinum Nightclub.

“Hell, yes. That McDonald’s across the street is open. Want to grab something?” Wade was already reaching for the door.

“Yeah. Just don’t tell Dex or he’ll run us ten miles on the next group workout session. Call Craig to see if he wants something.”

Wade chirped Craig on his Nextel and informed him of the food run. He took all of the orders and went on foot for the food.

Al called his informant on her cellular phone. “What’s going on girl?” He shouted so that he could be heard over the music.

“Nothing, baby. I’m just sitting here enjoying my drink and dreaming about my money. Everybody’s still here chillin’ on the fourth floor. Steel and his crew are putting some drinks down hard and fast! So you and me are still getting together later, right?”

Al smiled. He’d agreed to a late night rendezvous if they captured Taylor based on her tip. What the hell, he thought. It’s not like she’s a drug addict or prostitute. She was an attorney who just happened to smoke a little weed from time to time. He’d caught her last year with a couple of baggies when he was working off-duty at the very same club they were at tonight. He took the dope and held the arrest paperwork, pending her working off the charges at a time of his choosing. Now the time had come, and she was performing nicely. He’d chosen to pay her also because the work was extremely dangerous. Lee Taylor was not a man to cross if you liked living. “Most definitely. We’ll wrap Mister Taylor up and I’ll be over. I’d like a massage and a cold one waiting for me if possible.” What the hell, he thought. It wasn’t like he was full time on the force anymore and he was sure Dexter wouldn’t mind him spending one hot night with her.

“Oh, I’ll have the hot oils waiting, baby! It’s about time you gave in. I’ll call you when it’s time.”

Al was smiling widely when Wade returned to the car.

“What?” Wade asked as he handed him his double quarter pounder with cheese, fries, and Coke.

“Nothing. Thank you.” Al looked away still smiling. A hot oil massage would be waiting for him once Taylor was bagged and tagged. Suddenly, he wasn’t so hungry anymore.

Fifteen minutes later, Lee Taylor looked at his watch, and then nodded to his three companions. "Let's do this!"

As the four soon-to-be-murderers left the club, an attractive young woman sitting in a dark corner made a call on her cell phone. "He's coming out now. Be careful. I'll be waiting for you."

Al started the engine. "They're coming out now. Let everyone know."

Wade buckled up and grabbed his M16SP from the back seat, then radioed the others. "TRACKER to all units. The WOLF PACK is on the move. Stand by for further."

"CONTROL copies. WOLF PACK is mobile."

"STRIKER copies. We are at the target site and standing by. TRACKER, keep a loose tail. We don't want to scare them away."

"Roger, STRIKER. We'll keep it loose."

"10-4. STRIKER to COVERGIRL. What's your status?"

"STRIKER, we are secure. Go get 'em!"

Linda Kelley overheard Simone talking on the radio. "What's going on?"

Simone smiled slightly. "Well, in a few minutes Mister Taylor will either be in custody or dead. Are you ready for your show?"

Linda nodded and took a deep breath. She awakened the girls and got them ready.

Fourteen minutes and 3.86 miles later, members of the takedown team, hidden in the darkness, watched as Taylor and his crew brazenly parked directly in front of the Kelley's house. The men calmly went to the trunk of the car and retrieved duct tape and a can of gasoline. Their plan; tie the widow and kids up, shoot them execution style, and then burn the bodies and the house. That way the news crews could get live shots and help deliver Taylor's lethal message to anyone else who might consider testifying against him in the future.

The lookout got out of his car and joined them as they approached the front door. All five men drew weapons out from under their coats and looked around the neighborhood.

Taylor kicked the front door so hard that it flew off of the hinges and landed against the far wall.

Moving like a poor man's SWAT team, they rushed into the house and spread out. Unlike the police, however, they began searching every room looking for victims to slaughter. Taylor went

upstairs and got to the master bedroom first and tried to kick the door in, but something was blocking it. Two of the other killers joined him and managed to push the door open about six inches. Inside, they heard a woman and children screaming.

“Leave us alone! Take what you want, but please don’t hurt my girls!” Linda Kelley screamed.

Taylor smiled. His victims were trapped in the bedroom waiting to die by his hand. “Linda, just open the door and I promise I won’t hurt you.” He motioned to his henchmen. They pushed harder. The door moved and Taylor saw that a bed had been set against the door.

“How do you know my name? What are you doing here?” Linda Kelley asked frantically.

Taylor smiled. He truly enjoyed tormenting his victims. “I’m here to reunite you and your girls with your husband. I figure since I killed him, the least I can do is have his family join him. I promise that your girls won’t suffer too much.”

“You go to hell, Lee Taylor! I’m going to testify in court and lock your ass away forever! I’m calling the police right now!”

“Too late, bitch! We already cut the phone lines! Besides, by the time they get here, you and your brats will be shot in the head and burned beyond recognition!” Taylor roared as he began shooting blindly through the door. His men forced the door completely open and all five of them entered the dark room and began firing in all directions. Taylor went into the master bathroom, where he was sure he would find Kelley and her girls, and began shooting holes in everything. Then, he realized, finally, that no one was there. His brain tried to analyze the situation. He had heard Linda Kelley and her girls screaming. He had exchanged words with her. Where the hell were they?

“Lee! In here!” One of the men was standing in the closet pointing to the small door that led to the attic.

Taylor smiled and pointed his pistol. “You’re dead, bitch!”

They all fired into the ceiling in and around the bedroom. So many rounds were fired that they all had to reload before firing a second volley.

Taylor motioned for one of his men to crawl into the attic and check.

“You’re going to jail, Lee Taylor. This is the Police, drop your weapons and lie on the floor! Right now!” Ralph ordered.

Taylor and his men froze for a second, wondering where the voice had come from. They all started looking nervously around the room.

The voice came again, this time from the hallway. "I said drop your weapons! I can see your every move! This is your last warning!"

Linda Kelley watched the real-time video in silent awe. She, like everyone else in the room, knew that Taylor would not surrender. Soon, there would be a blood bath. She quickly sent her daughters into the other room.

"BIG BROTHER to STRIKER."

"STRIKER here," Jerry answered.

"As you can see on your MCTs, the WOLF PACK is not complying. They are still trying to figure out what happened. I suggest you execute now."

"Roger that, BIG BROTHER. We are already moving. Stand by."

Taylor and his men looked frantically around the room for cameras and speakers. "I'm not going to jail tonight whoever the fuck you are! I swear I'll kill any cop that tries to come through that door!" He motioned for his men to spread throughout the house. He turned to go to the window and look outside for the police.

"Everyone inside Linda Kelley's house is ordered to drop your weapons and get on the ground right now!" Ralph shouted into his microphone.

