



MACK BOLAN

THE
EXECUTIONER
40

Double Crossfire

Mack Bolan invades a deadly KGB-controlled narcotics and terrorist organization...

DON PENDLETON



Mack is back make no mistake...

Bolan's body was sheathed in skin-tight black fabric, and he walked as silent as the fog. The Executioner had become a part of the night.

"Hey there," he said softly as he moved across the elegant expanse of lawn.

"That you, Sid?" said the hardman, cupping a match in his hands to light a cigarette. "You're a little late, but I guess there's some left for you. I was first in line for her."

"Good for you," Bolan said, and shot the man in the head.

In the front room two more men were staring mindlessly at TV, with plates and sandwiches in their laps. One was raising his sandwich to take a bite when Bolan said, "Over here," in the flat toneless voice of death. The man turned and stared; his mouth was still gaping when he swallowed a tumbling bite of eternity. His pal dived toward a sofa, where a submachine gun lay propped against the cushions; Bolan helped the guy along with a whizzer through the neck.

Bolan went up the stairs. He pushed open a door and saw the fat man, sitting at a desk. "I think you've made some mistake..." whined the man.

Bolan leveled the AutoMag and fired.

Other

MACK BOLAN

Titles in the Gold Eagle

Executioner series

#39 The New War

#41 The Violent Streets

#42 The Iranian Hit

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~~There is no week nor day nor hour when terror may not enter upon this country, if the people lose the supreme confidence in themselves, and lose their roughness and spirit of defiance. The only bar against it is a large, resolute breed of men.~~

—Walt Whitman

Plant your stealthy bombs that maim little children, then call it a glorious war of liberation if you can. But I call it simple savagery, and I will stop you. I can respect any true soldier under whatever flag, but you murderous terrorists fill me with disgust. I have more respect for a cockroach, and I will step around it. But I will not step around you....
I will grind you into the earth.

— Mack Bolan

PROLOGUE

Mack Bolan was a veteran, a soldier of long service. He fought in a war he didn't choose, in Vietnam. And he fought in a war he did choose—in fact, he designed it—against the Mafia. This last seemed to be an endless war, from mob to mob, city to city. But after thirty-eight bloody campaigns, the Mafia Wars did come to an end, of sorts. In New York City. To underworld survivors it was also the end of their scourge, the man known as Mack Bolan, the Executioner.

But not really. Only the name was put to rest. And a new identity born, John Phoenix. It would be the same man, with a newer and larger war.

Destiny shaped this return. There would be more battles to be won and campaigns to be concluded but there'd always be a war. Tactics and terrain might differ, but the enemy and the war would always be there. Always that evil force, that devil's antithesis to humanity's growth and progress . . . from the plunderers and highwaymen of yesterday, to the international terrorists of today.

For every few steps mankind takes forward, there is a faltering step backward. For every positive action, a negative reaction. For every injustice, a final justice. It seems to be the eternal yin and yang of life itself, which is, after all, the ultimate justice.

Mack Bolan was a messenger of justice, a keeper of the balance. A man who preserved life by dealing with death. A man who continually walked the unmarked line of truth and morality. Morality. Yes, man is a moral agent. Mack Bolan knew that to be true.

The human mind seemed to be structured toward a moral awareness, an intrinsic recognition that some things are right and some are not—and structured, also, toward the need and the desire to establish and maintain standards of conduct.

It was perhaps the most worrisome aspect of human understanding, while also the noblest. Out of that need for ethical standards had been born all the world's religions, all its politics, philosophies, traditions, customs—all the things that bring us together while also dividing us as contentious factions.

And, yes, the human mind was designed for contention, too. That was our guarantee for individuality; the guarantee, also, of conflict forever as individual minds debated the definitions of good and evil.

If Mack Bolan had been inclined to think of such things, the stoic warrior could probably recite an endless succession of critical moments when moral dilemmas could have destroyed or neutralized him. Because Bolan was indeed a moral agent. Not the type who would stand at podium or pulpit to verbalize his moral perceptions but the sort who would silently incorporate them into a life-style. The kind of man who could not pay lip service to an ethic while otherwise ignoring it.

He made his individual judgment on the Vietnam dilemma and staked his life there while passing no judgment whatever on those who found a different moral answer. He did it again, back in the jungles of home, more alone than ever and more committed to a harsher ethic, when his Mafia Wars brought him into direct opposition with the collective precepts of the American nation—and, again, he did it without feeling the need to debate the matter with those who disagreed.

He could do so because Mack Bolan was a man at peace with himself; his wars were external, not internal, conflicts, his principles a pattern for living, not mental exercises. And he was at peace with himself because somewhere along his road of life he had found a higher understanding than most of us encounter in our day-to-day lives. It is written in Bolan's journal:

Not only is man a moral agent, he is the only moral agent in the entire perceptible universe.

The struggle, then, is a cosmic struggle . . . with cosmic goals. It is both Alpha and Omega. John Phoenix, you'd damn sure better never forget it.

John Phoenix was, of course, Bolan himself—the cover name under which all past "sins" against the nation were expiated. And the admonition to the self is very telling to the character and motivations of this remarkable man: he was saying, in effect, that moral dilemma is the shaping force of human evolution, the primary cause and the ultimate effect of human life. He was saying that the human mind is structured by nature for war everlasting.

The New War had begun. The battles would be many. The enemy would be everywhere. The weapons would be as primitive as the fist, as modern as the laser. Last time it was the jungles of Colombia; this time it was the barren wastelands of Turkey; next time it might be the streets of a major city, or the very place assumed to be impossible.

Yeah, morality had nothing to do with it. Only everything.



Mack Bolan came up behind the guy soundlessly, and if he hadn't deliberately let one hand knock against the side of the van, the guy would never have seen the face of his executioner. As it was, he was clearly startled, and he tried to cover it with talk. That was a mistake. The guy wasn't used to talking and acting at the same time. It was a mistake all right—the last one the guy ever made.

"Nice rig. Thought I'd take a look . . ." he said vaguely, and then he tried to move on and bring up the gun in his right hand at the same time.

But Bolan's own right hand was already emerging from under his left arm to level the Beretta Brigadier on the man from nearly point-blank range. A silenced 9mm Parabellum slug drew a pencil-line of light through the night air, and the guy's face changed. Below, his mouth opened wide in a look of surprise and dismay.

