

"A raw, intense, and authentic experience that pulls back the curtain on a world most will never see."

JACK CARR

#1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Red Sky Mourning*

A THRILLER

SILENT HORIZONS

CHAD WITH JACK STEWART

ROBICHAUX

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *SAVING AZIZ*

Praise for *Silent Horizons*

Silent Horizons is more than just a military thriller; it's an unflinching look at the clandestine warriors who operate in the most dangerous environments, setting the stage for the battles that follow. Robichaux and Stewart deliver a raw, intense, and authentic experience that pulls back the curtain on a world most will never see. A read you will not forget!

Jack Carr, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Red Sky Mourning*

Silent Horizons gives readers a behind-the-scenes look at the dark side of special operations and the toll it takes on those who navigate the battlefields of spiritual and mortal warfare. A riveting thriller you won't want to put down!

Shawn Ryan, former US Navy SEAL, CIA contractor, and host of *The Shawn Ryan Show*

Chad Robichaux's latest book, *Silent Horizons*, eloquently depicts a warrior's journey on and off the battlefield. It's the human side of the operator that hits hardest and resonates with my own experience. This book doesn't glorify war—it shows what it really means to those who live it. I'm proud to call Chad a friend and fellow warrior that's sharing his journey to help others—maybe even you.

Mike Glover, US Army Special Forces (Retired), founder of FieldCraft Survival and national bestselling author of *Prepared*

Propulsive and inspiring! Robichaux and Stewart clearly know firsthand the world of special operations and the toll it can take on those who serve. They also know how to keep you turning the pages! Absolutely fantastic storytelling.

Marc Cameron, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Bad River* and *Tom Clancy Red Winter*

Balancing commitment to family and commitment to the mission is a duty made harder by the secrecy surrounding clandestine operations and the work that feeds it. In *Silent Horizons*, Robichaux and Stewart show what reaches deep into the soul of every operator and reveal what many never get to say about the missions of elite operators.

Marcus Luttrell, US Navy SEAL (Retired) and author of the *New York Times* bestseller *Lone Survivor*

Real experience, valuable lessons, and exhilarating moments are captured in the pages of *Silent Horizons*. It's uniquely told through the lens of fiction by Robichaux and Stewart, men who have survived the pinnacle of military operations. But this is more than just a good story; it's an opportunity to see into the lives of those who chose sacrifice over peace and comfort.

Chadd Wright, former US Navy SEAL, ultrarunner, and founder of the Three of Seven Project

If you're looking for a military thriller that strips away the gloss and glamour, *Silent Horizons* will feel like an intense debriefing from a covert mission. There are few men, and fewer authors, who have walked in those shoes, and the authenticity is undeniable. This is what it's really like when you're operating behind enemy lines and carrying the weight of family and unspoken duty on your shoulders.

Andy Stumpf, US Navy SEAL (Retired) and host of the *Cleared Hot* podcast

The tension, the terminology, the thrills, the tradecraft—this is as real as secret intel ops get. Chad and Jack have opened a door to a world only a select few get to see. You won't be able to stop turning pages.

Andrew Bustamante, former CIA intelligence officer and founder of EverydaySpy

Silent Horizons is an amazing, heart-pounding thriller, but it's so much more. It's a deep dive into the personal battles we fight when the mission ends and the reality of life as a husband, father, son, brother, and teammate kicks in. I still often miss the relentless focus and comradery of a career in special operations, and this novel really tells the whole story.

Jason Redman, US Navy SEAL (Retired), *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Trident* and *Overcome*

Silent Horizons is a high-octane thriller that plunges readers into the gritty, dangerous world of special operations with breathtaking authenticity. Foster Quinn isn't just another action hero—he's a man grappling with loss, loyalty, and the weight of responsibility, making him as emotionally compelling as he is tactical. If you're looking for a gripping military thriller that offers both emotional depth and tactical brilliance, this is it. Fans of Brad Thor and Mark Greaney will love this book!

Ryan Steck, *The Real Book Spy* and author of *Gone Dark*

This story is brimming with authenticity and a jet-fueled pace. Robichaux and Stewart crushed it with *Silent Horizons*. I can't wait to see what these two write next.