Lee found a speaker behind a nightstand in the master bedroom. He shot it three times. "Fuck you cop! Come in and get me!"

Silence was his response.

"Y'all see any fuckin' thing out there?" Taylor demanded.

"I don't see shit, Lee!"

"Me neither! Ain't nobody out there! Let's get the fuck outta here!"

"Not yet! Let's just wait!" Lee ordered.

"Steel, we cain't stay here! All this shootin' is bound to bring the fuckin po-po!"

Dexter stared at the Kelley house as his temper flared. Lee Taylor was everything that he hated in a criminal - arrogant, mean-spirited, cold-blooded, selfish, and recklessly homicidal. He turned to Jerry. "You have control. He's not coming out without a fight. Execute the plan, now." He turned and walked to the next block over

so that he could watch the operation from the MCT in his vehicle.

Jerry nodded. "Roger that, sir. STRIKER ONE to all units. Standby for takedown. Snipers, set up for EXO-STRUCTURE TARGETING. Entry team, set up and stand by."

Eric led the entry team to the far side of the house next to the target house. "Entry team ready," he whispered into his radio mike.

"STRIKER ONE to CONTROL."

"Go ONE," Jackie replied.

"We're setting up the QUAD-S. Initiate THOTH's THERMAL SCAN TARGETING SYSTEM and link with us. The Snipers will send you their data as soon as you're ready. Copy?"

"CONTROL is already set. Snipers can start laser-targeting now. THOTH will run it."

"STRIKER EIGHT will go first, CONTROL." Cleo set up on top of a house north of the target, and aimed his silenced Mark 11 sniper rifle at the North wall. Next to him his laptop displayed a detailed diagram of the house and the location of the bad guys. The Mark 11's laser fed the critical data to THOTH via satellite.

"That won't be necessary, sir. I can target all five snipers simultaneously. You will each receive a tone in your radio when you have target lock. Would you prefer center-mass shots or circuitry shots?" THOTH asked.

"Circuitry shots, THOTH," Jerry responded.

"All snipers start scanning." Cleo ordered. His heart pounded with excitement as he complied with THOTH'S directions. They had all trained with RDT's experimental EXO-STRUCTURE TARGETING SYSTEM, but like much of their high-tech gadgetry, this would be its first live-mission application.

"STRIKER EIGHT. You are locked on the same target as STRIKER SIX. Please scan left to the untargeted suspect. Stop. Raise your weapon slowly. Stop. You have a circuitry shot. All snipers are locked STRIKER ONE." THOTH said impassively.

Lee stared into the darkness around the house. He couldn't see any cops but he knew that they had to be out there somewhere. Something wasn't right. DCPD has never been this good at being invisible. Something was not right. "Fuck this! Break out the Uzis!

Each man produced full-sized Uzi submachine guns from under their jackets.

“Whatcha wanna do, Steel?” one of them asked.

“Just fire some rounds at anything! I want to see where the fuck the cops are! This should get ’em moving around!”

“But I don’t see shit out there, Steel!” another one called out from the master bedroom.

“They out there! Just shoot at somethin!”

“CONTROL to all units, they’re about to open fire on the neighborhood!” Jackie warned as she monitored the conversation inside the house.

Suddenly, automatic weapons fire spat out of windows all around the house, peppering cars, houses, and trees, but fortunately, no people.

Jerry cursed as a round whizzed past his hiding place across the street. “Snipers, take them out!”

The five shots were so close together that may as well have been one. Armor-piercing 7.62 invaders zipped through thin wood and drywall, impacted soft tissue, and mushroomed. All five thugs stopped firing instantly and dropped to the floor. Four of them died instantly as their heads exploded. The three combined RDT systems had performed flawlessly.

Lee Taylor, tough as nails, was staring blankly at the ceiling, gurgling on his own blood as masked men in black glided silently into the house through the back door. His brain told him to get up and fight, but his body could not respond as his spine had been severed by the bullet. Nick’s round had torn through Lee’s neck and nearly decapitated him.

Blood filled Lee Taylor’s lungs and he began to gurgle loudly now. His eyes darted wildly in panic as the specter of death set in.

Dexter walked in and stood over him. Something about the room, a sound, or the look on Taylor’s face stirred an old memory. Suddenly, he was in Rabat, Morocco on the PSD EUCOM advance team. He and three other agents were in country conducting the advance for the General’s visit. Unbeknownst to the other PSD agents, the Defense Intelligence Agency had given him a different mission. Two of the terrorists that helped plan the bombing on the Marine Barracks in Beirut had been tracked to a Hezbollah safe house near Rabat. Late that night, Dexter slipped out of his hotel and rendezvoused with the DIA agents who provided the target location, weapons, and transportation. He changed into tactical wear as the

van drove to the target in nearby Kenitra, just a few kilometers northeast of Rabat.

The agents briefed Dexter as they traveled on highway N1, to highway S202, then into the industrial district. They stopped several blocks away from the warehouse complex that sat on the inlet that lead to the North Atlantic Ocean. Just outside of the warehouse, was a docked speedboat that was to be used by the terrorists in case of the need for a hasty departure.

“There are five of them in there. They just returned from a meeting with some unknown players several miles from here. Our other team is tracking them now trying to find out who they are. Here are the two Hezbollah operatives that are inside. This guy here is the leader. If you only get to kill one person, this is the one. His name is Walid Chibli. The other one is Samir Ghanem. We have confirmed that they were both involved in the bombing that killed your brother, Lieutenant Jesse Diamond Jr.” The agent specifically mentioned Dexter’s brother to spur anger in him.

“Understood. I appreciate you guys bringing me in on this one,” Dexter said calmly as he pulled his mask down over his face. He looked through the photographs of the terrorists, then the diagram of the warehouse complex. “Okay. I’m ready. Do you need to talk to any of them?”

One of the agents shook his head. “No, Sarge. We’re sending a message with this one. This one’s for your country and your family. Take them all out and grab what Intel you can find.”

Dexter chambered a round into the silenced MP5 that they provided and disappeared into the night. He checked his radio com with the DIA agents and proceeded along the dark road to the target. He slipped over the fence and hid in a dark corner and watched. Just as the Intel said, there were two men carrying AK47s guarding the front door of the smaller of the three buildings. He slipped around to the back and found two more guards that were not in the report. That meant there were seven adversaries, not five. What else could they be wrong about? He wondered. Not that it mattered. There was no way in hell he was going to abort this mission. He was going to take Walid out even if it meant him dying in the process.

He took a deep breath, raised his weapon, and shot the two rear guards in the head from his hiding place. He quickly set a small charge at the door then moved to the front of the building. He leaned

out from around the corner and shot the two guards dead. Fortune was with him as he found the front door unlocked. He slowly opened it and slipped inside. He could hear the men talking just a few feet away, down the hall. He set another small charge near the front door, just inside, and then went to work. Moving away from the voices, he searched each room, finding no one. That meant that the targets, at least three of them, were in that last unsearched room.