Above, a raggedly torn third eye leaked red from the middle of his forehead.

Bolan got the door of the van open, dragged the guy up the steps, and dumped him in the back. He had been out of the rig less than forty-five seconds, going EVA via the rear door while the guy was nosing around the front.

Nobody had taken any notice of them. It was dark, and besides, in Beverly Hills nobody was ever about on foot night or day.

Bolan reseated himself at the control console and checked the monitors. There was no sign of additional activity at his primary target, the house across the street. It was large, even by the standards of this wealthy suburb just west of Los Angeles proper. The red brick of its Georgian architecture made it look even larger, somehow more massive. Nearly an acre of immaculately tended lawn swept down to the sidewalk, beyond which towering palms lined the parkway next to the street, Benedict Canyon Drive. A long black-topped driveway arced up one side, passed under a portico shading the front door, and came back down on the other side to the street.

Bolan parked the van in front of a slightly smaller and more modern-looking house. There was apparently a party going on, because several other vehicles, mostly sports cars, were parked at the curb. The van fit right in. On either side of it, a vaguely psychedelic scene had been air brushed in full color. It also featured oversized bubble windows with tinted one-way glass, wide tires with raised white lettering, a sliding sun roof, and a lot of superfluous chrome. It was just the thing that a Beverly Hills partygoer with \$30,000 or so to spare might be driving.

The dead hardman lay in a crumpled heap against the back door where Bolan had dumped him. He was a big man, several inches over six feet and at least 200 pounds. He had a dark complexion and wore a bushy mustache and dark hair cut short. Bolan went quickly through his pockets. He found a loaded spare clip for a .45 automatic in the coat, a dirty pocket comb in the pants, and nothing else. The polyester suit the guy was wearing had come from a popular discount chain store. The back of it was slick with gore from the exit wound that had taken off most of the rear one-third of the gunner's skull.

In a way Bolan was grateful to the guy, whoever he was. He had just confirmed what Bolan had suspected all along.

This one had turned into a hard-probe, and some one was determined to see that Bolan didn't live to see it through.

There would be others. Bolan had no doubt of that, but he felt instinctively that for now the numbers were on his side. There had been no back-up man working behind the guy whose brains were

now messing up the van's floor. If there had been, Bolan would have heard from him by now. They'd figure him dead then, and they'd take their time with whatever was about to come down. When it did, Bolan would be waiting for them.

A good-looking man came out of the front door of the party house, carrying a drink and weaving slightly. Bolan recognized him through one of the tinted port-windows; he had seen him on the cover of one of those celebrity-interview magazines. The guy was the star of some kind of detective series. The man looked around, as if he were waiting for someone to come up and breathlessly demand his autograph. When no one did, he took his drink and himself around the side of the house. From its back came the sound of a woman's squealing laughter and then the splash of someone diving into a pool, or maybe falling in. The party sounded in full swing.

But Bolan wasn't interested in the party, except as a convenient stroke of camouflage. It was that Georgian mansion across the street that had brought him to California on this balmy early spring evening.

There were cars parked there as well, but they were accommodated by the long driveway. In contrast to the sports cars among which Bolan had taken his place, these were Cadillac's and Mercedes, with one Volvo and a Jaguar sedan thrown in—ten cars in all. As Bolan watched, a latecomer, a long-nosed Rolls-Royce, pulled up to the head of the line. A middle-aged man in a business suit got out of the back compartment and entered the front door of the house without ringing. A chauffeur in livery backed the car into the line, then got out and lit a cigarette.

Bolan lit one of his own and turned his attention to the compact but complete electronic console at which he was seated, a little state-of-the-art wizardry courtesy of Herman "Gadgets" Schwarz. In fact the van itself was part of the L.A. based Able Team's surveillance fleet, on loan to Bolan during what he expected to be a brief visit to the City of Angels.

Bolan flipped a toggle switch, his hands moving quickly and surely. The bundle on Bolan's floor had buddies, and they'd be on scene sooner rather than later. In whatever time he had left, Mack Bolan wanted to acquire as much advance intelligence about the situation as he could. In thirty-eight campaigns against the grasping tentacles of the Mafia octopus, and now again in his new war against the burgeoning threat of international terrorism, Mack Bolan had learned that careful planning and surveillance, not mindless wild-ass heroics, was the key to victory over these jackals.

Above Bolan's head, the van's sun roof slid open, and a small directional antenna rose into the gathering dusk. Bolan twisted a mini-phone into his right ear, then worked the large knob that controlled the antenna rotor. Static started to clear as the signal strength meter centered itself, and then a man's voice came through clearly.

Bolan clicked on the cathode ray display tube at his left elbow. The screen brightened, then resolved into a computer-generated floor plan of the first story of the house. Both the plan and the "bug" were courtesy of Able Team member Rosario "Politician" Blancanales, who had planted several of the tiny transmitters and re-conned the house that afternoon, posing as a Pacific Gas and Electric repairman tracking down a short circuit somewhere in the neighborhood.

The man's voice was deep and rich, with no trace of an accent. "My friends," he was saying, "you have perhaps guessed why I asked you here this evening. I have spoken with most of you before; all of you have surely heard of the World Armenian Congress. I hope to be able to explain to you tonight the Union's work and answer any questions you might have about it, in hopes that you will be moved to support the group with both your personal endorsements and your financial generosity."

On the CRT a blot of light was blinking in one room of the floor plan. The room was set toward the back of the house and to Bolan's left, as he faced it. Pol had described it as some sort of conference chamber, dominated by a large oak table seating about fifteen men.

The speaker's name, Bolan knew, was Marko Adamian. He was the owner of a large import-export

business specializing in petroleum products, heavy machinery, and electronics—a sort of super-brokerage that had made Adamian a millionaire many times over. Unfortunately, Adamian was not confining his international activities to business matters. Although the man was American-born, both of his parents had been driven by Turks from their native land in what was now eastern Turkey and had emigrated to the United States via Syria around 1920. As a result, Adamian, like many Armenians, both fervently supported Armenian nationalism and had a virulent hatred of Turkey. Unlike most of his countrymen, however, Adamian was getting involved with some pretty unsavory company in pursuit of his ideals. And right now it looked as if it was up to Mack Bolan to keep the industrialist's butt out of the sling.