Connor Sullivan, acclaimed author of *Wolf Trap*

Silent Horizons is a gut-punch of a thriller. Yes, it's an adrenaline rush of authentic action and suspense that takes us inside the secret world of special operations, but Robichaux and Stewart have also managed something much deeper (and more difficult): an exploration of the warrior spirit, the meaning of honor, and the costs borne by those who serve. Force Recon Marine Foster Quinn is the real deal.

David McCloskey, former CIA analyst and author of *The Seventh Floor*

Silent Horizons captures the unrelenting intensity of covert operations while honoring the quiet struggles that follow. Robichaux and Stewart have crafted a story that resonates deeply with anyone who's operated in the shadows. This is fiction, but it hits close to home for those of us who have lived it.

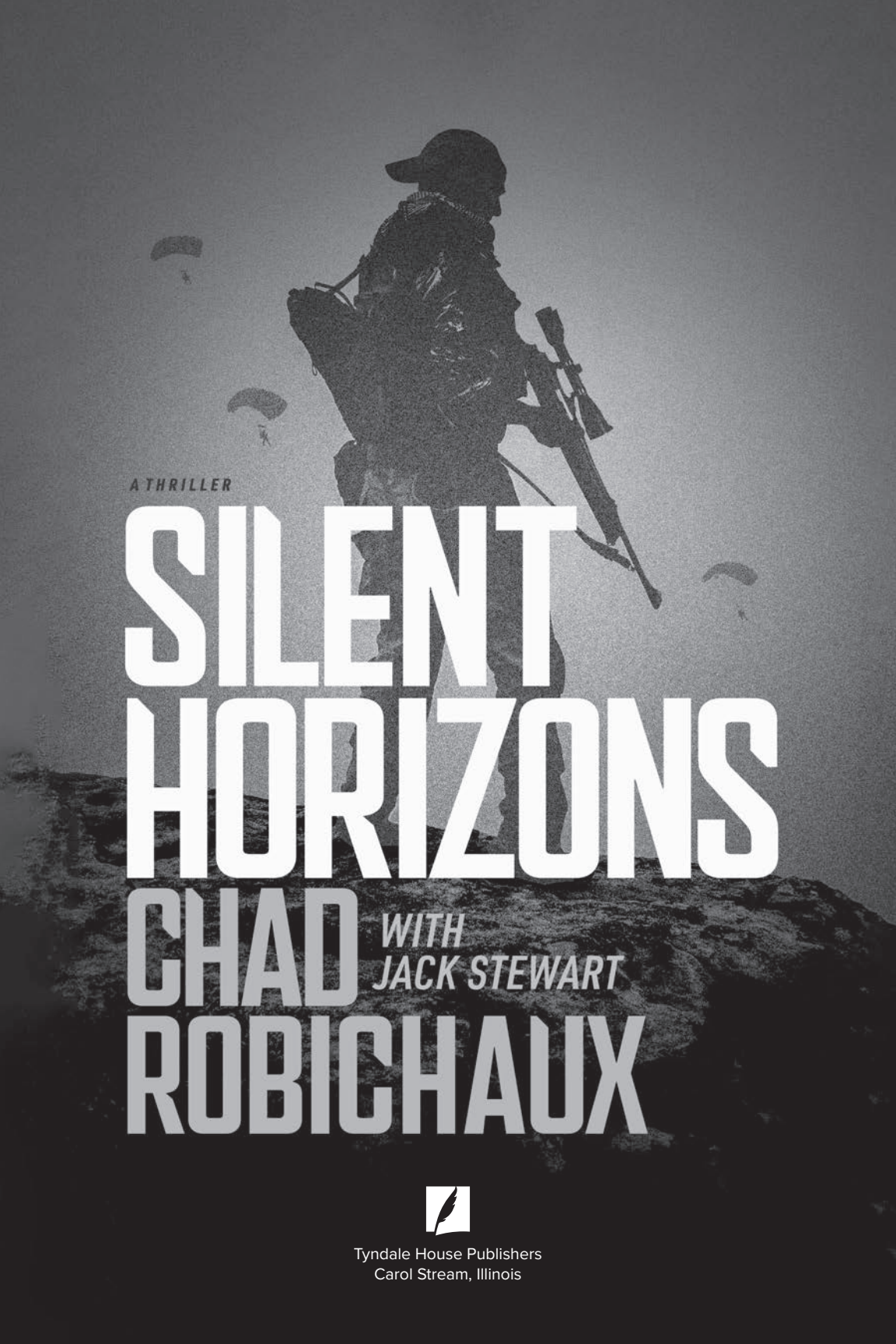
Sarah Adams, Former CIA targeting officer and author of *Benghazi: Know Thy Enemy*

Silent Horizons is an inspiring, fearless look at the unsung heroes of covert warfare. It takes you inside the missions but also into the hearts of the men who have to leave it all behind both when they deploy and again when they come home.

