

"Ryan Steck delivers....A wild ride you won't forget!"

— JACK CARR —

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR
OF THE TERMINAL LIST SERIES

RYAN STECK TARGET DOWN

A MATTHEW REDD THRILLER



Praise for Ryan Steck

Ryan Steck delivers again! Redd and Decker are locked, loaded, back in action and coming in hot! *Target Down* belongs at the top of everyone's 2026 reading list. From its first page to its last, this is a thriller that never lets up. Clear your calendar on publication day and prepare to strap in. It's a wild ride you won't forget!

JACK CARR, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Terminal List* series

Ryan Steck is the real deal! *Gone Dark* powers forward, with each scene slamming into the next like colliding freight cars. Matthew Redd is my new favorite thriller hero.

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Things have *Gone Dark* up in Montana, but Mathew Redd has his hand on the switch and is about to shed some light on the subject. . . . The fourth in Ryan Steck's pulse-pounding novels, *Gone Dark* fans the flames of a wildfire of a series!

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Gone Dark is wildly entertaining—Steck keeps raising the stakes, putting his characters into increasingly impossible situations, but Matthew Redd is a hero equal to every challenge. Vivid imagery, pulse-pounding suspense, and an all-time great dog—everything we read thrillers for.

JOSEPH FINDER, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Oligarch's Daughter*

Set in Montana's breathtaking Big Sky Country and packed with intense, hard-hitting action, *Out for Blood* reaffirms Ryan Steck's prowess in the thriller genre, demonstrating once again why his character, former Marine Raider Matthew Redd, is a force to be reckoned with. If you're looking for action, this one's coming in hot!

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Matthew Redd, introduced in Ryan Steck's debut novel *Fields of Fire*, is back and ready for trouble. Redd, a former Marine Raider turned Montana rancher, takes on a gang of outlaw bikers where the buffalo roam. The Wild West has never been wilder. Intense, brutal, and faster on the draw than a gunslinger; *Lethal Range* delivers a fresh take on your grandpa's Western.

NELSON DEMILLE, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Maze*

Intense, riveting, and ultimately wild escapist fun, *Lethal Range* is a powerful modern Western. It's *Sons of Anarchy* crashing into *Yellowstone*. Steck is a talented cinematic writer and has created a character in Matthew Redd that is both larger than life and remarkably relatable. Buy this book!

DON WINSLOW, #1 bestselling author of *The Force* and *The Border*

Matthew Redd is a hero many readers will find comfortingly familiar while refreshingly different, and Steck wields him with precision in *Lethal Range*—a spectacular follow-up to his stellar debut. If you're a skeptic who thinks Ryan Steck can only write about thrillers, you're missing out on one of the hottest new authors in the genre. You'll be far from disappointed in this installment and eager for more.

JACK STEWART, *USA Today* bestselling co-author of *Silent Horizons*

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*

A flawless story with a stellar cast of memorable characters . . . *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*

TARGET DOWN

RYAN STECK TARGET DOWN

A MATTHEW REDD THRILLER



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Prologue

KYIV, UKRAINE FIFTEEN YEARS AGO

Sergei Konstantin caught sight of the figure stepping out onto the upper span of the bridge—a lone silhouette backlit by firelight and moonglow, gliding over the unfinished superstructure like a ghost—and felt adrenaline surge through him.

It was the American.

Finally, he told himself, *we've found him*.

Volkov had been livid when Konstantin had called in to report the man's escape. The trap at the warehouse had been the perfect kill box—every exit blocked, no way out—and yet somehow, one of the Americans had made it through not just the warehouse fire but the outer perimeter. Not only had they all looked incompetent, but if the American survived, reported back to his superiors, then it would only be a matter of time before he or someone else started pulling threads, and the whole operation would unravel.

There was only one way to make sure that didn't happen.

The American has to die.

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Volkov had sent all his soldiers, along with a dozen hired guns, to monitor every possible exit from the peninsula. Konstantin had been sent to guard the Podilsko-Voskresenskyi Bridge—the half-finished span of concrete and steel that stretched across the Dnieper like a broken promise. Construction of the bridge had languished in a state of perpetual delay for years, and the prospects for it being completed in Konstantin's lifetime were not good.

At first, he'd been annoyed with the assignment. The bridge was too long—nearly four miles across—and too open. No professional would be dumb enough to try crossing it on foot. Konstantin figured he'd spend the night cold, bored, and irrelevant, guarding a monument to bureaucratic failure, while somebody else would gain Volkov's favor by bringing back the American's head.