"I think," Adamian went on in Bolan's ear, "that all of us may reasonably call ourselves influential men, both in the Armenian community and in our adopted country as well. All of you surely know Marko Djirdjirian, and of the successes of his film company. Senator Sarkesian's efforts in the state legislature have resulted in advances and recognition of our people all over California."

The introductions were half over when a red signal light next to the CRT started to flash. Bolan flicked a selector switch. Simultaneously, the transmission from the bug inside Adamian's house was input directly to the tape recorder, and Bolan's earphone and the console's microphone were cut into a special radio circuit.

Bolan quick-scanned the setup and said, "Go."

The nasal voice of Gadgets Schwarz sounded in the earphone. "I've got Hal standing by on landline. Sarge, ready to patch him in if you can take it. Hal says it's Priority Red."

"Hal" was Harold Brognola, top federal cop and Bolan's liaison with the Oval Office of the White House. "Put him through," Bolan said.

"You got him, Sarge."

The deep, level voice of Hal Brognola came on cool and calm, but Bolan knew this man well enough to hear the edge of excitement cutting through. "We've got confirmation from our regular intelligence channels, Striker," Brognola said, using the code name which he had bestowed on Bolan during the Mafia campaigns. "Adamian's in up to his neck, all right, and I don't like any of it."

"I had a little confirmation myself, Hal," Bolan put in. He quickly explained about the attempted breach of the van's defenses, and the deadly result—dead for one terrorist hardguy, that is.

That means it could be going down any time," Brognola said when Bolan had finished.

"Any minute," Bolan corrected.

"Right," Brognola said crisply. "That's why I'm glad I made contact. I'll try to make it short and to the point."

"It might have to be."

"Here's what we've got," Brognola said. "There is a direct link between Marko Adamian and an operation in Turkey that we've been monitoring for some time. And the Turkish operation is tied to the KGB."

"And that means a direct link to the Kremlin."

"Correct. A smuggling pipeline is being set up, and the same names keep cropping up on that angle as on Adamian. We are pretty certain that Adamian is being suckered—I'll have more details when I see you back here—and that makes it worse. The guy may be idealistic and over certain of himself, and too blind to see when he's playing with fire, but he's also an American citizen, and we've got to make sure someone doesn't get it into his head to blow the guy away."

"Well, it looks like he's been targeted," Bolan said.

"That fits in with the rest of it," Brognola said. "Again, details will have to wait. But we do know now what the smuggling pipeline will be carrying."

Bolan waited.

"Heroin, Striker," Brognola said. "Enough to flood the streets of every major American city."

Bolan sensed more than heard the car pull up across the street from him. Moving to his left put him in front of one of the oversized windows, which was opaque from the outside but afforded an excellent wide-angle view from where Bolan sat.

"It's going down, Hal," Bolan cut in.

"Number and ID?" Hal said immediately.

"One carload so far," Bolan said. "No ID I'm off the air, Hal."

"Live large, buddy," the head fed got in before Bolan broke the radio link.

No ID, yeah. But a tentative make, for sure. The car was a black Cadillac limousine, the kind that could carry eight using the twin jump seats in the rear compartment. It was cruising very slowly along the curb under the palms in front of Adamian's mansion, the motor chugging softly, the car long and sleek and sterile in what was now the full darkness of evening.

It looked familiar.

It looked like a Mafia warwagon.

And then a door must have been cracked open, because the dome light came on. Bolan could hear the angry snarl of a man's voice, and immediately the door slammed shut and doused the light.

But not before Bolan got a look at the man at the end of the back seat. There was something strange about the side of the face Bolan saw in profile. It was scarred, or somehow disfigured, but not so much that Bolan could not recognize it.

And yeah, he was of that Thing, La Cosa Nostra, This Thing of Ours—or what was left of it—one of the few to survive the Executioner's long one-man war that all but annihilated the Mafia within the borders of the United States. His name was Samuel "Sammy the Shoe" Tresa, so called because a congenital defect required him to wear a built-up orthopedic shoe on his right foot.

Bolan glanced down again at the limp bundle of clothes by his feet that had just lately been a man. He was not Mafioso; that Bolan was almost certain of. During his years of constant conflict with that rancorous growth on the corpus of society, the Executioner had built up a mental mug file of thousands of made men, those admitted to that unholy brotherhood. As Bolan had decimated the mob the number of snapshots in the mug file had, of course, decreased. The dead gunman was not among the ones that remained. But he had certainly come under the influence of some tough company.

Sam Tresa was one of the worst, a cheap hood who had never risen much above Mafia soldier because he was too innately vicious to have any real brains. Bolan had last seen Sammy the Shoe on that Terrible Tuesday of his final six-day blitz, which had mopped up the remnants of the Mafia like so much greasy gravy. The California Concept, the Mob plan to infiltrate the highest levels of major corporations, even of governments—to, in fact, form an invisible second government within the richest and most powerful nation in the world—this had brought Bolan to Southern California on the second day of that second mile.

That day had ended on a bluff above a beach house perched in Pacific Palisades, when Bolan sent a blazing message of death to the three men behind the scheme. Sammy the Shoe was head cock, or security chief of that house. He was ineffectually patrolling the beach below while Bolan visited hellfire upon it from above.

Tresa's hideously scarred face was a testament to the fact that he had not entirely escaped Bolan's firestorm.

The car was pulling away from the curb and gathering speed. It had never even come to a full stop. But that was no comfort. That Caddy was full, and this was no recon mission.

They'd be back, and Bolan guessed soon. They had to figure that their advance man had swept the area, and now they were coming in for the hit.

Only there was going to be a little something in their way.

Bolan clicked the selector switch. Adamian was still talking. He seemed to be answering a question about the aims and purposes of his Armenian Union. It would all be down on the tape for dissection later.

Right now Mack Bolan had other fish to fry.

It was time to go extravehicular again.

Sure. It was time to go hard.



Mack Bolan could not honestly say that he welcomed the respites between missions. In point of fact, they made him uneasy. It was not that he missed the action.

What Bolan felt was impatience, the unshakable urge to get on with a job that had to be done. There were too many arenas of conflict in the world—arenas created by man, with his rapacious instinct for the repression of his fellow man—that demanded Bolan's special skills.

He had welcomed the trip to L.A. His personal store of intelligence on the rampant upsurge in international terrorism was always growing, and he embraced any chance to supplement that knowledge firsthand. It was also an opportunity to check in with Gadgets, Pol, and ex-L.A. cop Carl Lyons: old friends, fellow warriors against Animal Man, wherever he dared to rear his head. The three formed his Able Team, based here in L.A.