Mark Smith, CEO of Smith & Wesson



**SILENT
HORIZONS**



A THRILLER

SILENT HORIZONS

CHAD *WITH*
JACK STEWART
ROBICHAUX



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Silent Horizons

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Prologue

FOSTER QUINN STOOD AT THE EDGE of the fifty-meter pool with his toes wrapped around the bullnose tile coping. He wore only goggles and a pair of sand-colored UDT swim shorts with the front pull strap cinched tight around his trim waist, and he shivered as the wind whipped down the hills from the north and crossed the exposed pool deck. He carried one hundred and ninety pounds of lean muscle on his six-foot frame, and the just-completed twelve-week course had erased any remaining fat, as if God Himself had sculpted a model Marine from stone.

“Enter the water!” The instructor’s voice boomed from over his shoulder.

Foster took one last breath and filled his lungs with the crisp morning air, then stepped off the deck into the deep end. Despite the water’s bitter temperature, he felt instant relief at being insulated from the wind. The ten-pound brick he held in both hands

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carried him quickly to the bottom. There, he set it on the solid line of miniature black tiles and started swimming while pushing it in front of him.

Nice and slow, he reminded himself.

He knew it was counterintuitive to move slowly when the objective of the exercise was to reach the other side without surfacing for a breath. Slower meant he had to hold his breath longer, but if he moved faster, his body would burn through his oxygen quicker. The only way he could complete the test was by remaining calm, and he forced himself to look down at the black tiles and ignore the wall that seemed impossibly far away. He tamped back the fear that was certain to cause his heart rate to spike.

Left . . . right . . . pull . . . relax.

Pushing the brick out like a spear, he scissored his legs and pulled with his free hand in a modified sidestroke. It moved him the greatest distance while exerting the least amount of energy. Nothing could be easier. And yet, it was so hard.

Left . . . right . . . pull . . . relax.

The pool's bottom sloped upward, and despite his best effort to ignore the enormity of the task, his mind registered the first of several landmarks that keyed him in on his progress.

Fifteen meters, he thought, then he exhaled a thin stream of air to relieve some pressure on his lungs. His feet continued churning at the same slow cadence he had set out on, and his free arm continued pulling him onward.

The brick slid across a black line perpendicular to his path, and again his mind announced its significance.

Twenty-five meters.

He exhaled a second stream of air, more forcefully than the last, and the bubbles shot to the surface as the fear he had kept at bay beat against his resolve.

You're almost there.

His heart thundered in his chest, its sound drowning out everything else around him in his liquid cocoon.

It's too far!

Left . . . right . . . pull . . . relax.

Each stroke was a battle of wills, pitting the hardened and competent Marine against the terrified boy held hostage in his mind. While one fought with each pull to reach the objective, the other fought to give up. All he had to do was let go of the weight, push off the bottom, and he could taste the fresh air once more. He could be free from his watery prison before it became his watery grave. All he needed to do was give up.

The end was now in view, but before he could rejoice in being nearly two-thirds of the way across the pool, his vision narrowed until only the black-tile line remained.

Nice and slow, the Marine pressed.

But the frightened boy countered, *You won't make it!*

Left . . . right . . . pull . . . relax.

Foster's body screamed at him to give up. His chest spasmed and expanded, trying to draw breath into his lungs, but he kept his mouth clamped shut. His heart raced faster, fueled by the trickle of adrenaline that had become a torrent. He moaned and let another burst of air escape to the surface, but still he kept moving forward. One kick. Then the next. One pull. Then another.

Forty meters.

He was almost there, but his vision continued closing in on him, leaving him with only a soda straw to look through. He no longer sensed the other Marines around him or felt the sting of the frigid water and the rough plaster beneath the brick. He felt only a warm, comforting embrace as his thrumming heart consumed every other sensation. Even the fear that had gripped him seemed to have vanished.

