

TOM CLANCY

ENEMY CONTACT

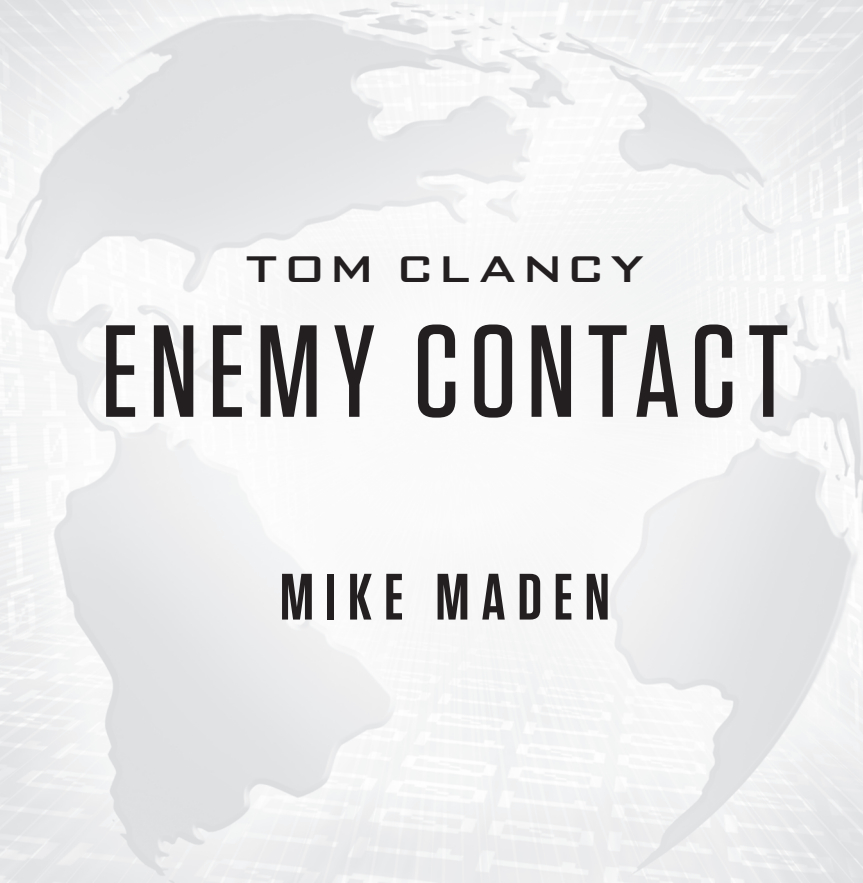
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MIKE MADEN

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Aut inveniam viam aut faciam.
I shall find a way or make one.

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

THE WHITE HOUSE

Jack Ryan: President of the United States

Scott Adler: Secretary of state

Mary Pat Foley: Director of national intelligence

Robert Burgess: Secretary of defense

Arnold “Arnie” van Damm: President Ryan’s chief of staff

THE CAMPUS

Gerry Hendley: Director of The Campus and Hendley Associates

John Clark: Director of operations

Domingo “Ding” Chavez: Senior operations officer

Jack Ryan, Jr.: Operations officer and senior analyst for Hendley Associates

Gavin Biery: Director of information technology

Lisanne Robertson: Director of transportation

CLOUDSERVE, INC.

Elias Dahm, CEO

Amanda Watson, senior design engineer and head of security for the Intelligence Community Cloud

Lawrence Fung: Watson’s number two and supervisor of the Red Team IC Cloud hacking group

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

OTHER CHARACTERS

Liliana Pilecki: agent with Poland's Agencja Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego (ABW)

Senator Deborah Dixon (R): Chair, Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Aaron Gage: husband of Deborah Dixon and CEO and founder of Gage Capital Partners

Christopher Gage: stepson of Deborah Dixon and CEO of Gage Group International

Rick Sands: former member 75th Ranger Regiment

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PARTIDO DE BAHÍA BLANCA, ARGENTINA

He was a Scorpion.

First Ensign Salvio was never more proud of that fact than now. He checked his watch.

Three minutes to target.

Like his men, he was kitted out in body armor, a leg-holstered Glock 17 pistol, an M4A1 carbine, and a ballistic ATE Kevlar helmet with night-vision goggles.

The noise of the whining twin turboshafts of the EC145 Eurocopter filled the dimly lit cabin. His platoon of special operators of Grupo Alacrán—Scorpion Group—was the best unit in the Gendarmería Nacional Argentina. Maybe the whole country.

Grupo Alacrán was Argentina's primary antiterror weapon. Like Israel's Yamam—the elite police unit with whom Salvio's team had trained in the Ayalon Valley—his men were the bleeding tip of the spear.

