

Atria Books
Proudly Presents

Full Black
by BRAD THOR

Turn the page for a preview of *Full Black* . . .

In the clandestine community, the most sensitive classified assignments are referred to as “Black Operations.”

Few suspect, and even fewer realize, that there is a darker side to black operations. These missions are born in the shadows. They are not classified or recognized. They simply don’t exist.

They are Full Black.

Ex Umbra—

“From the Shadows”

CHAPTER 1

SWEDISH COUNTRYSIDE
NEAR UPPSALA

His timing had been perfect. Swerving back into the lane at the last possible second, he watched in his rearview mirror as the white Skoda Fabia behind him careened off the road and slammed into a large tree.

Applying his brakes, he pulled off the road and stepped out of his vehicle. The air smelled of spruce and spilled gasoline. The woman from the passenger side joined him. They needed to move fast.

Half their work had already been done for them. The terrorist in the Skoda's passenger seat had not been wearing his seat belt. He was already dead.

The driver was trying to unbuckle himself when Scot Harvath arrived at his window. He was cursing at him in Arabic from inside. Harvath removed a spark plug from his pocket and used it to smash the man's window.

Grasping the terrorist's head, Harvath gave it a sharp twist and broke his neck. Gently, he guided the dead driver's chin down to his chest.

The final passenger was a young Muslim man seated in the back of the car who had begun screaming. As Riley Turner opened his door she could see he had wet himself. Painting his chest with the integrated laser sight of her Taser, she pulled the trigger.

The compressed nitrogen propulsion system ejected two barbed probes and embedded them into the young man's flesh. The insulated wires that led back to the weapon delivered a crackling pulse of electricity that incapacitated his neuromuscular capabilities.

Yanking open the opposite door, Harvath steered clear of the probes as he pulled the man from the vehicle and laid him on the ground. Once he had the man's hands Flex-Cuffed behind his back, Harvath removed a roll of duct tape and placed a piece over his mouth. Producing a pair of pliers, Harvath snatched out the probes. The man winced and let out a cry of pain from behind his gag. As he did so, Harvath looked up to see a pearl gray Opel minivan approaching.

The van pulled parallel with the crash scene and slowed to a stop. The sliding door opened and a man in his midtwenties stepped out into a puddle of transmission fluid and broken glass.

The young operative's name was Sean Chase. He was the product of an American father and an Egyptian mother. His features were such that Arabs saw him as Arab and Westerners took him for one of their own. The question was, would the members of the Uppsala cell accept him as well?

Chase was Harvath's ultimate listening device, and he was going to switch places with the young Muslim man from the backseat, Mansoor Aleem. Mansoor and the Uppsala cell were the only link they had to a string of terrorist attacks that had targeted Americans in Europe and the United States. And as bloody as those attacks had been, they were supposedly nothing compared to what the plotters truly had in mind.

Subbing Chase for Mansoor was the most crucial, and the most dangerous, part of the assignment. According to the intelligence they'd been able to gather, only two cell members knew what Mansoor actually looked like. They were friends of his uncle's, a terrorist by the name of Aazim Aleem. They had been dispatched to Arlanda airport in Stockholm to collect Mansoor and return him to their safe house two hours north. Thanks to Harvath, they were both now dead.

Harvath's team had had them under surveillance since they had arrived at the airport. The driver had made only one phone call, and that was after they had picked up Mansoor and were leaving the airport. Harvath felt confident that call had been to the Uppsala cell confirming that they had picked up their guest.

Harvath pulled the young Muslim to his feet and slammed him up against the van. Drawing his Taurus pistol, he placed it under the young man's chin and peeled the tape from across his mouth. "You have seen what we did to your colleagues?"

Mansoor Aleem was trembling. Slowly, he nodded his head.

While his uncle was a very, very bad guy, as were the two dead terrorists slumped in the Skoda, Mansoor Aleem had been on the cyber side of the jihad. That didn't mean he wasn't just as guilty as the men who pulled triggers, planted bombs, or blew themselves up. He was guilty as hell. He was also a potential treasure trove of information, having run a lot of the IT for Aazim Aleem's operations. Harvath had no doubt they'd be able to download a ton from him. But first, he needed to make sure he wasn't sending Chase into a trap.

"We know about the Uppsala cell," said Harvath. "We want you to take us to them."

Mansoor stammered, trying to find his words. "I—I can't."

"What do you mean you can't?" Harvath demanded.

"I don't know where they are."

Harvath jabbed the muzzle of his weapon further up into the soft tissue under the man's chin. Mansoor's eyes began to water. "Don't bullshit me, Mansoor. We know everything you are doing."

"But I *don't* know," he said emphatically. "I was just supposed to get on the plane. That's all. That's why they picked me up at the airport. I don't know where they were taking me."