He didn't hesitate; he stepped into the doorway of the office and paused for the briefest of moments to scan their faces. He immediately recognized Walid and Samir, but did not know the other man. He then killed Samir and the stranger with three-shot bursts before they could blink. He kicked the Walid in the face and knocked him out as he reached for a weapon.

When the terrorist awakened, Dexter was pouring water on his face.

"You blew up the Marine Barracks in Beirut, Walid. My brother died in that bombing. I just thought that you should know that before I kill you." He stepped back, slid his MP5SD to the back of his body, and let the terrorist stand up.

Walid was about to speak when Dexter's fist slammed into his chest. He flew backward and hit the wall. As he bounced forward, Dexter punched him brutally in the stomach, doubling him over in a heap. Walid vomited his recently eaten dinner all over the cold concrete floor.

Moving on auto-pilot, Dexter dropped to one knee beside him and caught the terrorist mastermind in the throat with a vicious upward ridge hand strike. Walid gasped as the force of the blow crushed his larynx and severed the arteries in his neck. Dexter leaned back slightly and punched him in the side of his head and knocked him over. Thunderstorm in full brew, Dexter stood over the dying Walid as he gurgled loudly now. His eyes darted wildly as he realized that he was drowning in his own blood.

Dexter drew his pistol. "No more killing for you, motherfucker," he whispered, and then pumped two rounds into the terrorist's face.

With revenge and justice now exacted, he quickly searched the building and gathered anything that looked like it might yield useful intelligence. He removed his two motion-sensing charges and concluded the mission.

Back in the present now, his hand instinctively went to his pistol

so that he could put two rounds into Lee's skull. "No more killing for you motherfucker," he whispered.

Jerry put his hand on Dexter's shoulder and shook his head. "He's as good as dead boss."

Dexter slid the gun back into its holster. He then realized it was Lee Taylor lying on the floor gurgling that caused his flashback to the Rabat/Kenitra assassination mission. It was one of many missions that could never be revealed to anyone except the Colonel, and from which he would never fully recover. His fingers played eagerly along the grips of his Sig Sauer P226. The thunderstorm was in full brew and the urge to kill was almost overwhelming. He felt no remorse or sadness for Lee Taylor. He only wished that he had pulled the trigger.

Jerry watched his boss closely, wondering what horrors he was reliving. He knew the look. He had seen it many times in his former teammates, and in the mirror. "All units recover our gear and standby until DCPD takes over." He looked at Dexter. "You okay, boss?" Eric walked over and joined them.

Dexter's eyes seared through the black mesh of his Nomex balaclava. His hand was still on his pistol. He stared at Jerry as if he didn't even know him. Then, suddenly, his mind and eyes cleared up. "I'm fine. Good job." He turned and walked out of the house.

Several minutes later, the DCPD watch commander from the nearby Fifth District Headquarters appeared at the front door. "All dead?"

"Yes sir. They left us no choice. They fired first," Jerry answered.

"Good. Fuck 'em! My nephew was one of the officers that Lee Taylor shot a while back. Put him in a wheelchair for a year. I hate these fucking thugs and their thug life bullshit! Don't worry, we'll take care of everything from here on out." He put his hand out to the masked warrior standing before him.

Jerry shook his hand firmly. "Glad we could help, sir." He keyed his radio mike. "STRIKER ONE to all units. Let's roll. CONTROL, we are all secure."

"CONTROL copies. CONTROL to COVERGIRL. You copy all of that?" Jackie asked. They had all been watching the take-down, but she wanted to confirm it.

"We got it, CONTROL. Thanks." Dawn turned to Linda Kelley.

“You did great. You really did.”

Linda removed the remote headset that she used to transmit to the speakers set up in her house by Ralph. “I’ve never seen anything like it anywhere, not even on TV. I mean, watching them in my house by satellite, and listening and talking to them. It was all so surreal!”

“Well, it’s over. Lee Taylor will never terrorize and murder again. I just hope we didn’t upset you too much,” Simone said.

“No. Not at all. I’m just happy that my husband’s killer got what he deserved. To be honest with you, I’ve never believed in the death penalty, but I’m glad his ass is dead!”

WEDNESDAY MORNING - 1000 HOURS

Monique closed the door to her office so that she could have some privacy. “Where have you been? I called your apartment and your cell phone!”

“Did you call the Command Center?” Dexter stared out of the window of the southbound Citation.

“Yes. They said that you were on a mission and could not be disturbed!”

“Okay. We were. I got home about six in the morning and I knew that you wouldn’t be coherent so I didn’t call. Sorry, but you know how you are when you’re dead asleep.”

Monique sighed heavily. She knew that he was right, but she couldn’t help how she felt. “I don’t care! I want to know where you were and what you were doing last night!”

“Remember a while back when that drug dealer in DC killed a witness in front of his wife and kids? The killer was profiled on America’s most wanted.”

“Yes.” She began to calm down.

“That’s what we were doing. Al got a tip that he was back in town to kill the wife and her daughters so that they could not testify against him. We followed him and his gang as they left a nightclub at about two o’clock this morning and went to her house to kill them. It was a beautifully executed operation.”

“Did your people kill any of them?”

Dexter frowned. “Yes, we did. They shot at us; we returned fire.”

“I knew it! Did your team ever encounter anyone they didn’t kill?” Her pain went away after that quip. Suddenly, she felt better.

Dexter half-smiled. “Sure we have. Listen; don’t expect me to

feel guilty. They had a chance to surrender. They simply chose to fire automatic weapons at us and we took them out. End of story. Hopefully, we sent a message to the thug community. You live by the sword, you die by the sword.” He fought back the urge to smile.

“Well. I think we need to talk about this new job of yours. I don’t think I like the way it’s working out.”

Dexter sighed and rubbed his chin. No amount of talk was going to change his mind about this job. He was in it for the long haul. “Okay. We’ll discuss it later.”

1100 HOURS - DALLAS MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Walker awakened and instinctively tried to reach for his throbbing nose with his right hand. The cold steel on his wrist quickly got his attention. He looked down and saw that he was handcuffed to the bed. “What the fuck?” He then looked up and saw two Dallas Police SWAT officers, brandishing automatic weapons, in the room with him. “Hey. What the hell is going on here? Why am I handcuffed?”

One of the officers opened the door and stuck his head outside. Walker could see several more SWAT types standing around in the hallway. “Officer, what’s going on? Am I under arrest?”

The SWAT troops just stared at him, following strict orders for them not to have any conversation with him at all.

