



PENGUIN  
CANADA

## Praise for *No Survivors*

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*An Indie Next Notable Book*

*A Daily Mail Best Thriller of the Year*

*Nominated for a Barry Award for Best Thriller*

“Beyond a shadow of a doubt the thriller of the year. Nail biting doesn’t even come close; it’s the purest shot of adrenaline you’ll get this or any other year.”

—Ken Bruen, author of *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Club*

“[A] burst of pure adrenaline . . . Breathless reading.”

—*Daily Mail*

“Tom Cain is forging a new standard for international thrillers—one that incorporates breakneck pacing, provocative concepts, and relentless action.”

—Steve Berry, author of *The Alexandria Limbo*

“A roller-coaster action adventure ride.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“From the first double cross to the explosive finale, *No Survivors* shifts like a rocket.”

—Jason Goodwin, author of *The Janissary*

“This book is like a bomb—fit to blow. Lean prose, breathless pacing and easily recognizable character types combine to create an engrossing read.”

—*Scene Magazine*

“I loved *No Survivors*. Tom Cain has crafted an all-too-real thriller that crackles with tension and leaves you questioning which parts are true and which are fiction. This one will keep you up at night.”

—Sean Chercover, author of *Trigger City*

“Cain remains particularly adept at writing post-Bourne action sequences, and Carver is a first-rate action hero . . . The book makes for one hell of a weekend’s worth of entertainment.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“Another stunner—compulsive and vastly entertaining reading.”

—Wilbur Smith, author of *The Queen of Sheba*

“Samuel Carver is a classic flawed hero to match all the greats . . . and we want more of him!”

—crimesquad.co.uk

“Samuel Carver is the thinking woman’s action hero. *No Survivors* is thriller writing at its best.”

“Irresistible. Smart and fast-paced, with everything you want from an international spy thriller. Cain romantically vexed lead characters—conflicted, driven, deadly—are both morally bankrupt and completely human.”

—Chelsea Cain, author of *Heartsick* and *Sweethea*

“Definitely a thriller, with bodies galore.”

—*The StarPhoenix* (Saskatoon)

“Swift and deadly as a hollow-point bullet, *No Survivors* by Tom Cain is a glistening dark gem of a thriller, fascinating, compelling, and beautiful in its rich complexity. Plan to stay in for the night—you won’t want to move until you read the last page.”

—Gayle Lynds, author of *The Last Spymast*

### **Praise for *The Accident Man***

“A tour de force . . . I found myself favourably comparing Cain’s storytelling with the best of Ian Fleming and Robert Ludlum as I dashed from one page to the next.”

—*Calgary Herald*

“Audacious, authentic, full of tension and tradecraft. . . Maybe it’s true and maybe it isn’t, but either way it’s a great thriller read. I loved it.”

—*Lee Chi*

“Audacious . . . utterly fantastic.”

—*Ottawa Citizen*

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PENGUIN CANADA

NO SURVIVORS

TOM CAIN is the nom de plume of David Thomas, an award-winning British journalist. His first novel, *The Accident Man*, was an international bestseller and is available in Penguin paperback.

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# NO SURVIVORS

*An Accident Man Novel*

**TOM CAIN**



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CANADA

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## **PREFACE:**

These Are the Facts . . .

On September 6, 1997, the Princess of Wales was laid to rest on an island in the Oval Lake at Althorp, her ancestral home.

On September 7, 1997, General Alexander Lebed, former National Security Adviser to Russian President Yeltsin, appeared on the prime-time American television news program *60 Minutes*. He revealed that his government no longer knew the whereabouts of many of their small-scale nuclear weapons, commonly described as suitcase nukes.

“More than a hundred weapons out of the supposed number of two hundred and fifty are not under the control of the armed forces of Russia,” Lebed said. “I don’t know their location. I don’t know whether they have been destroyed or whether they are stored or whether they’ve been sold or stolen. I don’t know.”

On February 23, 1998, Osama bin Laden used the London-based newspaper *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* to issue a declaration of war against what he termed “the crusader-Zionist alliance.” Bin Laden declared, “[The] crimes and sins committed by the Americans are a clear declaration of war on God, his messenger, and Muslims. . . . On that basis, and in compliance with God’s order, we issue the following fatwa to all Muslims: The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies—civilians and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it.”