Salvio flashed three fingers to his trusted number two, Sergeant-Adjutant Acuña, who acknowledged with a nod and a feral grin. The two of them cut their teeth fighting armed Mafia gangs and Islamic radicals in La Triple Frontera, the border region where

Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina collided. Long a bastion of drugs, guns, and human trafficking by international and indigenous gangs, the region's violence and crime grew worse each year. The Lebanon civil war drove tens of thousands of Lebanese to the region, and with them, Hezbollah.

And with Hezbollah came Iran.

Hell, even Osama bin Laden and Khalid Sheik Mohammed had visited La Triple Frontera years ago.

His government couldn't root them out. Couldn't even stem the tide. But after OBL appeared on scene, American money and technology flooded in and brought the war on terror to La Triple Frontera. Kept the cancer contained for a few years. But then the Americans turned their attention elsewhere and now Hezbollah was on the move again. South.

Tonight's mission was proof of that.

GNA intelligence had spotted a Lebanese Hezbollah commander two days ago, and CIA confirmed. But the CIA confirmation yesterday of an actual Iranian Quds Force commander on the ground near the coastal city of Bahía Blanca put blood in their mouths.

Against his government's protests, a gathering of Hasidic youth in Bahía Blanca was scheduled for next week. Hundreds of young Jewish people from all over the country would attend. A perfect target.

And an Iranian Quds Force commander to lead the attack.

Hezbollah had killed in his country before. More than a hundred Jews in two separate bombing attacks in the nineties.

And they'd promised to do it again.

The two terrorists were holed up at a small abandoned horse ranch just twenty-six kilometers north of the city. "Capture them—alive" was his only order, straight from the mouth of the *comandante mayor*. A chance to finally break the Hezbollah network, he said. And to knock the bastard Iranians back on their heels.

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So they saddled up at their base in Ciudad Evita, loading up three helicopters with twenty-three of his best troopers. The three Eurocopters took three different flight vectors, avoiding direct routes from the base to the target. He was pushing the EC145 range limit to the maximum but there was no point in making it easy for any shoulder-fired MANPADS the tangos might have with them. His aircraft would need a refuel for the flight back for sure.

“Two minutes out,” the pilot said in Silvio’s headset. He glanced around the cabin. Tarabini, Gallardo, Zanetti, Crispo, Birkner, Herrmann. His boys were young but well trained, good shooters and *duros*. They met his eyes with confident smiles. They were like hungry wolves in a pack.

His pack.

“Kill the lights,” he told the pilot. The dim red bulbs extinguished.

Salvio switched his comms channel. “Bravo One, this is Alpha One. Sitrep.”

His sniper team—a shooter and spotter posted a kilometer away in the flat, open field surrounding the ranch—replied. “Eyes on. No movement. Lights out. Good to go, sir.”

“ETA ninety seconds,” Salvio said, adding in English, “Stay frosty!” He logged off. Like every other Argentinian man his age, he grew up on American movies, but it was his Black Hat jump instructor at Fort Benning who’d first barked that order at him.

Time to rock ‘n’ roll.

Based on drone surveillance photos shot the day before, Salvio ordered the pilots to put down at twelve, four, and eight o’clock relative to the broken-down main house. The only trees in the area were a few dense mesquites surrounding the house, partially blocking the view of the windows. Fence rails were down in

several places, and a few ramshackle outbuildings were scattered around the now horseless ranch that had seen better days.

Each Eurocopter flared in near perfect sync to just a meter above the hard-packed dirt one hundred meters from the house. Salvio jumped first. His men followed, boots hitting the ground on a dead run. The choppers roared away and took up overwatch, circling high and wide as the Scorpion operators raced toward the main house. Beneath the moonless blue-black sky, the ancient farmhouse was a gray shadow.

Salvio landed at the four o'clock. He whispered orders into his comms for the advance of the rest of his team, knowing full well his men could do it without him.

"Bravo One, we're on the ground," Salvio said. "Watch your fire."

"We have your back, sir." The sniper team was positioned at six o'clock, the big Barrett M95 directly opposite the front door, ready to put a .50 BMG slug through any *cabrón* that stepped into its night-vision glass.

Salvio's squad advanced at a slow, crouching trot, as did the others. Out in the open on the flat, grassy plains there was little chance of finding cover, so dropping in close was the only choice. He'd chosen the night, hoping the fighters inside didn't have night-vision capabilities.

