

CHRISANN DAWSON

CONGO EBOLA

A large, jagged, black tear or scratch mark runs diagonally across the center of the cover, from the top right towards the bottom left. Inside this torn area, there is a silhouette of a group of about seven people standing together, facing forward. The tear has a rough, irregular edge, giving it the appearance of a physical wound or a significant breach.

THE CONGO SERIES

BOOK 3



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Congo Ebola
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Edited by Chris and Andrea Elston. Book layout and design by Chris Elston. Cover design by Liana Moisesescu

Library of Congress Control Number: 2024941236

ISBN: 978-1-953158-17-8
Printed in the U.S.A.



CONGO EBOLA

The image features the words "CONGO" and "EBOLA" in a large, bold, distressed font that resembles weathered metal. A large, dark, jagged scratch or tear runs diagonally across the center, revealing a silhouette of a group of people standing together. The scratch is deep and irregular, with sharp edges and a rough texture. The background is plain white.

Chapter 1

James sighed.

Immediately, his mind raced back to 2011 and the life-changing experience he had that year. It was nearly all he could think about when remembering his prior encounter with Congo. While it had started with what he thought was going to be an ordinary mission, it eventually led into an unexpected reunion with the love of his life and ended with the two of them being kidnapped by rebel forces, held for ransom, and narrowly escaping with their lives. Six years ago, he had gone to finish his previous mission, and here he was on an Air France flight that was about to land him there in that very same place for the third time. While parts of his past experiences had been amazing overall, they were something he had hoped never to repeat and this assignment scared him. He knew it was because he had more to lose than the first time that he had landed in N’Jili Airport in Kinshasa. Now, he had a wife and two beautiful boys.

The sigh formed itself into a smile when he thought about Julia,

and how their harrowing experience forced their relationship to blossom into something solid very quickly. Once safe, they had made their union official with a stateside wedding and short honeymoon before James was shipped back to Congo to finish that initial mission.

He was tired of adventure after that and just wanted to be with Julia. James had managed to get himself assigned to a training position for communications at Joint-Base Lewis-McCord in Washington state. Six years later, he found himself about twelve months out from being eligible for the retirement benefits that came with two full decades of service. That year should have slipped by on easy wings, until just a few days earlier when he got the phone call.

“James Worthy? This is Colonel John Fitzpatrick. Long time. How’ve you been?”

“Fine sir,” James responded, trying to mask his quickly sucked in breath. “What’s on your mind?”

“Ha! Some things never change,” Fitzpatrick answered. “Always right to the point. I like that about you. I’m calling to pull you out of your life of leisure among the evergreens. We need you in Congo again but in a totally different capacity. Want to hear the details?”

“Do I have a choice?” James half teased.

“Not really,” Fitzpatrick chuckled. “I’m sure you’ve heard the news about this most recent Ebola outbreak in Congo. Well, the international medical volunteers on the ground near the spillover

spot, the interior town of Domiongo, require some oversight. They need someone in charge of security for the entire operation. Your connection to the Congo and grasp of Lingala makes you the perfect man for this job. I’ll email you the details of the assignment. You can look it over and give me an answer tomorrow.”

James agreed to do just that. Four days later, he was in the air and on his way. Julia was worried about him being so close to the epicenter of the outbreak of this deadly hemorrhagic fever. As a nurse, she was fully aware of the risk to her husband’s health by being in such proximity. Plus, raising their boys alone nagged at her mind. James shared her concern.

Even though he considered himself to be a solid believer, the foundations of James’ faith were shaken by this task. Once again, a sigh released some of his inner turmoil. He put down the information with the details of the assignment, rested his head against the seat cushion and prepared to land in Paris where he was to change planes.

Chapter 2

The jetliner was on its final descent to the airport. James could feel the wheels snap into place, preparing to touch down. He relaxed as soon as the ones in the rear contacted the runway, but immediately the plane was once again going up. Several passengers around him that were awake expressed surprise at the rapid change of plans by the pilot. All eyes turned toward the few windows that had shades open.

Several passengers shrieked in fear and exclaimed simultaneously, “We’re going to die!”

James, too, saw what they saw. Another 757 was touching down on the right side of their plane, landing on a perpendicular runway. As their craft climbed upward, the oncoming plane passed just under theirs. James quickly opened his shade in time to see the other plane taxiing down the runway on the left. The two planes missed a messy collision by only inches. “Oh God, thank You,” he breathed.

Several others around him also added their praise to God. One middle eastern businessman behind him was profusely thanking

Allah. Nervous energy forced all the passengers that had witnessed the event to suddenly talk to each other, recounting what they had seen. The oblivious ones awoke to learn of the near miss. Within a few minutes of circling the airport, their plane landed safely, and the passengers disembarked.

James grabbed his rucksack and followed the crowd, most stopping to thank the pilot, who himself looked a bit unnerved. Once he got to the terminal, he found a cup of coffee, a cheese sandwich, and a quiet corner in a café in the middle of the night. He wanted to wrap his mind around everything and get his thoughts focused on his current mission. Somehow, he couldn't shake the idea that the "almost accident" was a harbinger, something to hint at the risk that lay ahead of him in Congo. "What time I am afraid, I will put my trust in You," James repeated the verse from Psalm 56 to himself out loud until he felt calmer and more in control.

As a Special Forces soldier, he was always trained to keep his mind at ease and yet focused, but as he aged, he found that he needed to lean more on God's strength and less on his own.

An hour before taking off for Kinshasa, James was seated at his gate. He was exhausted from the first leg of his journey and knew that once he was in Congo, he would be immediately taken interior, where he figured that any sleep he managed would be poor. Determined to preempt that on this next seven-hour flight, he boarded the plane

when his seat number was called, popped a ten-milligram chewable melatonin into his mouth, and settled back to sleep all the way to Kinshasa. He was out before they had reached cruising altitude.