Finally, Bolan trusted Hal Brognola's judgment almost as much as his own. The top cop had had a hunch that this one could be bigger than either of them suspected.

And he had damn sure been right. .

Bolan was dressed in the black nightsuit that fit him like a second skin. The 9mm Beretta Brigadier, the Belle, was snug in its snap-draw holster under his left arm; the thundering .44 AutoMag hung from military webbing at his chest. Spare magazines for both were clipped to his chest, within easy reach. Bolan secured the van and stepped out into the night, his night.

And came face to face with the actor he had seen on the front lawn of the party house twenty minutes earlier.

If the man had been weaving before, he was staggering now. He looked blearily at Bolan.

"Come on," he said, his slurred voice barely understandable. "You're mishin' the party. Lotsha girlsh . . ."

The actor took one step forward and passed out in Bolan's arms. That was just what he needed. Bolan dragged him to the car parked in front of the van, a low-slung '57 T-Bird in what looked like mint condition. The top was down. Bolan draped the man across the bucket seats and crossed the street.

Bolan had been EVA within forty seconds of the Caddy's surveillance pass, but the drunken actor had cost him some numbers. If Bolan were right, the Caddy would be back within moments. That's when the numbers would zero out.

The Adamian mansion was surrounded on three sides by a high thicket, half hiding a redwood fence. That dictated a frontal assault, and they had numbers, weapons, and experience. Sammy the Shoe had enough brains to assure that part, at least.

Bolan cut across the street, running low, and gained the shadows of the palms. He paused for a moment, then started up the sloping lawn at a dog trot.

An overhead fixture in the portico threw a watery circle of light onto the lawn in front of the house. Under it, the chauffeur from the Rolls-Royce was working on another cigarette, his back to Bolan.

Bolan had just reached the edge of the pool of light. That put him within twenty meters of the portico, and that was his position when the Caddy came screaming down Benedict Canyon Drive and wheeled hard into the driveway.

Bolan dropped flat to the ground. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the chauffeur turn in surprise to gawk at the long black car careering up the drive. The cigarette fell from between his lips.

The big silver AutoMag was in Bolan's right hand, extended and supported at the wrist by his left,

in firing-range position. He tracked onto the front of the car, held for a split second, then squeezed.

The first round tore into the left front fender and plowed on into the engine block. The second round followed like an echo, shattering the window on the driver's side and sending 240 grains of smoking death into the man behind it.

Another man screamed in pain, a high wail. The big Caddy careered off the drive and cut a furrow in the well-manicured lawn.

The doors of the Caddy burst open, and seven men scrambled out. The dome light revealed the eighth, the driver. He was slumped over the wheel, and the side of his head was a ghastly mess of red and white and gray.

Sam Tresa came out the rear door facing Bolan and dropped to the grass. "Move it," he screamed. "Goddammit, go."

But Tresa's order didn't seem necessary to spur the men on. Despite the impact Bolan's ambush should have made, they were making straight for the house. No one except Tresa even seemed to wonder where the bullets were coming from.

Bolan snapped a shot in Tresa's direction and was rewarded by a ragged yelp of pain. But the other six did not slow their charge. The one in front carried a submachine gun, the others handguns. As they entered the circle of light, one part of Bolan's mind registered that the men were not wearing the Mafia uniform, a business suit. Instead they were dressed in blousy shirts and baggy pants, and each wore a tall pillbox hat.

The fourth slug from the AutoMag caught the leader between the shoulder blades. He pitched forward, and the weapon skittered across the pavement into the darkness. At the same moment someone else fired, and a red stain spread across the front of the chauffeur's uniform jacket. A look of infinite surprise crossed his face, and then he slumped behind the Rolls.

The shooter was looking for another target when Bolan took the back of his head off.

The remaining four slowed for the first time. They were about twenty meters from the portico, forming with it and Bolan a roughly equilateral triangle. One of them shouted an order in a language Bolan did not recognize.

One dropped to his knee and began to return fire. A bullet plowed into the grass a few feet from Bolan's head. A second shot went high and wide, the attacker's gun arm describing a wild arc as he clutched with his other hand at his middle, where a split second before a 240-grain slug had torn a hole the size of a softball through his guts.

The other flanker dived for the discarded submachine gun. The remaining two men continued their charge, ignoring the fire behind them. Bolan came up running, holstering the AutoMag in favor of the lighter Beretta as he moved.

He was nearly on them when the numbers went straight to hell.

Adamian and two middle-aged men, all immaculate in business suits, appeared framed in the light of the open front door.

The sight of the three men whipped the attackers into a crazed frenzy. They started screaming, "Giaour, giaour," almost like a chant. The faces of the three Armenians whitened.

The man who had recovered the submachine gun started to bring it up at the word of his cohorts. It was the final move of his life, as a 9mm steel jacketed whizzer tore through him from less than ten feet away.

The last two gunmen were almost on the men at this door. Bolan cursed under his breath and tracked the Beretta onto the nearest one.

Four shots sounded so closely together that it was impossible to distinguish their separate sounds. One of the Armenians pitched back into the house at the same time Bolan's own shot crackled into the killer's head. Bolan moved his gun a few clicks to the left, but the final attacker was already punching

backward toward him, until his head slammed onto the paved drive with a sickening thump.

Adamian stood stiffly erect just outside the door, alone now. There was a rough tear in his suit coat high on the left arm, already starting to ooze red. In his right hand was a .45 automatic, its big ugly black eye staring straight at Bolan's stomach.

Bolan holstered the Beretta and stepped into the full light.

"Put down the gun, Mr. Adamian," he said calmly.

Adamian stared at him, took in the black nightsuit covering Bolan's 200-pound-plus frame. His eyes swept up to meet Bolan's icy blue-eyed gaze. He lowered the gun and said, "Who are you?"

"I'd make it about ninety seconds before the police arrive," Bolan said. "The only questions we have time for are mine. Do you know these men?" "No."

"Why were they trying to kill you and your guests?"

"How did you know? . . ."

"Answer the question," Bolan interrupted, his voice sharper.

"I don't know."

Bolan knew the man was lying. Adamian winced at a stab of pain from his arm wound and looked away from Bolan's hard stare.

