The Survivor

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Published by Bantam Press,
an imprint of The Random House Group Ltd

Extract

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Preface: These are the facts . . .

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

On 7 September 1997, General Alexander Lebed, former National Security Adviser to Russia's President Yeltsin, appeared on the prime-time American television news show *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 23 February 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 that: '[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 20 October 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 who are willing to perpetrate acts of violence to bring that end about'. In its section on 'Apocalyptic religious beliefs', it noted that: '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 that: '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.'

* * *

That much is true. Everything and everyone else in this book is pure fiction.

Prologue: March 1993

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 deep line that bisected his strong, dark brow suggested a determined fixity of purpose, and his clear green eyes conveyed a calm, almost chilly intelligence. A woollen 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 pre-flight inspection.

This apparently unimportant section of the

fuselage couldn't be reached from the cabin. So once the plane was airborne, whatever happened in the rear equipment bay, no one could do anything about it. Not that anything was supposed to happen there. 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 that held the hydraulic fluid that got pumped out through the system; the pipes that carried superheated, 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.

It was the air pipes that interested Carver. They were covered in thick silver-coloured cladding, held 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.

There was a TV on in the passenger lounge. The CNN reporter was 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, an undertone of barely restrained passion colouring his lyrical Irish brogue. 'The scenes are too appalling, too sickening. The charred and mutilated corpses of four hundred innocent women and children lie in 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

mean and flinty, narrow slits in wrinkled folds of leathery skin that seemed permanently screwed up against the glare of his native Texan sun. But he was letting his guard down now, 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 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 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.