Forty-five meters.

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Suddenly, his vision returned. It was as if somebody had flipped a switch and turned on the lights, unveiling the wall just in front of his face. His shoulders sagged with relief, and the tension he carried in his muscled upper back dissolved into the water around him as his classmates on either side surfaced. He reached out with both hands, inching the brick closer to the pool's edge, then stopped.

Fifty meters.

The frightened boy was gone.

Foster twisted his body and placed both feet on the wall, then pushed off with the brick stretched out in front of him. Even starved for oxygen, his powerful legs propelled him another five meters before the weight carried him back to the bottom. One leg. Then the other. Slowly, he scissored his legs together and resumed his swim.

Left . . . right . . . pull . . . relax.

He had completed the task, but something compelled him to go farther. It wasn't vanity or boastful arrogance, but the discovery of an untapped reservoir of determination. Unbidden, the words of the Recon Creed echoed in his mind and drowned out even the deafening cacophony of his heart's beating.

Exceeding beyond the limitations set down by others shall be my goal . . .

One kick. Then the next. One stroke. Then another. Foster pulled and pushed his body farther along the black line, beckoning him back to the deep from where he'd come.

Sixty-five meters.

To quit, to surrender, to give up is to fail. To be a Recon Marine is to surpass failure . . .

BOOM!

The sound resonated through the water and seemed out of place as the bottom again flattened out, but Foster just tilted his head forward and sighted in on the black line that was his goal. It had never been his ambition to break the record. He hadn't dropped

into the deep end intending to go more than fifty meters. It was as if he felt a direct connection to those who came before him—to James Roosevelt and Merritt Edson, to Samuel Blair Griffith and Alan Shapley.

Foster Quinn was a Recon Marine.

I shall be the example . . .

He opened his mouth to shout in triumph as he reached the seventy-five-meter mark, but . . .

BOOM! BOOM!

He squinted with confusion, and his world went dark.



Foster bolted upright in his bed and gasped at the booming sound still echoing in his ears. It took him a moment to realize where he was—in his one-bedroom flat in Isfahan, Iran—and he clamped his hand down over his racing heart and clawed at the matted hair on his chest.

The nightmares had become more frequent, but he didn't have the luxury of slowing his frenetic pace to figure out why. Maybe it was just stress. Or maybe it was because he was alone, deep behind enemy lines, and subconsciously longed to be a member of a team again—just one of many.

But now, it didn't really matter. Now, it was just him.

Just one man.

Alone.

BOOM!

Foster looked left and right at the shadows in his room, identifying and dismissing them. His heart rate slowed, but his lungs burned as if he had just surfaced from the weighted underwater swim, not from the dream of its distant memory.

He swung his legs out from under the thin bedsheet and set his bare feet on the dusty floor. Even in the dead of night, the ornate

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ceramic tile still retained a modest amount of heat from the previous day. He wiggled his toes, almost surprised to discover the tile's smooth touch and not the pool's rough plaster.

Groaning, he leaned forward and rested his forearms on his thighs, a thin stream of light falling on the bracelet Haili had made for him. He steepled his fingers and stared at the solid ground underfoot as if expecting to see the same black line that had beckoned him to test his limits. There was no line, but he knew he was still on its path.

Foster Quinn might not be a Force Reconnaissance Marine any longer, but he still embodied the same principles.

Honor. Perseverance. Spirit. Heart.

Those were the things that had guided him during his twelve years in the Marine Corps. Just like that day in the pool, Foster set the standard in everything he did. And he demanded the same measure of excellence from his teammates.

Yet here you are. All alone.

BOOM! BOOM!

The loud banging on the front door downstairs returned his focus wholly to the present, and he rose silently from the twin mattress and crossed quickly to the window. Pulling aside the rug he had hung in front to insulate his room from the sun's brutal rays, he peered through the dirty glass onto the street below. Two red Toyota Hilux Vigo trucks were parked directly beneath his window, and a quick scan in either direction revealed similar trucks with armed men in the back at both ends of the block.

He considered going for the hunting rifle he had locked away in a case across the room. But there were too many of them, and he was just one man.

The racing heart and crippling fear returned, plunging him once more into the deep end. But, like he had done in the Camp Pendleton pool, he confronted his fear head-on.