"They are Turks," Adamian said. "We are Armenians." Sure, Bolan thought. As if that explained it all, as if that were reason enough to explain what had suddenly turned a Beverly Hills estate into a kill-ground.

But it would have to hold for now. The numbers were up.

"How's the arm?" Bolan said, more gently. "It is nothing. A flesh wound is all."

Bolan allowed him a quick grin. He knew from multiple personal experiences that right now Adamian's arm would be throbbing as if someone were holding a red-hot iron to it. There was something about Adamian that appealed to the blitzing warrior; if Bolan had to make a snap judgment it would favor the Armenian. He was a big man, as tall as Bolan, broad-shouldered and obviously a man who kept himself in good shape. He looked several years younger than the forty-eight Bolan knew him to be.

"Good night, Mr. Adamian," Bolan said, and moved toward the shadow.

He stopped at its edge and turned back for a moment. Adamian had neither moved nor taken his eyes from Bolan.

"What does gĩaour mean?" Bolan said.

"'Infidel,' " Adamian said somberly. "In Turkish. A bad thing to call any man." He seemed to pull himself more erect. "I believe I hear sirens," he said calmly.

Bolan had already heard them, coming up quickly. But this one wasn't quite finished yet.

Bolan found Sammy the Shoe Tresa curled up in a fetal position on the grass near the crippled limousine. He was lying in a thick dark pool of his own blood. A lot of it had already flowed.

The heavy lead from the AutoMag had plowed into Tresa's left leg just below the hip and continued down to shatter his thigh bone. On the way it also severed an artery. Tresa had somehow managed to press a hand against the entry wound, and his handkerchief was stuffed into the hole where the slug had come out. Blood pumped out weakly between Tresa's fingers.

Bolan crouched in the shadowy darkness next to the dying Mafioso. The sirens got louder, and the two black-and-whites with "Beverly Hills Police Dept." stenciled in a shield on their sides tore up the driveway, their headlights sweeping over Bolan's head. He waited until they got to the portico. It would be only a matter of minutes before they got around to checking out the Caddy.

Bolan gently turned Tresa's head, and for a moment there was no expression in the man's wide eyes except pain and the knowledge of imminent death. Then the eyes went even wider, and the pain gave way for just a moment to gaping surprise.

"My God," Tresa whispered hoarsely. "Bolan. You're dead. New York, that rig of yours, they blew it sky high, right there in Central Park. Oh, my God." He closed his eyes, then opened them a moment later. "They said you were dead," he said again, hurtfully, as though somebody had broken a blood oath.

"Someone came to you, Sammy," Bolan said. His voice was very low, almost expressionless, but there was a hard edge to it at the same time. "They told you how to make contact with the Turks, and they told you what they wanted setup."

Tresa opened his mouth, struggled to get out the word. "Yes," he breathed.

"Who was it?"

Tresa shook his head. The effort took all his strength.

"You're dying, Sammy," Bolan said in that same lethally quiet voice. "You know that."

"Don't know him. Not in the Family. Never saw him. Nobody did."

"What did you call him?" Bolan pressed. "The name, Sammy."

"No name," Sammy said. "Paradine. Some kind of code or something. Just Paradine." The Mafioso nearly smiled then. The smile turned into a ghastly chuckle, and then the chuckle became a choking rattle. His eyes went glassy, and his mouth froze in a grotesque O.

Bolan left him and went to the street and across to the van. Incredibly, the TV actor was still passed out in the sports car, but a couple of dozen people were gathered on the front lawn of the house where the party was, staring at him.

As Bolan unlocked the van, a man called out, "Hey, wait a minute." A woman said, "You ought to make him stop," but in a bored tone, as if she were already losing interest.

Bolan swung away from the curb, passed a couple of houses, then flicked on the van's headlights.

A man was caught in the glare. He was tall and slim, with longish blond hair, and he was wearing wraparound sunglasses. The eye gear was out of place at this hour, even in Beverly Hills. As Bolan passed, the man turned his head to follow his progress.

Two more Beverly Hills P.D. cruisers tore past in the opposite lane, lights flashing and sirens whining. Bolan cut across Sunset Boulevard and through the Beverly Hills business district, then took Wilshire west to the San Diego freeway. He eased into a middle lane, then reached for the microphone clipped to the dashboard, which automatically tied into the control console's transmitter. Gadgets Schwarz answered immediately.

His eyes on the highway, the big man in black requested transport arrangements for Washington, D.C. "Immediate departure," he added.

"You got it," Gadgets said. He had obviously been monitoring the police bands, because he followed his confirmation with a barrage of coded questions.

Bolan cut him short. There were too many things he wanted to chew over in his own mind. Gadgets understood.

"Stay hard, Sarge," he signed off. Yeah, Bolan said to himself. Stay hard.

Always.



Hal Brognola took a sip of his coffee, grimaced, and said, "Now I remember what I forgot to bring a thermos of my own brew. Every time I taste this stuff you call coffee, I get the distinct feeling someone's trying to poison me."

"He likes it that way," April Rose said, nodding toward Bolan. "I'm with you. I'd rather drink kerosene."

Bolan grinned at them. Inside he was impatient to get on with the briefing, but he knew the tension they both felt, and he understood that the joking helped them to deal with it. April returned the grin. She was a tall girl, strikingly built, with flaring hips and jutting bosom, dark, silky hair, and shining eyes that turned especially luminous when she looked at Mack Bolan. She also held a degree in electronics and had done considerable graduate work in solid-state physics.

She and Mack Bolan had come together on the first day of the Executioner's last bloody mop-up of the remnants of the Mafia. She was Hal's idea; he called her a "project technician." Actually, she was to serve as liaison during Bolan's second bloody mile, and to provide back-up support. Bolan resisted because he had seen too many of his allies end up dead, or worse--as "turkeys," gory masses of technically alive flesh and screaming nerve endings, desperate for the mercy of death to end their torture.

But there had been no time for argument. And during the first few days of that final, week-long war, April became in turn associate, ally, and then true and large friend. Now, as "housekeeper" of Mack Bolan's Stony Man Farm base, she was responsible for every facet of day-to-day operations, including maintenance, communications, personnel deployment, and liaison with the other Stony Man teams, as well as with the feds in that wonderland on the Potomac called Washington.