But now it seemed luck had favored him.

The American had chosen to cross the bridge after all.

It'll be the last thing he ever does.

The man was already well out onto the span, a hundred meters at least, moving fast and with purpose. Somehow, the American had slipped past Konstantin's position in the shadows below the ramp. That realization sparked a flicker of irritation, but it passed quickly. The man was on the bridge with nowhere to go. That was all that mattered.

He was too far away for a clean pistol shot. Even with a steady hand, beyond fifty meters, scoring a hit with a Makarov was more a matter of luck than skill. A shot from this distance would just waste ammo and alert his target.

I need to get closer.

Konstantin slipped from cover and started up the ramp at a run. Ahead, the steel arch rose like a sentinel in the dark, its ribs gleaming under moonlight. The basic structure of the bridge was in place, but there were still gaping voids in the deck, scattered scaffolding, and skeletal lanes open to wind and sky. As Konstantin reached the top of the ramp and crested onto the main span, the deck changed beneath his feet—concrete giving way to steel plates bolted into place over open air. His footsteps rang out sharp and hollow, like a hammer beating a gong.

He winced.

But the American hadn't looked back. He was still moving at a fast walk, though not in a straight line. Instead, he was randomly weaving back and forth, no doubt hoping to make himself a more difficult target for a sniper. Yet, for

all his caution, he remained seemingly oblivious to the sound of approaching footsteps.

Konstantin closed the distance at a sprint.

Seventy-five meters . . .

The Russian's lungs were burning from the exertion. He wasn't a runner.

Fifty meters . . .

Close enough.

Konstantin took a couple more steps, then stopped and raised his Makarov in a two-handed grip, took aim at the American's back, and fired.

The report thundered across the span, shattering the quiet.

The American staggered as if he'd been shoved from behind but didn't fall. Instead, he veered to the right, even as Konstantin pulled the trigger twice more. He couldn't tell if either of the follow-up shots scored a hit, but he knew his first round had found its target.

Konstantin continued tracking the man, chasing him with the front sights, trying to line up another shot. But the American veered again, this time stumbling toward the edge.

Two more shots—snap decisions, no time to refine the aim. One may have hit; both might've missed. He couldn't tell.

Konstantin cursed aloud.

The American reached the edge, one hand slapping out against the guardrail. Then, without warning, he pitched forward, over the side.

Konstantin lowered the pistol and jogged toward the spot, breathing hard. There was a dark smear on the rail, glistening in the moonlight. He pulled a compact flashlight from his coat, snapped it on, and tilted the beam to reveal a bloody streak on the metal, right where the American had gone over.

He's bleeding. Good.

Thirty meters below, the Dnieper rolled wide and black in the moonlight, its surface broken only by wind and current. The man had gone over the north side, the upstream edge of the bridge. That wasn't good—it meant that when the American surfaced, the current would carry him back under the structure and out of view.

Konstantin scanned the surface, looking for any sign of movement. A ripple, a splash, the glint of skin catching moonlight. But there was nothing.

No sign of the American.

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Konstantin knew the bullet hadn't killed him outright, but the injury, perhaps combined with the shock of hitting the water after falling thirty meters, might easily have stunned him, leaving him unable to swim back to the surface.

He's dead, Konstantin tried to convince himself. *He has to be.*

But that wasn't good enough.

Volkov will want confirmation. He'll want the man's body.

Konstantin waited a full minute, then another, playing his light back and forth across the water, expanding his visual sweep to adjust for the current, but the river refused to give up its secret.



It would be two weeks before Volkov would finally get confirmation of the kill, in the form of a bloated, partially decomposed body washing up on the bank of the Dnieper, thirty kilometers downstream. The identity of the victim was never made public, but Volkov had contacts—men and women embedded in various agencies, well-placed enough to learn what official channels would not disclose.

The dead man had been an American named Daniel Keene. Military background, attached to a task force so secret it didn't officially exist. His remains had been quietly repatriated, shipped home on a military transport, along with three other badly burned and similarly "unidentified" bodies.

The last member of the American ops team known as Rogue Unit was dead. *Officially.*

Privately, however, the man's name was *not* Daniel Keene.

The American's real name was Aaron Decker.

That's all they ever knew.

And the *unofficial* story was much, much different.

WARSAW, POLAND PRESENT DAY

"I just saw a ghost."

