



**MEL ODOM**

BOOK 2 ★ CALLED TO SERVE

**RENEGADE**

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# RENEGADE

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# 1

**DRUG DEALERS** were like weeds. Even when they were pulled out by the roots, sometimes they came back.

Pike Morgan lounged in the night's shadows and watched the hustlers push their product. He'd already crossed paths with this particular group a few months back and drawn some unwelcome heat that his witness protection marshals hadn't been happy about. Pike was about to make them a lot less happy.

Of course, they wouldn't know until it was too late. He grinned at that thought and knew Petey would have been amused as well. It was at times like this, when he was about to beard enemies in their lairs, that Pike missed Petey the most.

All through juvie, through the back streets of Dallas, in the biker bars and strip clubs that dotted I-35 and I-20, Petey had always had Pike's back. Rough neighborhoods and dangerous situations had never been so bad when Petey had been with him.

Except for the time that Petey had gotten greedy and got himself killed. Petey had known that Pike would never have backed that particular play, so he'd gone alone, not telling Pike till he was in over his head. Pike had held on to Petey as he'd died, keeping the other man on his Harley in front of him while they'd raced to the nearest hospital.

Petey had bled out minutes before they'd arrived.

So now Pike was holed up, chafing under a whole list of witness protection rules—some he followed, and some he ignored—until after his testimony in the case against the men who had killed Petey. That was a trade-off he made to get those men because he couldn't get them on his own.

The drug dealers who had moved back into the neighborhood during his deployment in Somalia were another matter.

Standing against the wall of a warehouse that had been abandoned to urban decay, Pike watched the drug operation. He couldn't believe the Tulsa PD hadn't shut it down.

But the cops had to go by the book, and investigators didn't get many answers to questions. There wasn't a lot of trust for cops in this neighborhood, primarily Hispanic with some Asian families mixed in. In addition to the big crimes going down, there were a lot of little ones that had to stay secret as well. People who were there illegally, commerce that was handled under the table—all those things were done in the name of survival.

Achieving relative safety meant giving up the shadows that hid those other activities. People who were just getting by, who were marginalized, tended to get preyed on the most. Sadly, most of their predators came from the same families. That was another reason no one talked.

Pike wasn't there to talk. And he didn't mind taking action when officials couldn't. He liked action like that. Signing up for the Marines had been the closest he had come to getting back to the old ways, and that was too heavily supervised. Except when they were out in the field.

Somalia had offered a good run. But he was stateside again now and growing restless. Mechanic work only occupied a man so much. And this was something that needed doing.

The drug delivery system was simple. Two Hispanic guys stood in an alley beside a derelict three-story apartment building and made

contact with buyers, who drove up and never had to leave their cars. The guys in the alley negotiated the buy and took the money, which they put into a bucket that was lowered from a third-story window. The drugs were delivered back down the same way.

Police would have had a hard time dealing with the setup. In order to manage the takedown safely, they would need a lot of people. Those people would be seen coming, and the guys holding the drugs would vanish. All the police would have were the people on the ground. At best, they might have been able to capture enough crack to secure a misdemeanor conviction because no one could prove how much product was moving.

A twenty-year-old Camaro with a crumpled driver's-side front quarter panel rolled into the alley on busted shocks and doused its lights. Two young women sat in the front seats.

One of the young guns in the alley went over to take the order, leaning boldly into the window to flirt with the women. The other was puffing on a cigarette or reefer and watching the dialogue. The girls in the car laughed at the dealer's comments.

Pike decided to make use of the distraction. He reached down and picked up the five-gallon can of gasoline he'd brought with him, then started across the narrow two-lane. A light breeze stirred the trees along the street and created shifting shadows on the pavement. Pike made no noise as he walked.

He was dressed in black jeans, black military boots with crepe soles, and a black jacket to ward off the remnants of a winter chill that ghosted through the city. He carried three incendiary road flares in a pocket of his jacket and a telescoping baton attached to his belt. Black elastic gloves covered his hands and allowed him free movement.

The guys were so wrapped up in their potential for romance that they didn't see Pike till he'd already stepped into the alley. The man at the window came up hard-faced, putting on a show for the young

women. He wore baggy pants, a Thunder basketball jersey, and a hoodie pulled up over a baseball cap. The hoodie was unzipped to show the Glock pistol tucked into his waistband.

“Hey, homes, what you doing here?” The guy’s voice was loud, but Pike heard the tension in it, about to crack. The words were slurred just enough to tell Pike that he was high, too. That gave Pike an edge, but it also meant the guy would be more dangerous.

“Came looking for a taste.” Pike didn’t break stride, gaining another six feet.

The pusher pulled the gun and held it at his side. “You stop right there. This here’s Sureños territory.”

Pike read the papers. The Sureños were the local Hispanic crack dealers and sometimes feuded with the Bloods and the Crips over business.