Chapter 3

An hour before the plane was scheduled to land, James was awakened by the stewardess bringing breakfast and coffee. He sat up, stretched out his still well-chiseled back muscles, and worked on waking up his mind. Navigating the N’Jili Airport was never an easy task, and he had to hit the ground running.

James carefully nursed the small, very strong cup of coffee after adding his cream and sugar. He took time to check his passport, visa, and letter of intent. The last time he was in Congo, he was a part of an American unit sent by President Obama to hunt down rebel warlords. This time would be very different. He would be a small piece of a larger international community assembled to deal with this deadly crisis. It would be a new experience for him, probably requiring some mental adjustments.

Every passenger buckled in as the captain announced they were on their final descent. After the near miss in Paris, James was more than a little nervous about the prospect of landing. The worry was

unfounded as the pilot smoothly set down the huge craft on the rather dilapidated field. After James secured his belt pack and shifted his rucksack onto his shoulder, he stepped out the door onto the portable metal stairs. The combined heat and humidity of the early morning in Congo engulfed him, making him feel as if he were breathing in warm bath water.

He said his final goodbye to the stewardess and civilization and walked down the steps. He was shuffled along with the others toward the terminal to be greeted by the health official checking shot records in the back of passports. Once inside, the chaos and confusion, combined with the heat, made a strange welcoming committee. James maneuvered through the crowd toward customs. He knew his international invitation would be more than enough to get him through the process easily. He stepped to the small window, handed the man his papers, and waited for them to be handed back. On the other side of the gate, he was supposed to be greeted by the United Nations' protocol.

James noticed a thin, dirty-blond haired man with his name on a sign and walked in that direction. The man reached out a hand. "James Worthy? I'm Sebastian Smith, part of the UK delegation here in Congo to address this crisis. I'm the one who will get you on your next flight to the interior."

"Nice to meet you, though not really under these circumstances,"

James replied. "Just curious, but I studied as much as I could of Domiongo. I could not see an airport there. How exactly am I landing?"

"Good question. Well, weeks back when the international community felt the need to move in to manage this outbreak, they hired an Italian company to build a dirt runway. That's the reason only small prop planes can get in and out with ease. Larger shipments of supplies are going upriver by barge and then by road. Anything else you were wondering about?"

"What about housing?"

"Another good question," Sebastian said. "An educational facility has offered the use of their buildings as clinics, offices, and temporary dormitories. Rather primitive but better than the grass huts that many have there. No running water per se, but large plastic cisterns have been placed on elevated platforms to use gravity to create pressure for showers. Just bucket flushing for the bathrooms though. Meals and clean water are being prepared by experts. Here's your ride," Sebastian said as he led James back out onto the tarmac and up to a small prop plane.

"This is Dan Carson. He's a missionary pilot with Mission Aviation Fellowship. He's been a huge help in getting people in and out of the interior. Dan, meet James Worthy, American military, here to coordinate the security efforts out there in Domiongo."

James and Dan shook hands and exchanged information about their homes stateside. Dan took James' rucksack, placed it in the back, and said they were waiting for one more passenger. Sebastian dismissed himself and left the two men to become more acquainted.

Soon, an American-trained Congolese doctor named Pierre Kalongo showed up. Once he was situated with his gear properly stowed under the cabin, the men readied themselves for the four-hour flight to Domiongo and their uncertain future in this terrifying health crisis.

Chapter 4

Of course, the takeoff went smoothly, but James was worried about the landing on that new dirt runway. He had flown in various crafts his whole military career with little bother to his equilibrium, but he noticed, as he had aged, that his stomach did not tolerate the rough flying of smaller planes well. As Dan circled his Cessna around the field to check for goats, James felt the blood drain from his face. Things became black for a second, and he was sure he was going to be sick. He grasped the plastic bag Dan handed him and steadied his head against the seat back.

But sooner than he had expected the plane was down and the door was open, allowing a warm breeze to fan his face. James sighed his relief as he tumbled out of the plane, thankful to be safely on the ground.

Pierre was just as pleased to have landed, but the two men became gravely sober as they remembered why they were there.

One man stepped away from the small building being used as a

terminal accompanied by a soldier, the strong sunlight causing them both to squint their eyes. “Hello, I’m Jim Pressman from the UK; this is Facundo Martinez, a UN soldier from Uruguay. Glad you’re both here. I’m in charge of protocol in Domiongo with the international response to this outbreak. Both of you are vital to the success of this mission. James, I’m happy to turn over security to you. I’ve been carrying that burden in addition to my other duties. Pierre, we need your expertise on this deadly disease.”

Both men put forth their hands to shake, but he put his up in protest. “New rule; no hand shaking here on the ground. We touch elbows instead. Trying whatever means necessary to prevent the spread of the virus.”

James and Pierre tried out their new greeting as Dan prepared his craft to return to Kinshasa with a few outbound aid workers. Pressman led the way to an ancient Toyota Landcruiser that was parked a few meters away. “I’ll drive you to your quarters, then meet you in an hour to give you a tour of the operations before the evening meal is served,” he instructed. Facundo stayed behind on his post.

“This landing strip was built north and east of Domiongo only a month ago,” Pressman offered as the two men threw their gear into the back of the Toyota and climbed in. James took the back seat.

“Can you explain what we’re seeing as we head toward the compound?” James asked. “Was this road also repaired to

accommodate the mission?”

“Yes,” Pressman said. “You were here in Congo six years ago I was told. So, you are familiar with the condition of most of the interior roads. This one was in no shape to bring people and sensitive equipment along, so it was repaired by the same Italian company that built the strip. The jungle is very dense along both sides of the road, but Domiongo also has very wide-open spaces. After all, a large part of it is savannah as well.”