“Nuthin’ to say, huh? Well, who the fuck can I talk to then?” Walker snapped. He began looking for an escape route. He did not want to be trapped like an animal if Clark came after him again.

The door opened and the two SWAT officers stepped out. Five men in suits and one in a leather jacket and blue jeans took their place.

Walker frowned. “Well, what the hell is all this? More of Clark’s goon squad coming to finish me off?”

“James Walker, I’m special agent Edgar Franks from the FBI. With me is Detective Allen from Dallas PD homicide, Detective Dean from Garland PD homicide, Ranger Martin, Texas Rangers, special agent Simons from ATF, and special agent Robbins from the DEA. We want to talk to you about the events surrounding your little rampage last night.”

“What? What the fuck are you talking about? I was the one kidnapped and beaten by Adam Clark and his thugs last night! I was

at my buddy's house playing poker when they broke in, killed everyone, and took me hostage!"

"Well, Mister Walker, the way this police report reads, you and your men were running a Meth lab out of your house in Garland. You got high off of your own stash and went to Dallas to settle an old military score with two men named Clark and Carpenter. After you left the house, somebody fucked up and caused a massive explosion, killing everyone inside. You know how volatile those Meth lab chemicals can be," he said, looking at the other men for confirmation.

They all nodded in agreement.

Agent Franks continued. "Once you got to Dallas, you went to a warehouse where Clark's security company is headquartered and booby-trapped three company vans. Then, you sat back and waited for Clark and his men to come out. When they tried to leave to go home to their families after a hard training day, their vans exploded, and you opened up on them with automatic weapons fire. Mr. Clark survived the explosion, disarmed you, and fought with you briefly before you ran away. Luckily, someone saw you break into the warehouse gates and called the police, who captured you as you tried to run away from the scene. Therefore James Walker, you are being charged with operating a Meth lab, ten counts of first degree murder, five counts of attempted murder, possession of illegal firearms, aggravated battery, armed burglary, use of explosive devices in the commission of a felony, and we're going to try to charge you with the death of your friends in the Meth lab explosion."

Walker sat forward quickly and got an instant rebuke from his ribs. "You gotta be fuckin' kidding me! Fuckin' Clark and his men broke into the house, shot all of my friends, set up that Meth lab, and blew up the house! They kidnapped me and took me to that warehouse to torture and kill me! The only reason that I'm still alive is because that damned Dexter Diamond and his black assassins called Dallas police and sent them to the warehouse! Diamond's people were probably the ones who set off those explosions that killed the CTAC pukes! I'm just a freakin' victim here!"

Agent Franks smiled. "Really? First of all, what the hell is CTAC? And who the hell is Dexter Diamond?"

Walker felt a warm flush sweep through his body. He was stuck. There was no way to explain Dexter's involvement without exposing

his own terrorist activities, in which he did in fact commit multiple acts of murder. It was also obvious that Clark had all of these men in his pocket. Clark had set him up perfectly. Then it hit him. What the hell was Diamond doing in Texas anyway? And how did he know where to find him? Walker half-smiled and shook his head. Diamond was in Texas to kill him but Clark actually saved his life. Diamond then saves him from Clark by sending in the police. But how did they find him? How does Diamond keep beating him at every move? Well, it didn't matter anymore. He was sure that he wouldn't live long enough to get the answers to those questions or go to court on those bogus charges. Walker looked up at the men in his room. "Diamond? He's nobody. Just some guy I had beef with when I was in the Rangers. I just thought that he'd like to see me go down for something like this." Walker looked away. The best that he could hope for now is that Diamond would at least kill Clark and Carpenter soon after they killed him.

"Mr. Walker, isn't it true that you also had conflict with Clark and Carpenter when you were with the Army Rangers?" Agent Franks asked.

"I want an attorney. I got nuthin' else to say." Walker laid his head back and closed his eyes. His run was over. All he wanted to do now was see his boys one more time.

"That's what I thought you would say," Agent Franks quipped. He stepped out of the room and walked down the hallway, out of earshot of the SWAT team, and dialed a familiar number.

"Tell me something good," Clark answered, after checking the caller ID.

"It's all set. We've got all of the evidence under our control and all of the other agencies are on board. US Marshals will be here any minute to take Walker into federal custody."

"I'd be careful with him. He's a very dangerous man. He might even try to kill a few of your agents trying to escape. Hell, he might even be suicidal given all of the evidence and charges that you have against him."

"Absolutely, Adam. We'll be extremely cautious. You and the wife have plans this weekend?"

"Nothing special. Why?"

"Let's do dinner. Oh, I have to go. The Marshals just arrived. I'll call you later."

Clark smiled as he disconnected. He'd turned a potentially disastrous situation into a perfect frame-up. Walker was going to take the fall for the entire mess and sadly, die in an escape attempt, or commit suicide before he could even speak to an attorney. He dialed Carpenter's number.

"Yes sir?" Carpenter hoped for good news. He was packed and ready to go, but he didn't really want to flee the country and live in another god-forsaken, third-world hell-hole again.

"Relax. We're good to go. I feel like a little hunting trip. Maybe up in Washington, DC. You think the boys will be interested?"

"Roger that, sir. They could definitely stand to let off some steam."

"Good. Set it up and let me know. We'll wrap up things here first, though."

"Will do, sir. Out here." It's about fuckin' time, Carpenter thought. He'd heard enough about Dexter Diamond and his team killing brother warriors in the struggle. After Clark killed Walker, he was personally going to kill Dexter, cut his ears off and have them mounted for display in his hunting cabin in the mountains.

2030 HOURS -HARRISON FCI, FLORIDA

Warden Richards didn't show any emotion as officer Dorn Sheppard told him about the Jannette Walden situation. He took a drag off of his cigar and looked at the younger man. "I'll get with a friendly judge and have him issue a court order to have Miss Walden brought back to federal custody. You and Boscoe are going to be temporarily moved to the men's side of the prison until this thing blows over."

"But what are we giving in to that Diamond bitch for, sir? It'll make us look weak!"

The warden smiled. "Because she has high-powered connections of her own, and it'll make us look like we're doing something proactive. We'll keep her off balance for a while, then, when she comes to interview you all, introduce her to the prison justice system."

"What do you mean, sir?" The statement caught him off guard.

"I never liked that bitch. She thinks that she's better than everybody. If the inmates happened to riot while she is here harassing us, anything could happen to her."

“Oh yeah. Those things do tend to get real nasty.” A smile came across Sheppard’s face. He knew exactly what to do.

DIAMOND RESIDENCE, OCOEE, FLORIDA

“I’m having a hard time dealing with your disappearing acts. I don’t like not being able to reach you when I need you.” She stood close to him and looked him in the eyes.

Dexter frowned. “Did something happen with you or the kids? What was going on that you needed to talk to me right away?”