Nice and slow, he thought.

Foster's heart rate dipped as he drew a long slow breath in through his nose and held it for a beat before exhaling. Like any good Marine, he wanted to fight. Just over thirty years old, he was no longer the chiseled specimen he had been after completing the Basic Reconnaissance Course, though he was still in remarkable shape. But he knew it was a fight he wouldn't win. He had made his way into Iran under a nonofficial cover, and he would use it to get himself out.

The pounding on the door resumed, and Foster resigned himself to his fate and turned to the chair in the corner where he had draped his clothes. He stepped into a pair of faded jeans and pinched the coin pocket's left rivet to activate a distress beacon. It would be active for an hour before self-destructing and becoming nothing more than an inert fleck of metal and silicone. He pulled a partially buttoned solid blue shirt over his head, then slipped his feet into a pair of leather boots.

The door crashed open, and Foster slowly turned for the stairs as his heart pounded in time with the beating of feet running up the worn treads. When the first man appeared, he feigned shock and held up his hands.

"Don't shoot," he said, letting a quiver of fear break through his otherwise calm baritone voice.

The first man reached the top of the stairs and swung the butt of his rifle up into Foster's chin. His head snapped back, and stars ringed his vision, but he had expected the strike and had already begun moving backward to soften the blow. It still hurt like the dickens, but it hadn't knocked him out cold.

A second man reached the landing and darted around the first to grab Foster's arms and wrench them behind his back. The man was strong, but his technique was flawed. Had there not been more men scrambling up the steps in reinforcement, Foster could have broken the hold and turned the tables on his assailant.

"Why are you doing this?" Foster pleaded, letting a hint of fear

and confusion intermix with genuine pain. But he knew why, and he had expected somebody to come for him eventually.

They yelled at him in Farsi, but his mastery of the language was marginal at best, and he only caught bits and pieces of what had them worked into a frenzy. Unfortunately, he caught enough to know his fears were warranted. Somebody had ratted him out.

He'd thought that somebody was a friend.

"You are an American spy," a third man said in surprisingly good English. He stepped forward and placed a thick hood over Foster's head.

"What? A spy?" He shook his head against the rough burlap. "N-n-no," he stammered. "I'm just a hunter!"

"No! You are a spy!"

An invisible fist slammed into Foster's stomach, and he doubled over at the blow, despite half expecting it. The punch wasn't very well placed, and he suspected the offending wrist had probably taken the worst of it. But it still took the breath out of him.

He opened his mouth under the hood, trying in vain to inhale, but the punch had seized his diaphragm. His heart rate ticked up with another injection of adrenaline, but so far, he had kept the frightened boy banished from his mind. The Recon Marine was still in charge, and after only a few seconds, his heartbeat slowed again.

Unseen hands gripped his upper arms and the back of his belt, lifting him slightly off the ground as they carried him to the stairs leading down into the warehouse. He shook his head and continued asserting his innocence, slowly twisting and jerking his body to resist his captors' efforts to abscond with him. He knew enough about how this usually went to abandon hope of surviving through the night.

They would beat him and question him, then torture him and interrogate him until he gave them whatever answers they sought. Whether at the behest of MOIS or worse, in the end, they would kill him and dump his corpse somewhere public as a gruesome warning.

Unless Seth got the message.

“Please,” he moaned. “I’m just a hunter. I’m not here to hurt you. Please, let me go.”

“Just a hunter!” the third man scoffed.

Foster protested, “Call Director General Ghorbani! He’ll confirm I’m only a guide—”

The man struck him in the side of the head, ending the conversation as they reached the warehouse floor. Foster felt the cool night air wash over him as they carried him through the front door and out onto the street, where he heard only the soft pattering of a truck’s idling engine through the thick burlap over his head. He knew what was about to happen.

“You’re no guide . . . *Foster Quinn*,” the menacing voice said in his ear. He had the presence of mind to recognize that the man had used his true name, confirming his fears that somebody had discovered who he really was. There would be no chance of talking his way out of this.

He just needed to survive. At least long enough for Seth to send help from Abu Dhabi.

A rifle struck the back of his head, and that hope disappeared along with the world around him.