Now it was Pierre’s turn. “So, what are we to expect as far as medical conditions? What type of buildings are being used as clinics? And what protocol is there to ensure the safety of the medical staff?”

“Well, there’s the Josephite school complex on the north side of town, a bit away from the main population,” Pressman answered. “The year was nearly over for the dry season when the outbreak occurred, and the administrators have graciously offered the use of their compound for as long as needed. They run a technical and teaching institute here that has been in Domiongo since 1929. Some buildings are older, but all are well-maintained for the purpose of educating young people. As for the safety protocol, standard practices are being observed. Doctors and nurses are completely suited up with no skin showing. They are then sprayed down with bleach after seeing patients even before the suits are removed. So far, none of the medical personnel have been infected with the disease.”

Since the school was near the airport, the drive was completed in less than ten minutes. The Toyota stopped in front of a heavy steel gate and honked demandingly. The gate swung open to allow James and Pierre to step into their new reality: combating Ebola in central Congo.

Chapter 5

The gate opened and before them sat an old, red-roofed structure. It had been built long ago as the first school of the Josephites, a small Catholic mission organization, but was eventually repurposed into school offices. Due to the current situation, however, it had been converted into a staging area and offices for the medical staff. The building was shaped like a “T” and behind it to the left was another two-story construction.

“This is where the medical community meets daily,” Pressman explained. “From here they plan the day’s events, record data, and execute their duties in defeating this invisible enemy. Some team members are actually doing research here on the spillover site. That building you see to the left is being used as the clinic for the infected persons. It is well away from where the rest of the volunteers, aides, and reporters are staying. We felt it best to put as much distance as possible between the volunteers and the sick.”

“Good thinking,” Pierre chimed in.

Once they were through the gate, and it was closed behind them, the vehicle continued down the sandy path to the left, headed toward the dorms and cafeteria. James was impressed with the quality of the buildings as they approached, and his eyes appreciated the beauty of the well-maintained grounds. Palm trees and ancient tropical plants were everywhere. Their vehicle drove past another long, two-story, red-roofed building and stopped in front of a smaller structure with a typical tin roof.

“James, this is where you and Pierre will be staying. Some security personnel are in chambers on the bottom floor over there. You have a separate room; that larger one down there on the left with the gray door. We felt like your job is rather individual and that you would do better with focusing on security if you had your own accommodations. Pierre, we have you in this first room with an American doctor, Lucas Jackson. We figured you’d enjoy a roommate that you could chat with about the States since you were educated there. He’s older than you, in his forties, but you should get along.”

James and Pierre hopped out, stretched their legs, and grabbed their gear. Pierre opened the door to his new home, and it was immediately obvious which bed was his by the lack of mess on the left side of the room. He had been pleased to see that it was freshly painted, had good lighting, and a wide window at the back. James, too, was pleased with his. He stepped inside to appreciate his own

freshly painted pale yellow walls. It was a bit larger than the others, ten meters by ten meters, and had a double bed with a mosquito net, a wicker chair and footstool, and a long worktable and chair. There was a large open window along his back wall as well, facing a jungle twenty meters away. He set his bag down and closed the door.

Pressman had said supper would be, at five o’clock, which gave James an hour to organize himself before meeting his colleagues. Sixty minutes remained of what he considered a normal life.

Chapter 6

As James settled into his new home, he began to unpack the items he had brought with him; some out of necessity and others to give him a little familiarity to this otherwise mostly uncomfortable situation. The first thing he did was take out the picture of his family. Julia, Silas and Luke, with himself at Multnomah Falls in Oregon. It was taken only three weeks earlier, the most up to date one he had. It grieved him that his boys would be growing while he was away on this assignment. One with no definite end date. He worried that Luke would not remember him when he got back to the States, so he decided to give Julia a quick call before his life became too complicated. It was only four a.m. on the west coast, and James knew she'd be asleep, but he wanted to reassure her that he was safely on the ground.

The phone rang on the other end and Julia picked up almost immediately. "Hello?" came the groggy voice.

"Julia? Hey Babe, I just wanted you to know I'm here. Sorry to wake you."

“No worries,” Julia said, clearing her throat. “I was just starting to stir anyway. How was your flight? Uneventful, I hope.”

“Hmm, well, not quite. But all’s well that ends well, right? We had a near miss on the stopover in Paris. Too long of a story to recount now. I’ll email you about it later tonight though.”

“Sounds like a plan. Just glad you’re safe.”

“Hey, I have my own room. It’s actually a pretty good size and comes complete with its own mosquito net, too. The place, as a whole, is a large campus of a school that’s almost ninety years old. You would like the architecture and landscaping. Very well maintained.”

“Good,” she whispered. ‘But what about the important stuff? How far is the hospital facility from where you will be staying? Are you in any danger?’”

James could hear the concern in her voice and was quick to put her at ease the best he could. “Don’t worry, Julia. They have the living quarters as far from the medical facility as possible. A good quarter of a mile anyway. I’m fine. Besides I have no business being that close to the action.”

“Well, good,” Julia said, sounding the slightest bit relieved.

“Listen, I need to finish unpacking before supper in a few minutes. I promise that I will email you later when I get my laptop set up and figure out the WiFi. Take care, Babe! I love you.”

“I love you too, James. Bye.”

James sighed again as he clicked off the phone. His hands felt chilled, and he wiped them across his hot face. The act both calmed and comforted him. He had paid the extra money to have his American carrier open his phone to international calls and was glad he did. He finished pulling out his laptop, charging cords, and adaptors for the exchange of electrical current to 110, then splashed water on his face and brushed his hair. He was thankful his room had a sink, using gravity fed water, although no toilet or shower was in sight. He would need to find that toilet before supper.