Monique looked down. “Well, nothing. But I don’t like not being able to reach you.”

“I understand that. But you must remember the many times when I was on a stakeout or SWAT callout and you couldn’t reach me for a few hours. This is really no different.” Except for the fact that I was out killing terrorists and blowing up stuff, he thought.

“I guess. I just hope that you’re not doing anything outside of the law.”

“Who, me? I wouldn’t even dream of it.” He let a smile play on his lips.

“Yeah, right, mister secret agent man. I’m keeping a close eye on you from now on.”

“Okay. Hey, how’s that corruption investigation going?”

“Good. We’ve discovered that some white power group called The Brotherhood might be behind all of it. We’ve collected quite a bit of information and evidence from my witness. I expect to start interviewing the guards and inmates soon.” Her mood suddenly lifted; she liked talking about her work.

“Do you want me to send some of my people up there to snoop around? We specialize in hate groups, you know.” His ploy worked. She’d forgotten all about his exploits.

Monique frowned as if she’d swallowed something bitter. “No. I can handle this myself. Besides, I don’t want the suspects to end up dead because they pissed off one of your trained killers. Seems like everyone that opposes your team ends up dead.”

Dexter smiled. “I’m crushed that you would say such a thing. We are professional bodyguards, intelligence experts, and investigators. Killing bad guys sometimes come with the territory, but we don’t seek it out.” Now that’s a damned lie, he thought.

“Whatever! Keep your assassins away from my prisons. I can

handle it.”

“Well, it’s been my experience that men who participate in groups like that can be pretty vicious if you tread in their territory or threaten their extracurricular activities. In other words, you could get hurt for pissing these people off.”

“No. They wouldn’t dare mess with me. Not if they value their jobs.”

Dexter smiled. “If you say so.” He held back the urge to laugh at her naiveté. She’d never really had anyone challenge her because she was favored by the big bosses. In fact, rumor had it that she was in line for the executive training program soon, and would be asked to move to Washington DC. Be that as it may, he felt that she was being unrealistic about her expectations in this particular case. Men with that much power would not relinquish it easily and if she tried to bring them down, there were going to be casualties.

2100 HOURS - ANDREWS AIR FORCE BASE, MARYLAND

Captain Samantha Eleanor Green woke up just as the Lear jet smoothly landed. She quickly looked to her left to see if she could catch a glimpse of the hangar where Air Force One was kept. She’d seen it several times when she was stationed at the Pentagon, but she’d never gotten the chance to go on board. She looked around for the sergeant that served as her flight attendant. He was bringing her a warm washcloth. “Thank you, sergeant. May I have a bottled water to take with me?”

“Yes, ma’am.” The sergeant disappeared into the jet’s small galley.

Captain Green sighed. She liked the DC area and missed the friends she had made here, but she certainly did not miss the power plays, politics, and fast pace of beltway life. Her new job as the company commander for the training cadre at the Army Intelligence School at Fort Huachuca, Arizona was a most welcome change. She stretched in her seat and began wondering what General Carlisle needed her to do so urgently that she was ordered back to Washington without any explanation. Not that it mattered. True to her reputation, she would take on any mission put before her because she was a true American patriot, and patriots don’t question orders, they get the job done.

The jet taxied to the Air Force side of Andrews and deposited its

sole passenger at the base operations office. A man in Army battle dress uniform met her at the bottom of the plane's stairs as the Air Force Tech sergeant brought her bags down.

"Now there's a sorry excuse for an Army Special Forces soldier if I ever saw any. No wonder the damned Navy SEALs are taking over as the military's premier special ops force!" she quipped as she put the bottle of water in her purse. Not even a hint of a smile showed on her face.

Master Sergeant Henry "Hank" Ledger looked at her and chuckled. He knew that she was joking even though she wasn't smiling.

She rarely did. "Sam" Green was a career Intelligence officer with a reputation for tackling dangerous and sensitive missions. She also was known for her no-nonsense demeanor and sometimes vicious tongue. Standing only 5'4", with a button nose and fierce blue eyes, men often underestimated the petite, attractive blond only to have their egos severely traumatized as a result of wrongly judging a book by its cover.

"That's fine with me, ma'am. Let them get killed first for a change."

They exchanged salutes, shook hands and began walking to the transient line, or 'T' line that led to the secure parking lot. "Good to see you again, Captain. How was your flight?"

"Sudden. What's the word, Ledger?" She purposely stared at his lean physique.

"You know the drill, Captain. Politics as usual." He avoided her gaze.

"You in on this?" Her eyes cut to the familiar T-39 that was on display just outside the secure lot.

"No, ma'am. This one is all yours. I don't even know what or where it is. Nobody's talking, or nobody knows."

"Figures. Let's go see the old man then."

Master Sergeant Ledger shifted uncomfortably in his seat as they rode in silence down Suitland Parkway.

Captain Green was staring at him somewhat salaciously. "You alright, Hank?" She reached over and put her hand on his thigh.

"Um, yes ma'am. I mean, Samantha. I just didn't know what our status was, you know. I haven't heard from you in months. I just didn't know..."

She unbuckled her seatbelt and slid closer, moving her hand down between his legs. “Demands of command, Hank. And I met someone. We just started dating.”

He swallowed hard. “Oh. Well, I figured as much. I um...”

“You’re still married, right?” She massaged him harder.

“Yeah. We’re doing okay. The twins are heading off to college this year. I’m thinking about retiring soon.”

“I think you’re ready.” His erection was full blown now.

“You do?”

“Yes. Pull over. I want to taste you.” Her voice was uncharacteristically sultry.

“Oh. That. But the General is waiting.”

“Let him wait. You want to try and drive while I do it?” She began undoing his fly.

“No. I um...”

“Then shut up and stop this damned car. By the way, you’re going to return the favor as soon as I’m done with my briefing. So be sure to call your wife and tell her you’ll be late getting home tonight. That’s an order, sergeant!”

“Um, she’s skiing in Park City with some of her friends. She won’t be back until the weekend.” He pulled onto the side of the road and turned the lights off.

She leaned in and grabbed his ear gently in her teeth. “That’s even better. Now shut up and let me get my protein!” She grabbed his legs and turned him toward her. She yanked his pants and underwear down to his thighs and grabbed his penis with her left hand. “How I’ve missed you!” she whispered, before sliding her mouth fully down onto it.

Ledger’s body tensed as Sam sucked smoothly with her mouth and pumped earnestly with her hand. He suddenly remembered why he missed her so much. He squirmed and jumbled his thoughts in a desperate attempt to maintain control.

Sam felt him fighting ejaculation and knew just what to do. She knew that he was still in love with her and that she had complete control over his heart as well as his body. With her free hand, she reached up and found his hand, slid her fingers between his and squeezed.