The three of them were sitting in what Bolan called the "War Room." It was located adjacent to the primary command center, a converted three-story colonial farmhouse.

The farm featured the most modern facilities, carefully camouflaged to provide a secure retreat and working base for Mack Bolan and his teams. The 160-acre spread had been a working farm for most of its 200-year existence, and some of the fields were already plowed and would soon be planted with crops. Close to the big house were various outbuildings, all of which had been converted to serve the base's needs. The dairy barn doubled as armory and base supply. The hay barn could billet up to 200 troops, and there were less austere VIP quarters on the upper level. A gymnasium, theater, and athletic fields were available to the personnel. The garage housed the farm's motor pool, while the communications facilities had ComSat capability and a direct computer tie to Washington. All this was secured by an electrified fence, remote servo-controlled surveillance cameras, and a sophisticated electronic vehicle/personnel identification system.

The farm was located in the shadow of the Shenandoah Mountains in north-central Virginia, twenty minutes by air from D.C. From the front porch of the main house, Bolan could see the mountains' high ridge to the west, along which ran the Appalachian Trail. Stony Man Mountain dominated the vista, rising to just over 4,000 feet. To the south, Hawks Bill Mountain rose toward the sky. Now, with spring coming early to the area, the hills were already starting to green up, the leaves returning to the oaks and maples, the grass starting to color.

It was not long past sunup when the meeting in the War Room convened. Bolan had returned four hours earlier and grabbed a few quick hours of combat sleep, then wolfed down the chow that April had prepared before she joined the others.

The War Room was set up to facilitate just the kind of briefing that was taking place now. Several

conference tables could be combined to seat as many as two dozen people, or separated for more intimate groups. Its walls featured an array of oversized video screens, as well as one for slides and film. A library of videotapes were designed to supply graphic back-up to any discussion. It included detailed maps of virtually every corner of the world, designed by National Security Council cartographers from public sources as well as from the latest field intelligence. The tape library also included photographs of tens of thousands of individuals from all over the world, an up-to-date electronic mug file of terrorists, assassins, mercenaries, and extremists.

Bolan turned and nodded a good morning to a new member of the group. This was Aaron "the Bear" Kurtzman, a large, rumped man who usually wore a lab coat spotted with pipe ashes. Kurtzman was almost a human extension of the computer's electronic brain; of them all, he clearly had the most intimate relationship with the giant data bank. Kurtzman could take a raw request for information, organize it into the precise terms the computer responded to, and then sit back while it spewed out a veritable torrent of data and intelligence. In his private moments, Kurtzman likened himself to a composer: he arranged a diversity of input into some kind of harmony for his orchestra, the computer. The playback, the computer's cooperative production of all the information he demanded, was beautiful music to the scientist.

Now Kurtzman sat in one corner of the War Room at a control terminal tied into the main brain. His pipe clenched in his teeth, Kurtzman was busily feeding preliminary data coordinates into the machine. Although the console was only a little bigger than an office typewriter, Kurtzman could use it to address the entire tape library on a random-access basis, as well as control the visual display systems in the room.

Hal Brognola put down his coffee cup and straightened a pile of papers that was already straight. "Let me run through a little background material," he said, "and then I'll try to tie it all together for you."

He examined the top sheet for a moment. "Our country's relationship with Turkey has been uneasy for years. First, most of the heroin that found its way into the U.S. came from Turkish poppies. In 1971, Turkey agreed to halt the production of raw opium, from which heroin is refined, in exchange for \$37.5 million in U.S. aid. But in 1974, Turkey violated this aid agreement by using U.S. arms to invade Cyprus, which it still holds.

"When we cut off the aid, they closed our military bases. After a lot of behind-the-scenes negotiation, we started up the aid again in 1978, and they let us reopen four bases. But that same year Turkey and the U.S.S.R. signed a nonaggression pact, and now Turkey is taking the Soviets' handouts as well as ours.'

Brognola turned to the next sheet. "Turkey is currently being wracked by a wave of internal terrorism that goes back to 1975. It's politically motivated, and it's coming from both sides, the left and the right. And legitimate parties at both ends of the spectrum are believed to be giving at least tacit support to clandestine terrorist groups. It's become so bad that fifteen to twenty people a day are being killed. And it's not just terrorist against terrorist.

In the past two years, eight Americans have been killed, as well as several other members of the foreign and diplomatic communities."

"What brings us in at this time, Hal?" Bolan asked.

"Several things. First, the Turkish government has asked for help. The ruling conservative party and the moderate left have agreed to fight terrorism together, and they want our support. The president was reluctant to get our hand in—we all know how these involvements tend to escalate. But if they refuse our help, the Russians will be only too willing to oblige. And Turkey's Middle East location, at the eastern end of the Mediterranean, bordering on Russia, Syria, Iran, and Iraq, makes the country extremely strategic in the current world situation. The president was faced with a hell of a decision,

but now it's out of our hands."

"How?" April asked.

"The Turkish terrorists, left and right, have struck an unholy alliance, with Russian backing. Apparently they're convinced that once they've got rid of the common enemy, they can fight it out among themselves. Who knows how these insane bastards' minds work? But we know one thing for damn sure—they're about to bring the battle right into our streets. Not with guns or bombs or troops, either. Not violence of the flesh, just violence of the spirit." Brognola leaned forward. "They've got a little white powder to do their fighting for them."

It was almost four in the morning, Los Angeles time. The last police officer had left a half-hour before. Marko Adamian was physically tired, but his spirit was elated. The firefight on his front lawn had frightened him, certainly. What man would not be frightened by such an experience? But it also meant that the time for action had finally come, the time Adamian had anticipated for months.

He sat in his conference room, the table before him empty except for a telephone. It was a private, unlisted line, its number known only to those committed to Adamian's cause. When it rang, Adamian lifted the receiver with a steady hand. He listened for a few moments, said "Yes," twice, and replaced the receiver. Then he went to the front of the house and turned off the light shining in the portico.

In the front closet there was a traveling bag, already packed. He took it out, placed it by a comfortable armchair, and sat waiting in the darkened room.

The big man dressed all in black both troubled and impressed Marko Adamian. It was quite possible that he owed this man his life. Yet he could not understand what the man had been doing on his front lawn, and how he had come to be there. Adamian recognized in this man something special, something he had seen in few men before. An air of quiet assurance, of strength, and of something more. That something more was an aura of goodness and right, and that was the troublesome part. Certainly that man in black meant a threat to Adamian's grand plan. But he also had sown the slightest seed of doubt in Adamian's mind, doubt that his plan was truly the course of what was right.

