

"A terrific sense of place in Big Sky Country
and a hero to root for in Matthew Redd."

— C. J. BOX —

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF SHADOWS REEL

RYAN STECK LETHAL RANGE

A MATTHEW REDD THRILLER



Praise for Ryan Steck

“[A] strong debut. . . . The suave yet vulnerable lead and propulsive narrative will keep readers hooked. This is an auspicious start for Steck.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY on *Fields of Fire*

“Done exceptionally well. Steck’s debut actually gives us two bangs for the buck, hitting on a pair of classic thriller tropes in the same volume. . . . His command of battle scenes and the warrior mindset is exceptional. *Fields of Fire* reads like Nelson DeMille seamlessly blended with the likes of Brad Thor, Brad Taylor, or Jack Carr, and is not to be missed.”

PROVIDENCE JOURNAL

“This breathtaking debut thriller . . . [is] well done, with crisp writing that produces the always desired yet rarely achieved sensation of ‘being there.’ The author’s concise style and clean prose get the reader engaged in the characters as well as the story line from page one. The adrenaline-fueled pace does the rest. The result is a book that won’t allow the reader to walk away before the story is finished.”

READER VIEWS on *Fields of Fire*

“*Fields of Fire* is going to be a hit that fans of the thriller genre will quickly gravitate to and love. Steck’s Matthew Redd will be around for a long time, captivating readers with each page. Make sure you thriller readers grab yourself a copy of this one—you won’t regret it.”

BEST THRILLER BOOKS

“Ryan Steck’s *Fields of Fire* busts out of the chute with nonstop action and it never lets up until the final page. A magnificent debut with a terrific sense of place in Big Sky Country and a hero to root for in Matthew Redd.”

C. J. BOX, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Shadows Reel*

“Ryan Steck hits it out of the park with his debut, *Fields of Fire*. Part military thriller, part spy novel, part good old-fashioned Western—Matthew Redd has cemented himself as the go-to man in a bad situation. It starts off with a literal bang and never lets up, with an ending that will leave readers scrambling for more.”

BRAD TAYLOR, *New York Times* bestselling author of *End of Days*

“The stakes—and tension—don’t stop building until they explode into a denouement readers will never forget. The debut thriller of the year.”

KYLE MILLS, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Enemy at the Gates*,
on *Fields of Fire*

“You know Ryan Steck as the Real Book Spy. Now get to know him as the author of *Fields of Fire*, his debut thriller featuring Marine Raider Matthew Redd in a battle that will leave you speechless and begging for more. Lock and load!”

JACK CARR, Navy SEAL sniper and #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of
The Devil’s Hand

“The Real Book Spy becomes the real spy. Action! Suspense! And the introduction of former Marine Raider Matthew Redd, a formidable new hero who doesn’t like being told no. Ryan Steck’s *Fields of Fire* kicks off an exciting new series. Check it out.”

BRAD MELTZER, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Escape Artist*

“Ryan Steck’s *Fields of Fire* breathes fresh life into the thriller genre with his hero Matty Redd, a hard man forced to fight for those he loves in the harsh wilderness of Montana. A compelling premise strongly executed. Fans of C. J. Box and Vince Flynn will anxiously await the follow-up to *Fields of Fire*.”

MARK GREANEY, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Sierra Six*

“An iconic character is born. . . . This compelling debut will linger in your thoughts long after turning the final page.”

K. J. HOWE, executive director, International Thriller Writers, and bestselling author of *Skyjack*, on *Fields of Fire*

“Ryan Steck has gone from writing about thrillers to writing a first-rate thriller himself. All you have to do is start reading about his new hero named Matthew Redd to understand. This is a book that does exactly what books like it are supposed to do: keeps you turning the pages to find out what happens next. And spoiler alert? Every time you think you know, you don’t.”

MIKE LUPICA, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Robert B. Parker’s Payback* and *Robert B. Parker’s Stone’s Throw*, on *Fields of Fire*

“A flawless story with a stellar cast of memorable characters—Ryan Steck’s stunning debut, *Fields of Fire*, is a twisty, electrifying thriller reminiscent of the very best of Brad Thor that will keep readers flipping pages well into the night.”