Ledger’s body lurched violently as he came. He cursed under his breath because he wasn’t ready to cum. He didn’t want her to think...

“Mmmmm. That was yummy! God, how I’ve missed you!” She pulled his pants up and gently buttoned them. She reached up and stroked his face. “I can’t wait to make love to you tonight.”

Ledger was speechless as he tried to compose himself. Her gaze was crumbling his steely exterior. He wanted to tell her that he loved her, how much he missed her. But she made him swear to never use the “L” word again, and he didn’t want to push her away this time. Her eyes shone like stars in the dark vehicle. He was completely at her mercy. He’d been in love with her ever since his Delta team extracted her from that Bosnian warlord’s camp after she was briefly taken hostage while posing as a reporter. Unfortunately for the warlord, he fell for her cover and by snatching her, provided US forces his location. Sam had a GPS locator implanted just below her left breast that allowed for her every move to be tracked by satellite. The entire enemy group was eliminated, and Sam secretly received the Medal of Honor for her role in the clandestine mission, which was still highly classified.

Sam kissed him on the cheek and slid back to her side of the car. She took the bottle of water out her purse and rinsed her mouth, spitting the results out of the window. She then took out a small bottle of mouthwash and rinsed again, repeating the cleansing process.

Ledger smiled and shook his head. He realized that she had planned this all along. Women are truly in control of these things, he thought, smiling again.

“Come on baby, let’s go. We don’t want to keep the old man waiting, do we?” She slid back over next to him and began stroking his hair and neck.

Ledger pulled back onto the highway. His heart was pounding with anxiety. For this brief moment in time, he was in heaven. Not that anything was wrong with his wife of twenty years; she was still youthful and sexually exciting. It’s just that Sam was a train that he didn’t see coming, and he couldn’t avoid it or get out of its way. If only he weren’t married, but there was nothing wrong with his marriage....

“What’s on your mind, Hank?” she asked, interrupting his self-interrogation.

His heart jumped when she called his name. “Oh, nothing. Just wondering what kind of fucked up mission they had in mind for you

this time.”

“Liar. I know what you’re thinking. Let’s just enjoy our time together, okay? I’d really like that.” She stroked his sandy blond hair gently. “I like your hair long like this.”

Ledger smiled weakly and nodded. He swallowed the words “I love you” back down into that knot in his belly.

Sam moved back to her side of the car as they approached the entrance to the Pentagon parking lot. It wouldn’t look good for a single officer and married NCO to drive onto property all cuddled up in a government vehicle, would it?

Minutes later, the General’s face lit up as Captain Green entered his office.

“Sam! Sorry to bring you here on such short notice, but I need your special touch on this matter. Close the door and have a seat. Would you like a hit?” he asked as he produced a bottle of Scotch.

“Hell yes, sir. You pour it up and I’ll knock it down,” she said without hesitation.

General Carlisle explained the mission to her and directed her to put a plan together to quietly bring the gold back stateside. “Sam, we don’t have a whole lot of time. I need you to get this done within the next thirty days or so. What do you think?”

“I’m pretty sure I can get it done, but let me go over and look at what assets I have at my disposal before I give my best estimate.”

“Fair enough. As you know, Stuttgart is home to European Command, and Dick Kraft is running things over there so you can tap any element of his command to secure the necessary equipment you need for the mission. You’ll have a team of Green Berets from 10th Battalion to assist you with the transport and security of the gold. Sam, this is one hell of a delicate issue. Most of the people in the White House don’t even know about it, so let’s keep it tight.”

He handed her a list. “These are the phone numbers of all the people you’ll need to contact. How you get the gold back here is up to you. Just make sure once you get it here, you take it directly to Fort Knox. They’ll be expecting you.” Carlisle downed a shot of Scotch.

Sam nodded. She didn’t ask why the gold was in Switzerland or why she was supposed to bring it back. Furthermore, she really didn’t care. Her government had given her an assignment and it was her job to get it done to the best of her ability.

2200 HOURS – ORLANDO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Willoughby looked over her notes from her interview with Conner Swanson and the other bankers she'd interviewed. Of all of them, Swanson was the only one who really had any readable reaction to her questions about the gold. Plus, he'd let a little more slip out over dinner, drinks, and several steamy hours in her hotel room. That was enough for her to ask her boss to allow her to do a full investigation of his bank and its holdings.

This will be the scoop of the decade if that gold turns up, she thought as the plane landed at Orlando International Airport. Twenty minutes later, Willoughby noticed a group of expressionless uniformed Customs agents with what must have been a drug dog standing at the international flights arrival gate.

"Somebody's in trouble," she said to herself. She handed the woman at the desk her passport.

"Anything to declare, Miss Carrolton?" the woman asked.

"No," she said with a smile.

The woman looked over to her right. Two of the Customs agents and two men in civilian clothes approached her. "Are you Willoughby Carrolton?"

"Yes, why?" She looked at the two long-haired men.

"I'm Special Agent Browning with the Drug Enforcement Agency. Please, come with us." He quickly flashed his badge. His partner did the same.

A female Customs agent took her by the arm. Willoughby instinctively stiffened her body. "Wait a minute! What's this all about?" Panic started to set in. She swallowed hard.

"Ma'am, just come with us. Now!" The Customs agent tightened her grip on Willoughby's arm. The agent with the dog came closer.

Oh my God, I'm going to jail! She thought as it suddenly became warm in the cool terminal. "There must be some mistake! I'm a reporter with the Orlando Sentinel!" she announced as they forcefully escorted her through the terminal.

They stopped at a plain gray door. One of the Customs agents unlocked it and led them inside. Willoughby was shoved into a hard plastic chair and told not to move. Her heart thundered as she looked around the cold room. The walls were bare. No one responded to her questions. To make matters worse, the DEA guys spoke to each other quietly as they went through her computer bag and purse.

“What is going on here?” she frantically asked the unsympathetic Customs agent.

“Just relax, ma’am,” the woman coldly instructed.

Tears began welling in Willoughby’s eyes. Several minutes later two more Customs agents, an airline official, and two Orlando Police officers came into the small, already overcrowded room. They were carrying her luggage. They sat the bags on the table and brought the dog over to them. The dog immediately began clawing at her make-up bag. The DEA agents looked at each other.

“What? What does that mean?” Willoughby asked them frantically.

Browning ignored her and opened the bag, then dumped the contents onto the table. He picked up a can of hair spray and looked at it. His partner took it from him, unscrewed the top, and pulled out a clear plastic bag with a brownish-white powder in it.

The woman put her hand on Willoughby’s shoulder.

“What is that?” she asked as her heartbeat increased.