**SEVEN
MONTHS
EARLIER**



ONE

BAARDHEERE, SOMALIA

Foster sat in the back seat on the right side, peering through a sliver of a window in the shape of a Dorito. He lamented the poor visibility compared to the older Humvees he had grown up with in the Marine Corps but admitted the Oshkosh Joint Light Tactical Vehicle had several advantages.

Ting!

The improved armor was one, but he still flinched with each round that impacted the side of the four-seat Combat Tactical Vehicle.

“How much longer, Foster?” Seth asked from the seat directly in front of him.

Using his plaid shirtsleeve, Foster wiped the sweat from his brow and cursed the air-conditioning system. Despite promises that it could withstand extreme temperatures, it seemed overwhelmed by

Somalia's sweltering spring. It spat water and lukewarm air, when it worked at all.

Ting! Ting!

Foster pressed the push-to-talk on his plate carrier and shouted into the microphone perched on a boom in front of his mouth. "We need air support!"

The voice transmitted back from the joint operations center was maddeningly calm. "Angel One Zero, ETA on your ISR is five mikes, over."

Foster groaned. As their JTAC, or Joint Terminal Attack Controller, he was responsible for providing air support, and five minutes was a long time to be stuck in a tin can—even one with comfortable seats—waiting for an intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance drone to arrive overhead. But at least it would bring a bigger gun to the fight. And right now, they needed it.

"Foster! How much longer?" Seth asked again, his gaze fixed through the forward windshield on the tracers streaking into their convoy from both sides. Technically, they weren't supposed to be in harm's way. At least, that's what their task force headquarters had told them. The nine Americans—seven SEALs, one Marine, and one Agency operations officer—were there to *advise, accompany, and assist* their partner forces but remain at the last line of cover and concealment.

Too bad the enemy got a vote.

"Five minutes."

"Too long," Justin Salters said. The lone Agency man sat next to Foster and nervously tugged on his chest plate. "Is it armed?"

"Two Hellfires and a GBU," he replied.

The MQ-9 Reaper was primarily used to locate and track high-value targets, but it never flew in theater without the ability to deliver hate if needed. Armed with two AGM-114 Hellfire air-to-ground missiles and a single five-hundred-pound laser-guided bomb,

the Reaper had the potential to turn the tide on this ambush. The Kenyans and their American advisors just needed to hold out long enough for the remote-controlled cavalry to arrive.

“Do you think he’s here?” Ryan asked from the driver’s seat.

When Justin didn’t answer, Foster elbowed him. “That’s a question for you, Hoss. It’s the CIA’s intelligence.”

“He should be.”

“*Should be,*” Ryan echoed in dismay.

Foster wasn’t so sure. All the intelligence their JSOC, or Joint Special Operations Command, task force had collected pointed to the man known as SANFORD returning to the al-Shabaab stronghold in southern Somalia. But something about it didn’t feel right to him. From the moment their convoy came under attack, Foster had begun having second thoughts about the intelligence they’d received. It seemed SANFORD had been one step ahead of them their entire deployment.

Ting!

Foster flinched again as the small screen in his lap flickered to life, and the Reaper began broadcasting images of the ambush. “Holy . . .”

“Angel One Zero, what’s your status?”

Yeah, now you’re concerned.

“Stand by,” Foster said, ignoring the question as he began planning how the Reaper could deliver its ordnance to have the greatest impact. After seeing their small convoy surrounded by large groups of insurgents closing in from all directions, there was no longer a question of authority. This was cut-and-dried self-defense.

“How bad is it?” Seth asked.

“Bad.”

“Angel One Zero, Bravo Six . . .”

“We’re the last two trucks at the rear of the convoy, marked with IR beacons,” Foster replied, his strained voice laced with frustration. The lights blinking on the two JLTVs were visible on the Reaper’s

feed, and their status should have been evident. The African Union Mission to Somalia vehicles at the front of the convoy were engaged in pitched combat and had dismounted their Kenyan soldiers to repel the attack while their American “advisors” sat comfortably behind two inches of armor at the rear.

“Copy, we’re diverting everything we have to you.”

Good call.

“What are we doing, boss?” Hunter asked from the second vehicle.

Seth keyed the microphone to reply. “Sit tight. Foster’s drumming up air support.”

“We need to do something!”