On October 20, 1999, the FBI released Project Megiddo, a long-term investigation into fundamentalist Christian cults who “believe the year 2000 will usher in the end of the world and will

are willing to perpetrate acts of violence to bring that end about.” In its section on “apocalyptic religious beliefs,” it noted, “Many extremists view themselves as religious martyrs who have a duty to initiate or take part in the coming battles against Satan.” The report also commented, “There is no consensus within Christianity regarding the specific date that the Apocalypse will occur. However, within many right-wing religious groups there is a uniform belief that the Apocalypse is approaching.”

This much is true.

Everything and everyone else in this book is pure fiction.

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## **PROLOGUE:**

March 1993

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# 1

The airport mechanic was a shade under six feet tall, and the body beneath his overalls and padded cold-weather vest was lean and athletic. The single line that bisected his strong, dark brown hair suggested a determined fixity of purpose, and his clear green eyes conveyed a calm, almost childlike intelligence. A woolen knitted cap covered his short brown hair. The lower part of his face was hidden behind a beard.

There was a badge on his chest. It gave his name as Steve Lundin.

The badge was fake. The mechanic's real name was Samuel Carver.

No one in the hangar batted an eyelid when Carver unscrewed the hatch at the tail end of the executive jet and hauled himself up into the rear equipment bay for a standard preflight inspection.

This area was not reachable while the jet was airborne. It was simply a place filled with ugly but functional components, much like the basement of a building. Things like bundles of wires linking the plane's electronic circuits, the cables and hydraulic lines that controlled the rudder and elevators, the accumulator holding the hydraulic fluid that got pumped out through the system, the pipes that carried super-heated, high-pressure air off the engines and sent it for use in the plane's cabin heating system. None of these things were much to look at, or remotely exciting, until, of course, they went wrong.

The air pipes were what interested Carver. They were covered in thick silver-colored cladding, held together with plastic clips, and they formed a network through the plane via valves and junctions, pretty much like a domestic water system. So he messed with the plumbing, loosening one of the junctions so that the hot air would leak from it. The junction in question was barely a hand's breadth away from the hydraulic accumulator.

By the time Carver closed the equipment bay hatch and walked away, the fate of the aircraft was sealed.

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There was a TV on in the passenger lounge, the CNN reporter having a hard time holding back his tears as he stood in front of a blackened, burned-out church.

“We can’t show you what it looks like inside the smoking charnel house behind me,” he said, a undertone of barely restrained passion coloring his lyrical Irish brogue. “The scenes are too appalling, too sickening. The charred and mutilated corpses of four hundred innocent women and children lie there. The scent of their burned flesh fills the air all around.

“While Western politicians turn their eyes away from this insignificant corner of West Africa, a ten-year civil war has descended into genocide. The rebel forces mounting this ruthless campaign are better-trained and equipped than ever before. Their leaders are showing levels of organization and strategic planning far ahead of anything they have displayed before. Somehow, somewhere, these merciless killers have acquired new resources, new expertise. And so, as the village’s few survivors search among the corpses for their loved ones, one question comes inevitably to mind: Who is backing the rebels? For whoever they are, and whatever their motivation, they have the blood of an entire people on their hands.”

“Shit, this boy’s a friggin’ comedian!”

Waylon McCabe slapped a hand against his thigh as he addressed the three other men in the room. Most of the time McCabe’s eyes were cold, narrow slits in wrinkled folds of leathery skin that seemed permanently screwed up against the glare of his native Texan sun. Now he was letting his guard down, opening up a little, taking it easy with his buddies.

“Man, I swear he’s about to cry, just to show how sensitive he is. But I’ll bet he don’t care about a bunch of dead niggers, any more ’n I do. He’s just in it for hisself, thinkin’ on the prizes he’s gonna git for being such a damn humanitarian . . . hell, he might make almost as much money outta this war as me.”

“I seriously doubt that, boss,” said one of the other men, swigging from a bottle of Molson Canadian.

“Well, I don’ know, Clete,” replied McCabe with a grin. “Sure, my diamonds’ll pay better. But you gotta consider the costs. He ain’t had to ante up for guns ’n’ ammo, instructors to train them native boys. . . .Here, throw me one of them beers afore I die of thirst.”

McCabe was a long way past sixty, but for all the lines on his face, he was still tougher and possessed of more energy than most men half his age. He had spent the past three days on the northern coast of the Yukon and Northwest territories. From there on up to the North Pole it was pretty much just ice. Now he was sitting in a private room in the terminal at Mike Zubko Airport, right outside the town of Inuvik, waiting on the plane that would take him home.