James left his room and began to survey his environment, getting a solid lay of the complex. He had been a soldier for nineteen years, nine in the Special Forces. It was an old habit to thoroughly take in his surroundings before stepping into them. He could see Pressman chatting with a colleague across the courtyard, so he knew he had a few minutes to continue familiarizing himself with the area.

Just behind his building, beyond another long one, was a huge, sprawling breadfruit tree loaded with green, football-sized fruit, which was more like a starch, similar to a potato. Immediately to his right was a cinder block building with a rusty, tin roof. Pressman had said that it housed the media. Directly across the courtyard was a very long two-story building, and he couldn’t help but wonder who was staying there. The UN, EU, and NATO all had personnel participating in this mission. There were two mango trees on either

end of the building. The fruit was abundant, but it was deep green because harvest was still months away. His heart sank, hoping he was no longer in Congo to eat those ripened mangoes.

He strode across the courtyard toward Pressman and met up with him just as Pierre was stepping out of his room. Another thing that James noticed was the large step up into that longer building. From being in Congo last time, he realized that this was due to the pathways being swept daily for decades. He remembered that Congolese mamas made a habit of sweeping their yards.

James greeted the two as Pierre approached. "I hope the grand tour begins with the bathroom."

"Oh, right. I should have pointed that out when I dropped you off. Sorry, that was like an hour ago. Let's start in that direction. The bathroom is just a glorified outhouse. It's behind that building there where the press is staying. I'll walk you guys over."

"What's this long building here?" Pierre asked.

"That one actually has many uses. The cafeteria is down there on the left. It's open anytime of the day or night with water, bread, butter, jam, peanut butter, coffee and tea in thermoses, and sugar and powdered full-cream milk. To the right is an internet room, a library, and a television room. We have no channels, but plenty of DVD's and a player. The second door leads to a lounge. The rest of the rooms are used as dormitories for the international staff. Here are those

bathrooms. To the right are three water closets and to the left are three showers. Those are gravity fed, but the bathrooms have buckets of water for flushing."

James stepped into one of the WC's. The ceramic floor that greeted him sloped down toward the back, leading to a hole. He did his business and washed things down by dipping a large plastic cup of water out of one of the buckets. Once outside, his small group headed back to the cafeteria for supper.

Chapter 7

Pressman, James, and Pierre entered the cafeteria, which was already mostly full. Pressman stopped to paint his colleagues a picture of the way things worked in there. “Ok, men, this is basically how it is. Most days people sit in the same few tables with the same people based on common interest or language. At those back two tables on the right are where most of the English-speaking members sit. Usually from the US or UK. They represent the International Red Cross, World Health Organization, and Samaritan’s Purse. Some are doctors and pharmacists. Others are here doing data collection and research. We’ll sit at that back right table.”

“That sounds good to me,” James piped up. “I like sitting where I can see the whole room, with my back to the wall. Even before joining the Special Forces, I liked to adhere to Doc Holliday’s advice.”

“You’re not the first person I’ve heard say that,” Pressman snickered before continuing. “Sitting at the two tables in that back left corner are the Congolese nurses and doctors. Pierre, you are free

to join them or sit with us. I can introduce you if you like.”

“Great,” Pierre said. “I’ll join them in a minute.”

“At that middle back table are members of both the WHO and the EU. They are also here mainly organizing data and reporting results back to their offices on the continent, mostly speaking French and German. In front of them is the small contingency from the UN. They are soldiers from Uruguay, like Facundo. They all speak Spanish but are also fairly fluent in English. James, much of your job will be to work with them in security, as well as form a solid bond with the local FARDC unit. Finally, this table closest to us right here is the press corps. They represent Sky News, BBC, CNN, and Al Jazeera. They all speak several languages, including English.

“Now, on to the more important matter at hand, let me show you how food is served,” Pressman continued with a grin. He began walking toward the area where the kitchen window showed a counter with plates displayed. As James followed, his right shoulder was roughly shoved back by someone passing him. A tall, bearded man with piercing blue eyes and dark brown hair gave James a long stare before mumbling an apology under his breath and moving on. James continued to watch him walk to the press table and sit down, then turned back to catch up to Pressman.

“So, the plates are filled here at the kitchen counter. The utensils are here. Dirty plates and silverware are left in this dish pan of soapy,

bleach water. Drinks are here,” Jim pointed toward the table to the right of the kitchen window. “Like I said, two large coolers of ice water, all purified. One of coffee. One of tea with the cream and sugar already added. Over there are the containers of additional sugar, and full cream powdered milk. Locally made fresh bread is out twenty-four hours a day, along with peanut butter, jams, and an off-brand Nutella. Grab your plates, men. James, I’ll meet you back at the table. Pierre, let me get you introduced.”

James made his way through the maze of cafeteria furniture and found a seat. He set his plate aside and returned for his drinks. He downed one whole cup of water and refilled it, then chose a mug of the tea as well. He craved coffee, but he also knew it was too late in the day to drink that much caffeine. Several of the English-speaking members nodded to him as he passed by again. As he settled into his chair, with his back to the wall, one man got up from the next table and sat down across from him.

“I’m Lucas Jackson, a doctor here working with Samaritan’s Purse. Mind if I join you? I’d shake your hand, but especially in the cafeteria at least, we try to avoid that. Don’t want to spread the virus by accident. We’ve gotten into the habit of bumping elbows, though.”

“Yes, I heard. James Worthy, Special Forces. Just got called up to oversee the security of this operation. Nice to meet you.”

“I’m glad to see a fellow American joining the team, especially

doing security.” Lucas began. “I tell you, there’s something about this outbreak that worries me. I just can’t put my finger on it.”

“Well, hopefully I can,” James encouraged.

“Me too,” he chuckled. “So, tell me more about yourself. Like where you grew up, your military career, family...hit me.” Lucas finished so his new friend could talk and began to eat his meal.

