

## CHAPTER ONE

Somewhere in the Middle East, the sun began to rise over the Frat House, the code name of a secret military installation dedicated to United States Special Operations Forces and their covert activities. Created following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, the Frat House has supported such Special Forces, or Spec Ops, as: the Green Berets, Army Rangers, Delta Force, Night Stalkers, Navy Seals and Psyops. The C.I.A. has also used the Frat House as a home base for its own Middle Eastern counterterrorism activities. According to the Pentagon, C.I.A. and all unclassified maps of United States military installations, the Frat House does not exist.

Emerging from one of the many tents present within the boundaries of the Frat House, C.I.A. counterterrorism specialist, Jack “Tarzan” Trzansky, walked quickly across the military base, took a final drag on his cigarette and flicked it toward the sandy ground. Showing the peace sign to a large group of heavily armed guards, the stout, middle-aged man ran his right hand over a scalp of thinning hair and entered the hospital tent.

Inside the sophisticated medical facility, Tarzan dodged oncoming nurse traffic as he approached a haggard doctor, Major George Rollins, who was seated at a cluttered desk, lost in thought.

“Mornin’, Doc,” Tarzan said.

“Hi, Tarzan,” the lanky 35-year-old physician replied, quickly exiting his trance.

“I just heard they brought Captain Adams in here,” Tarzan said. “What gives?”

“Medics brought him in late last night,” the doctor answered in a tired voice. “We just finished working on him an hour ago.”

“How is he?” Tarzan inquired.

“Not good, Tarzan,” Rollins replied. “Not good at all.”

“What happened?” Tarzan asked apprehensively.

“What happened is he caught a grenade up close and personal last night,” Rollins answered succinctly. “His jaw and facial bones are shattered, his front teeth are gone, and his neck and chest have gaping wounds.”

The fatigued doctor removed his eyeglasses, rubbed his bloodshot eyes and ran his hand through his short blonde hair.

“Unfortunately, that’s only part of the problem,” he added.

“There’s more?” Tarzan asked.

“Tarzan, the captain was castrated by the grenade blast,” the physician replied, tossing his glasses on the desk and making direct eye contact with his early morning visitor. “His scrotum is wide open, his testicles have been reduced to a few shreds and his penis has been severely macerated.”

The C.I.A. veteran stared directly at the physician, took a deep breath and shook his head in disbelief.

“He’s going to be all right, isn’t he?” Tarzan asked nervously.

“Let’s just say he’s going to survive,” the physician responded.

“So, what’s the game plan?” Tarzan inquired. “Ramstein?”

“Stateside,” Rollins answered. “The captain is going to need a lot of surgery and tons of rehab, and from a cardiac standpoint, he’s stable enough to make the trip right now. Besides, there’s a lot of concern around here about his safety after everything that happened last night. That’s why all available personnel are currently standing guard outside. An air evac is already in the works. The captain should be on a jet to Andrews Air Force Base within the hour, and once he gets there, he’ll be taken directly to Walter Reed. I’ve already talked to the medical admitting officer at the hospital, and he assured me their best people will be ready to start working on the captain the moment he arrives.”

“Doc, I need to see him before he leaves,” Tarzan stressed.

“I know,” Rollins replied. “He’s been asking for you ever since he got here. He can barely whisper at this point because of his neck injury and all the sedation, so you’ll have to sit close to him and listen very carefully.”

“Thanks, Doc,” Tarzan said. “I’ll keep it short.”

“Tarzan, before you go in there, tell me something,” the curious physician requested. “What makes Zack Adams tick? I mean, the guy is 28 years old, barely five-foot-six and only 140 pounds, but he carries himself like an All-Pro linebacker. He lost the other two members of his Delta Force unit last night and is currently in the process of losing essential body parts, but all he seems to be concerned about is how long it’s going to take for him

to recover and get back in the fight. You're his friend. What is it with him?"

"Doc, there are only two men in the entire world as tough as Zack Adams," Tarzan answered, as he opened the curtain to the injured soldier's private space. "And the guy in here is both of them."