There was a pause on the line, then the gravelly voice of Grigori Volkov filled Konstantin's ear. "A ghost?"

"I saw Aaron Decker."

Konstantin glanced over his shoulder, scanning the terminal, checking to make sure that the man—the *ghost*—wasn't now following him.

It was him, he thought again. *But how?*

He'd been sitting at the airport bar, halfway through his second vodka, preparing for a long flight home, when he saw the man walking openly through Chopin Airport like he didn't have a care in the world—the same man he'd shot and killed on a bridge in Kyiv, fifteen years ago. The American had aged a little, grown his hair and beard, but it was him.

Alive.

Konstantin had moved quickly, jogging ahead to stage himself near a boarding gate to get another look at him, just be sure. Then he'd made the call.

"He's dead," Volkov said when Konstantin had finished his report. "You killed him."

"I know." Konstantin lowered his voice. "But I tell you, he's here. In Warsaw."

"Kostya, they found his body. Matched his DNA. Whoever you saw, it wasn't him."

"I'm telling you, it *was*," Konstantin said, his voice flush with irritation. "He walked right past me, didn't even look. But I know it was him. Same face. Same walk. I'll never forget how he moved. He's older, sure, but it's him."

There was another long pause. Konstantin could hear Volkov's breathing over the line. "If it is truly him . . ." He trailed off. "The body. The DNA results. Someone helped him do this. And yet, there was no blowback from that operation. He didn't just survive. He went underground. Why?"

Konstantin knew it was a rhetorical question. He had not been privy to the reasoning behind the decisions his boss had made those long years ago, but he knew it involved powerful men in sensitive positions. Men who stood to lose everything if the truth about what happened that night ever came to light.

Volkov waited a beat before continuing. "I want you to find out who he is, Kostya. Who he *really* is."

Konstantin felt a flicker of unease—not from the fear of reprisal, though that lingered too, but from the simple fact that he had no idea where to begin looking for that information. He could reach out to one of his informants in the Polish security service, get the American's name from passport control. He

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would almost certainly be using an alias, but it was a place to start. “And when I find out who he is?”

“You do what you should have done fifteen years ago,” said Volkov with grim finality. “And this time, Kostya, make sure he’s dead once and for all.”

ONE

WASHINGTON, DC

Gavin Kline sat two seats from the end of the polished conference table, the placard in front of him like a place marker at a wake. *Acting Director, FBI.*

The title carried just enough weight to get him in the room—but not enough to mean anything.

His role as director was always going to be temporary, an interim appointment until a presidential nominee was approved by the Senate. The directorship was a political appointment, reserved for loyalists—champion fundraisers with law degrees. But while he had the job, he made the most of it, rooting out corruption and generally improving the Bureau's public image. Washington being Washington and politics being politics, a few months had become six, and then twelve, and now, almost two years later, he was still at the helm.

Nevertheless, he knew his days were numbered. The White House had put out its short list and he wasn't on it.

That was fine. Kline wasn't even sure he wanted the job. At the end of the day, he was a cop, not a politician. But what bothered him most was the uncertainty of his future. Where did he go from here?

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His first choice would be to take his old job as head of the Intelligence Directorate back, but whether he would be able to do that depended on who actually took over the top spot. It wouldn't be unusual for a new director to clear out the old guard. There were of course plenty of other jobs out there for someone with his experience, but Kline had trouble imagining a life outside the Bureau. And retiring? He couldn't see himself doing that at all.

Although . . .

Lately, he'd been thinking an awful lot about spending more time in Montana. Not some middle-aged cabin-in-the-woods, fly-fishing fantasy. He spent enough time there to know there was a dark underbelly beneath that Big Sky. But Montana was where Matthew lived, with Emily and the kids.

His grandkids.

The thought of him, Gavin Kline—unrepentant, lifelong bachelor—having *grandkids* still boggled his mind. He had assiduously avoided being a family man, but the older he got, the more he understood the appeal of those things he'd always written off as distractions. Not Christmas cards or birthday parties—he wasn't built for that. But just the idea of being part of someone else's life.

Part of Matty's life.

Matthew Redd. His son.

Just thinking about him made Kline's chest swell with pride. Matthew had grown into an extraordinary man, despite all of Kline's mistakes and squandered opportunities.

They would never have a traditional father-son relationship, and they were both reconciled to that. What they had was something else. They'd fought together, shoulder to shoulder. Saved each other's lives. And had come to develop a bond that had nothing to do with bloodlines. Not father and son, but brothers-in-arms. And he had convinced himself that was enough.