“Well,” James started, “I grew up in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, just north of Philadelphia. My wife, Julia, and I went to high school together, but lost touch until six years ago when we met up in Eastern Congo. She was doing a short term as an NGO nurse at a hospital. I was here as part of that Special Forces team that President Obama sent back in 2011 to hunt down some warlords. Julia and I went through a pretty harrowing experience back then. We were actually abducted by a small rebel group.”

“Wow! Sounds terrifying,” Lucas responded.

“It was. We escaped though, obviously, but the experience convinced us that we wanted to be together, so we did a quick military wedding before I had to go back and finish that tour. Once completed, I got myself a cushy gig in Washington state. We have two boys, Silas and Luke, four and two.”

“Yikes... at least it all worked out.”

“True,” James continued, “and all was going well until less than a week ago. I was called up for this assignment because I’m familiar

with the culture and know a smattering of Lingala. But I gotta tell you, Lucas, I don’t like it. I’m one year from retirement. I just have an uneasy feeling that something will keep me from crossing that line as smoothly as I would like. Enough about me though. Tell me your story. How long have you been with Samaritan’s Purse?”

Just then Pressman approached the table after having introduced Pierre to the Congolese doctors.

“Hey,” greeted Lucas. “I was just about to tell James my story.” Pressman took a seat as Lucas continued. “So, I’m actually just with Samaritan’s Purse for this crisis. I typically work at a hospital in Miami. Mostly, I deal with trauma in the ER, but occasionally I need to fall back on my college specialty which is infectious diseases. Sometimes people come into the port of Miami carrying more than just luggage.”

“That experience makes you valuable, I’m sure,” James said.

“Definitely coming in handy here. Anyway, my family lives there in Dade County. I think I’m a bit older than you, plus I married younger. I met my wife, Cindy, at our church’s singles’ ministry about ten years ago. We have two kids too, but a son and a daughter. Congo is new to me. Samaritan’s Ministry reached out from a tip from a friend, who overheard something in a conversation. You know how that goes,” Lucas smiled wryly.

“That’s how I got here too,” James added.

“Anyway, I’ll chat more about my worries after a bit. Let’s eat.”

The three men dug into their plates of a very typical meal: beans, rice, greens, stewed goat, and canned corn. Pressman explained that the food repeated itself on a similar pattern each day and week. James simply appreciated a warm meal, and as the food settled into his stomach, a deep, overpowering fatigue enveloped him. His flight had begun yesterday morning in Washington. Now at the end of his second day, he was near exhaustion. He completed his meal, said goodbye to his dinner companions, and excused himself for the night. He knew that he had to get that promised email in for Julia before succumbing to his weariness.

“Well, that’s a wrap for me, fellas. I’m bushed. I’ll probably be up in the middle of the night thinking about what I can snack on and being irritated by the time change. See you in the morning.”

James made sure he got in one more trip to the WC before retiring to his home away from home to finish off his evening.

Chapter 8

James felt immense relief when he walked into his room and locked the door behind him. He was exhausted, not only from his traveling, but also from the burden of meeting new people and adjusting to the new surroundings. His years in Washington state had softened him. He acknowledged that he was no longer as sharp as he was during his active years in the Special Forces. He also had to face his underlying fear concerning this assignment, but that would have to wait until after a night of rest.

The first thing he did was shed his shoes for the flipflops that he pulled out of his rucksack. He then got everything ready inside his bed and arranged the mosquito net, getting it properly tucked in. Next went his water bottle from the airplane, a flashlight, his Bible, pens, and his journal, a habit which he learned to appreciate from his wife. He was missing her and couldn’t wait for the next time he was able to communicate with her. Thinking of Julia made him smile. His love for her was deep and had almost already lasted a lifetime. This, of

course, prompted him to move onto his next task of getting connected to the internet.

One of the news agencies, realizing how vital internet was to their journalists, had worked hard to set up an independent connection through satellite phones and a series of routers that linked to the cell tower located a few kilometers away in Domiongo. Congo had jumped from the old, black rotary phones to cellular technology overnight. What used to be only ham radios and a few Motorolas, was now a sophisticated network of towers crisscrossing the country, many built by CCT, a Chinese communication company. James was really appreciating that advancement at that moment.

He sat in front of his laptop and pulled out the piece of paper from his shirt pocket that Pressman had given him with instructions on how to link to the internet. Within a minute he was excited to be connected and immediately began his letter to Julia.

Hey Babe!

I got connected pretty quick. I just got back from supper and decided to lock myself in early for the night. So far, I like the team members that I've become acquainted with. A man named Jim Pressman met us at the small, dirt landing strip, got us settled in, and then took us to the cafeteria. I ate with him and an American named Lucas Jackson who's a

doctor with Samaritan's Purse. I think I'm really going to like him.

I promised I'd tell you about that scare we had in Paris. In short, our pilot had touched down our back wheels, but suddenly changed his mind and took us straight up again, hard. A few of us who were awake looked out the window to the right and saw a jet landing on an adjacent runway. It missed ramming the side of our plane by inches and seconds. Really scary. Oddly, it seemed like a warning. You know I'm not superstitious, but I was annoyed by that thought.

Anyway, supper was nice, and I like that I have my own room. I probably will save my shower for the morning. I'm craving sleep right now. It's been a long thirty hours. Jules, please pray for me often. I'm really worried about this assignment. Give the boys a squeeze for me.

I love you, Babe.

Me

James sighed when he pushed the send button, that irritating habit that started six years ago and seemed to be a part of his Congo experience. He had one more email to send before he could begin to relax. Colonel Fitzpatrick had asked him to let him know that he was safely on the ground. He plunked out a quick correspondence to him and clicked his computer shut. . He sighed again, looked around his room, and thought about those granola bars in the bottom of his sack.