As Tarzan closed the curtain behind him, he was momentarily overcome by the sight of his friend's face and body heavily wrapped in bandages and seemingly trapped in an intricate web of intravenous lines and catheters. Taking a few seconds to compose himself, he finally announced his presence.

"Hey, Zack, it's me," Tarzan said quietly.

"Hey, Tarzan," the heavily sedated soldier answered in a muted and raspy tone of voice. "Glad you came. I've been waiting for you."

"You okay?" Tarzan asked, as he approached Zack's bed.

"Negatory," Adams replied. "I'm in a lot of pain right now, but I'll be good to go once the docs patch me up. They're getting ready to fly me stateside."

As Tarzan sat down within whispering distance of his injured friend, Zack grabbed his arm.

"Chameleon was right where you said he would be," Adams whispered. "I saw him. In fact, I got my hands on him."

"Tell me what happened," Tarzan said quietly, as he watched Zack start to experience a paroxysm of pain.

"We arrived at the target site and my unit covered the courtyard while I entered the house," Adams replied slowly and deliberately. "Chameleon was in one of the bedrooms, having his own way with a young woman. When he saw me open the bedroom door, he quickly jumped out of bed and pulled the woman with him, using her as a human shield."

The Delta Force veteran experienced another wave of intense pain and struggled to reposition his body before continuing.

"Chameleon pushed the girl into me, but I was able to reach over her and get my hands around his neck," he said. "With the girl still between us, he reached over to a night stand and grabbed some kind of grenade. He pulled the pin and dropped the grenade on the floor. As soon as I released my hold and tried to pull the girl away, Chameleon dove on the other side of the bed. A few seconds later, the grenade exploded."

Zack took a number of deep breaths and waited for his pain to gradually subside.

“I passed out but started to regain consciousness when I heard a series of loud explosions in the courtyard,” he said. “I crawled over toward the girl and saw she was dead. I blacked out again and woke up here.”

“Tell me more about Chameleon,” Tarzan said. “Do you remember what he looked like?”

“I’ll never forget what he looked like,” Adams replied. “Unfortunately, there’s not much to describe. He was in his mid to late forties, dark and average. I never heard him speak, so I can’t tell you anything more specific. I don’t recall any distinguishing features.”

“He blends real well,” Tarzan said. “That’s why we call him, ‘Chameleon.’ Like I told your unit in yesterday’s briefing, the C.I.A. has known about this guy for a few years, but we still don’t know his name or nationality, and we still don’t have his finger prints or any other kind of identification. We’ve only been able to identify him using voice printing. If it weren’t for satellite surveillance and voice print analysis, we never would have been able to place him in the different terrorist camps or been able to corner him like we did last night. We’ve probably seen his face in surveillance photos, but with a few disguises, he could be any one of dozens of unknowns we’ve photographed.

“Tarzan, I’m sorry,” Zack said emotionally. “I let you down, and I let my unit down. I had the world’s most dangerous terrorist in my hands and I let him slip away.”

“Listen, Zack, you didn’t let anybody down,” Tarzan countered. “Your unit was recruited for an impromptu mission just minutes after we picked up Chameleon’s voice on a satellite pass and realized he was in our backyard. We didn’t know what to expect from him, and we had no reason to believe the place he was staying at would be booby trapped. Like you said, Chameleon is the most dangerous terrorist in the world, and now we both know why.”

“Yeah, we do,” Zack sighed.

“Zack, I know how bad you feel about things right now, but think about how much you accomplished last night,” Tarzan continued. “One by one, the United States has brought down most of the big name terrorists since 9-1-1, but each of these guys had a name, a face and an identity. We still don’t know Chameleon’s real name, but you got a good look at his face last night. Because of you, he’s no longer invisible. Now he can be identified.”

Zack lifted his head and looked directly at Tarzan.