SIMON GERVAIS, former RCMP counterterrorism officer and bestselling author of *The Last Protector*

“Thriller fans, debuts don’t get better than this. Explosive from page one and rarely letting up, *Fields of Fire* heralds the arrival of hard-charging, even harder-hitting Marine Raider Matthew Redd to the genre’s pantheon of mesmerizing franchise heroes. First-time author Ryan Steck writes with the expertise of a seasoned pro and delivers 1,000 percent. Get your hands on this book!”

CHRIS HAUTY, nationally bestselling author

“*Fields of Fire*, Ryan Steck’s long-awaited debut novel, is loaded with action, emotion, and plenty of authentic details. I could not put it down!”

NICK PETRIE, author of *The Runaway*

LETHAL RANGE



**RYAN
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A MATTHEW REDD THRILLER



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ONE

PORT DE POLLENÇA, SPAIN, ON THE ISLE OF MAJORCA

For the moment, things were quiet, but they wouldn't stay that way for long.

The drone was about the size of a hummingbird and just as quiet as it flitted from tree to tree, hiding behind branches until its operator determined that it was safe to continue moving. A sharp-eyed observer on the ground would have no difficulty distinguishing the tiny remote vehicle from an actual bird. Fortunately, the target area appeared to be clear of observers, sharp-eyed or otherwise.

Half a kilometer away, in the rear cargo area of a panel van emblazoned with the logo of a floral delivery service, four men huddled around a twelve-inch iPad Pro, watching the feed from the drone's 4K high-definition video camera. Three were sworn agents of the US Federal Bureau of Investigation, assigned to a rapidly deployable international

counterterrorism unit—a fly team. The remaining man—dark-haired with a broad chest and biceps that strained the fabric of his black long-sleeved Under Armour T-shirt—was working under an exclusive contract to the bureau and was, by virtue of his experience and superior training as a former elite Marine Raider, the field leader of the fly team’s eight-man tactical operations unit. His name was Matthew Redd.

The screen of the iPad showed the back of the villa—a sleek, modern structure of glass and steel that was conspicuous against the rugged rocky hills overlooking Port de Pollença. The floor-to-ceiling glass walls afforded the villa’s occupants an unobstructed view of the bay to the east but also provided the four men in the van an unobstructed view of the house’s interior.

“There.” Redd stabbed a finger at the screen. “Back it up a couple seconds.”

The man holding the tablet—the team’s intelligence analyst, Special Agent Sean “Mac” Fleetwood—tapped the screen, then used the slider to reverse the playback until Redd called out, “Freeze it. Can you zoom in?”

The frozen image showed a sitting room, appointed with a large sectional and two overstuffed chairs, and as the picture was magnified, it revealed two figures seated therein. One of them, clearly male, sat on the sectional, looking out, his face fully exposed to the camera. The other person occupied one of the armchairs, which was positioned opposite the sectional. As a result, the person’s back was to the window. Despite the camera’s astonishing resolution, all the men in the van could see of the second person was a luxurious mane of thick flaxen hair.

“Is that him?” asked a third man, Special Agent Bryan Tanaka.

Redd stared at the screen for several seconds. He was the only member of the fly team to have seen the subject in person—in fact, he had actually brunchd with the man the previous year—but his familiarity was of the face-to-face variety.

He shook his head, uncertain. “It might be.”

“*Might be* isn’t going to cut it with Kline.”

“I know,” Redd sighed. “Go back to the live feed. Let’s see if we can get a different angle.” He reached up to activate the microphone headset

attached to his tactical radio. “Damon, when am I going to be able to hear what’s going on in there?”

The voice of Special Agent Damon Jones squawked in his earpiece. “Sending you the feed right now, boss.”

Jones was presently perched in a tree farther down the hillside, just beyond the wall that delineated the edge of the villa’s lot, painting one of the big windows with the invisible beam of an infrared laser. The laser was part of a sophisticated eavesdropping device that read the vibrations on the window glass the same way that a phonograph stylus read the almost-microscopic deviations in the groove of a vinyl record and transformed them back into sounds—specifically, into a remarkably faithful rendering of the conversation taking place inside the villa.

A pop-up window appeared on the tablet with a link to the audio player. Fleetwood tapped the pop-up to accept the invitation, and a noise like rushing wind filled the interior of the van. After a moment, the static abated, replaced by the sound of someone talking.

“. . . want to do about Regeneron?”

Redd closed his eyes to focus on the voice, paying more attention to its timbre and cadence than to what was actually being said. It was a male voice, with a hard-to-pin-down European accent.