He pulled one out, replaced his clothes with gym shorts, put his shirt and pants on the hooks, and crawled into the mosquito net. He had already positioned the fan inside, tucking the net everywhere else around the bed.

His intention was to journal first, but as soon as his head hit the pillow, he felt the need for sleep rise up. As he was drifting off, he thought he heard a helicopter landing somewhere nearby. *That's a strange sound this late in the day*, was his last thought before finally giving in to slumber.

A ten-minute drive away, on that same grass landing strip, the helicopter pilot was helping his passenger, a willowy, thirty-something woman, down to the ground. She grabbed his hand to steady herself and let a few choice swear words describe what she thought of the intense heat and humidity. A thin, rigid, tall man walked over from the small mudbrick building to greet her. The Congolese soldier he had paid to keep his mouth shut, glanced away to avoid becoming even more complicit than he already was.

"I'm JP Walker," she introduced herself. The man accepted her information but offered none of his own. He simply pointed to an old Toyota pickup truck and helped JP into the passenger seat, tossing her bags in the bed.

Once they pulled out of the landing strip compound and headed for town, the driver spoke. "Are you sure you know your assignment?"

"We can't afford any mistakes. This man must be distracted from doing his job."

"I understand. This isn't my first rodeo," JP practically shrieked.

The rest of the ride to the older, Belgian-built houses on the north side of Domiongo was finished in silence. When they arrived at their destination, JP was introduced to the sentinel and cuisinier before being shown to her room. Without a goodnight, the two parted, each completely focused on their task. J.P. went to sleep, but her driver hung around in the shadows and then, a few hours later, slipped away from the house.

As James was falling asleep in Congo, Julia was back home and pulling out her family journal. This particular one was where she shared her fears and triumphs and all the beautiful little things that made up her life. She took her pen and added to it.

June 5, 2017

God, I'm addressing this as a prayer to You because I am so frightened. The last time I felt this way was when James and I were abducted, but I haven't been so terrified since. James is far away from us and in a very dangerous situation. Ebola, God! Ebola! How can he combat an unseen enemy?

Lord, I know I have to trust him to Your care. I am completely powerless here to do anything to help him where he is. Lord, You must surround

Him with Your protection. Not only with Yourself as a shield from that awful virus, but also if You could surround him with people who will love him, and respect him, and selflessly aid him in this task of security.

God, I love this man that You gave me. He is a tender husband and beautiful father to our boys. Bring him home to us. Please don't let us be without him in this life. God, I beg You.

Julia's plea ended with a tear that smudged her page. She brushed it away with a bit of frustration at seeing the paper marred. She closed the journal, closed her eyes, and internally continued her prayer for James.

Chapter 9

James was suddenly awake, even though he had taken melatonin, knowing that it helped to readjust his circadian rhythm after traveling through several time zones. He didn't move and barely breathed. Something had startled him. Without moving a muscle, he slowly let his eyes scan the darkness of his room. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary. He then checked the open screened window on the right, but all seemed well. The distant, dim light from the cafeteria showed nothing was there. Then, slightly changing the position of his head, he looked at the screened window behind him. Although it was dark on that side of the building, bouncing flashlights in the distance showed the silhouette of a person standing just outside his room.

He was undecided on whether he should confront the peeping tom or ignore him. He chose the latter, even though he could not figure out why someone would be looking in his window. Without facing that direction, James sat up and turned on his flashlight. The quickly retreating footsteps and a snapping twig finished the story.

James glanced at his watch. Almost four a.m. He knew that going to bed early would result in him waking up early as well, but he did not expect a middle-of-the-night curiosity seeker to be involved. Regardless, he was up and decided to start his day.

Before hopping out of bed, James took the time to check the floor around his flipflops for creatures. As tough as he was, a large spider was his kryptonite. Fortunately, all was clear. He got up and pulled both window curtains shut before clicking on the overhead light. An illuminated room, where every corner could be easily seen, was an immediate comfort. James took a minute to finish unpacking his clothes. A large wooden cabinet seemed the only place to store things. He hung shirts, pants, and shorts, and placed undergarments and toiletries on the shelves to the right. He was not required to wear his standard uniform, but rather was sent with camouflage, tan, and brown shirts, and matching pants. The U.S. did not want him to be expressing obvious patriotism since it was an international response.

Finally, James drank most of his bottle of water and put his shower things in a tote that the compound had provided with the room. He gingerly opened his door and looked around. Everything was dark except the cafeteria. Even from this distance he could see a few early risers sipping on drinks. He shined his flashlight into the darkness in front of him, closed his door, and began the trek to the showers. He rounded the corner of the press dormitories, went to the bathroom

first, then walked up to the first shower door.

Once inside with the door locked, James strategically placed his flashlight and proceeded to take the coldest shower he had experienced in many years. “I *am* getting soft,” he told himself, as he shuddered and spit out the frigid water from his mouth. Having gotten past the initial shock, he suddenly realized how alive he felt. With his hair and body now clean, he dried off, dressed, and headed back to his room.

James finished organizing his things, made the bed, and grabbed his Bible, journal, pen, and flashlight. Determined to acquaint himself with early mornings in the cafeteria, he crossed the courtyard in seconds and entered the brightly lit room.

Chapter 10

Immediately upon entering the building, James locked eyes with the man who had bumped shoulders with him the evening before. He decided to introduce himself.

“Good morning. I’d shake your hand, but I guess that’s discouraged here. I’m James Worthy. I’ll be overseeing security for this operation.”

“Victor Archer,” the man said, standing up. “I remember you from last night. Sorry I bumped into you. I was in a hurry. I work with Sky News. Here reporting on the outbreak.”

The apology surprised James. “No worries. Listen, I’m going to take some time to nurse a cup of coffee while I wake up and do some journaling. Afterward, could I sit with you for a bit?”