He was trying to decide whether to pursue his hunch that there were significant oil deposits in the region. The major corporations had all pulled out of the area. Oil was cheap, extraction would be expensive, and the local Eskimos—Waylon McCabe was damned if he’d call them Inuits; screw them if they felt offended—were getting uppity about their tribal lands getting despoiled. The way they saw it, the upside wasn’t worth the aggravation.

McCabe, however, looked around the world at where all the oil was, and where all the trouble was, and saw they were all pretty much the same places. Sooner or later, between the towel heads in the Middle East and the Commies down in South America, supplies would be threatened. Meanwhile there were billions of Chinese and Indians buying automobiles and building factories, so demand could only go up. High demand and insecure supply would mean rocketing prices, and fields that were only marginal now would become worth exploiting. At that point, who gave a damn what a bunch of

seal hunters thought? A few bucks in the right pockets and that problem would be solved. And anyone who refused to take the money would soon find out they'd made the wrong decision.

There was a knock on the door, and Carver walked into the room. His normal relaxed stride had disappeared. The way he carried himself was tentative, his expression hesitant and nervous. He gave the clear impression that he felt uneasy in the presence of a man as wealthy and powerful as McCabe.

"Plane's checked, filled up, and ready to go," he said. "Don't mind me saying so, sir, you'd best be on your way. There's weather coming in."

McCabe gave a single, brusque nod that at once acknowledged what he'd said and dismissed him from the room.

Carver paused briefly in the doorway, though nobody seemed to notice or care.

"Have a good flight, sir," he said.

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## 2

The plane was routed out of Inuvik to Calgary, three hours and fourteen hundred miles away to the southeast, most of it over mountainous wilderness.

The moment the engines were fired up, air started leaking from the pipe, gaining all the time temperature and pressure. It was directing its heat right onto the hydraulic accumulator, which was filled with very sensitive, highly flammable fluid. As the minutes rolled by, and the plane rose to its cruising altitude at around thirty thousand feet, heading out over the Selwyn mountain range, that fluid got hotter and hotter. Finally, about forty minutes out of Inuvik, the temperature became critical and the accumulator burst open with an explosive blast that shook the rear of the plane. The airframe was strong enough to withstand the detonation, but the flames from the burning fluid greedily found more fuel in the plastic sheaths around the wires, the ducting within which the circuits were bundled, the cladding around the air pipes—all manner of combustible materials.

The crew barely felt or heard the explosion over the juddering of air turbulence and roaring of the jets. The first thing the pilot knew for sure was the warning light telling him that fire had taken hold of the rear equipment bay. The second was that there was nothing whatever he could do to put it out. From this point he had a maximum of seven to eight minutes before the flames ate through the control systems for his rudder and elevators.

The moment McCabe's jet left the ground, Carver got into the three-year-old Ford F-250 heavy-duty truck he'd bought for cash two weeks ago in Skagway Alaska, and headed to the nearest gas station. In the restroom, he shaved off Steve Lundin's beard and took off his overalls, which he dumped in a trash can out back. Then he turned south, onto the Dempster Highway. A short while down the road, the asphalt ran out. For the next 450 miles, crossing one Arctic Circle, two time zones, five rivers, and several mountain ranges, he'd be on nothing but rough shale and gravel.

They told you this kind of thing in Inuvik, the sheer, overwhelming scale of the local geography and the incredible absence of other people being the region's proudest features. The Yukon Territory alone was almost as big as Spain, but had just thirty thousand people in it. But the Northwest Territories next door, made Yukon look as impressive as a suburban backyard. Its forty thousand inhabitants were spread across an area bigger than Spain, France, Holland, Belgium, and England put together.

Carver was perfectly happy to listen to these boastful recitals. He liked facts. He found the certainty reassuring, something reliably nonnegotiable in a world of compromise, betrayal, and unpredictable emotion. They took his mind off the thing that was eating away at his conscience, the thought of all the other people on the plane who would die with Waylon McCabe. Carver was used to the concept of collateral damage. He understood that the innocent often died alongside the guilty. He grasped, too, the human mathematics that said it was better that a handful of people should die in a plane crash than hundreds of thousands be wiped out by acts of genocide. He could even tell himself that the people who worked for Waylon McCabe probably knew what he was doing and had profited

from his actions. That didn't mean he had to like any of it.

