

A soldier in full combat gear, including a helmet and a tactical vest, is seen from behind, walking away on a dirt path in a desert environment. The landscape is filled with scrubby bushes and several iconic Joshua trees. In the distance, a range of mountains is visible under a clear sky. The title text is overlaid on the top portion of the image.

DETACHMENT
SHADOW
STRIKE **21**

MIKE TAM

DETACHMENT 21

SHADOW
STRIKE

MIKE TAM



A FIRE DRAKE PRESS E-BOOK

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

Copyright © 2009 by Mike Tam

All rights reserved. This book, or parts thereof, may not be reproduced in any form without permission.

*For My Friends –
Who know who they are*

DETACHMENT 21
SHADOW
STRIKE

PROLOGUE

Somewhere on the Horn of Africa 0357 Hours (UTC+3)

When you're short on everything but the enemy, you're in a combat zone.

The unbidden snippet of military gallows humor crossed Staff Sergeant Ryan Cawley's mind as he hit the dirt; the sharp, distinctive cracks of Kalashnikov rifle fire thundering all around him. Mere minutes ago, he and his squad mates had been doing their job – training the local ethnic resistance forces how to fight and overthrow the corrupt military junta that had deposed the legitimate government and established their own hard-line dictatorship.

Now, at least half his squad was dead, the rebels were scattering like cockroaches from light, and he was alone with no cover and only a half mag in his rifle. Inwardly, he cursed himself for ever thinking it

might be okay to let the rebels keep watch by themselves. The fucking amateurs must have fallen asleep.

Belly-crawling over to the body of Captain Kenneth Drover – whose head had been reduced to a wet, bloody smear on the desert sand – he turned the body over and grabbed the last two full magazines from the dead man's chest rig, doing some quick mental math as he did so.

Seventy-two rounds divided by the entire junta's forces? Yeah, I'm fucked.

He strained to try and hear if any of his people were getting off return shots, but if they were, it was drowned out by the unrelenting wave of fire boxing them in.

Bullets tore up the ground in front of his face and he felt a warm, wet sting as something grazed his right cheek. He swore and wished he had a helmet. And a Kevlar vest. And hell, why not a tactical air strike too, while he was daydreaming anyway. As it was, he and the rest of his Special Forces A-team were dressed like locals in garish, ill-fitting shirts, torn slacks and worn-out open top sandals to better maintain their cover.

Fat lot of good that did, he thought bitterly in hindsight.

Digging himself in behind the captain's body and bringing his rifle up, he peered through the thermal weapon sight mounted on the top rail and scanned for targets, painfully aware that his limited ammunition meant he'd have to choose his targets carefully. Eventually, he came upon a pot-bellied man of seemingly average height crouched behind

an armored fighting vehicle, dressed in faded camouflage fatigues with a beret perched on his head. The pistol in his hand gave him away as an officer.

Taking careful aim, Cawley centered the sight's reticle over the officer's chest. Exhaling slowly, he squeezed the trigger and the rifle bucked, sending the man sprawling in the wake of a three-round burst. Without waiting for the man's fellow soldiers to get a fix on his position, Cawley pushed up and sprinted to a new position, dropping down again belly-first a few seconds later. Scanning the killing field once again, he saw no sign of the rebels or his squad mates, just bodies in the sand and several hundred junta soldiers closing in.

Fuck it. Live to fight another day.

He turned and ran.

* * *

Two days later, Cawley was beginning to wonder if he'd have been better off letting the paramilitaries kill him. Wandering alone through the African desert with no food, no more water and no idea which way he was heading... Well, his rifle, with a round in the chamber, was starting to look mighty friendly. Exhausted, he collapsed in the partial shade of a sand dune, spread-eagle on his back, welcoming the embrace of death.

It was then that he felt the wind begin to stir as if from the downwash of a chopper overhead. Seeing and hearing nothing, he dismissed it as merely a figment of his dehydrated imagination, until the

sand around him began to swirl, assaulting his eyes with a flurry of blinding grit. He brought one hand up to shield them, the other covering his nose and mouth.

When the dust subsided, he looked and found himself at the eye of the storm, a matte-black silhouette hovering directly overhead where the sun should have been. His brow creased slightly in puzzlement but at this point, he would have accepted Lucifer himself with open arms if it meant an end to his earthly suffering.