Victor nodded his assent, and James went to get some coffee and fresh bread which was still warm to the touch. His mouth watered as he watched the melting Irish butter, made from milk derived from grass-fed cows, making its fat content higher and the consistency extra

creamy. A second piece he spread with the local peanut butter. He knew that peanuts were a staple in Congo. They were roasted and ground into a butter but lacked the salt and ingredients to make it creamy. He took his breakfast appetizer and headed to the corner table where he had sat the previous evening. After a good night of sleep, albeit a bit shorter than he would have liked, an invigorating shower, and hot food in hand, he was feeling more awake before he even sat down.

James opened his Bible to his favorite warrior battle in 1 Samuel 17 and read the story of David and Goliath. He thoroughly loved David's enthusiasm for a good fight and a just cause. James completely understood, having himself always shared the same feeling. He almost leaped at the opportunity, just as David had run toward Goliath. He finished with writing Psalm 18:2 at the top of his journal page, right under the date. Warrior King David often recorded his battle sentiments in the Psalms. In this verse, David completely elevated God as his defense, even calling Him his "High Tower." With God's help, David could see over his enemies and was best suited to assess their weaknesses.

James savored each sip of coffee and bite of bread before finishing up and heading back to Victor's table.

"Is this a good time?" James asked. "I don't want to interrupt anything."

"No, no, sit down," Victor welcomed. "I finished sending a report last night. I'm just checking my social-media accounts. I'm a confessed Twitter-aholic."

"Twitter-aholic? I didn't even know that was a thing. Although, I do like Twitter. Instagram too." James felt a little more at ease as he slid into the hard, plastic chair. "So, where are you from?"

"Well, I'm based out of London," Victor replied. "I have a flat there, not too far from the Sky News offices, but I grew up in a smaller community in the northern part of England. My family still lives there. We've had the estate for generations." He paused, and a strange look passed over his eyes. "My family is a bit of an enigma...even to me."

"Well, every family has some quirks," James said.

"This goes way beyond a few eccentricities," Victor dismissed before trying to move on. "How about you and your family? I found your Twitter profile. Bio says you grew up in Pennsylvania but live in Washington State and that you're a Christian with almost twenty years of military experience. I'm curious how you were able to consistently maintain your faith in such a difficult career field."

"Umm, not sure how to answer that," James said. "I've been a Christian since I was about eight, and I was rather open about my faith in high school, but during my early military years, I really just kept my mouth shut and did my job. I wasn't preachy, but I wasn't

hiding my faith, either. I was there if a friend needed to talk, and they all knew that; respected that. But as I've gotten older, and especially since I've been married, I've grown very serious about everything."

"Why did marriage change that?" Victor asked.

"My wife Julia is the best. Her own unwavering, out-and-out faith has really influenced me to be more vocal about sharing Christ." James paused and Victor jumped in.

"How long have you been married?"

"Six years. Julia and I went to high school together, then didn't see each other for quite some time before we were reunited in eastern Congo, of all places. I was part of that mission when President Obama sent Special Forces soldiers down here to hunt a notorious warlord. Julia was doing a short-term medical mission as an NGO nurse. We were actually abducted by a rebel militia and held hostage for a week. That really elevated our relationship to the 'serious' stage a lot more quickly than it probably would've gotten there otherwise."

"Oh, my goodness. I overheard Pressman explaining that to someone last night after you had gone to your room but didn't catch all the details. I'd like to hear that story sometime. So, it sounds like you were a bit older when you got married. Like what? Thirty or so?"

"Yeah, thirty-one, actually," James said. "Julia is the same age as me. There were some adjustments after both living on our own for so long, but it was totally worth it. What about you? Married?"

"Nope. And I'm really old," Victor confessed. "A year older than you or more. Just turned thirty-nine last month. Honestly, I guess I've hesitated to get married because of my family. My kind of girl does not fit their picture for me."

"How so?" James asked.

"I come from old money, and all the complications that entails, but what I really want is simplicity. My family expects me to marry specifically to carry on the tradition of passing that money on to the next generation. I want to find someone who just wants to be with me for me, not for the money. No agenda."

"How could anyone object to that?"

"You don't know my family," Victor cautioned. "My parents are in control of absolutely everything. Right down to choosing who I marry."

"Sounds invasive," James admitted.

"Very. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to unload on you like that. Especially since we just met."

"No, no, it's cool. We all have stuff we have to deal with. That's what makes us human."

By the time their conversation was winding down, the sun had begun to rise and, slowly, other team members were starting to trickle in. James kept his eye on the room and its inhabitants, but he had to admit that his curiosity about Victor's family was piqued. When he

saw Lucas come in, he excused himself, grabbed a plate, piled on a true breakfast meal, and joined his new friend at what was becoming their typical table in the back corner.

Chapter 11

James enjoyed finishing his breakfast with Lucas. It was only the two of them until they noticed Pressman approaching the table. Before he got there, James whispered, “Sometime I want to hear more on your fears about this mission. Maybe we can sit down together after supper for a while.”

“Sure. Tonight works. I can try to find a corner in the lounge so we won’t be interrupted.”

“James, if you’re finished,” Pressman began as he walked up to them, “I may hand you off to Facundo and our local point man, Katey. He’s the head of our Domiongo region Congolese unit. I arranged for them to take you on a tour of the perimeter of the compound. Seemed like a good place to start. Hope you’ve got some good walking shoes. I thought we’d begin with that. I’m guessing you’ll be finished about ten, so I’ll meet you back here around then to discuss your job description and goals.”

James stood and stretched out his back muscles. He started to

extend a hand to say good-bye to Lucas, nearly forgetting the new protocol, but quickly stuck out his elbow to correct his mistake. “Talk to you later,” he stated as he followed Pressman across the room and out the front door of the cafeteria.

In the courtyard, Facundo stood chatting with Katey. Pressman introduced James, who again had to remember not to shake hands.