His secretive employers, who called themselves the Consortium, would not have been impressed by his principled qualms. They saw themselves as moral guardians in an immoral world, righting wrongs that defeated politicians, policemen, and armies, hidebound by laws and rules of engagement. The McCabe job was Carver's third assignment. A former Royal Marines officer who had fought with the corps' Special Boat Service, an elite within an elite, he had resigned his commission in disgust at the futility of his unit's efforts. The dictators he and his men had fought were still in power. The terrorists were treated like statesmen. The traffickers in drugs, guns, and people had never paid for their crimes.

He could kill a man face-to-face, with a gun, a knife, or his bare hands. But his employers preferred a more subtle, deniable approach. So Samuel Carver provided them with accidents, like the one he just prepared for Waylon McCabe.

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### 3

The pilot had shut down the engines to slow the progress of the fire, and the only sound was the eerie rush of the air outside. The flight attendant, perched on her flimsy fold-down seat, was biting her lip and trying desperately to suppress a tidal wave of panic, barely held in check by her training and professional pride. She was smoothing down her skirt with jerky, distracted movements that suggested she was unaware of what she was doing. But, looking back down the cabin toward the rear, she was the first to see the smoke as it seeped into the compartment, insinuating its way through air vents and between the gaps in floors and partitions like a plague of ghostly, toxic snakes. The smoke was shot with bilious yellows and dirty browns, a stew of chemicals given off by all the materials burning in the back of the plane. As the cabin filled with it, the passengers started to cough and retch.

“Oxygen masks . . .!” croaked the attendant, hammering her fist on the flight-deck door, forcing the words out between desperate attempts to breathe. The copilot turned his head, caught a whiff of smoke, and immediately hit the release switch that opened the trap doors above each seat and let the masks dangle down by the passengers’ heads. Then the crew put on their own masks. They worked fine. The passengers were not so lucky.

There were six passenger seats in the cabin, plus the attendant’s position, making a total of seven masks. One of them did not deploy at all. Two dropped, but supplied no oxygen. That left four masks among five people, and a life-and-death game of musical chairs began.

The attendant’s mask was functioning. So was McCabe’s. He’d inhaled a whole load of crap by the time he got it on, but finally he was breathing sweet, pure oxygen, and the heaving in his chest began to subside.

The other three men started scrambling through the ever-thickening smoke, shouting, screaming, and coughing in their desperate search for clean air. One managed to kick, punch, and elbow his way to a chair that had a working mask. Another was overcome by the smoke and sank to the floor, bent double on his knees, where he took his last few breaths. Then he collapsed, stone dead, in the aisle.

The fourth man, meanwhile, had finally found a working mask, but his brain seemed unable to give his hands the necessary instructions, his fingers fumbling helplessly as they tried to stretch the elastic strap over his head. He was coughing so hard now that he was bringing up blood, a scarlet spume that foamed from his mouth, bubbling and wheezing until he, too, was still.

And all the while, the plane kept dropping through the sky, the wind howled and buffeted around it, and the cables controlling the elevator flaps were eaten away by the flames.

The flight crew, meanwhile, were too busy to be afraid. There was barely any light in the sky now, and the mountains through which they were descending were just black silhouettes, outlined against the deep blue horizon. They were seven thousand feet up, less than five thousand feet above the lowest ground in the region, giving them maybe ten miles to play with at most, and no way to go but down. They’d dumped all their fuel to save weight and reduce the risk of any further fires. They’d deployed

the undercarriage. All they were missing was their landing site. Then one last faint glint of light reflected off a sheet of flat white ice, and they saw a frozen lake up ahead.

It looked like a giant pair of spectacles. Two large, open areas at either end formed the lenses, linked by a curved channel. A small island stood right in the middle of the left-hand, westernmost lens. But it was too close and they were still too high. They were going to overshoot.

The pilot muttered a string of expletives into his oxygen mask and pushed the plane into an even steeper dive. He'd wanted to come in at a steady, shallow glide. Now he had to swoop down toward the lake like a dive-bomber, pull up at the final moment, and pray that the controls could take the strain.

Down the plane plunged, closing in on the lake, till the cockpit windshield seemed filled with nothing but ice.

They were over the first round lens of the lake now, still five hundred feet up, the pilot frantically pulling at the joystick to get the elevator flaps to lift, and pull the plane out of the dive.