Mostly.

Some part of him had always believed that he could persuade Matthew to come work alongside him at the Bureau. They'd done it in the past, with Matthew working as a civilian contractor advising a fly team, on an ad hoc basis. But with the success of that endeavor behind them, Matthew had turned his focus to home and family, striving to turn a profit with the ranch and raising his two babies, along with the latest addition to the family, a young boy who had practically fallen out of the sky and into their arms. If Kline was going to pull

Matthew away from ranch life, get him to move the family east, he would need a pretty powerful incentive.

It was probably a moot point anyway. Once he turned the reins over to the next director, his ability to create the right job for Matthew Redd would be severely limited if not eliminated altogether.

For now, though, he was still the director of the FBI, and that meant enduring afternoon meetings like this one—a closed-door interagency security council convened inside the West Wing’s Situation Room. The official topic was cross-domain threat convergence. In practical terms, that meant looking at where national security and law enforcement priorities overlapped, especially in the gray areas where organized crime, cyber activity, and geopolitical maneuvering blurred together.

Russia was the driving concern today. Not the war in Ukraine exactly but the strategic noise surrounding it. The president claimed to want a comprehensive policy—diplomacy, force projection, law enforcement—though his choice to delegate oversight to the national security advisor made Kline question whether the leader of the free world actually wanted to solve the problem or just give the appearance of caring. So far, the meeting seemed like typical Washington wheel spinning.

The president’s man had just finished a rundown of the latest intelligence: arms traffic moving through the Black Sea corridor, shell companies in Cyprus laundering funds for unnamed buyers, a fresh wave of ransomware attacks pinned to Eastern European syndicates. All of it with fingerprints that pointed back—indirectly—to Moscow.

“The question,” the advisor said, “is how much of that activity is directed—not just tolerated—by elements inside the Kremlin.”

The table stayed quiet for a beat, then the director of national intelligence broke the silence. “If you’re asking whether Russian intelligence is controlling these actors directly, I’d say no. But enabling them? Absolutely. These networks have reach, liquidity, and plausible deniability.”

A deputy from Treasury—mid-forties, tightly wound—jumped in. “We’ve traced four separate crypto funnels back to entities flagged by Europol. All laundering through art holdings and real estate. The scale of it . . . This isn’t just a few bad actors freelancing. Someone’s coordinating the movement.”

The advisor nodded. “Which is why we need consensus—how do we treat this? As an intelligence matter? A financial crime? Or as hybrid warfare?”

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A low murmur passed around the room. Kline resisted the urge to roll his eyes. This was the part where everyone picked their jurisdictional turf and dug in.

The secretary of defense leaned forward, fingertips pressed together. “We need to be careful about conflating organized crime with state policy,” he said calmly. “The Russians have long relied on criminal intermediaries as unofficial assets. It’s a legacy tactic. That doesn’t mean they’re being micromanaged. Sometimes chaos is just . . . useful.”

Kline regarded the man. He hadn’t expected the SecDef to be the one pumping the brakes. Most of the DOD people he’d known saw every crisis as a nail begging to feel the hammer of the United States military.

After that, the conversation splintered into side exchanges—intel-sharing agreements, Treasury warrants, NATO liaisons. Typical interagency churn. No one wanted to own the problem, just to make sure their agency wasn’t left holding the bag.

Kline paid attention, taking mental notes. There were a few sharp minds at the table who understood the problem, but no one put forth anything remotely resembling a comprehensive plan for dealing with it.

Finally, the national security advisor turned to him. “Director Kline, does the FBI have anything to add?”

Kline straightened in his chair. “Our policy is, as it has always been, to vigorously prosecute organized crime on American soil, regardless of whether it’s state sponsored. But we recognize that the lines are getting blurrier—and that these networks don’t stop at borders, physical or digital.”

He let that hang a moment, then added, “So let me say this clearly. The Bureau is committed to working hand in hand with our partners across the interagency community. We’ll share what we know and follow the evidence where it leads. No silos. No turf wars. That’s the commitment. While I’m still in the chair, at least.”

A few heads nodded. No one objected.

He stood with the rest of the room as the meeting adjourned. Outside, aides began swapping notes and blocking out time for the next round of briefings. Kline stayed back, watching the knot of suits shift and re-form like chess pieces. He could already see a future where his seat was filled by someone less interested in nuance and far more interested in optics.

But for now, it was still his Bureau, and that made it his problem.