A hatch slid open on the side of the sleek, black carapace and a line was tossed out, followed by a khaki-clad figure fast-roping down towards him. Hitting the loose sand, the figure doffed its helmet to reveal a long frock of auburn hair. As the newcomer drew nearer, Cawley made out the face of a young woman – Caucasian and fiercely beautiful. An angel.

But why would an angel look so worried?

“Hey, you still with me?” She called, coming to a stop and dropping to her knees beside him.

American accent.

He parted his lips, his parched throat struggling for words.

“Hold on,” she said, reaching for something on her belt. Cool water washed over his lips and down his throat.

Grabbing greedily for the canteen, the woman pulled it away before his fingers could reach.

“Not so fast,” she said. “You’re severely dehydrated. Too much water now could send you into shock. Drink it slowly.” She handed the canteen

to him and he took it gratefully and had another sip.

“Who are you?” He managed finally in a dry croak.

“A friend,” she said. “Let’s get you home.”

He lay weakly in the sand and watched as a tubular metal basket was lowered from the chopper which, after he was safely strapped in, brought him aboard. The inside was windowless and dark, lit only by the glow from several flat panel computer monitors and instrument panels. Two other figures sat inside, opposite one another on folding bench-style seats. One, a black man with close-shaven hair and a neatly-trimmed goatee dressed similarly to the woman in khaki and olive drab, grinned over at his impassive companion who sat with his arms folded across his chest, eyes inscrutable behind opaque mirrored shades.

“Told ya we’d find him if we went this way,” the first man said. His companion said nothing, offering only a noncommittal shrug.

“How ya doin’, champ?” The man continued, turning to Cawley. “To be honest, I wasn’t so sure if you were gonna make it out this far.”

“That makes two of us,” Cawley said.

“You’re lucky we found you when we did,” the woman chimed in. “Dehydration aside, you were headed straight towards a junta-controlled highway.”

“So, I take it you’re not with them, then?” Cawley asked cautiously.

She smiled. “Like I said, we’re friends.”

“U.S. military?” He tried again.

Again, the patient smile. “That’s classified, sorry.”

Cawley managed a grin of his own. “Definitely U.S.

military, then.”

She laughed. “Either way, no need to worry. You’re in good hands and we’re taking you home.”

* * *

CHAPTER ONE

Magnitogorsk, Russia 2030 Hours (UTC+6)

“I can’t believe I let you talk me into volunteering for this,” Sergeant John Westmeyer said, nervously eyeing the loading crew as they maneuvered a supposedly shock-proof crate marked with various biohazard symbols in half a dozen languages into the bed of his armored truck, locking it down and cinching the straps tight.

Corporal Jason Brauch, his co-driver, laughed. “It’s only a Soviet-era bioweapon. What could possibly go wrong?”

Ever the superstitious type, Westmeyer shot him a baleful stare.

“Hey, I said it ironically,” Brauch said, putting up his hands, “C’mon. This is a milk-run.”

“I know,” Westmeyer sighed, “But still. That shit

was made to kill Americans, man. I'm not sure I like the thought of it rattling around in my back seat."

Brauch shrugged, jerking a thumb back over his shoulder in the same motion. "Whatever. As soon as this one's been decommissioned, it'll be one less thing in the world to worry about."

"I guess," Westmeyer agreed.

"Sarge, I need you to sign this," the loadmaster said as he approached, handing Westmeyer a pen and a clipboard with a hardcopy of the cargo manifest. He scribbled on the dotted line and handed the clipboard back to the loadmaster.

"Great, thanks. We're all good to go," the man said, walking away.

"I'll meet you over there," Brauch said.

"Sure," Westmeyer said, "Join you in a sec."

As Brauch jogged back to the truck, Westmeyer walked over to confer with the platoon sergeant in charge of providing their armed escort.

Dressed in a black polo shirt and jeans under body armor and cradling an assault rifle, his face hidden behind dark sunglasses and a full beard, the man looked every inch like how Westmeyer imagined a modern day pirate might. In reality, he and his entire squad, similarly equipped and attired, had been contracted by the Department of State from Scytheon Worldwide LLC to ensure that the convoy and its cargo made it unhindered to the disposal facility. If anyone tried to get in their way, Scytheon would be on hand to discourage that sort of behavior. The man turned as Westmeyer approached.

"We rollin' out?" He asked.

“Yeah,” Westmeyer said. “You guys got a copy of our route, right?”

The man patted the map pocket mounted front and center on his chest rig. “Right here where I won’t lose it.”