In the rear equipment bay, the cables connecting the pilot to the elevators had been burned and frayed to little more than wire strands, and all the time, the demand for more lift was putting more pressure on the cables, stretching them tighter.

The nose wouldn't come up. They were going to crash straight into the ice.

The cables were unraveling.

The ice was barely a hundred feet below them.

And then, at last, the plane pulled out of its dive, the descent flattened, and at that precise moment the final strands of cable snapped, the elevators lost all control and the plane fell the last fifty feet onto the frozen lake in a spectacular belly flop that buckled the undercarriage and sent the craft skittering across the ice like a giant hockey puck.

Somehow it found a straight-line path across the curved channel between one half of the lake and the other. But the impact had been enough to throw the attendant from her flimsy seat, ripping her mask away from its moorings, and throwing her in a flurry of arms and legs down the cabin, between the chairs, till she collided with the back wall and slumped motionless to the ground.

In the final instant before the plane had landed, an image flashed across Waylon McCabe's mind, a memory from his childhood, Sunday morning in the church house, his mother singing a hymn in her harsh, reedy voice, his father's voice a low, tuneless drone. He could smell their clothes, a bitter scent of sweat, dirt, poverty, and defeat. McCabe had not been back to that church in fifty years. He'd left far behind the day he had watched his mother being buried and had quit his hometown for good.

The image vanished as he realized they'd got back down to earth in one piece. The impossible had happened. He'd made it.

Then the tip of the starboard wing caught against the rock face of the island, which jutted up out of the ice in the middle of the lake. The wing sheared right off and sent the rest of the plane spinning off at a new angle.

It came ashore in the center of a small cove, riding up the frozen beach till the port wing hit a massive boulder, crumpled, and left the fuselage arrowing into the rocks and trees, burrowing a deep trench through the thick winter snow and trampling the smaller saplings until the nose of the fuselage hit a much older, bigger pine.

The point of impact was slightly off center, to the pilot's side, and he was squashed like a bug on a windshield as one half of the flight deck was obliterated and a huge gash was torn down the side of the plane. McCabe's last surviving companion was flung out into space, still attached to his chair, till he came to rest, impaled by a tree branch, fifty feet away. The final intact section of the plane caromed off a rock outcrop. The rest of the flight deck disintegrated, taking the copilot with it, and the main length of the cabin simply snapped in two, like a broken twig. The last of the smoke escaped into the subzero air. And Waylon McCabe slumped, eyes closed, in his chair.

There was an emergency locator beacon on the plane. A helicopter was heading out of the nearest settlement, Faro, within half an hour of the crash. The rescue team was winched down to the ground while the helicopter hovered overhead, illuminating the main crash site with its spotlights. One by one the corpses were discovered and then, when all hope seemed lost, there came a shout: “We got a live one!”

Waylon McCabe briefly regained consciousness as his stretcher was being winched up toward the helicopter. As he rose through the air, up into the heavens, his eyes were dazzled by shafts of light, his ears overwhelmed by what sounded like the fluttering of a million angels’ wings. The first words he was aware of hearing came from a paramedic: “It’s a miracle you survived.”

That’s what the doctors said, too, when he’d been airlifted to the nearest hospital. The new reporters who besieged the modest facility, his lawyer and financial director, who flew in from his corporate headquarters in San Antonio, the flight attendant who fussed over him as he was flown back home to Texas—they all used that same word: *miracle*.

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**FIVE YEARS  
LATER:**  
January 1998

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## 4

Samuel Carver's room had a million-dollar view, clear across the water to the snowcapped peaks that rose in serried ranks beyond the southern shore. While the mountains stood solid and immutable, the skies above them displayed an infinite variety of light, color, and temper, concealing the glorious landscape one moment, illuminating it the next. On a clear day, a man could stand at the window and see all the way to Mont Blanc. He could practically reach out and touch the black runs.

But Carver wasn't standing. Having visited death upon so many, he was now condemned to a half-life, trapped in a solitary purgatory. He was lying in bed, his body twisted in a fetal curl. The room was centrally heated, but his shoulders were hunched against the cold. It was silent, yet the palms of his hands were cupped over his ears, his fingers clawing at the back of his skull. The light was gentle but his eyes were screwed tightly against a scorching glare.

Then he began to stir. He jerked his back straight, then arched it, throwing his head up the bed and opening his mouth, uttering soft, wordless moans, while his limbs thrashed in random, spasmodic movements. His twitching became more frantic and his cries grew in volume.