The twenty-four troopers closed in rapidly from three directions, weapons high, rounds chambered, safeties off. Heavy boots thudded onto the rickety wraparound porch, where the squads split up, stacking on either side of windows and both doors, front and back. Flash-bangs were pulled.

Salvio took the front door. Arab music blared from a tinny radio inside. He whispered another order into his comms. Flash-bangs crashed through window glass in six places simultaneously. The men closed their eyes and opened their mouths just as the grenades detonated.

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Doors crashed open under their boots and Scorpions poured through into darkened rooms. The tactical light on Silvio's Glock 17 illuminated the living room, as did the swiftly panning lights on the carbines around him.

"Clear!" one of his *sargentos* shouted from the back of the house. Other shouts of "Clear!" soon followed. Soon, Acuña appeared, disappointment in his flash-lit eyes.

"All clear, sir. Nobody's home."

Salvio swore as he holstered his pistol. *Where the hell were these bastards?*

"*Aquí!*" a man shouted from the kitchen. Silvio and Acuña dashed in. Private Gallardo's lighted weapon pointed at the floor inside a small pantry closet. A trap door. Salvio tore it open and pulled out his pistol, activated the tac light on the barrel.

"Gallardo, Hermann, with me," Salvio ordered as he dropped into the darkened tunnel.

Salvio and the others returned to the kitchen entrance empty-handed. The tunnel ran seventy or so meters to an empty outbuilding. The terrorists must have fled from there, out of sight of his sniper team.

Salvio checked in with the chopper pilots on his comms, all deploying night vision and thermal imaging. "See anything?"

"No, sir. Not even a rabbit."

Damn it!

He was supposed to report the capture of the two terrorists to the *comandante mayor* as soon as it happened. The old man would be pissed. All he had in his hands at the moment was his own swinging dick. Not exactly what HQ was hoping for.

Salvio barked orders. He'd tear the place apart for intelligence. Maybe come away with something to show for their efforts.

They ripped through the house front to back, flipping mattresses, tossing drawers, pulling rugs, tearing up floor boards. The place looked like a debris field after a tornado.

Somebody had been here—trash and butts on the floor, a filthy, unflushed toilet.

But not one shred of intel to bring back for a trophy.

While his men stood around gulping water from their hydration packs and scarfing down protein bars, Salvio called his pilots, ordering them to land for exfil. Might as well get back to barracks at Ciudad Evita and call it a night.

Ten minutes later, his unit's three Eurocopters touched down, their turbines slowed. His men ducked low to avoid the carbon-fiber rotors raking the air just above their heads and piled into the choppers. They made room for the sniper and his spotter, who'd had to hump in six clicks by foot the day before to avoid detection. The sniper grabbed a spot on the floor at Salvio's feet.

At least the men were in good spirits, Salvio told himself. They laughed and joked among themselves as young men do for release after the adrenaline rush of a combat operation.

Even one where no shots were fired.

"Ready, Ensign?" the pilot asked.

"Let's get back to the barn," Salvio said, in English. Just like his instructor at Fort Benning used to say. "*Rápido.*" Salvio's son, a striker, was finally starting on his *fútbol* team. With any luck, the refuel would go fast and he'd make it home in time to catch his game.

The turbines whined as the choppers lifted in unison, arcing into the warm, starlit sky, streaking for home in single file.

A heartbeat later, alarms screamed.

Missile lock.

Salvio grabbed a handhold as the helicopter plunged violently

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to escape, blowing auto-chaff in a steep banking turn. Through the gunner's door he saw a fiery streak slam into one of his choppers and erupt in a cloud of flaming metal.

The last thing Salvio heard was the roar of the exploding HEAT charge that tore his aircraft apart, killing most, including him. The screaming survivors perished when the burning wreck slammed into the ground five hundred meters below.

In the space of thirty seconds, the entire Scorpion platoon ceased to exist.

Proof of concept number one.

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CRISFIELD, MARYLAND

Jack pulled up to the curbside street in front of the modest one-story white frame house and killed the engine. It brought back memories. He hadn't been here since his freshman year in college, when Cory's mom cooked the two Georgetown students a roast. "Stick-to-yer-ribs food, Jack. That's what you boys need if you're sailing today," she'd said. Taking the skiff Cory's dad built out onto Daugherty Creek was one of Jack's favorite memories.

Cory's working-class family was a lot like that little house. Solid, sturdy, dependable—and certainly nothing fancy. But Cory had been a good friend, and the memories Jack had from the summer road trip they took in their sophomore year, hiking fourteeners in Colorado, still made him laugh.