Harvath studied the younger man's face for any telltale signs that he was lying. As far as he could surmise, the man was under duress, but he

wasn't lying. "I want a list of all the cell members. Right now."

"What cell?"

Harvath pushed the gun up harder, causing Mansoor to gag.

"I only knew the two men in the car," he said as his eyes drifted toward the wreck. "But they're dead."

"You're lying to me, Mansoor," said Harvath.

"I'm *not* lying to you."

"I want you to describe all of the other cell members to me. Ages, backgrounds, all of it."

"I don't know!" Mansoor insisted. "You keep asking me questions I cannot answer! The only two people I know in all of this country are dead! You killed them!"

With so little time available to them, that was as good as Harvath was going to get right now. Patting down Mansoor, he found his wallet and tossed it to Chase. He then went through his pockets and removed everything else.

Chase already had a U.K. passport, with his picture, issued in Mansoor's name. He also had a driving permit, ATM card, two credit cards, and a host of pocket litter and assorted paraphernalia that would make him even more believable.

Chase fished through the handful of items Harvath had taken from his prisoner, particularly his boarding pass, London Tube card, and house keys.

Popping the lid of the small trunk, the young operator opened the suitcase and quickly studied its

contents. He wouldn't be taking the bag with him, but knowing what was inside would give him a little more insight into the man whose personality he was about to assume.

When Chase was done, he zipped up the case, closed the lid, looked at Riley Turner, and said, "Let's get this over with."

Turner approached and unrolled a small surgical kit. Pulling out a syringe, she began to prep an anesthetic.

Chase shook his head. "I appreciate the thought, but I'll pass on the Botox."

"As you wish," replied Turner as she gestured for him to sit down on the backseat. "This is going to hurt."

The young intelligence operator beckoned her closer. "I can take it. Don't worry."



Turner swept back his dark hair and then abraded his forehead with a piece of sandpaper. To the man's credit, he sat there stoically, but in all fairness, that was the easy part. Next, Turner removed her scalpel. Placing it at the young man's hairline, she dug it in and cut a short, craggy line.

Chase immediately sucked through his clenched teeth as the blood began to flow down into his eyes. Turner handed him a handkerchief.

"God, that hurts."

"I warned you," she replied.

Having secured Mansoor in the van, Harvath came back over and gathered up a handful of broken glass. Turner took it from him and sprinkled



pieces into Chase's hair, as well as the folds of his clothing.

Harvath patted down the dead driver, looking for his cell phone. When he located it, he removed it from the terrorist's pocket, tossed it to Chase, and said, "Showtime."



CHAPTER 2

Mustafa Karami had not been expecting another call from Waqar. Waqar was supposed to be driving. *Nafees was to send a text message when they got close to Uppsala.* Something must have gone wrong. Karami answered his phone with trepidation.

“Please, you must help me,” said a distraught voice.

“Who is this?” Karami demanded.

“Mansoor.”

“Why are you calling from this number?”

“There’s been an accident. I don’t know what to do.”

Karami was very serious about operational security. He didn’t like speaking on cell phones. “Where are your traveling companions?”

“I think they’re both dead.”

“*Dead?*” Karami repeated.

“There was another car—we swerved and then our car hit a tree.”

“What kind of car?”

“Who cares what kind of car? Waqar and Nafees are dead.”

The young man was bordering on hysterical. Karami tried to calm him down. “Are you injured?” he asked.

“No. I mean, I don’t know. I hit my head. There’s some blood.”

Karami needed to bring him in. “Is the vehicle operable?”

“No,” replied the young man.

“Were there any witnesses? Have the police been called?”

“I don’t know.”

“Where are you?” asked Karami.

“I don’t know that either. What am I supposed to do? Are you going to come get me or not?”

Karami forgave the boy his insolence. He was very likely in shock. He adopted an even more soothing tone. “I want you to tell me what you see around you, so I can discern where you are.”

Chase rattled off several of the landmarks nearby.

“Okay,” said Karami as he removed a map from his desk. “That’s good. I know where you are. I’m going to send two of the brothers to pick you up. There’s a village less than three kilometers up the road. As you enter it you’ll see a grocery market on your left. Just beyond that is a soccer pitch. Wait there and the brothers will come for you.”

“Praise be to Allah,” said Chase.

Karami disconnected the call. Turning to two of his men, he relayed what had happened and dispatched them to pick up Mansoor Aleem.

When the men had gone, he turned to his most devoted acolyte, Sabah. Sabah was a large, battle-hardened Palestinian. In his previous life, before becoming a mujahadeen, he had been a corrupt police officer in the West Bank town of Ramallah.