By the time Carver woke, he was screaming.

"Wake up, wake up!"

Alexandra Petrova placed her hands on Carver's shoulders and tried to free him from the nightmare's grip, gently shaking him back into consciousness. His body felt weak and flabby, softened by months of inactivity. His face was rounder, his features less clearly defined as the bones disappeared behind pouches of flesh. His eyes were red-rimmed and fearful.

The screams petered out, replaced by a confused, semiconscious muttering and then the familiar sequence: the panicked, darting looks around the room, his body half raised from the bed; the gradual relaxation, sinking back onto his pillows as she stroked his hand and reassured him; finally the answering squeeze, the attempt at a smile, and the single whispered word, "Hi."

And then another, "Alix."

It was Carver's name for her, the one he'd used in the days they'd spent together, before his months of confinement in this private clinic on the shores of Lake Geneva. It was a sign that he recognized her, and was grateful for her company, though he could not yet recall what she had meant to him before. But then, he did not know who Samuel Carver truly was, either: what he had done and what others had done to him.

"Still the same dream?" she asked.

He squeezed his eyes shut for a moment as if to drive the last fragments of the horror from his mind, then answered, "Not the same dream. But the same ending, like always."

"Can you remember what happened at the beginning of the dream this time?"

Carver thought for a while.

"I don't know," he said.

He sounded indifferent, not quite seeing the point of the question.

“Just try,” Alix persisted.

Carver screwed up his face in concentration.

“I was a soldier,” he said. “There was fighting, in a desert. . . then it all changed.”

“You were probably dreaming about something that actually happened. You really were a soldier.”

“I know,” said Carver. “You told me before. I remember that.”

He looked at her with eyes that sought her approval. For the umpteenth time, she tried to persuade herself that the man she loved was still in there somewhere. She imagined a time when the blankness in his eyes would be replaced by the fierce intensity she had seen in them on the night they met, or the unexpected tenderness he had revealed in those stolen hours when they had been alone together, keeping the world at bay.

They’d both been in Paris, working the same assignment, the night of August 31, 1997. Carver had been standing at one end of the Alma Tunnel, waiting for a car. She had been riding pillion on a high-speed motorbike, firing her flashing camera at the Mercedes, goading the man at its wheel to drive ever faster, whipping him on toward death in Carver’s hands.

The moment they met, she was pointing a gun in his direction. Seconds later, he’d pinned her to the pavement, his knee in the small of her back. Half an hour later, she’d followed him into a building knowing he’d rigged it with explosive charges, knowing that those bombs were about to go off, but trusting absolutely in his ability to get them both in and out alive.

Now here they were in Switzerland, almost five months later, two people who had been forced into acts of terrible violence, but who, in their few precious moments of shared tranquillity, had each seen in the other a hope, not just of love, but of some small measure of redemption.

For Alix had secrets of her own. On her journey from the drab provinces of the Soviet Union to the gaudy luxuries of post-Communist Moscow, she, too, had compromised her soul. Just like Carver, she longed for an escape. But the past had clung to her and Carver alike, and it had exacted a bitter price on the night of torture and bloodshed that had subjected Carver to agonies so extreme that they had ripped his identity away from its moorings and buried his memories too deeply to be retrieved.

Alix had even begun to wonder if she really did love him anymore. How could you love a person who no longer knew who you were, or what you and he had meant to each other? She had once loved Samuel Carver—she was sure of that. She would still love that man if he were with her. But was he that man any longer? Was he any kind of man at all?

Alix fiddled with Carver’s pillows, plumping them up and rearranging them, pretending to make him more comfortable but really just trying to distract herself from her thoughts, and the guilt she felt for even allowing herself to consider them.

From behind her came the sound of a discreet cough.

A man was standing in the doorway, wearing a somber dark-gray suit and a tie whose pattern was muted as to be virtually invisible.

“Mademoiselle Petrova?” he said.

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## 5

“Good afternoon, Monsieur Marchand,” Alix said, making a conscious effort to stand up straight and smile as cheerfully as her stress and fatigue would allow.

She spoke French. That at least had been one positive achievement over the past few months. She had a third language to add to her native Russian and the English she’d been taught by the KGB a decade ago. The same agency had trained her to charm any man she wanted, but Marchand seemed resolutely immune to what was left of her old powers. He was the clinic’s finance director. His sole concern was the bottom line.