Westmeyer nodded. “Perfect. Get your birds spooled up. We’ll be out of here in five.”

The man nodded and headed off, he and his men boarding their three helicopters, each one painted black and gray with a single red stripe running the length of the body, separating the two colors. Westmeyer went to join Brauch in the truck’s cab, clambering up into the driver’s seat and buckling himself in. He turned the key and the engine roared to life. A light touch on the gas pedal and they were rolling out into the rapidly darkening evening.

* * *

Westmeyer threw all his weight against the wheel and the truck lurched hard to the right, swinging around into a tight, evasive turn. The headlights had revealed two pickup trucks blocking the road up ahead, along with a handful of men armed with what looked like RPGs.

“Banshee, Banshee, this is Mailman!” Westmeyer called over the radio to their helicopter escorts. “We’ve got a roadblock up ahead! Armed hostiles! Can you help us out, over?”

Silence.

“Banshee, Banshee, come in, over!” He tried again.

They’d been less than an hour away from the

disposal facility, almost home free when all hell broke loose. The force of the turn flattened him against the window and he gritted his teeth as he struggled to bring the vehicle back under control.

“Shit.” Maybe the escort choppers had been shot down already. He turned to Brauch. “We may be on our own down here.”

The truck jarred violently just as Brauch was reaching for his rifle. Westmeyer flicked his eyes to the side mirror and saw flames dancing inside the wheel well.

“We’ve been hit,” he reported, surprised by the calm in his own voice while fighting the truck’s diminished response. The truck was equipped with run-flat tires but he knew they couldn’t stand up to RPGs. He swore.

Then, up ahead, Westmeyer saw the most beautiful sight in the world – a Scytheon helicopter racing towards them out of the darkness.

“Hooah! About damn time you got here!” He called over the radio, “Bring the rain!”

There was a flash of light and a puff of smoke as the chopper unleashed a pair of rockets from the pod mounted to its airframe. Westmeyer watched, enthralled, as they streaked in, rapidly shedding altitude until...

“Oh, shi—”

The explosion and rollover slammed Westmeyer’s head against the dashboard hard enough that the world went black.

The Scytheon helicopters set down next to the scorched furrow in the ground that the truck's uncontrolled skid had raked, mowing down trees and undergrowth in its path while it plowed to a stop. Emerging from the chopper in full Level A hazmat gear, the platoon sergeant grimly surveyed the wreckage. It was a shame that two American soldiers had died, but the government had refused to allow anyone other than military personnel to drive the truck, so Scytheon had to stand back and content themselves with merely providing air support. Still, all things considered, the op had gone off without a hitch.

As his squad closed in on the remains of the trailer, each man clad in the same self-contained protective gear and toting cutting torches, he felt a slight sense of trepidation, as anyone might when confronted with a weapon that could easily wipe out a city. Still strapped securely to its pallet, the olive drab crate sat waiting for them as the doors creaked open.

Pandora's box, the sergeant thought.

It didn't appear to be damaged in any way but they still handled it with infinite care, then undid the latches and opened the lid to check on its contents.

Inside, secured in rows by wooden skids and steel strapping were twenty-four 152mm artillery shells, each one with a payload containing a variant of the deadly Marburg virus as a dried, inhalable dust. When they were sure none of the shells had been dented, cracked or otherwise compromised, they closed the lid and latched it securely before taking off their suits.

As they loaded the crate onto one of the helicopters, the sergeant pulled out a scrambled radio handset and thumbed the transmit button.

“Banshee to Chimera, the package is secure.”

* * *

CHAPTER TWO

Location Unknown 1506 Hours (UTC-7)

The stealth-modified helicopter touched down smoothly on a dark earth-colored concrete platform, its sound-dampened rotors not making so much as a whirr as they spun down to a stop. After ten hours in the air and at least two in-flight refuelings, Cawley was nearly blinded by the harsh sunlight as he emerged from the chopper's hatch and sank his boots into the scrub brush encrusted sand.

Looking around, he was slightly dismayed to find himself still in the desert, though one that looked different enough that he was sure they hadn't just been circling the same spot for the better part of a day. The auburn-haired woman, whose name he'd learned was Cantrell, bounded out the hatch and

landed lithely a few feet away, stretching to work the kinks out of her legs and back.