“That sounds like Giroux,” Fleetwood whispered.

Redd raised a finger, requesting silence.

Then a different voice sounded. “Let’s hold on to it for now. The pendulum always swings back.”

Redd’s eyes snapped open. “That’s him,” he said without a hint of reservation. “That’s Anton Gage.”



Fifteen months earlier, all that Redd knew about Anton Gage was that he was the Elon Musk of biotechnology research. Not merely an innovator, though he was certainly that. Nor just obscenely rich, the handsome and charismatic Gage had achieved a level of celebrity that money alone couldn’t buy. Rather than pursuing grandiose dreams of space travel and

planetary conquest, Gage had focused his attention on a more grounded and immediate concern, namely finding a way to feed the earth's growing population through genetically engineered, high-yield, drought- and disease-resistant cereal crops.

Or so he had claimed.

In reality, Gage's solution to ending world hunger was not to make more food, but rather to reduce the number of hungry mouths to feed. His tinkering with the genome had been part of a radical plot to decrease birth rates in the developing world.

Although Gage himself had not initially been on anyone's radar, the FBI's counterterrorism division had become aware of another key figure in the plot, a mysterious bioweapons scientist known only by the code name Willow. A team of Marine Raiders had been sent to capture Willow at his research lab in Mexico, but a highly placed mole in the bureau alerted the scientist to the danger. Acting under Gage's orders, Willow had not only escaped but had arranged a lethal reception for the Marines, killing the entire squad . . . save one.

Matthew Redd.

Redd's guilt at having let his team down was exceeded only by his anger toward the man who had, albeit with the best intentions, prevented him from accompanying the ill-fated mission. That man, Gavin Kline, was now in charge of the FBI's Intelligence Directorate and, as such, was Redd's boss, at least insofar as his activities with the fly team were concerned.

Kline was also Redd's biological father.

Theirs was a troubled relationship. Redd's mother, who had died when Redd was a child, had kept Kline in the dark regarding the existence of his son. When he finally learned the truth, being a father was the last thing the career-focused Kline had time for. Rather than make room in his busy life, Kline had instead handed young Matthew off to an old war buddy, a Montana rancher named Jim Bob Thompson—Redd had always called him J. B.—to raise as his own.

Redd did not blame Kline for the death of his team, but neither did he entirely forgive the FBI director. There was a gulf between the two men

that, at least as far as Redd was concerned, could never be bridged. The only thing that really bound them together was the hunt for Anton Gage.

Although Redd had ultimately thwarted Gage's scheme, the billionaire himself had escaped, fleeing the country. Gavin Kline, acutely aware of his son's tactical prowess, as well as his burning desire to balance the scales of justice, prevailed upon Redd to join the fly team on an ad hoc basis, which was why Redd was now sitting in the back of an ersatz delivery van five thousand miles from home.

As eager as he was to see justice done, what Redd really wanted was to be finished with the hunt. To get back home to Montana, where the work on his ranch was piling up even faster than the bills. More importantly, home was where Emily and little Matthew Jr. were waiting for him.

He still remembered what he'd said when Kline had first tried to recruit him to the fly team.

"I'm not like you. Gavin. I'm not going to abandon my wife and son to chase bad guys."

He had meant to wound with those words, but it had also been the truth.

The sting of loss had begun to fade, first as his love for Emily, his high school sweetheart, was rekindled, and then with the arrival of their son. He was no longer compelled by a desire to carry out some Old Testament retribution—an eye for an eye, a soul for a soul—upon Anton Gage. There wasn't enough room in his heart for both love and the kind of hate required to keep a man on the path of vengeance. In the end, he had taken Kline up on the offer more out of a sense of unfinished business than anything else.

Now, after months of relentless searching, the target was at last in the crosshairs. Forty-eight hours earlier, a wire transfer from a flagged Cayman Islands account had set alarm bells ringing at FBI headquarters. The funds had been electronically transferred to a bank in Palma on the Spanish island of Majorca. The man who made the withdrawal had been identified as Jean-Paul Giroux, believed to be Gage's financier. After leaving the bank, he had gone directly to a villa on the other side of the island, where, it was also believed, his employer was presently hiding out.