“Could you spare me a moment, Mademoiselle Petrova?” he said, managing to combine an obsequious, oily politeness with an unmistakable hint of menace. He waited until she had followed him out into the corridor, out of Carver’s hearing, then spoke again.

“It’s about Monsieur Carver’s account. The payment for last month will soon be overdue. I trust there is not a problem. You should be aware that if patients are unable to settle their accounts, it is the clinic’s policy to terminate their treatment.”

“I quite understand,” said Alix. “There is no problem. The account will be settled.”

Marchand gave a curt nod of acknowledgment and farewell. Alix watched him walk away down the corridor. Only when he had turned the corner and was out of sight did she go back into Carver’s room and slump down in the visitor’s chair, holding her head in her hands.

Somewhere Carver had a fortune, the profits of his deadly trade, banked in an anonymous offshore account, or stashed in safe-deposit boxes and private hiding places. The money would keep Marchand satisfied for years, but only Carver had ever known where it was. And now he had no clue that it even existed.

He had at least been blessed by one benefactor. Thor Larsson, the tall, skinny, dreadlocked Norwegian who was Carver’s technician, computer expert, and closest friend, had given Alix access to Carver’s flat. Using money paid to him by Carver, he had done his best to meet the sanatorium bills. But now that money was running out and Larsson had nothing more to give.

Alix would happily have paid her share, but she had no formal identification papers and no work residency permits, and thus no way of getting a respectable job. In any case, she spent every day on Carver’s side. All she’d been able to find was a late-night waitress gig in a sleazy *bierkeller*, whose owner was only too happy to turn a blind eye to Swiss employment law if he could hire pliable immigrant women on the cheap. As he liked to remind his girls, Switzerland had no minimum wage. Alix just about made ends meet from her tips, but she couldn’t hope to pay Carver’s bills as well. Not if she stuck to waitressing.

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## 6

Lev Yusov was fifty-two years old, though to Western eyes he would have seemed at least a decade older. He smoked too many coarse, unfiltered cigarettes. He drank too much cheap vodka. His single-room apartment lacked ventilation in the summer and heating in the winter. The walls were peeling and the window frames were rotting. But Yusov was no worse off than anyone else in the 12th GUMO.

The workers of Russia's 12th *Glavnoye Upravleniye Ministerstvo Oborony*, or Main Directorate of the Ministry of Defense, were just like every other employee of the once-mighty state. Their wages were pitiful, when they were paid at all. Their living conditions got worse by the day. The staff at the 12th GUMO base had recently gone on a hunger strike, demanding to be paid the money and benefits that they had been owed for months. Even officers had started protesting that they couldn't get by without taking a second job.

This dissatisfaction was significant for one very simple reason. The 12th GUMO was the organization responsible for the administration, storage, security, and safety of Russia's nuclear weapons. When its people became angry and resentful, they were in a position to cause serious trouble. And for Lev Yusov, anger and resentment were his default states of mind.

A lifetime spent in the service of the Motherland had left him little more than a glorified filing clerk, sitting behind a counter in a provincial depot, checking papers in and out, taking orders from officers no better than him, or—which was even worse—their stuck-up personal secretaries. He knew he was just an anonymous old drudge in their eyes, an insignificant functionary whose only means of exercising power lay in his ability to be unhelpful. Yusov exercised that power to the full.

Woe betide the request that was not made exactly as the regulations required, or the form that was incorrectly filled in. His capacity for nit-picking, obstruction, and sheer bloody-mindedness, honed by decades of experience, had become legendary. No one went down to Yusov's grim, windowless basement kingdom if they could possibly avoid it. No one socialized with him or passed the time on a day. And so, when Alexander Lebed went on American TV, talking about missing nukes, and set off a frenzy of backside-covering within the 12th GUMO, as senior officers desperately strove to find out whether these bombs existed and, if so, what had actually happened to them (before passing the buck as far and as fast as they possibly could), no one thought to ask Lev Yusov whether he had any files on the subject, tucked away on the rows of shelves that stretched into the darkness behind him.

This exclusion was just one more drop in the acidic lake of Yusov's bitterness. The more he was ignored, the more he sat and pondered about all the documents that had passed before his eyes—documents that he cherished as his most precious, meticulously cared-for possessions. Something was nagging at the corner of his mind, an uncertain memory of a computer printout handed to him many years before, when half the ambitious young whippersnappers who now bossed him around were still in short trousers. It had contained a stream of numbers, and had been folded up and put in a cardboard envelope. This file had no name, just a reference number. Nor had there been any description of it.

contents. The man who had handed it to him had insisted he had no idea what it might be—just another piece of bureaucratic flotsam that had washed up in his department.