Jack approached the front door with trepidation. He hadn't seen Cory in years. Always meant to, but they both got busy. When his father died in his junior year, Cory gave up his dream of law school and dropped out of Georgetown to take over his father's hardware store, and to care for his ailing mother. Jack made it out a few times that year, but Cory was too tied up with customers and inventory to really do anything but shoot the bull over coffee at the store.

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Jack's academic plate was also overflowing. No hard feelings. Just a fork in the road. They went their separate ways.

Jack found his dream job with Hendley Associates and The Campus.

Cory stocked lumber and bird food.

Cory's mother died a few years back, but Jack missed that funeral—he didn't even know about it until a year after she was buried. He meant to call and offer his condolences, but it just felt too damn awkward after so much time had passed.

Yeah, awkward.

Some friend, asshole.

Jack rang the doorbell. A moment later, a smartly dressed middle-aged nurse in blue scrubs opened the door. Jack noticed her lapel pins. Mary Francis was an RN and a nun. She smiled.

"You must be Jack. Cory's expecting you."

"Thank you, Sister."

Jack followed her through the neat and tidy home, the old wooden floors creaking under his two-hundred-pound muscled frame.

"How's he doing?" Jack whispered, as if in church.

"As well as can be expected," she replied at full voice. "It won't be long now."

He followed her down a narrow hallway. A dozen family photos in cheap frames hung on the walls. One of them was a picture of Jack and Cory standing next to that skiff so many years ago.

Ouch.

"This way," the nun said, pushing open a bedroom door. An invitation for him to enter alone.

Jack halted for a second. He would've felt more comfortable charging blind into a Tora Bora cave with an empty pistol than dealing with what he was imagined was waiting for him inside.

"Jack, you came."

Cory smiled broadly, sitting up in his adjustable bed. He held

out his hand. Despite the pallid skin and skeletal frame, he exuded warmth and grace.

Jack sighed with relief. He crossed the room and took Cory's soft hand. Jack was six-foot-one and powerfully built. More so now than when they were in school together. But back then, Cory had been six-four and two-twenty. A state champion lacrosse player. A real beast. Hard to believe the frail wraith in the adjustable bed had once carried a 175-pound Jack a mile and a half down a Colorado slope on his back after he twisted his ankle. Now Cory was half his former weight, if that, and could barely hold up his own arm.

"Good to see you, Cor."

"Sorry for the long drive out. I know you're a busy guy."

Ouch. Again.

Cory saw the flinch. "Sorry, I didn't mean it that way. I know working for a financial firm like Hendley Associates must be an eighty-hour-a-week job."

"Sometimes I bring a cot to the office. Better to sleep than commute."

"Good for you." Cory lay back on his elevated bed, obviously fatigued by his efforts.

Jack glanced around the room while Cory got comfortable, adjusting the IV needle taped to the back of his bruised and sallow hand. A large crucifix hung on the wall opposite the foot of his bed. Next to it was a framed wedding photo of his parents. Cory was an only child.

Standing next to the bottles of pain meds was a framed novena—"Our Lady of Good Remedy." A rolling IV stand with a bag stood on the far side of the bed.

"So, I like what you've done with the place," Jack said.

"My designer calls it Medical Modern. Sort of like *Mad Men*, but with drugs instead of booze."

"I need to call her."

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“Just wait a few more weeks. I know a place where you will be able to get all of this stuff dirt cheap.” Cory winked.

Jack chuckled. He never knew anybody funnier than Cory. Or scarier, when he threw a punch. Fists like cinder blocks tied to tree trunks. Two bikers in a Jackson Hole bar discovered that side of Cory the hard way.

Jack suddenly felt very self-conscious, his full beard and head of hair in stark contrast to Cory’s naked scalp. Chemo took that thick mane of curly blond hair, no doubt, but not the fire in those dark brown eyes.

Cory reached for a plastic cup full of ice water, but it was too far away. Jack snatched it up and brought it close.

“Thanks.” Cory sipped cool water through the straw.

Jack’s eyes drifted back to the prayer card. *“Dear Lady of Good Remedy, source of unfailing help, thy compassionate heart knows a remedy for every affliction . . .”*

“You go to church much, Jack?”

“Me? Not enough. You?”

“Kinda hard to wheel this bed down the aisle these days. But I do have my own nun, don’t I?”

Jack glanced back at the large crucifix. He thought about the coeds that used to draw to Cory like flies to honey, and the beer kegs he’d polished off, almost single-handedly. “I guess you got some religion lately.”

“No, I got some cancer lately. My faith renewed is the payoff.”

“That’s great,” Jack said.

Cory heard the cynicism in Jack’s voice. “Yeah, I know. Foxhole prayers and all of that. But I’m serious. There’s something about facing your mortality that brings eternal things into focus.”