The room seemed deathly quiet. Everything appeared to move in slow motion as the policeman reached for his handcuffs and walked toward her. “Miss Carrolton, you are under arrest for the possession of heroin and the introduction of a controlled substance into the United States.”

“But I..!”

“Shut up! I’ll tell you when you can talk! Now sit there and keep the hell quiet while I fill out this paperwork!” Browning ordered.

The policeman ratcheted the cold handcuffs down on her wrists. “You heard the man. Sit here and keep your trap shut, and you might just get to keep your teeth.”

Dexter stared out of the window of his office. Walker, the NAF, and Adam Clark were no longer a concern. The RDT people were beginning to move his entire operation to Atlanta, beginning with his inventory of special operations equipment. He recalled the promise that Dawn’s father had made at dinner last year. It was time for Chuck Robinson and Harold to come clean about what lay in store for his team. Why would they spend millions of dollars to fund this operation? Why would Robinson risk a billion-dollar empire to secretly back this team? Dexter shook his head. Sure the NAF and its Millennium Strike Force were dangerous, but they hardly warranted

this kind of attention. The Institute and its backers were clearly involved in something much larger than they were telling him.

He sat down at his desk and scanned some of the paperwork that he'd brought home with him. Agent Patricia Brown had left the Secret Service and was joining his team. He wondered if she was a plant. Could she be part of an elaborate investigative effort by FBI Agent Robert Farren to get inside of his team? That was something he would have Simone look into. Trooper Leslie Brown was also on board now, but she would be quite loyal since he saved her life, wouldn't she?

It was early in the year and his team had already scored multiple highly volatile and highly successful covert operations, wiped out a huge domestic terrorist network, and took out a group of murderous fugitives. Most teams don't see this much action over a period of years, yet somehow he felt that all of this was just the beginning.

Willoughby Carrollton, Orlando Sentinel reporter, daughter of a world-renowned surgeon, possessor of multiple master's degrees, was now a common criminal in deep trouble with the law. The agents filled out what they called an arrest affidavit then left her alone in the interrogation room. Two agonizing hours passed before the uniformed policemen came in and snatched her out of her seat.

"Let's go lady! Time to go to jail!"

"Jail? Why? I haven't done anything! I want to talk to my lawyer right now! This is not legal! I know my rights!" She stiffened her body as the officer tried to guide her out of the room.

The officer pushed her backward and swept her feet out from under her, sending her crashing to the floor. "You stupid bitch! You don't know your rights! I know your rights! And the only rights you have right now are the rights that I give you! Now get up, shut up, and walk!"

Sobbing and hurting from having landed on her handcuffed wrists, Willoughby struggled to get to her feet unsuccessfully until one of the officers helped her up. She walked quietly to the car, unwilling to experience another trip to the floor.

She stared blankly into space as the police car left the airport. She was going to go to prison for fifty years if she didn't cooperate, they told her. But how could she? She had no idea of how that heroin got in her bag. The handcuffs were really digging into her wrists now,

but the cops refused to loosen them. So this is what hell is like, she thought. She began sobbing uncontrollably as she contemplated the public humiliation she faced.

The police car was traveling through a poorly-lit industrial district on the South end of Orange Avenue when the driver stopped the car. The passenger got out and opened Willoughby's door. "Get out!"

She looked up at him suspiciously. "Why? Where are we?" she asked. She suddenly realized where they were. They were nowhere near the Orange County Jail. I'm going to die, she thought.

The cop reached in, grabbed her by the hair, and pulled her out. "Get your ass out here!"

She stumbled as if to fall, but the cop snatched her back upright.

"What's going on? Why are we here?" she pleaded, her eyes filled with tears not only from fear, but also of pain from having been cruelly yanked around by her hair.

"Shut up and turn around!" he snapped, as he spun her around and slammed her face down on the ice-cold trunk of the patrol car.

Tears were flowing freely now as he un-cuffed her. She wondered again if she would live through this hellish nightmare.

The other cop got out of the car smiling. He took her bags out of the trunk and threw them onto the dirt and grass. There were no sidewalks in this stretch of road.

"Miss Carrolton, this is how it is. You will go home and forget about your little news story about gold in Switzerland. You will wait for a phone call that will tell you when you can have your story. Should you decide that you don't want to wait for us and do things your way, just remember this day. We can, and will, do anything to you we want. This ain't no fuckin' movie. You cross us and you'll be dead so quick it'll take God three days to get the news!"

The other officer laughed as they got back into the patrol car. "That's pretty good, Brett. Mind if I use that?"

"Hell, be my guest. I stole it from my pops," Brett grunted.

The police officers drove away, leaving Willoughby standing coatless on the cold, dark street next to an open field. What just happened? Were they real cops? Should I tell somebody? She wondered why they hadn't taken her laptop with all of her story notes stored on it. Dazed from thoughts of going to prison and death threats, Willoughby gathered up her bags, sat on the larger one and began crying. She mustered the strength to dig her cellular phone out

of her purse so that she could call her boyfriend. It would be quite a while before she realized how cold it was outside.

STUTTGART, GERMANY

Friday, two days after Samantha Green received the initial call from General Carlisle; she was landing at SAAF, the Stuttgart Army Airfield in Stuttgart, FRG. The Air Force jet she flew on was bringing the latest movies over for the commanding Generals to watch in their home theaters.

Master Sergeant J.J. Hammer, team leader of the Special Forces team assigned to assist Sam, met her at the plane. He'd been anxious to see who this female Captain was that started giving him orders when they talked on the phone just one day ago. He'd worn a snug-fitting pullover that showed his broad shoulders and wide lats that he spent hours in the gym developing in hopes of impressing her. She sounded aggressive on the phone. He liked that because it meant that she just might be willing to play.

Sam stepped off the plane and looked at the typically dreary German winter sky.

"Need some help with those bags, ma'am?" Hammer asked, as an Air Force sergeant brought her bags off the plane and sat them on the tarmac.

She frowned and looked at him as though he were retarded. "Hell yes, Sergeant! You think I want to carry three suitcases by myself? Jesus, I thought you green-beanie-wearing, glorified grunts were supposed to be smart!"

Hammer laughed at the small but feisty captain. He liked her already. "Never can tell when a sexual harassment claim might come flyin' at a guy nowadays, ma'am," he said smiling. He ran his hands through jet black hair that he kept combed to the back.

Sam snorted, "Bunch of whiny-assed women started that shit! If I tell a man no and he doesn't get it, I have plenty of ways to fix his ass without depending on another man just like him to come running to my rescue! If he's married I'll go right to his damned house and tell his wife to start puttin' out so he'll leave me the fuck alone! If he touches me, I'll rip his nuts off and shove 'em down his throat! But on the other hand, Sergeant, you'll treat me like a lady until I tell you otherwise," she said tossing the suitcase into the back of his Chevy Silverado.