“I want you to find this accident, Sabah, and I want you to make sure that it was in fact an accident. Do you understand?”

Sabah nodded.

“Good,” said Karami in response. “Whatever you learn, you tell no one else but me. Understood?”

Once again, Sabah nodded.

“We cannot afford accidents. Not now. Not with everything that has happened. We can only trust each other. No one else.” With a wave of his hand, Karami ordered him out. “Now go.”

Maybe he was too paranoid, but so many of their plans had been undone that Mustafa Karami was suspicious of everything and *everyone*.

He tried to tell himself that Sabah would get to the bottom of it. It was a small country road that was not very often traveled. Karami had helped select the route himself. If the accident scene was undisturbed, Sabah would be able to ascertain what had happened. If the police or bystanders were already there, there would be nothing he could do. He was too smart to risk exposure.

If that was the case, Karami would have to con-

duct his own investigation. It would begin with Mansoor Aleem himself. Until proven otherwise, he could not risk trusting even the nephew of a great man like Aazim Aleem. Anyone could be corrupted. Anyone could be gotten to.

Fulfilling their final obligation was all that mattered now. Karami had sworn an oath. He would stick to that oath and he would not allow anything or anyone to get in his way.

He was reflecting on whether or not it was a good idea to bring Mansoor to the actual safe house or find somewhere else for him to remain temporarily, when the Skype icon on his laptop bounced.

He had been sent a message from the man whom he served—the sheikh in Qatar.

“Everything is in place?” asked the sheikh.

“Everything is in place,” typed Karami.

“Stay ready,” replied the sheikh. “You will be called to move soon.” And with that, he was gone.

Karami refocused his mind on Mansoor and decided that for the time being, he would be kept elsewhere, away from the safe house and the rest of the cell. There was too much at stake.

The man who called himself the “Sheikh from Qatar” closed his laptop with his liver spotted hands and looked out the window of his cavernous apartment. He had quite literally a twenty-million-dollar view of the Manhattan skyline. It was stunning. Even at this predawn hour.

He had always made it a policy to be up before the markets. Despite his advancing age, he found he needed less sleep, not more.

As he privately swilled astronomically expensive vitamin cocktails and had daily exotic hormone and stem cell injections, he publicly told people he'd had abundant reserves of energy ever since he was a boy and credited genetics and his impeccable constitution as the source of his vigor.

Such was the Janus-faced character of James Standing. Even his name was a lie.

Born Lev Bronstein to Romanian Jewish parents, he was sent from Europe to live with relatives in Argentina at the outset of World War II. His parents did not survive the death camps.

At thirteen, he ran away from his Argentinean relatives, renounced his Judaism and changed his name to José Belmonte—an amalgamation of two world-famous Spanish bullfighters at the time, José Gómez Ortega and Juan Belmonte García.

The newly minted Belmonte found his way to Buenos Aires, where he took a job as a bellboy in a high-end hotel. Thanks to his proficiency in languages, he started filling in on the switchboard at night, eventually moving into the position full-time. And that's when he began to build his fortune.

Belmonte, né Bronstein, listened in on all of the hotel's telephone conversations, especially those of its wealthiest guests. At fifteen years old, he entered the stock market. By eighteen, he was polishing his

English, and at twenty he changed his name yet again and moved to America.

Standing had been the name of a handsome American guest with a gorgeous, buxom, blond American wife who visited the hotel in Buenos Aires every winter. To Belmonte, they looked like movie stars and represented everything he felt the world owed him. Using the first name of one of his favorite American writers, James Fenimore Cooper, he adopted the Standing name as his surname, and James Standing was born.

He immigrated to America, where he parlayed his substantial nest egg and penchant for trading on insider information into one of the greatest financial empires the world had ever seen.

Now, from his gilded perch overlooking the capital of world finance, he read all the papers every morning before most of the city was even awake.

Regardless of his ritual, he would have been up early today anyway. In fact, he hadn't been able to sleep. He was waiting for a very important phone call.

Someone, to put it in vulgar street terminology, had fucked with the wrong guy. That "wrong guy" being James Standing. And the someone who had fucked with the wrong guy was about to be taught a very painful and very *permanent* lesson.

In fact, it would be the ultimate lesson and would stand as a subtle reminder to the rest of his enemies that there were certain people in life who were not to be crossed. Not that Standing would take credit for what was about to happen. That

would be incredibly foolish. Better to simply let people assume. The mystery of whether he'd been involved or not would only add to the aura of his considerable power.

Though he'd gotten to where he was by breaking all the rules, he still needed to appear as if he was playing by them—at least for a little while longer. But soon, America, like an old hotel on the Las Vegas strip, was going to be brought down in a controlled detonation. And when that happened, the rules would no longer apply to men like James Standing.