“I know who you are. Just looking for a taste. Don’t want no trouble.” Pike knew he looked the part enough to sell it.

With his jacket open to the T-shirt underneath, the dragon tattoo wrapping his throat was partially visible. Since returning stateside, he’d let his hair and beard grow. His hair was shaggy, starting to brush his shoulders, and his beard was thick but he kept it cropped short. Mulvaney would have told him he looked too much like he had in the old days. Broad and swarthy, Pike knew he’d been marked by the streets he’d grown up in. On the surface, most people would assume he wasn’t any better than the gangbanger in front of him.

Most days, Pike would have agreed with that assessment. But not when it came to drugs. That was one of the things Pike had never done, but he’d protected plenty of brother bikers who trafficked in things like that. Pike had always kept his hands clean, to his way of thinking. A man just had to know where his allegiances were. Too bad those could change without warning. If he’d been less of a survivor, he would have been dead a dozen times over.

Pike reached into his front pants pocket and took out a couple

crumpled twenties. He let the slanting streetlight catch the bills. “I got money.”

The man swaggered as he took a few steps closer. He was holding the gun and was in front of the young women, who stared raptly at them. He was shorter and lighter than Pike, but he figured the pistol made all the difference.

“An’ I got a gun. So when I tell you to stand, you stand.”

“Sure.” Pike shrugged.

The man gave Pike a hard look. “I don’t know you.”

“Don’t know you either. But I know who you are.” Pike displayed the money again. “Unless you don’t want to do business.”

“You a cop?”

“I look like a cop?”

The man wrinkled his nose. “Don’t know what you look like.”

“Hey, Rudy.” The voice came from the third-story window. “You okay down there?”

Rudy didn’t look away from Pike. “Yeah, yeah. I got this.” His eyes flicked to the gas can in Pike’s hand. “You run outta gas?”

“Sure.” Pike set the gas can down and held the twenties out again. “I got money.”

When the man reached for the bills, Pike had to resist moving his hand away. Preventing the money from getting snatched would have been easy. But he let Rudy take the twenties.

“Now *I* got the money, homes, and it’s gonna be the money I charge you to walk back outta this alley without getting shot.”

Pike’s left hand flashed out and clamped on to the gangbanger’s gun hand, crimping the wrist almost to the point of breaking it. The Glock dropped from his slack grip, and Pike caught the weapon immediately in his right hand.

“Help! Help!” Driven by the pain in his wrist, Rudy collapsed to his knees. He cursed and clawed at Pike with his free hand.

Pike released the trapped hand, then snap-kicked Rudy in the face, sprawling him out unconscious in the alley. Spinning, cognizant of the other man pulling his weapon out as well as the frantic shouts spilling from the third-story window, Pike pointed the Glock and fired immediately, aiming by instinct.

The bullet caught the other man in the brachial nerves, and the man's pistol dropped from his numbed fingers. His mouth widened in alarm as he stumbled back.

Without pause, Pike raised his captured weapon to the third-story window and fired five times in rapid succession.

The rounds ricocheted from the brick exterior around the window, driving the guy there inside the building. Pike didn't want to kill anyone if he could help it. That would complicate things. All he wanted to do tonight was send a message.

The young women in the car sat frozen, staring at him. He slapped the car roof with the flat of his hand, hard enough that the noise echoed through the alley.

“Go!”

The driver put her foot on the accelerator. The engine coughed and wheezed, and for a moment Pike thought it was going to seize up and die. But the carburetor finally caught up with the increased fuel and the car sped away in a noisy, faintly sweet, blue carbon monoxide haze. The vehicle shot around the corner at the far end of the alley and disappeared.

Pike retrieved the gas can and headed for the door at the side of the building.

The man he'd shot in the shoulder scampered away, only pausing a second as if to think about going for the pistol lying on the ground. Pike ignored the man and focused on the door. He set the gas can down and tried the knob, finding it locked. Stepping back, he fired the pistol into the locking mechanism twice, reducing it to scrap metal.

He kicked the door open, picked up the gas can, and went inside, stepping immediately into the shadows beside the doorway so he wouldn't be easily seen. Footsteps clattered on the stairwell in the center of the floor. Empty units with doors torn from their moorings lined either side of the hallway.

Pike walked toward the stairwell, checking the rooms as he passed. No one else appeared to be in the building. He didn't think there would be with all the gang activity, but he wanted to be certain.

Two gangbangers halted halfway down the stairs. They raised their weapons and started firing. Bullets thudded into the walls beside Pike and dug divots out of the cheap carpet on the floor.

Without breaking stride, Pike took aim and fired. The bullets caught both men in the legs and they toppled down the stairs. By the time they started trying to get to their feet, Pike stood above them. He pointed his weapon at their faces.

"Drop the guns." He repeated the order in Spanish just in case either of them didn't speak English.

The two young men released their weapons, but they glared balefully at him through their fear.