“You accomplished a lot more than you realize last night,” Tarzan stated with conviction. “You got a close

look at the one man known to have direct ties to every major terrorist organization in the world. What's more, you looked right in the eyes of the man who has been responsible for coordinating most of the recent terrorist attacks against the United States and our allies. Like I told you before, Chameleon is an experienced messenger and event planner, and probably the only guy on the planet who most terrorist groups trust to deliver the kind of messages that can only be whispered. We're going to find this guy again, and when we do, the machinery of international terrorism is going to be disabled for a very long time. You got to him last night, Zack. Now he knows it can be done."

"Tarzan, I have to ask you to wrap things up," Major Rollins said, opening the curtain to his patient's private space. "The captain's ride will be pulling up to the door any minute, and I still need to prep him for his flight stateside."

"Sure thing, Doc," Tarzan replied.

"Tarzan, before you go, listen to me carefully," Zack said, once again grabbing the C.I.A. veteran's arm. "My brothers died last night, and I died with them. I don't know what's going to be left of me by the time all the surgeries are finally done, but whatever is left still has a job to do."

Tarzan smiled and conveyed his understanding by squeezing Zack's hand.

"Don't patronize me," Adams said firmly. "Do whatever you have to do to get me back in this fight as soon as possible. I'm already dead, so nothing else matters."

Tarzan stared through the facial bandages into Zack's eyes and conveyed his understanding with a short nod.

"Never forget I was a warrior when I left my wife and son, and I can never go back to them as anything less," Zack continued. "As far as my unit is concerned, I still have a mission to complete. Eternity depends on it. I'll do whatever it takes to bring down Chameleon. Do you understand? I'll do whatever it takes."

Tarzan continued to stare at his injured friend and tried to convince himself it was his friend, rather than morphine, that was doing the talking.

"Tarzan, go way out on one of those famous limbs of yours and grab us both a big grapevine to swing on," Zack said. "It's going to take a suicide mission to stop Chameleon, and since I'm already dead, I think I'm the right guy for the job. Besides, I think I'm entitled to some

payback for what he did to me and my brothers last night.”

“Tarzan, I really need to get in here,” Rollins interrupted, as he reentered the space with a team of medics.

“Tarzan, make it happen,” Zack implored. “And please spare my family all of this. Understand?”

“Roger that,” Tarzan replied, as he knocked fists with the injured soldier. “Godspeed, Zack.”

Side-stepping a growing number of military personnel who were involved in Captain Adams’s care, Tarzan made his way out of the hospital tent and quickly lit a cigarette. Sitting down on a nearby bench, he stared at the tent, and for the next 15 minutes, tried unsuccessfully to reduce the various components of his emotional meeting with Zack Adams to an unemotional common denominator.

Seeing Captain Adams being moved from the hospital tent to a waiting ambulance seemed to accelerate Tarzan’s thought processes and suddenly provide him with the common denominator he required. Wasting little time, he got up from the bench and immediately walked toward the base’s communications tent.

Entering the tent, Tarzan showed the peace sign to its lone occupant, an Army communications specialist.

“I have to make a private call to the company,” Tarzan said.

Without saying a word, the young soldier left the tent, and Tarzan immediately placed a call via a secure link to a contact at C.I.A. headquarters. After he finished his call, Tarzan stepped outside the tent and lit another cigarette. Looking across the desert, he could see a military jet taking off from a nearby runway.

## CHAPTER TWO

Air Force Captains, Marsha Bell and Lisa Dow, walked down a long corridor inside the Pentagon.

“I’d love to know what’s going on at the Joint Chiefs pow-wow this morning,” Captain Bell, a thin woman with curly blonde hair, quietly mused. “The Chiefs are meeting with the Deputy Secretary and Chief Intelligence Officer of Homeland Security, not to mention all the top brass from the National Security Agency and National Counterterrorism Center.”

“Something heap big is going on – that’s for sure,” Captain Dow, a tall brunette, replied *sotto voce*. “I recognized some old guard from the C.I.A. and F.B.I. walking in there too.”

While the two officers quietly debated the nature of the high profile meeting being held in one of the Pentagon’s conference rooms, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were in the process of concluding their emergency briefing of America’s intelligence community.