Four months of furtive but infinitely patient rummaging passed by before Yusov found the envelope. It was marked *top secret* and date-stamped with the 12th GUMO insignia.

He took out the computer printout. The paper was flimsy, the dot-matrix printer ink fading to pale gray, but he could still make out 127 entries arranged vertically over six pages. Each entry consisted of three number groups. The first two groups contained either ten or eleven digits, divided into three subgroups, of degrees, minutes, and seconds. The third group contained eight digits in a single sequence. One complete entry read: 49°24'29.0160'94°21'31.047'99875495.

Lev Yusov had spent his entire working life in the 12th GUMO. The first two number groups were easily understood: He knew a set of map coordinates when he saw them. Normally, such coordinates would describe a weapon's target: either the location at which it was aimed or the one it had actually hit. But what if these numbers referred not to targets, but locations? The missing weapons described by Alexander Lebed were portable. They must have been taken somewhere. Perhaps these numbers revealed where.

As for the last eight digits, Yusov assumed they referred to some sort of arming code. He knew that no nuclear weapon, be it an intercontinental missile or a single artillery shell, could be detonated without specific instructions. These numbers would provide the correct combination for each individual bomb.

Late at night, his hand clutching a half-empty bottle, Yusov considered the significance of what he had found. If he was right about the meaning of those numbers, then they were his way out of his shitty flat and his shitty job, and the shits he had to work with.

Someone, somewhere would pay a fortune for that list. For anyone who possessed it and the means to get at the bombs would have the whole world at his mercy.

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## 7

**W**ar in the desert was supposed to be all about heat, sweat, and choking clouds of dust. But this was when the sun was up. This was a winter's night. Carver felt deep-frozen, colder than he had ever been, and the chattering of his teeth drowned out the scrabble of steel against dirt from the spades of the men digging down into the earth.

From where Carver stood, the holes were simply patches of blackness in the blue-gray expanse of the starlit desert.

There were seven of them, the size and depth of open graves awaiting their coffins. Or maybe this was what a goldfield looked like when the first prospectors arrived and started burrowing down for their fortunes. Carver and his men were prospecting, too, searching for the fiber-optic cable, buried somewhere beneath their feet, that kept the Iraqi dictator in touch with his troops.

Carver's team from the Special Boat Service had been allotted two hours on the ground to break that link. There were fifteen minutes left. And still no sign of any cable.

Carver shook his head in helpless frustration. There was just time to dig one more hole. He was trying to work out where to put it when there was an explosion of deafening white noise, hissing, and crackling in his ear. He could just make out a voice, almost buried beneath the distortion: "We've got company, boss. Couple of companies of mechanized infantry, heading directly at us."

"Do you think they've seen us?" Carver asked.

He was already on the run toward the perimeter, needing to see for himself, but the ground seemed to have softened, sucking at his feet like quicksand. His progress was way too slow. He wasn't going to get there in time. Meanwhile the noise in his ear was getting louder. He wanted to tear off his headphones, but now the lookout's voice was bursting into life again. "They've got mortars. Here we go . . ."

The desert silence was broken by a series of distant percussive crumps, followed by whooshes, like fireworks streaking into the sky. A few seconds later, magnesium parachute flares burst over the landing zone, scorching Carver's eyes and leaving the fifty-foot-long Chinooks as exposed in the burning white light as a pair of naked lovers surprised by an angry husband.

Now there were mortar rounds falling all across the landing zone and cannon fire cracking through the night air. Carver could hear a new voice now, one of the chopper pilots, his voice tightening as adrenaline flooded his nervous system: "We're like coconuts in a shy here. I'm starting up the rotors. You'd better get your men aboard sharpish."

Carver started issuing orders. He was shouting into his intercom, but he must not have made himself heard because the men weren't moving and even though the chopper rotors were turning at top speed, they didn't seem able to lift off the ground, and suddenly the whole landing zone was filled with Iraqis. He couldn't work out how they'd got there so fast, or why they were speaking Russian to him. He thought he recognized their faces, but they kept blurring out of focus. He pulled the trigger of his submachine gun, but no bullets came out, even though the magazine was full.

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