Kline had immediately ordered the fly team into the field and begun the not-inconsiderable chore of coordinating with Spanish authorities. Redd, who had been home in Montana when the word went out, had been forced to travel by commercial air. Although the team had a twelve-hour head start on him, he hit the ground running.

Confidence that they had indeed run Gage to ground was high, but not absolute. Neither Kline nor the Spanish government would authorize further action without 100 percent positive identification. As the only person on the team—and quite probably in the entire bureau—to have met Gage face-to-face, Redd's presence was doubly important.

Without another word, Redd drew back from the huddle and exited the vehicle. Once outside, he took out his bureau-issued Iridium satellite phone and called Kline.

"It's him," Redd said as soon as the connection was established.

"You're sure?" Kline asked.

It was an unnecessary question, and Redd had to bite back a sarcastic reply to that effect. Instead, after taking a moment to compose himself, a moment that could easily be attributed to signal lag, he said, "You don't forget a voice like that."

In fact, it wasn't just the sound of Gage's voice that Redd recognized but everything about the way the man communicated. His languid, self-assured, supremely arrogant persona. "It's him," Redd repeated.

"Because we can't afford to get this wrong," Kline went on. "We're on thin ice with the Spanish government as it is. They'd prefer to handle this themselves."

This time Redd answered with silence, which stretched out to several seconds before Kline finally spoke again. "All right, what's your plan?"

"We keep it KISS." KISS—"keep it simple, stupid"—was Redd's standard operating procedure. The fewer moving parts in a plan, the less chance for catastrophic failure. "We'll wait until oh-dark-thirty, then go in under cover of darkness." Redd shot a glance at his watch, which he had adjusted to local time during the long flight to Barcelona. "It's about three thirty here. That gives us nine hours to recon the objective. Figure

out what kind of security he's got. And it gives you plenty of time to clear any bureaucratic hurdles."

Kline seemed to consider this for a moment, then came back. "All right. I'll get to it, but—and I can't stress this enough—under no circumstances are you to go kinetic without a green light from me. Understood?"

"Yeah," Redd answered with all the respect he felt Kline deserved, and then rang off without further comment.

In Redd's opinion, Kline was being overly cautious. It was a common tendency among those who left the operational side of things to become bureaucrats. There was nothing more pathetic than a door kicker turned bean counter.

An excess of caution was not Redd's only concern, however. Gage could not have avoided detection, never mind capture, for as long as he had without help. Whether because of loose security procedures among international law enforcement agencies or information supplied by highly placed double agents, Gage had managed to stay several steps ahead of his pursuers. There was good reason to think that looping in the Spanish authorities might inadvertently tip Gage off to the fact that the net was finally closing around him.

Redd shoved the sat phone into his pocket and climbed back inside the van. "Anything to report?"

Fleetwood shook his head. "They're still talking shop. Moving money around. Secret hedge funds and stuff."

"Anyone else in there?"

"Doesn't look like it, but if he's got security, they might be laying low. Keeping quiet and unobtrusive."

While Redd considered this, Tanaka weighed in. "He might not have anyone. He knows we're looking for him. An entourage would just attract attention."

"That will make our job a whole lot easier," Fleetwood said.

"Nothing is ever easy," Redd said. "If we stroll in there expecting no resistance, we could get surprised real fast."

He quickly outlined the plan and timetable that he had given Kline,

then added, “Let’s pull the drone back for now. I don’t want to take any chances on Gage or one of his men spotting it. We’ll maintain audio surveillance only until it gets a little darker. Tanaka, see if you can find a floor plan for the villa online. It looks pretty open, but better to be sure. We’ve got the time. We’re going to rehearse until we can do this blindfolded if we have to.”



With Fleetwood, Tanaka, and Jones maintaining surveillance on the villa, Redd made the forty-minute drive back across the island to a Spanish National Police Corps—CNP—training facility located in the general aviation area of the Palma airport, where the rest of the team was standing by. He found them in the shoot house, running through dry-fire entry exercises along with four shooters from the elite tactical Grupo Especial de Operaciones—GEO—the CNP’s equivalent of the FBI’s hostage rescue team.