"Sureños, right?"

"That's right, and you're gonna die for what you're doing tonight."

"That a fact?" Pike grinned. "You don't know me. But I know you. You tell that to your bosses. Tell them that if you come back here, I'm gonna find them and they'll never see me coming. You got all that? Or do I need to repeat it?"

Neither of them said anything.

Pike kicked the closest one in the head, hard enough to hurt. He was still attentive to any more activity on the stairs.

"Yeah, yeah. I heard you, man. I can remember."

"See that you do. I have to repeat myself, I'll carve it into you." Pike nodded toward the stairs. "How many more up there?"

“Three.”

“What are they doing?”

“Packing the drugs and the money.”

“Is there another way out of here?”

The guy hesitated and Pike kicked him in the head again, drawing an immediate string of curses.

“Is there another way?” Pike kept his voice level, calm.

“They can climb down from the window.”

Pike gestured with the pistol. “Go. Get out of here.”

Cursing, limping, the two gangbangers leaned on each other and staggered toward the door.

Pike picked up their pistols and stuffed them into his jacket. Then he uncapped the gas can and sloshed the contents over the floor. He took out a road flare, cracked it open as he backed away, and lobbed it into the pool of gas.

The flammable liquid caught fire at once and grabbed hold of the building like a live thing, crawling up the sides of the hallway as if ravenous. The darkness in the building melted as the flames grew stronger and taller.

Pike turned and ran from the building the way he had come. Outside, he glanced up at the third-story window but didn't see anyone scrambling through. He checked the loads in the Glock and discovered there were still seven rounds in the magazine. He sprinted toward the back of the building, spotting the two shadows of the limping men heading toward the street.

Rounding the rear of the building, Pike scanned the top floor and spied a rope dangling from another window on the third floor. A trio of gangbangers climbed awkwardly down it. They carried backpacks. A pimped-out SUV was parked halfway down the alley.

Pike pointed the pistol above the man at the top of the rope, then squeezed the trigger. The report reverberated between the buildings.

The man at the top let go in his panic and fell onto the next two. All three of them toppled to the pavement in a heap, then started clawing for their weapons.

Firing again, Pike stepped out so they could see him. "Lay the guns on the ground or I'll kill you."

Reluctantly, cursing, the men produced their weapons and placed them on the ground.

"Leave the backpacks."

"Homes, you don't know all the trouble you're getting into."

Pike trained his weapon on the man who had spoken. The gangbanger was the first to strip out of his backpack.

"Stay on the ground and crawl away."

Fearfully, the three men clambered across the ground. Sirens echoed in the distance. Pike didn't know if the sirens were coming to address the gunshots fired in the alley, but if they weren't, he knew it wouldn't be long.

Gray smoke rolled from the lower windows of the building where the glass had been broken out. Flames twisted and pushed the darkness inside the structure out into the alley.

Moving swiftly, keeping an eye on the three men to make sure they didn't pull out another weapon, Pike unzipped the backpacks. All three held money and drugs. Evidently the men had split up the haul. Satisfied, Pike grabbed the backpacks by the straps, lifted them from the ground, and headed for the sleek SUV. Firelight gleamed off the spinner caps.

"What are you doing, homes? That's my ride."

Pike didn't know which of the gangbangers had called out. He didn't care. Using the butt of the pistol, Pike broke the glass in the driver's-side window. The gangbanger cursed plaintively. Ignoring the cries, Pike hauled the backpacks up to the window and shoved them in.

Walking to the rear of the SUV, he pulled out a lockback knife and ducked down to slash the fuel line to the gas tank. Gasoline ran out onto the ground like ink, and the fumes filled Pike's nose. He started walking back the way he'd come. Taking another road flare from his pocket, he struck it and tossed it under the SUV into the pool of gasoline.

Flames whooshed to life and latched on to the vehicle.

"No! You didn't do that!"

Pike shot a look at the three men at the other end of the alley. "Tell the Sureños this neighborhood is off-limits."

The man cursed him.

Wheeling, Pike fired a round that cut the air over the man's head. The man dove to the ground, followed by his two buddies. At that point, the gas tank in the SUV exploded and the vehicle jumped off the ground slightly before settling back down. The interior was on fire as well, burning merrily. Most of the money and the drugs would burn before the fire department arrived, but he was willing to bet enough evidence would be left to get police investigators started on the operation. The neighborhood would be watched over for a time.

When Pike reached the unconscious man he'd left in the other alley, he caught the man's collar and dragged him into the street. He searched the man and found a throwaway cell phone. Opening the phone, Pike punched in 911.

"Nine-one-one operator. State the nature of your emergency."

"Fire." Leaving the phone connected, Pike dropped it onto the unconscious man and kept walking. Even if the neighbors didn't call in the fire, emergency units would be dispatched.

He walked away, feeling pretty good about the night's work.