

PERMANENT ENEMY

A NOVEL

(Preview Chapters)

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Chapter 1

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BRETT COLLINS AND his commando unit had no idea that his covert mission would turn into a bloodbath. It was eleven minutes past midnight in sub-Saharan Africa. The vast and remote tropical jungles of the Republic of Dargombi lay in semi-darkness about 15,000 feet below as a camouflage-painted MC-130H special operations transport aircraft snuck toward the drop zone. A smiley half-moon cast an eerie illumination from a clear, stark-naked sky.

Inside the cockpit that was jam-packed with electronic indicators, the pilot made a scrambled radio transmission:

“Bravo-Alpha approaching drop zone. Over!”

A raspy and commanding voice belonging to a middle-aged man filtered through the pilot’s earphones.

“We copy Bravo-Alpha! All clear on LZ. Proceed to next phase. Over!”

In the partial-darkness of the aircraft cabin, the heavily-armed twelve-man commando team in jungle camouflage fatigues and face paints was now

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making final preparations, checking and re-checking their weapons and gears—M4 assault rifles, Glock 9mm pistols, pineapple grenades, rocket launchers, commando fighting knives, Night Vision goggles...

Brett Collins casually glanced at the eleven camo-painted faces in black berets and headsets, and reminded himself once again that these were men he could depend on, specialists who knew more than a dozen ways to kill with their bare hands, let alone with a gun, knife, explosives or an improvised weapon.

He also knew they were all aware that they could depend on him. They would follow him into a hellhole if he asked. Brett felt a sense of pride, mixed with an unusually deep feeling of apprehension, which nobody around him could detect. A premonition of danger was manifesting itself far too early in the mission. Brett knew that his sharp and well-developed survival instincts rarely sent a false alarm. *Something's very wrong*, he thought to himself. He wondered what it might be.

IN THE DENSE tropical jungle below, under barely perceptible streaks of light from the half moon, about 100 heavily-armed men in black private army uniforms were maneuvering secretly through the bushes with AK-47 assault rifles at the ready. Led by a sinister-looking, 51-year-old, American mercenary notoriously known as The Colonel, the army of foreign mercenaries slowly and cautiously

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inched their way toward a field in the middle of the jungle. The Colonel wore an olive green sabotage uniform without an insignia, a dark-green beret, and a black eye patch that covered his right eye. Spread out over a large area in the jungle, the advancing army scrambled for deeper cover as the unsuspecting American aircraft flew past overhead.

Less than two minutes later, the Colonel, who hid behind a mahogany tree, whispered instructions into the mouthpiece of his headset:

“All units, this is the Colonel. Maintain radio silence from here on. Hold your fire until the enemy is at treetop level.”

IN THE NIGHT sky above the jungle, the aircraft's rear ramp door opened, causing a gush of warm tropical wind to surge into the cabin as Brett Collins and his commando team shuffled forward and began jumping out in the semi-darkness. Less than a minute later, all twelve warriors were freefalling toward the jungle below. Their Black Spider parachutes began opening up shortly thereafter, filling the foreboding night sky. The MC-130H transport aircraft banked and made a wide, 180-degree turn, and departed from the area. The twelve unsuspecting CIA contract operatives slowly drifted downward...

Far beneath them in the jungle, the Colonel and his foreign fighters began maneuvering hastily to have the landing zone surrounded.

Chapter 2

CLUTCHING HIS M4 rifle at the ready as he drifted downward under the wide parachute canopy, Brett's sharp eyes scanned the jungle below through his Night Vision. He quickly detected movements—several armed men darting through the bushes.

“Mission is compromised!” he yelled into his headset mouthpiece, “Hostiles on LZ!”

His M4 was already blazing away with ferocious intensity. The floor of the jungle suddenly lit up with spectacular and deadly muzzle flashes and tracer bullets from out-going gunfire as some fighters began dropping dead from in-coming volleys. Firing and taking hits while still airborne, the commando unit blazed its way down into the hell below, crash-landing under fire.