In some ways, the man in black reminded Adamian of another man he had met recently. Physically, this other man was somewhat different—tall also, but almost slim, blond, with eyes always shaded behind very dark glasses. This man carried with him an aura as well. But while the man in black projected strength and purity, the blond man projected pure menace, unleavened by any morality. Yet Adamian knew he needed this blond man, Paradine, and that was the feeling he had to trust.

He shook the thought from his mind and checked the luminous dial of his watch. When exactly fifteen minutes had passed from the moment the private phone had rung, Adamian rose, picked up the traveling bag, and went to open the front door.

At first he saw no one. Then he felt the eyes on him, and a moment later he made him out, standing a few meters away and off to the side of the door, staring at him from behind the black glasses that were like insect eyes.

"Good morning, Paradine," Adamian said.

"Let's go," the other man said curtly, in the flat, accentless voice that seemed almost to cut into Adamian.

Adamian shut the door behind him and followed the other man toward the waiting car, squaring his shoulders as he walked, determinedly putting his doubts out of his mind.

He would have to be ready. The cause deserved that at least.



Men had died here.

Mack Bolan could sense their presence, as if their souls had not entirely departed the wide, sloping valley of the Shenandoah, where Stony Man Farm was nestled. Warriors, kindred spirits, perhaps a hundred thousand of them, who had died through fratricides in this valley, in a war that had pitted brother against brother well over a hundred years before.

And sure, Bolan could pick up the vibrations of those wraiths who still walked the valley. Warfare was not something he liked, nor was it something he saw as a force of good. But warfare was something he understood.

Many would see no similarity between the blue-coat or the Johnny Reb of 1865 and one black-clad fighting man operating twelve decades later. The man himself knew there was no real difference at all. Sure, the battlefields changed; the tools of the trade were refined into ever more deadly variations; the ideologies behind it all became more complex, more self-justifying. But for the line soldier, none of that really made any difference.

His job stayed the same: to fight, against the fear and weariness and frustration as much as against the enemy. To endure. To try but never really to succeed in understanding the why of it all. Above all to survive.

Survival. That was one thing that Mack Bolan knew well.

And, yeah, peace was something Bolan knew, too.

This was by no means paradoxical in this man, who had dedicated his life to the warrior path. Bolan's inner nature was clear as early as his days in Vietnam. It was there that he had first earned the label of the Executioner, for his ninety-seven successful assassinations of Viet Cong and other enemy targets. But in those days he was better known as "Sergeant Mercy," for the kindness he showed to the noncombatant residents of that war-torn country, often at great risk to his own hide.

Yet this man was not a do-gooder, nor a zealot, nor some kind of white knight on a snorting charger. On the contrary, Bolan's philosophy was quite simple—if a clear preference for good over evil can be called that. A younger Mack Bolan touched on this in a letter from Vietnam to his father.

"This is not a war of ideologies," Bolan wrote, "despite what the moralists back home, on both sides of the argument, seem to think. It is a war for the future of the human spirit. And if we allow that spirit to be crushed, we fail all mankind."

Mack Bolan had kept a personal journal since the age of fourteen. He later made the following entry, while awaiting this assignment at Stony Man Farm.

The enemy in this new war is the same as it has always been, the same as it was in Southeast Asia, the same as the Cosa Nostra was on the home front. That enemy is Animal Man, whatever he calls himself, whatever his race, nationality, so-called philosophy, or politics. Neither has my mission changed. It remains to preserve the human estate, the heritage of civilization, and positive human evolution—in short, all the noblest aspirations of the human spirit.

It is easy for all of us to become complacent. War has not been fought within the boundaries of this country for over a century, when men died in this very valley. Many have no firsthand experience of the horror of man taking up arms against man. It is much easier when the fight is muddying up someone else's backyard instead of your own. It is much easier to perceive the struggle as remote, even unreal, when the war is carried on television between reruns of some situation comedy.

But there is nothing unreal about the struggle at all. It is there, and it goes on. We cannot leave it to

someone else to fight it. We are the "someone else," those of us who understand what has gone wrong and what is to be done about it.

What is unreal is the perception of peace, the notion that man's oppression of his fellow man is a sometimes thing that really doesn't touch us. It is illusory, like a brightly painted backdrop on a stage that hides the rotting bare boards behind it.

At this moment, in so many corners of the globe, violence and terrorism are the orders of the day. Arabs against Jews, Jews against Muslims, Muslims against Christians, Protestants against Catholics, Whites against blacks, even men against women. From South Africa to Northern Ireland, from Haiti to Cambodia, the world is soiled with violence. Whether the roots are racial, religious, economic, or utterly irrational, the results are the same: distrust blooming into fear, then turned into raw hatred that cannot but end in the sudden and senseless death of the innocent for the betterment of the vicious few.

Then we have the professional terrorists, who don't even pretend to have an ideology. They are the worst of this unholy brotherhood, brutal mercenaries for hire to anyone with the right price, willing and even eager to kill for the unholy pleasure of the act as well as for the money.

They are men with the moral sense of a poisonous snake, belly-crawling their way through life. I will not suffer the existence of flagrant human savagery.

The world is not made for people. It is made by people. Like everyone, I have a choice: I can sit back and hope that the world does not overtake me, or I can do my best to swing that world around in the direction I choose.

"An interesting substance, heroin," Aaron Kurtzman said pensively from his console in the corner of the War Room. Bolan, Brognola, and April turned a little in their chairs to hear him better.

"I just read the most recent scientific study on it," Kurtzman went on. "It's more than addictive. It becomes a way of life. The addict's entire consciousness is taken over by his need for it, so that his reason for existence is defined by his desperate quest to ensure that he is never without it."

"A kind of slavery," Bolan said. "The worst kind, because its victim is even robbed of his ability to comprehend his situation."

Kurtzman nodded in agreement. "It really is the most efficient instrument of enslavement ever conceived. And it doesn't affect just the addict. A large and regular supply of heroin can cripple an entire society. Have no doubt, Mack. If you can't bust this new heroin pipeline, the United States will suffer serious damage."