“Can I ask where we are?” Cawley said, “Or is that—”

“Classified,” she finished for him with an apologetic smile. “But not for long if the colonel decides to bring you into the fold. C’mon.”

She waved for him to follow and they set off in the direction of a low sand-colored building just barely visible about a hundred meters away.

As he walked, a low rumble coming from behind made him turn around. He saw that the ground in front of the helicopter and landing pad had tilted upward about thirty degrees and where there had been nothing but sand and Joshua trees just a few moments earlier, there now lay a cavernous ramp, framed at the lower end by a pair of heavy-looking steel blast doors which lumbered open slowly.

Cawley watched in rapt fascination as the doors opened fully and their chopper rolled down into the waiting maw. Then, the doors closed behind it and the cover was lowered, trundling shut to conceal all evidence of its presence. Even the dark earth color of the landing pad was fading in uneven and splotchy sections, as though water was evaporating from its surface to return it to its natural sand-colored state.

“You coming, or what?” Cantrell called from further up ahead. Cawley turned back to her.

“Uh, yeah!” He called after her, jogging to catch up.

A blessed wave of air conditioned coolness met them as Cantrell led him into what appeared to be

an administration and support building of some kind. They walked down a maze of pristine, white-painted corridors, each one more or less identical to the last. Cantrell finally stopped in front of a black metal door with a frosted glass window inset into the upper half and knocked smartly on the glass.

“Come in,” came a voice from the other side.

Grabbing the pewter handle, Cantrell pushed the door open and led him into an office.

Inside, it was tastefully furnished in dark wood and leather, framed photographs and medals decorating the walls. It emanated a sense of warmth and comfort that belied the bleak austerity of the corridors. Behind a large wooden desk, seated in front of a computer screen and keyboard sat a middle-aged man dressed in unmarked fatigues.

Cawley snapped to attention and saluted when he noted the polished silver oak leaf on the beret that sat on the man’s desk. Cantrell assumed a parade rest stance.

“Cantrell reporting with Staff Sergeant Cawley as ordered, colonel,” she said.

The colonel nodded to Cantrell. “Thank you. You’re dismissed.”

Cantrell took her leave and the colonel turned his attention to Cawley, still holding his salute.

“As you were, sergeant,” the colonel said, returning the salute. “How are you feeling?”

“Fine, sir,” Cawley replied. “Any word from my unit, sir?”

The colonel smiled grimly. “Right to business, I see. I like that. You’d better take a seat, sergeant. I’ll fill you in.”

Cawley seated himself in one of the chairs opposite the colonel's desk and eyed him expectantly.

"I'm Lieutenant Colonel Steinhauer," the colonel said, "And it's my sad duty to inform you that you are the only survivor of ODA 5513." He paused for a moment to let that sink in. "Frankly, I'm amazed that you survived at all. We received reports nineteen hours ago that the National Liberation Army had mobilized towards some remote location in the middle of the desert. By the time SOCOM was ready to admit that yes, there were American forces operating in the area, it was all over but the shouting."

Cawley swallowed, hard. "I see."

Steinhauer nodded. "When Team Two radioed in saying they'd found a survivor, I asked them to bring you here so that maybe you could help confirm the identities of the bodies we recovered. You think you can do that, sergeant?"

"Yes, sir."

"Alright then," Steinhauer said, levering himself out of his chair. "Follow me."

The colonel led Cawley down another series of corridors until they stopped in front of an elevator. Steinhauer bent forward and put his face up to an iris scanner, then swiped a keycard and punched a series of numbers into the pad under the scanner. A few moments later, the doors opened and the two of them stepped into the elevator. They went down.

They emerged into a brightly-lit unpainted concrete hallway. The floor was tiled in black linoleum with a pattern of raised discs embossed

into the surface that dampened the sound of their footsteps as they made their way along.

“What is this place?” Cawley asked as they emerged into the main hangar where a modest fleet of unmarked aircraft were being serviced. Four massive elevator platforms, one nestled in each corner of the hangar deck, towered high above their heads, no doubt leading up to the hidden ramp where Cawley had disembarked his chopper, and possibly others like it.

“We call it Blacksite Umbra,” Steinhauer said, leading Cawley across the hangar towards another corridor on the opposite side.

“And who’s ‘we,’ sir?” Cawley asked, seizing his chance. “I’ve been asking but nobody’ll give me an answer.”