In the field that served as the landing zone, half of Brett's men, six, lay dead still attached to their parachutes. Three others had multiple gunshot wounds in the lower parts of their bodies but were still in the fight, engaging enemies on their flank with fierce gunfire, and rocket attack, killing, and

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forcing some of the fighters into a momentary retreat. Brett and two commandos survived the landing safe and sound; they were now busy cutting down anything that moved outside the perimeter.

Brett sprang to his feet with hellish fire, going on the offensive, and cutting retreating men to pieces. Some of the enemy fighters scrambled up tree branches as others, who were laying cover fire, began dropping to the forest floor like flies under fast and furious slaughter fire from Brett. He directed his fire upward cutting men from tree branches and treetops, splintering wood and foliage. A few yards ahead of him in the semi-darkness, a fighter threw a grenade. It landed on the forest floor about two feet in front of Brett, who saw it, dove at it in a flash, and, in one swift motion, grabbed and hurled it at the fleeing group of fighters. Half a dozen men flew to pieces in a blinding fireball explosion. Already flat on the forest floor, keeping his head low behind the cover of a tree trunk, Brett quickly reloaded his M4 rifle as he yelled into his headset mouthpiece while heavy firefights raged around him.

“Intruder Romeo to Control Delta: ambush on LZ! Fifty percent KIA! Mission aborted! Requesting immediate extraction! Over!”

A throaty voice quickly came through his headset. “Control Delta to Intruder Romeo: negative! Extraction not possible! You must cease transmission immediately. It’s an order! Godspeed, Intruder Romeo! Over and out!”

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“Control Delta! Fuck you!” Brett Collins cursed into his headset mouthpiece. Then, he sprang to his feet with fearsome rapid-fire, running through the forest with maddening rage, killing, dodging, knifing, blasting, terminating...

And then, he ran out of ammunition for his M4. He quickly pulled his sidearm, a Glock 9mm, and kept shooting and dodging as enemy fighters relentlessly popped up from behind every tree in front of him, and from his left, and right flanks as he pursued them, killing with precision single shots and two-shots.

Then a bullet hit him in the back, just below his bulletproof vest. He lurched forward and fell...

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Chapter 3

AS HIS BODY met the forest floor in the semi-darkness, his left hand pulled a pineapple grenade from his waist belt. He pulled off the grenade pin with his teeth as he was struck again, this time in the buttocks. A group of enemy fighters surged out of hiding a few yards ahead of him to finish him off. Brett threw the grenade at them, the Glock pistol still in his right hand. He buried his face in the forest bed as the explosive detonated in a thunder blast killing several of them.

Brett winced with pain as he quickly dragged himself up, but fell again as an AK-47 stuttered from his left flank, putting three bullets in his left arm, just above the elbow. The shooter started sneaking closer to Brett's position. Brett fired a single shot through the foliage, hitting the shooter dead-on between the eyes. The man dropped to his knees and collapsed to the forest bed.

There was a momentary lull in the firefight around Brett, but sporadic gunfire still echoed

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through the forest from the landing zone area. Painfully, he dragged himself up with a grunt. He was in a bad shape—his back and buttocks were now drenched with his blood. The bullet holes in his left arm furiously dripped blood. He turned and began to limp agonizingly through the forest, heading back in the direction of the distant, weak, but on-going firefight at the landing zone.

He came upon a dying enemy fighter in his path, who roused slightly on the jungle floor. Brett raised his Glock and pulled the trigger to finish him off, but heard a familiar click sound.

“Fuck!” he cursed. “Now, I’m totally out of ammo. Good grief.” He re-holstered the pistol, and pulled his commando fighting knife from a scabbard on his waist belt as he limped along wincing with pain.