Foster understood the SEAL’s frustration. They were on the tail end of the United Nations Security Council mandate and were sticking to the tired playbook of hanging back and letting others do the fighting for them. At least with a Reaper overhead, he had the chance to do something meaningful. But he only had three shots, and he needed to make them count.

“Angel One Zero, this is Envy Six Two, over.” Another calm voice.

“Bout time,” Ryan muttered.

Foster ignored him. “Envy Six Two, this will be type two control . . .”

Despite the intensifying gunfire, he relayed the first set of target coordinates to the MQ-9 Reaper crew who sat thousands of miles away in an air-conditioned trailer at Creech Air Force Base in Nevada. He waited patiently with his eyes glued to the small monitor while the crew slewed their sensor to the right spot and positioned their aircraft.

“Envy Six Two in,” the voice said, indicating that the Reaper was on its attack run.

“Cleared hot,” Foster replied.

“Ten seconds.”

Foster echoed the Reaper pilot’s call on the intrateam net and

continued watching the drone feed, his eyes darting from one heat source to the next as he added up the number of terrorists under the crosshairs. When the missile impacted, he saw the glow through the windshield, but his eyes remained fixed on the screen as the Reaper crew widened the sensor's field of view to gain a better perspective of the damage the Hellfire had caused. Foster figured they had taken out six or seven with that shot. But it wasn't enough. The insurgents still crawled like ants across the screen.

"Good effects," he said over the radio. But he didn't have time to savor the minor victory and wanted to hit them again hard and fast to break their will. He shifted the Reaper's sensor to another sizable group of insurgents on their left flank.

"Envy Six Two in."

"Cleared hot."

The second Hellfire missile detonated fifteen feet above the ground and dispersed shrapnel in a cloud over twenty al-Shabaab fighters. But, even with the two back-to-back missile attacks, the insurgents demonstrated a resolve he found unnerving.

He's got to be here, Foster thought hopefully. Why else would they fight like this?

It would be a nice feather in his cap to end his task force deployment by nabbing the number one bad guy in East Africa, but he was more concerned with just making it through the night. Foster directed Envy Six Two to target the center of what looked to be the principal element near the front of the AMISOM convoy with its five-hundred-pound laser-guided bomb. Even at the opposite end, they were well within the bomb's blast radius. But it was a risk Foster was willing to accept.

"Tell the Kenyans to button up," Foster shouted to Seth, who quickly relayed the message to the African commander.

"Angel One Zero, confirm target . . ." The Reaper crew was understandably hesitant to drop so close to friendlies.

“Danger close. My initials: Foxtrot Quebec, over.”

“Envy Six Two copies.” The calm voice had developed a slight tremor. “Envy Six Two in.”

“Cleared hot.”

Foster noticed Justin reach for something in his cargo pocket but was fully engrossed in watching the Reaper approach weapons release. The Agency man removed his cell phone, silenced it, then looked up long enough to see the Kenyans retreat to the relative protection of their vehicles. There was nothing left for them to do but sit and pray.

“Ten seconds,” the Reaper pilot said.

Instinctively, Foster crouched lower in his seat and stared at the flashing cursor on the screen as the Reaper sent laser energy into the target to guide the weapon in flight. The phone in Justin’s hand lit up again, and Foster glanced over as the spook unlocked it to read the text message. Through the dim glow reflecting off his face, Foster saw a panicked look that made him forget about the bomb hurtling through the night sky toward them.

“What is it?” he asked.

“SANFORD’s not here,” Justin replied, just as a deafening concussion rocked their vehicle.



Two days later, the team arrived at the objective exhausted, filthy, and completely unsurprised to find a dry hole. Foster cradled his SOPMOD M4 as he leaned against their truck and sat in a sliver of late-afternoon shade, looking out across the swath of dirt Seth had hoped would pass the Air Force sniff test. Their last gunfight had ended less than an hour before, and he felt his weary body sagging into the dirt as he enjoyed a brief respite from the truck’s confines.

The door above his head opened, and Foster looked up into Seth's scowling face.

"Uh-oh. Not good?"

"Some bird colonel hoping for a star denied our request for a C-130," the SEAL replied.

Foster sat up and stared at the towheaded officer in open-mouthed bewilderment. "You're kidding me."

"Wish I was."