Steinhauer smiled slyly. “We’re nobody, sergeant. Officially, we don’t exist. You won’t find us in anyone’s books, but if you did, we might be listed under JSOC’s Special Mission Units as Joint Combat Applications Detachment 21.”

The colonel led Cawley deeper into the bowels of Blacksite Umbra and along the way, they passed locker rooms, living quarters, a briefing room, training facilities – a small, self-sustaining city, from the looks of it. By the time they arrived at the morgue, Cawley had almost forgotten why he’d been brought down to begin with. He sobered up, putting a lid on his awe as Steinhauer walked over to the multi-door cold chamber and pulled out eleven drawers, one after the other. A blanket-draped form lay atop each of the metal racks and Cawley pulled back the cloth over each face in turn.

“Marr. Acharya. Perez. Oldfield. Wong. Stojanovic. Drover. Payne. Lewis. Ingram. Kashmiri.” He turned to Steinhauer. “All present and accounted for, sir.”

Steinhauer nodded. “Thank you, sergeant.”

“What’ll happen to them now, sir?” Cawley asked, swallowing a lump in his throat.

“Their next of kin will be notified and their bodies released if they’re claimed, of course.” Steinhauer said. “Now, let me escort you back up to the hangar. A chopper’s waiting to take you back to Fort Campbell.”

“What?” Cawley blinked. “Just like that, sir?”

Steinhauer shrugged. “Were you expecting a pajama party?”

“But... all the things I’ve seen?” A twisted knot of dread formed in Cawley’s stomach. “Wait a sec, that chopper’s not going to conveniently crash and kill me once I’m aboard, is it?”

The colonel laughed and shook his head. “No, sergeant, that’s not how we do things around here. I’m sure you can keep a secret, anyway. Besides, uttering a word of this to anyone is tantamount to treason. You’re not a traitor, are you, sergeant?”

“No, sir.”

“Good.” Steinhauer said, apparently satisfied, and headed for the door.

“But in that case, I want in, sir.”

The colonel stopped and turned back to Cawley. “I beg your pardon?”

“This unit, sir. Where do I sign up?”

Steinhauer eyed him askance. “You don’t even know what it is you’re volunteering for, sergeant.”

“Doesn’t matter, sir,” Cawley said, having fit the

pieces together, "I still want in."

This whole thing, he'd realized, was an elaborate recruitment campaign – what with that thing Cantrell had said earlier about bringing him into the fold and Steinhauer personally giving him the grand tour of the facility instead of just showing him photos of the bodies while the two of them were still seated in his office. It was obvious that they wanted him, and he was definitely interested, but they were waiting for him take the initiative. They only wanted volunteers.

The colonel fought back a derisive snort. "Well, what makes you think we'll take you? You're just overcoming a bout of dehydration, possibly even heat stroke. You've got severe sunburns. Hell, it could take a month or more before you're back to anywhere near fighting condition. We're the blackest of black ops with a global reach and presidential sanction to do whatever is necessary to protect this country. We live in the shadows and get no recognition. We're America's attack dog that's kept half-starved in its cage. What makes you think you can hack it?"

Cawley grinned. *Give the man an award.* "Try me, sir."

* * *

CHAPTER THREE

Blacksite Umbra 1648 Hours (UTC-7)

After being offered a shower, a sandwich and a clean uniform to wear, Cawley finally felt human again. Steinhauer had left him in the company of Sergeant Major Miles Whittaker, whom Cawley recognized from the chopper ride over, to see to some other urgent business. Given instructions to show Cawley the ropes, Whittaker had administered a few oral and written evaluations, had him perform some physical tests, then led him to the shoot house and gotten him set up with a full combat loadout.

“You wanna be a part of this outfit, you gotta show us what you’re made of,” Whittaker said.

Cawley laughed. “Watch and learn.”

Whittaker smirked. “Alright, then you’re probably gonna need this,” he said, handing Cawley a rifle

and magazine from the locker behind him. “Now, here’s the deal. We’ve got your standard breach-and-clear scenario set up for you in there. Neutralize the hostiles, headshots only, and don’t touch the hostages. Par time is thirty-five seconds. Think you can do that?”

“Absolutely.”

Whittaker shrugged. “We’ll see about that. Clock starts as soon as you breach the door. Shooter ready! Range is hot!”