“Yes, ma’am,” he answered with a loud, deep laugh.

She climbed up into the truck and slammed the door shut as he put the other two bags into the back, solving the dilemma of whether it was safe to close her door for her or not.

“Are you sure you want to do this now?” he asked as they left the airfield.

“Yes. I want to give a quick mission brief today so you’ll know what to expect. I have a lot of running around to do, so my little blond ass will be very tired the next week or two.”

Hammer laughed again. “You drink, ma’am?”

“Is the sky blue?” Her facial expression showed him how dumb his question was.

Hammer drove her directly to his office at Panzer Barracks. The team was waiting in the briefing room for them, anxious to know what this top secret assignment was going to be.

“Ma’am, we going into Kosovo or Iran again?” one of the young sergeants asked after she introduced herself.

“Well, for one thing I’m sure you were never in Iran or Kosovo, were you?” she corrected him.

“Right, ma’am,” the young soldier acknowledged. Officially, they were never in either country, and that was the standing order. “I just thought...”

“Don’t think, that’s my job, and to answer your question, no. Sorry guys, this is an easy one. All you have to do is go to Switzerland, pick up a billion dollars worth of gold and bring it here. Then we’ll take it stateside to Fort Knox. Piece of cake. I’ll be your mission commander and logistics coordinator. Anything you need I’ll see that you get it,” she explained as calmly as a woman sending her husband out to pick up a loaf of bread at the corner store.

Sergeant Ayers, medic and newest member of the team, was in a playful mood and decided to have some fun at Captain Green’s expense. Unfortunately for him, he didn’t know of her background and foolishly judged the book by its cover.

“Whatever we need *you* will supply, ma’am?” he asked in a cheap, suggestive manner.

Hammer flinched at the arrogance of the junior NCO and was about to snatch a knot in his ass, but decided to see how the Captain would respond. He was not disappointed.

“Don’t you fuck with me, Sergeant snot-nosed, no-fucking-body!”

I'm not impressed by you Special Forces types! I've been in countries you've never heard of and done shit that'll make your hair turn gray! I've been through the SERE course and some of the other Boy Scout training that you limp dicks go through! You might be in Special Ops but you're still in Uncle Sam's Army, in which I am a Captain! Now you show the proper respect or I'll have those stripes ripped off of you so fast you'll forget you ever had them! Hammer, I thought you had a professional outfit here!" The Captain's blazing blue eyes seared through Ayers.

Hammer struggled to maintain a straight face. "Humble apologies, ma'am. He's kinda new to the team. Damn near fresh off the 'Q' course, ya know." He looked over at Ayers. "Keep your fuckin' mouth shut and pay attention, newbie!"

Ayers silently acknowledged by dropping his head as the rest of the team openly laughed.

"Please, continue Captain," Hammer eyed the rest of his Green Berets to make sure they got the point, too. They did. Messing with the average Captain was no big deal, but this one had Pentagon connections and that meant she was not to be messed with. He wanted to get promoted, and that meant he needed friends in the Pentagon, not sharp-tongued, well-connected enemies.

"Thank you, Sergeant Hammer. Now I haven't finalized the plans for this but I called and got the skinny on EUCOM H.Q. because they're supposed to have the equipment we need for the mission." She paused to look through her notes.

Hammer decided to ask some questions. "Ma'am, how are we supposed to move that large a shipment of gold out of Switzerland without dropping a big cargo bird there? There ain't no military bases for us to use and we sure as hell can't drive through two countries with a couple of tons of gold without having to stop at a weigh station or two."

"That's true, Sergeant. We will be using an Air Force jet. Some zoomie General over at Patch Barracks uses one and he travels to cheeseland on a regular basis. The bird is a Douglas DC-9 Fan Jet Airliner. The General has access to two of them but the other belongs to his boss, the Supreme Allied Commander."

"You got the specs on that plane, ma'am?" The bald sergeant, team communications specialist asked.

"Yep. The plane has an approximate load capacity of eighty-six

thousand pounds depending on the weather. The payload specialist I spoke with says that the colder it is, the more weight the plane can carry. The weight of the gold is calculated at about thirteen tons, so that shouldn't be a problem. It will be up to you to get this information to the pilot at the time of the shipment so he or she can determine the take-off and landing weight. They also need it to calculate flap angle, fuel, and all that other pilot crap. Once you secure the gold in Switzerland, you will fly ahead to Stuttgart on a chartered jet and wait for the General's DC-9. When the General's party has cleared the airport, you will transfer the gold to a C-130. You will then escort the gold to Andrews Air Force Base where you will refuel. I'll meet you there and we'll all fly out to Fort Knox together. Once we land, your part of the mission will be over. Fort Knox MPs will take over security of the shipment and see that it is properly stored. I think it's important that you all know that we are doing things this way because we don't want the whole world knowing about this operation. I also feel it's important for you all to know we wanted only the best for this sensitive mission, but the Navy SEALs were busy so you got the duty." Captain Green maintained a straight face as her last sentence sank in.

The men stared at her for a second, and then burst into laughter. Hammer smiled. This was going to be an easy and fun mission for a change.

Sporting a slight grin, Captain Green waited a few moments for the men to call down.

"Ma'am, you put all of this together in just two days?" Hammer asked.

Her face went back to being serious. "Yes. What's your point?" she asked, crossing her arms.

"No point. I'm impressed. I've never seen an officer make a decision and take action so fast. It's refreshing." Hammer regretted the words as soon as he spoke them.

His men turned and looked in his direction.

"It's refreshing!" They sang in unison, as if they were making a corny soft drink commercial.

Hammer nodded and crossed his arms as he blushed. He smiled at them slightly, to let them know that they would all pay dearly for their jocular jab.

Captain Green chuckled at Hammer's disguised compliment. So

far he was saying and doing all the right things. At this rate he might get some sooner than he thinks, she thought. “That’s all, men. I need to go get some rest.” She handed Hammer a folder. “Here is a list of the equipment you’re going to need. I’m working on getting a copy of the General’s itinerary so we can set a target date. If he’s not scheduled to go to Switzerland in the next few weeks, I’ll call Washington and have them arrange it. I’ll be in touch daily so stay close to the phone. Oh, and no talking about this mission to your wives, girlfriends, or boyfriends if you swing that way. Any word of this slips out and you’ll all be butt-buddies in Leavenworth for the rest of your natural, pathetic lives. Let’s go, Sergeant.” She picked up her briefcase and walked out.

Hammer followed, ignoring the crude comments and gestures of the Green Berets. He liked Captain Samantha Green. For as crude and tough as she talked and acted, she was still a beautiful woman with stunning blue eyes and a tight little ass. He was going to enjoy screwing her brains out, if she dropped her guard.