“Sure, I suppose it would.” Jack didn’t mention he’d stared death in the face a few times lately. Quite a few times. He had a hard time finding faith in the dark abyss of a pistol barrel shoved in his face.

“Don’t be like me and wait until something like this wakes you up.”

“Now you sound like my sister.”

“I liked your sister. She doing okay?”

“A doctor now, just like Mom. Same hospital, even. Married a great guy.”

“Good for her. Your folks okay? I don’t watch the news much these days.”

“They’re doing well. Thanks for asking.”

Cory coughed violently. Thick gobs of phlegm rattled in his throat. He lurched forward, gasping for breath, his pale face reddening with the effort.

Jack reached for a clean spit tray on the table and held it up to Cory’s lips with one hand while supporting his bony back with the other. Cory coughed and spat until a spoonful of yellow gel finally dropped into the pink plastic tray.

The nurse burst into the room.

“Cory?” She rushed over to the bed as Jack gently lowered him. She took the spit tray from Jack’s hand and set it down.

“Thank you, Jack. Perhaps you can wait outside for a minute,” she said as she wiped Cory’s mouth with a tissue.

“Sure, no problem.”

Cory shook his head and waved a frail hand. “No, wait, Jack, I’m fine.”

“You sure? I’ve got plenty of time.”

Cory took another sip of water with the nun’s help. It surprised Jack how much effort it took him. He finished and sighed with exhaustion.

“I’ll be right outside,” the nun said. “But call me before you need me, okay?”

Cory smiled. “Okay.”

She left, closing the door gently behind her.

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“So, Jack. Remember those fourteeners we climbed in Colorado?”

“Sure do. I was thinking about that when I pulled up.”

“Good times, man. Can’t tell you how often I thought about those days when I was counting pallets of sheetrock and roofing nails. Got me through some dark patches.”

Guilt fell all over Jack like a bucket of warm motor oil.

“I’m sorry about that, Cory. I should’ve—”

“Oh, man. No. I wasn’t saying anything. I just mean climbing those mountains meant a lot to me. That high up. Clean air. And the quiet!”

“Yeah, good times for sure.”

“I’ve had a lot of time to think about my life lying here, ya know? Things done, and things undone. And to be honest with you, I wouldn’t change a lot. Don’t get me wrong. Arguing a landmark case in front of the Supreme Court would’ve been awesome, but it wasn’t meant to be.”

“It must have been hard on you.”

“It was, and it wasn’t. I just did what I had to do to take care of my family. You would’ve done the same thing for yours. I know you would have.”

Jack nodded. He sure as hell would have. There wasn’t anything he wouldn’t do for his family, especially his mom and dad.

“So really, no regrets. Well, except one. I never told you this, but I made two promises to my dad when he was on his deathbed. I’m proud to say I kept one of them—finishing my pre-law degree at Georgetown last year.”

“That’s freaking awesome. Congratulations.”

Jack stuck out his hand. Cory took it as best as he could.

“Thanks, man. Summa cum laude, too, by the way.”

“Not surprised.” Truth was, Cory was the sharpest knife in the drawer.

"But I didn't keep the other promise. And it's killing me."

"You do look like shit. But I thought that was the cancer," Jack said, hoping for a laugh.

He got one.

"Ouch, man," Cory said, touching his stomach. "Don't do that. It makes me hurt."

"Sorry."

"No, you're not."

"No, not really."

They bumped fists. Friends again. For life.

However long that was.

"So, what's the promise you didn't keep?"

Cory told him.

Jack didn't bat an eye.

"It's a lot to ask, I know. But I couldn't think of anyone else I could ask, let alone pull it off. But I hate to disappoint my dad, you know?"

"Yeah, I know. But I think he'd understand."

"He probably would. But this is about me. I want to keep my word. And you're my only shot."

Jack fought back the tears welling up in his eyes.

"It would be an honor."

Sister Mary Francis brought in a bottle of twelve-year-old Macallan single-malt whiskey and two glasses Cory had purchased for the occasion. The bedridden man sipped water out of his glass while Jack worked his way through a couple fingers. They laughed and told stories like old college buddies do, but the light began to dim outside and Cory's eyes began fluttering with fatigue.

Jack left the room with Cory gently snoring and Sister Mary Francis's heartfelt thanks.

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“If he needs anything at all, please call me,” Jack said, slipping her a business card. She handed him one of hers as well.

“I will. Safe travels, Jack. And God bless you for coming.”

Jack was surprised his phone rang with her number three and a half hours later as he sat at his desk, poring over a spreadsheet.

Cory Chase was gone.