Kurtzman raised one meaty hand and counted the points off on his fingers. "First, it is highly profitable for the sellers. The markup between the poppy farmer and the street vendor is several thousand percent. That means that the terrorists at one end of the pipeline and organized crime at the other end will get fat and strong from the profits. That could undo a lot of your earlier good work, Mack.

"Second, most of the user population will resort to street crime to support the habit, seriously depressing the quality of life in our urban centers.

"Third, the economy suffers, because when goods and money are stolen, the honest person pays proportionately more for everything.

"And fourth, police agencies on all levels become overburdened, and their general effectiveness is reduced. That completes the vicious circle: the original crime thus encourages subsequent crime." Kurtzman put a match to his pipe and puffed vigorously.

"It's the ultimate army of invasion," Bolan said. "No personnel or equipment to speak of, no risk or danger. Just a little white dust that can bring a country to its knees."

"Right," Brognola said. "And that's what we're facing, Mack. The coalition government's intelligence people have discovered that the terrorists have formed a cadre in eastern Turkey. They've

been subsidizing the growing of opium poppies for several years, and they've set up a plant in the area for processing it into raw opium. Now they've got enough stockpiled to move. First it goes to refining factories in southern Europe, where it becomes heroin. The Italian Mafia has a hand in that part of the operation. From there," the head fed said solemnly, "the flood starts. It ends on our streets."

"Do we have an exact location on the stockpile?" Bolan asked.

"No, but we can come close," Brognola said. "Aaron, could we have the relevant sector on display, please?"

The Bear's tobacco-stained fingers danced over the console. The lights dimmed as he called up data. A moment later a map of the eastern area of Turkey came up on one of the video screens. The Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic appeared, abutting Turkey's eastern border, a mountainous, landlocked state slightly bigger than Maryland.

"The area is rugged and sparsely populated," Brognola said. "Communications facilities are limited, and a hell of a lot could go on there that no one would know much about. But we've had a few breaks. Our intelligence sources have been able to ascertain, partially through observation and partially from reports from Kurdish nomads in the area, that the Turkish terrorist group—they call themselves the Turkish Peoples' Liberation Army—has concentrated its activity in this area, the high country north of Lake Van." Brognola's pointer indicated a large, roughly triangular body of water, then moved higher on the map. "Here, north of Van and south of the Kara River, is high mountain country. There are several abandoned mines in the area, and we are pretty sure they are using one for their base. To process the raw opium, they've got to have a generator. If we send you over in a chopper equipped with heat sensors, Striker, you should be able to pinpoint them."

Brognola looked at Bolan. The big man stared back impassively. "We can't intercede in what would appear to the world as an internal matter," Brognola said. "At least not officially. For their part, the Turkish government is justifiably afraid that if they were to go in with a large force, the word would get out, whether the operation were successful or not. That would no doubt drive into a rampage the thousands of other members of the Turkish terrorist underground who are well-entrenched in both Istanbul and Ankara."

"That's where I come in," Bolan said.

"Correct. You've got to find that damn heroin cache, Striker, and you've got to see that it never finds its way out of Turkey. You'll move out immediately. We have good reason to believe that the terrorists are about to make their play."

The head fed sat down, eased back in his chair, and took in the other three. "Okay," he said. "Questions?"

"Several," Bolan said softly. "But let's start with the obvious one. I know you've determined that Adamian fits in. How, and on whose side?"

Brognola sighed, and for just that one unguarded moment, Mack Bolan could see in the man's face all the burdens that he carried on his shoulders, all the responsibility for making decisions that, if they turned sour, could change the course of the free world for the worse. Then the top cop straightened, and the light of dedication flashed back into his eyes.

"He fits, all right, Striker," Brognola said. "And what he means is trouble, pure and simple."



April came out onto the front porch of the farmhouse and refilled Bolan's coffee cup. He gave her an absentminded smile, and she returned a wide grin that demanded he take a longer look. Not only was she tall and strikingly built, but she carried with her a poise that made even strangers listen to what she had to say. Now that the morning sun had warmed the air, she had changed to a pair of cutoff blue jeans and a checked shirt tied halter-style under her breasts. She looked, Bolan thought, a little like Li'l Abner's girlfriend Daisy Mae, but with dark hair.

The morning briefing had broken for a while to give Bolan time to go over some background material that had come down the line from the NSC main computer. He set aside the sheaf of papers, lit a cigarette, and sipped at the coffee. He was impatient to get on with it, but there was a question in the girl's eyes that demanded an answer.

"It's starting again, isn't it?"

"It never ended," Bolan said. "You know that." "Damn it," she said suddenly.

Bolan stood up and faced her. "What is it, pretty lady?" he asked softly.

"Nothing," she snapped. But then her voice softened too. "That's a lie," she went on. "It's a whole lot."

"I understand." And he did, perhaps more than he would ever be able to express to this woman in words.

"No," April said. "Let me get it out now, and maybe I won't have to go through this every time." She took a deep breath. "It's always going to be this way, isn't it? Somebody's after someone someplace, and they send you off as though you were some piece of machinery. And you go right along with it. In the meantime, I sit here wondering whether you're ever going to come back, and if you do, whether it will be in a car or in a box."

Bolan shook his head. He reached out and ran one finger tenderly down the side of her pretty face. "No one sends me anywhere. You know that; you've made the same choices I have."

"Why does it have to be alone every time?"

"You know the answer to that one, too. We're talking about one-man quick-reaction capability, and that's something I know."

"While the woman sits at home keeping house."

Bolan laughed. "You're right," he said. "None of us trust women with the really important jobs. That must be why you're my primary mission control and why you're in charge of the whole ball of wax when I'm not here. Women's work, right?"

April laughed, too, and she flushed prettily. "Mack," she said. "I'm sorry. And thanks for listening."

She turned and shook her butt at him saucily, then disappeared back into the house. Bolan stared after her thoughtfully, then went back to his reading.

Writing in his journal later, in an attempt to sort out on paper what he had learned, Mack Bolan had cause to reflect on the nature of history. If the story of mankind was centered around a series of conflicts, as it appeared to be, it would seem to be impossible for the historian not to take sides. And yet the world was, and always had been, colored with varying shades of victory and defeat, of good and evil.

The history of the conflict between Turks and Armenians, the conflict that motivated Marko Adamian, was rich in these subtle shadings. And it was a conflict that was as old as three millennia, and as new as the Beverly Hills fire of the night before.

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