THE LANDING ZONE was being overrun. Dead bodies of Brett’s men and those of enemy fighters littered the clearing as the last two commandos left standing—and wounded—lunged at the enemies with fighting knives, having run out of ammo and grenades. The Colonel and his remaining fighters, about twenty men opened fire at almost pointblank killing the two men. They crumpled to the ground in the overkill.

And then, all was quiet...

The American mercenary and his foreign hired guns began slowly inspecting the eleven fallen CIA commandos, at times, using their feet to turn the

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bodies over and make certain they were dead. Standing over a body, a fighter called out in a heavy foreign accent, “Colonel! I think this one is pretending.”

At this moment, hiding in thick foliage outside the perimeter, Brett Collins flung his commando knife at the fighter. The cold steel blade darted through the air and buried itself deep in the fighter’s throat. He staggered backward, dropping his AK-47, and fell dead. The Colonel and his men reacted quickly; they turned and opened furious fire. Brett Collins was already tearing through the bushes in a painful, life-and-death zigzagging. He tripped over a stump and fell. Bullets puffed off dirt and foliage around him and zipped past his head in close calls as he rolled onto his feet in the semi-darkness. Wincing and grunting with pain, he tore through the jungle growth. Several yards behind him, the Colonel and his fighters mounted a hot pursuit; some of the men reloaded their rifles without stopping as they gave chase.

Brett made a sharp turn in the jungle, disturbing a swarm of fireflies; he tore through with unbearable pain and suddenly came upon a swamp river infested with over-grown crocodiles. He stopped abruptly at the river’s edge, almost falling over headlong. “Fuck!” he cursed. Six of the large crocs scuttled toward him with lightning speed. Two of them rushed out of the water as Brett leapt into the air with a grunt and caught a tree branch high enough, as both crocs swung their open jaws to bite off his legs. More of the crocs rushed out of the river

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excitedly, and began gathering under the tree. Perched precariously on the tree branch, Brett glanced over his shoulder in the semi darkness. He could see his pursuers closing in.

He was trapped.

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Chapter 4

DRAGGING HIMSELF HIGH up the tree limb as fast as he could, and at about 12 feet above the crocodile-invested river, Brett began painstakingly crossing by leaping from one connecting tree branch to another in a heart-stopping high-wire act. Not far behind him, his pursuers stopped dead in their tracks as they came upon the crocodiles. They opened fire on the reptiles.

AT SUNRISE, THE sub-Saharan tropical jungle brightened up as rays of sunshine streaked through the jungle canopy and penetrated all the way to the forest bed. The cries of wildlife harmonized with the gushing resonance of a magnificent waterfall crashing down the side of a 200-foot, vertical cliff that was covered with lush, evergreen foliage. Soaking wet from head to toe, and barely alive, Brett Collins found himself at the foot of the waterfall. He'd been drifting in and out of consciousness for some time now. He'd lost too much blood. Extremely

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weak and dying, he crawled with difficulty, inching away toward dry land. He had struggled and stumbled through the wilderness for several miles through the night, successfully evading his pursuers. But now, he was lost in the middle of nowhere, and was quickly losing his cognition. No search-and-rescue aircraft was hovering overhead. No sign of an approaching and friendly search party beating through the jungle either. *I'm fucked!* From jungle treetops around him, colorful birds and a school of baboons observing him cried animatedly.

An adult leopard napping on a nearby tree branch became alerted. The big cat turned its head in Brett's direction, saw him, and promptly descended from the tree, leaping into nearby foliage. Dazed and shivering from head to toe, Brett Collins was vaguely aware of the predator. By now, he'd managed to drag himself to dry land, but was too sick and exhausted to continue.

The leopard started moving very slowly through thick foliage that framed the open clearing, stalking him in a semi-circle. Brett lay face down in the undergrowth and fought desperately to stay awake, but he lost consciousness again.

Suddenly, the leopard was standing directly behind him, only about two yards away in the clearing. The hungry cat glanced around. Then, in self-assured strides, it began to close in...

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