Cawley slid the magazine into the weapon and worked the charging handle, chambering a round before stepping up to the door. He let out a breath as he flicked off the safety, then spun and mule-kicked the door. It flew open, slamming into the wall and bouncing back but Cawley was already inside, weapon up and scanning. He found himself in the foyer of a mockup apartment unit with the kitchen to his left, a corridor to his right leading presumably to the bedrooms and the living room directly ahead, fully furnished with a couple of ratty couches and a television set. This, in and of itself, was not out of the ordinary but what made Cawley hesitate for those first few crucial seconds was the sight of two live humans kicking back on the couch, watching TV.

When he finally snapped out of his temporary paralysis, he noticed the five armed mannequins arranged around the two live role-players. The rifle bucked in his hands as he engaged, taking down each hostile before moving into the kitchen. A quick search and assess revealed no threats so he moved on to the corridor leading to the bedrooms. The hallway was narrow so Cawley let the rifle fall on its

sling and seamlessly transitioned to his sidearm. Two open doorways lay to the left with a single closed door at the far end. Moving quickly through the first door, Cawley cleared each corner before moving on to the next room, repeating the procedure and finding nothing. Wasting no time, he kicked down the last door and entered to find two more hostile mannequins, which he quickly dispatched.

“Clear!” He called before engaging the weapon’s safety and making his way back to the foyer.

“Shooter, unload and show clear!” Whittaker said, entering the apartment. “Thirty-four point nine five seconds. You like to keep it down to the wire, don’t you?”

“I wasn’t expecting anyone to be home,” Cawley said, gesturing towards the two grinning role-players.

Whittaker laughed. “Yeah, that usually fucks with the new guys. But we train the way we fight. No mistakes. Out there, a screw-up’ll cost you a lot more than a time penalty. You want to try it again?”

Before Cawley could answer, the PA system pinged twice, an amplified voice blaring over speakers throughout the base.

“Attention! Attention! All field team personnel report to Ops Center on the double. Repeat, all field team personnel report to Ops Center on the double.”

Without a moment’s hesitation, Whittaker turned and sprinted out the door with Cawley and the two role-players following close behind. They jogged through the corridors and up a flight of perforated

metal stairs to a large circular glass-walled room that overlooked the main hangar. Computer displays covered every available surface and a ring of technicians sat monitoring each one.

At the center of the room, Colonel Steinhauer stood below a giant, metal framework suspended from the ceiling with screens mounted all around it for 360° visibility. Cantrell, the mirrorshades guy and several others who Cawley didn't know were already present.

Steinhauer turned as Cawley and the others entered, catching his eye before turning to Whittaker.

"Is he cleared?" Steinhauer asked, pointing at Cawley.

"Your call, sir," Whittaker said. "I've still got him running the gauntlet but he's doin' alright."

Steinhauer considered that for a moment. "Okay, he can stay," he said before turning back to face the others.

"Roughly eight hours ago, the Army Transportation Corps lost contact with one of their convoys, callsign Mailman," Steinhauer began. "Their mission was to transport a crate of Soviet-era weaponized bioagent for proper decommissioning and disposal."

He picked up a remote control and pressed a button. The screens overhead blinked to life and displayed a satellite map of Russia, quickly zooming in on a region to the south.

"They left from Magnitogorsk at 2045 hours local time," the colonel continued, "En route to the Chemical Weapons Destruction Facility in

Shchuchye. They never made it. From overhead satellite imaging, we managed to locate the crash site and a team was sent in to recover the crate.”

“Let me guess,” one of the role-players behind Cawley piped up, “No sign of it.”

“Got it in one,” Steinhauer answered. “Nor is there any sign of the three-bird helicopter escort assigned to the mission. Worse, whatever happened to that plane occurred during a satellite changeover, so we have no visuals, infrared or otherwise.”

He looked around at all those assembled. “Ladies and gentlemen, I don’t have to tell you that we are facing a global crisis of epic proportions. The President has authorized me to send a team out to locate and recover the bioagent. We’re free to employ whatever methods we deem necessary to secure it and return it to U.S. military control. Are there any volunteers?”

There wasn’t a man or woman in the room whose hand wasn’t raised.

“That’s what I thought,” Steinhauer said, smiling proudly. “Alright, people, let’s get to work!”

* * *

If you enjoyed this sample from *Detachment 21: Shadow Strike*, would you consider giving me some feedback and/or constructive criticism? It would help me grow and develop as a writer and would also be greatly appreciated. You can e-mail your feedback to:

mike [at] firedrakecreative [dot] com

Thanks for your time!

- Mike Tam