“In summary, then, highly unusual activity of potential consequence to the Armed Forces and national security has taken place over the past 48 hours,” Major Marshall Higgins, a young Army attaché, with a deep voice and jet black hair, reiterated. “After sustaining multiple wounds, Captain Zackary Adams was transported by Army jet from the Middle East to Andrews Air Force Base. He was immediately transferred by helicopter from the air base to Walter Reed. An Army surgeon, nurse and medical technician accompanied Captain Adams on the flight from the Middle East, and rode with him in the helicopter to the hospital. The team helped the helicopter crew transport Captain Adams into Walter Reed and formally transferred his medical care to the hospital’s admitting officer. Fifteen minutes later, a team of surgeons reported to the hospital’s screening area to examine Captain Adams. Instead of finding the 28-year-old wounded male they were expecting, the surgical team found a heavily sedated 39-year-old male who had been reported missing from an in-patient unit at the Philadelphia Veterans Administration Medical Center four hours earlier. Thus far, exhaustive efforts to find Captain Adams have been unsuccessful.”

“Thank you, Major,” Admiral Wesley Fitzsimmons, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said, scratching his healthy head of white hair. “Are there any comments?”

“The fact Captain Adams is missing is one thing,” the C.I.A.’s Herbert Stuart, a middle-aged everyman, stated emphatically. “The fact he may be the only American who has seen and can identify the international terrorist, known to us only as ‘Chameleon,’ is something else entirely.”

“So, what are you saying?” Marine General Jeremy Hyde, a lean and mean 60-year-old, with dark brown, crew cut hair that seemed to be perpetually standing at attention, asked. “Are you saying terrorists kidnapped Captain Adams from a heavily guarded military hospital?”

“I would strongly consider that possibility,” the unimintimidated C.I.A. veteran replied. “After all, Captain Adams is the only American to have ever seen Chameleon. Terrorists may have considered it necessary to abduct Captain Adams before he had the chance to identify one of their most important leaders. Furthermore, as Major Higgins mentioned in his initial remarks, Captain Adams arrived at Walter Reed with his face and neck heavily bandaged. The substitution of another patient, who had the same body build and clothing as Captain Adams and whose facial features were also concealed by bandages, must be viewed as a clever tactic someone used to facilitate the captain’s abduction. That someone needed a motive. I can’t think of anyone with a more compelling motive than terrorists trying to protect Chameleon’s hidden identity.”

“We can sit here all day and debate who abducted Captain Adams and why they did it,” Admiral Fitzsimmons calmly contributed. “What remains incontrovertible is the fact an Army officer is missing from a United States military hospital. Now what are we going to do about it?”

“We’ve already begun questioning everyone who had contact with Captain Adams at Andrews,” Air Force General Marc Springstein, a military face man with blue eyes, curly brown hair and storied political aspirations, answered confidently. “However, *Air Force One* was on the ground when the jet carrying Captain Adams landed and our security was already heightened. So, I don’t expect our investigation to reveal much.”

“We’re doing the same at Walter Reed,” Army General Stanley Ostrowski, a gray ghost with the most service time in the group, added. “We plan to review all

the surveillance tapes and talk to everyone who was on duty at the hospital before and during Captain Adams's arrival. We also plan to interview the flight crew and medical team that transported Captain Adams to the hospital and review recent logs of all hospital visitors."

"What about the F.B.I. and Homeland Security?" Admiral Fitzsimmons inquired.

"Our Counterterrorism Division will get right on this," F.B.I. Assistant Director, Clay White, a polished executive of Jamaican descent, responded. "I'll personally see to it our *Flying Squads* are briefed A.S.A.P."

"Homeland Security will make this a priority matter and immediately alert all federal, state and local law enforcement agencies," Deputy Director, Kip Tanner, a criminal justice poster child, replied. "We'll also prepare to raise the national terrorism alert status if this situation escalates."

"On what basis?" Admiral Fitzsimmons asked.

"Credible threat," Tanner answered.