Foster removed his ball cap and ran his fingers through his long hair, then shook his head and glanced over at what remained of their battered convoy. The Kenyan and Ugandan forces had comported themselves well in the heat of battle, but five days of near-constant firefights had all but depleted their rations and ammunition supplies. There was no way they would survive a return trip through the gauntlet.

"What about an Osprey? We can give the Kenyans our trucks," he suggested.

Seth squatted down and pinched his stubbled chin in thought. Had they not been deep in the heart of al-Shabaab territory and hundreds of miles from the ocean, Foster might have expected to see the SEAL cradling a longboard and headed into the surf. Instead, the Texan held a carbine across his knees like it was a Gibson acoustic. "Too far, bro. The JSOAD looked into air-dropping a fuel bladder to set up an ad hoc FARP, but the risks were too high."

"So, what's their plan?"

"Sit tight," Seth said, finally giving in and shifting his weight to collapse onto the ground next to Foster. "They said the Air Force already has an approved LZ survey, so at least that hurdle has been crossed. If we need more food or ammo, they'll emergency air-drop a resupply bundle for us."

"Can always use more five-five-six and Rip Its."

Seth chuckled. "I'll put in the order."

Foster pulled the ball cap back onto his head, then climbed to his feet and kicked a stone, watching it skitter across the dirt onto the makeshift runway. "All we need is a freaking cargo plane. How hard is that?"

As if sitting on the ground had taken the fight from him, Seth leaned back against the JLTV and closed his eyes. But he nodded anyway.

"When's the next update?"

"Top of the hour," Seth mumbled. Foster could tell the frogman would be asleep well before then. Though they had all endured training that required them to go inordinate lengths of time without sleep, the last five days had sapped them of their strength. And whether Navy SEAL or Force Recon Marine, the adage *Sleep when you can* was tried-and-true.

Seth's breathing slowed, and Foster walked away, letting their team leader catch up on some much-needed rest. He nodded at a few of the Kenyan soldiers, standing sentry at their end of the landing zone, then made his way to the second truck, where Hunter and Hayden had cornered Justin and were grilling him on what they considered faulty intelligence. They looked like Viking pillagers preparing to claim their spoils of war.

Foster only caught the tail end of the spook's reply: "... was corroborated by SIGINT."

"So what the heck happened?" Hunter asked.

"Beats me," Justin replied. "But I can promise you we've got a lot of people working to figure that out."

Foster sidled up next to him while scratching at his thick beard. "You said signals intelligence corroborated your assessment that SANFORD was here?"

Justin nodded.

"Like *here* here? Baardheere?"

“As late as twenty-four hours ago, a cell phone we assessed as belonging to him was active in the camp. And . . .” He paused for dramatic effect. “Two others associated with his entourage were active up until the moment of the raid.”

“So where are they?” Hunter asked.

Justin’s head whipped from Foster to the SEAL, and he shrugged. “Had to be a ruse of some kind, right?”

“Yeah, but why?”

As much as Foster held a healthy dose of skepticism for the mystical arts of the Central Intelligence Agency, he knew the men and women of the intelligence service were exceptionally good at their jobs. Both Justin and his predecessor, a man by the name of Luke Chapman, had been exceptionally gifted case officers with keen eyes for the intricacies of building target packages in the Wild West of Somalia. He didn’t think it was fair to place the blame squarely on their shoulders.

“Does it really matter?” Foster asked, trying to divert the conversation to a more productive topic. “A dry hole is a dry hole. Now we just need to get our butts home in one piece.”

Hunter held his gaze on the Agency man a while longer, then finally turned to Foster. “Yeah, so what’s the status of that? We got a bird coming or what?”

“The Air Force denied our request for a C-130—”

“You’re kidding me!”

“—but the JSOAD is figuring something out.”

“Right,” Hayden said. “I’m sure they’re going to be in a real big hurry from their air-conditioned tent six hundred miles from the fight.”

Hunter swatted at the other SEAL. “Stop being so cynical.”

Hayden responded by opening a can of Rip It and bringing it to his mouth. He drained it in one long pull, then crushed the squat can in his bearlike grip. “You’re right. I should count my blessings.”

SILENT HORIZONS

“A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap,” Foster said.

“Confucius say what?”

He gave Hayden a crooked smile. “Just something my mom used to say.”

A long burst from a nearby Kenyan HK21 machine gun halted their banter, and they swung into action.