Kline had negotiated use of the training facility as a staging area with the understanding that going after Anton Gage would be a joint operation. It was a political decision, not a tactical one, and while Redd knew that the GEO operators were every bit as competent as his own men, he was apprehensive about trying to coordinate with the Spanish team, especially on such short notice. Special mission units were successful because the individuals who comprised the teams trained together for hundreds of hours until they were as in tune with each other as the musicians in an orchestra. He had gone along with the arrangement up to this point because he didn’t have a choice, but now that Gage’s presence was confirmed, he faced the added challenge of figuring out a way to involve the Spanish police without actually involving them. He figured he had about eight hours to crack that nut.

Using the blueprints as a guide, Redd’s team created a fairly accurate facsimile of Gage’s villa in the shoot house, with plywood panels held in place by sandbags to simulate interior walls. Once that task was complete, they resumed their dry-fire drills, running through almost every

conceivable variation of the anticipated raid. Redd would have preferred live-fire rehearsals with pop-up targets—simply shouting, “Bang, bang” did not prepare one for the noise and smoke and fury of going in hot—but time and circumstances, not to mention a limited supply of ammunition, necessitated restraint. He wasn’t overly concerned about it. The team had spent plenty of time on the range, and he had drilled with them four days a month for the last nine months. They all knew what to expect. These rehearsals were just a matter of fine-tuning before going live.

They were into something like the thirtieth iteration when Redd got a call from Fleetwood.

The agent came right to the point. “We got a problem, boss. I’m gonna play you what we just heard.”

There was the briefest pause, and then Redd heard Anton Gage’s voice in his ear. “Let’s hold on to the crypto for now. I’ve got a feeling the Chinese are going to reverse their position on that, and when . . .”

Gage trailed off, and then a new voice could be heard, a man’s voice, low but urgent. “Sorry to interrupt, Mr. Gage.”

The voice was not Giroux’s, which meant there was at least one other person in the villa, possibly a bodyguard. Also, they now had independent confirmation that the man whose voice he’d identified was Anton Gage. Redd’s satisfied grin slipped, however, when he heard the rest of what the newcomer had to say.

“We’ve just received word that this location is compromised.”

“Compromised?” Gage’s easygoing manner instantly transitioned to wariness.

“The FBI knows that you’re here. They’re already moving resources into place.”

You’ve got to be kidding me!

Redd’s nostrils flared as he fought to keep his temper in check. This was exactly what he knew would happen once the bureaucracy got involved. Someone had leaked information about the impending raid, and now Gage knew they were closing in.

“How long do we have?”

“Hard to say. We should leave immediately.”

There was a brief pause and then Gage spoke again. “We’re too vulnerable on the roads. Have the helicopter pick us up here. We can fly directly to the yacht.”

“Helicopter?” Redd snarled as if spitting out a curse.

“That will take a while to set up,” Gage’s aide cautioned.

“How long?”

“An hour. Maybe a little longer.”

“Do it.”

Redd had heard enough. “Mac, come back.”

The audio playback ended and Fleetwood spoke. “I’m here, boss. What’s our play?”

“Get the drone back up. I need to know everything there is to know about that villa. How many hostiles, where they are, how they’re armed.” He took a breath, then added, “And be ready to move when we get there.”

He hung up without further explanation and stepped back into the shoot house. “FRAGO!” he shouted, employing military shorthand for “fragmentary order,” the term used when there was a minor change to the mission plan. “We’re moving out now!”

After a moment of stunned silence, the fly team operators shifted gears, checking their weapons, securing equipment and ammunition that had been put aside during the rehearsals. The GEO shooters exchanged confused glances; then their leader, Alex Tomas, approached Redd.

“What is going on?” he asked.

His English was just a little better than Redd’s Spanish, or as Tomas had derisively called it, “your Mexican.” There were enough differences between Tomas’s native tongue and the dialect Redd had learned during nearly a decade of living in San Diego and making weekend runs to Tijuana to make communicating in English the preferred option.

Redd debated trying to mislead the Spaniard. Given what he was planning to do, he certainly didn’t need any interference from the local authorities, and he would never get a better chance than this to slip the

leash. On the other hand, there were advantages to having the locals on his side. He decided to take a chance on them.

“Somebody warned Gage. He’s planning to evacuate by helicopter in about an hour. If we’re going to take him down, we have to move. *Now.*”

That explanation seemed to suffice. Tomas and the GEO team were door kickers like Redd and didn’t need convincing. Tomas nodded and turned back to his men, urging them to follow the Americans’ lead. Redd wondered if the phone call he was about to make to Kline would go as smoothly.