"If anyone feels the earth moving in Arlington today, it won't be an earthquake," General Hyde remarked sarcastically. "It will be the sound of military heroes turning over in their graves."

"So much for the idea of the United States never having to fight a war on American soil," Admiral Fitzsimmons added.

As the military and national security leaders concluded their meeting at the Pentagon, another meeting was just beginning in the base commander's tent at the Frat House.

"Tarzan, here's all we were able to recover from Chameleon's love nest," Colonel Mitch Trethaway, a high-and-tight man of steel, said, placing a leather attaché case on a small table. "I took the liberty of having it disarmed. Its shell was filled with C4. Trying to open this thing with the wrong combination would have won some lucky contestant a free trip to the international space station."

"Any finger prints?" Tarzan asked.

"None," the base commander replied. "What were you able to find out about the nest?"

"The estate is currently owned by a bank," Tarzan replied. "According to the bank's records, the house has been unoccupied for the past six months. Its previous owner was a retired businessman who lived there until his death."

“Before you open the case, there’s something we need to talk about,” Trethaway advised, as he poured two glasses of bourbon.

“Like what?” Tarzan asked.

“Like Zack Adams,” Trethaway answered. “I received a call from Washington a little while ago. Zack is missing.”

“What do you mean?” Tarzan asked.

“Just what I said,” the colonel reiterated. “Zack is missing. He landed at Andrews and was immediately transported to Walter Reed by helicopter, but shortly after he arrived at the hospital, he pulled a disappearing act.”

“Is this some kind of joke?” Tarzan asked.

“No joke,” the colonel answered unequivocally, as he lifted his glass to his guest and took a healthy swig of bourbon.

“I’m sure there’s a logical explanation,” Tarzan said reassuringly. “Walter Reed is a big place. Someone probably wheeled Zack into the wrong room or took him somewhere for tests. I’m sure he’ll turn up soon.”

“I’m not so sure,” Trethaway said skeptically. “There’s more to this. When Zack arrived at Walter Reed, he was wheeled into a holding area until a team of doctors could get there to examine him. When the doctors finally arrived, the patient in the holding area wasn’t Zack but some other patient who had been previously reported missing from the Philly V.A. They’ve turned Walter Reed upside down and they can’t find Zack. He’s missing, and because of his last mission, there’s concern terrorists may have kidnapped him.”

“Chameleon,” Tarzan sighed, looking directly at the base commander and slowly nodding his head.

“Ditto,” Trethaway concurred.

The two men stared each other into an uncomfortable silence.

“Listen, Mitch, speculating about what may or may not have happened to Zack isn’t going to get us anywhere tonight,” Tarzan said. “So, before we both get all worked up for nothing, let’s wait until we get a few hard facts under our belts. Agreed?”

“Agreed,” the colonel replied.

“Okay,” Tarzan said. “Let’s take a look inside this case already.”

The veteran investigator shook his head in disbelief as he rummaged through the contents of the attaché case.

“It looks like Chameleon won a five-minute shopping spree through an adult boutique,” Tarzan commented.

Trethaway snickered, as he refilled the glasses with bourbon.

“I know what this is for,” Tarzan said, removing a bottle of Viagra from the case.

“And I know what these are for,” he continued, removing assorted boxes of condoms.”

“Ditto these,” Tarzan quipped, removing a collection of hardcore porn magazines.

“I have no idea what these are all about,” he admitted, removing a stack of papers on which random numbers and letters had been erratically stenciled.”

“I know these are all heart pills but I’m not sure what conditions each medication is used to treat,” Tarzan said, removing stock bottles of prescription drugs.

“I called Major Rollins about the pills,” Trethaway said.

“What’d Doc say?” Tarzan asked.

“The pills are Digoxin, Verapamil and Atenolol,” the colonel answered, taking another healthy swig of bourbon. “Like you said, they’re all used to treat heart problems. Rollins said they all lower heart rate, and Verapamil and Atenolol also lower blood pressure and prevent angina. Digoxin is used primarily to treat heart failure and control irregular heart rhythms. I couldn’t find any of those little brown vials of Nitroglycerin pills in the case, the ones patients with heart conditions use when they experience chest pain.

“If Chameleon uses Viagra, as the contents of this attaché case suggest, I doubt he’d risk taking Nitroglycerin at the same time,” Tarzan observed. “Taking the two drugs close together can cause a sudden drop in blood pressure and even lead to a heart attack.”

“You’re right,” Trethaway said. “I didn’t think about that. I guess the one thing you don’t want to do is die with a hard-on.”

“Well, if Chameleon has been taking all these pills, we know what’s been causing his chest pain, high blood pressure and irregular heart beat,” Tarzan quipped, as he emptied the remaining contents of the case on to the table top. “Let’s see, we’ve got four pairs of handcuffs, three leather straps and two dildos from outer space. The only thing missing is a partridge in a pear tree.”

“Maybe Chameleon got hungry,” Trethaway said sarcastically. “By the way, the backup unit that rescued Zack also retrieved the dead girl’s body. Her name was Karen Drake. She was the 29-year-old American television producer who was reported missing while filming a Middle East documentary a few months ago.”

“She’s the sixth American woman to have been kidnapped within a 300-mile radius over the past two years,” Tarzan said angrily. “The women were all young, all professionals and all extremely attractive. The young lady your boys brought back is the first that’s been found.”

Tarzan emptied his glass of bourbon with one gulp and held out the glass for another refill.

“Do you think any of the other women are still alive?” Trethaway inquired.

“If any of them are still alive, they’re probably wishing they were dead,” Tarzan replied.

“Why do you say that?” the colonel asked.

“I don’t think I ever told you this before, but “Girl Number-Four” was C.I.A.,” Tarzan answered. “After the third American woman was kidnapped, just before you took over command of this base, I sold the company on the idea of sending in a female assassin to put out Chameleon’s lights, once and for all. The company went for my plan because of Chameleon’s penchant for young American skirt, not to mention a total lack of any other viable options. So, we planted a highly visible female agent in a musical review that was staging shows for the troops throughout the Middle East. She was a backup singer who stole every show because of her great looks and seductive moves on stage. One night, Chameleon’s people took the bait, and the girl disappeared as planned.”

Tarzan took another healthy swig of bourbon.

“So, what happened?” Trethaway asked.

“It didn’t take Chameleon very long to see right through our plan or neutralize his would-be assassin,” Tarzan replied. “Within a week of the female agent’s kidnapping, the C.I.A. started receiving small tokens of Chameleon’s gratitude. At first, it was the girl’s fingernails, then her toenails, and finally, her teeth. They were all mailed to company headquarters, one at a time, with accompanying photos of her being whipped and forced to participate in unspeakable practices and unnatural acts. To add insult to injury, every tooth and nail was sent to the C.I.A. from locations on five different continents. The final insult was Chameleon sending the company a microscopic tracking chip that had been implanted under the girl’s skin. The disabled chip was mailed from a post office a few miles away from C.I.A. headquarters in Langley. That was the last the company heard from Chameleon. Ergo, if “Girl Number-Four” or any of the other kidnapped American women are still alive, they’re probably wishing they were dead.”

The colonel stared at Tarzan in disbelief.

“Mitch, I’ve been here a lot longer than you,” Tarzan continued. “The C.I.A. sent me here to get rid of Chameleon. So far, some very good people tried to help me complete my mission and died for their trouble. Now the best of them is missing in action on American soil. I forget what the United States looks like, but I’m not going back until I get Chameleon. One way or another, I’m going to get him.”

Returning the belongings of his adversary to the attaché case, Tarzan took one final swig of bourbon and left the company of the base commander with case in hand.

As Trethaway poured another splash of bourbon into his glass, Tarzan stepped out into the night air, looked at the stars and lit a cigarette. Inhaling the cigarette smoke as if to desperately extract some vitamin or trace mineral he seemed to be lacking, Tarzan walked briskly in the direction of the base’s communications tent.