“Nice to meet you, Katey,” James began, waving his hands as a substitute greeting. “Oyebi Lingala? Ngai, nayebi mwa ndambo.”

The head of the Congolese unit was excited to hear that James knew Lingala. He grinned broadly and then responded, “Eeh, nayebi Lingala malamu, kasi nayebi Anglais mpe. I do also speak English, but since Facundo does not know Lingala, and neither of us know Spanish, I believe we must use a language everyone can understand to avoid any miscommunication. Besides, I never get to practice American English, so this is good!”

Facundo piped up. “I only know little English so please, very slowly.”

“Absolutely,” replied James. “No problem. What’s the plan?”

“My goal is to start at the front gate and walk the whole property clockwise. James, do you need to change shoes first?”

“I do, actually. I’ll be back in two minutes.”

James quickly returned with hiking boots, a pad and pen, and the simple smell of the light coconut from his sunscreen. “Ready now.

Let’s go.”

The men began by walking back to the front gate, which only took a few minutes.

“So, is there anything about the security of this operation that worries either of you?” James asked.

Katey piped up as they took the narrow path northward that followed the inside of the wall. “Yes! I am very worried. Not as much about the physical security, although I do want to point out some weaknesses, but I am truly afraid about the tension in the village of Domiongo about this outbreak. Many are terrified. Those who have loved ones who are sick here at the clinic are saying that proper protocol is not being followed. They are speaking of this in all the markets in the village. Others who have already had family die are saying that they are not being permitted to bury their dead according to tradition.”

“Hmm. I wonder why they feel that standard safety procedures are not being followed. Does it have to do with clinical or medical safety, or are they speaking of something else?”

Suddenly the pathway narrowed, forcing the men to walk single file, and Katey paused before responding to show James something. “Do you see this large mango tree? It has long branches that cross over the wall to the road on the other side. It would be very easy for someone to climb over into the compound by crawling on that tree.

This is one thing that must be fixed. People will need to be hired to trim back all trees from near the perimeter walls.”

James agreed to Katey’s suggestion and made a note in his tablet.

“Now, to answer your question, the broken protocol I am speaking of is medical. This may be a rumor, but it is whispered that they do not wash between patients. It is not only the washing of the medical staff after they are finished seeing patients though, it is also that they are not taking safety precautions within the clinic walls.”

“There any proof about a disregard for safety? What exactly is standard practice for going from one patient to another?”

Katey answered the question with a suggestion, “I think that Dr. Jackson will be more knowledgeable. My sources are only the gossipers in the city.”

Facundo, interrupting, pointed to something high up in a bonyanga tree. “See. Way up there near the top. A small clan of monkeys. What exactly are those, Katey?”

“They are called ‘lesula’ by some. The species is new to western man. I believe that although many hunters in Congo have known this monkey forever, it was only discovered back in 2011 or 2012. I cannot remember the exact date. I have never seen one in this area of Congo. Actually, I have never seen one. My grandfather was a skilled hunter. He told me of this as a young child.”

The density of the forest rapidly increased as they continued.

Although it was the beginning of dry season, the monsoons had only stopped a week earlier. The heavy smell of the damp, pungent earth attacked James’ nose. The fragrance immediately took him back to his and Julia’s abduction. On that first night, when they had been force-marched to the rebel camp, a recent storm had acquainted him with the aroma of damp jungle. He was always surprised by the strength of smell to bring back a memory.

Trying to move past the unpleasant thoughts, James chimed in. “Isn’t it unusual for monkeys to be so close to the human population?”

“Very good point, sir,” Katey said. “I am surprised to see them here, as if they are comfortable around man. What you say is valid.”

They were way past the compound buildings and began to head east, almost directly behind the cafeteria. The path widened and suddenly the wall was gone, leaving only a chain-link fence, just as the forest gave way to a clearing, roughly three hundred meters wide, before the forest once again engulfed them.

“Where did the wall go? Is this only fencing, Katey?” James asked. “Is anyone worried about this?”

“Yes,” both men answered at once. Katey picked up, “The property did not originally have a wall completely around it. When the epidemic broke out, the response team hastily put up this temporary fence.”

Facundo added, “I do not believe it is sufficient to keep out

anyone who would attempt to enter. I believe that it should have a razor wire on top.”

Both James and Katey agreed with that. James added that in his notebook.

Soon the path turned south. Once again, the jungle was dense and smelled strongly of damp foliage. Just before the final turn took them west back toward the main gate, Katey pointed out a vine-covered entrance, remarking that the path on the other side was a back way to the village and that the gate had not been used for years.

James bumped elbows with the men to conclude their task and made an appointment to meet with them again an hour before supper. He headed back to his room to rest before his meeting with Pressman. It was only nine a.m., and he was already drenched in sweat, but his first official task as head of security was complete.

Chapter 12

James had one hour before his appointed meeting with Pressman, and he had several thoughts nagging him. First, he could not get over the fact that someone had been peeking in his window and he was determined to find out who it was. Second, he was struggling to identify the sound he heard just before dozing off. And now, he was wondering about that clan of monkeys.

Shaking his head to try and focus, he grabbed his water bottle that he had filled up earlier and plopped himself on the wicker chair in his room with his phone, journal, a larger notebook, and several pens. He was just getting comfortable to prepare for a good thinking session when it occurred to him to check the area outside his window. He pulled himself out of the chair and walked around the back of his room.

There was very little foliage near his window, just a few random weeds. And although the sandy soil was relatively dry from lack of precipitation, he could clearly see two footprints close to the window

that were deeper than the ones moving away from it. He bent down to ascertain any distinguishing marks, but all that was obvious were three circles in the same pattern as commonly seen on the bottom of most flipflops.

“Huh. Nothing unique about that in the Congo,” James said out loud. He took another minute to follow the retreating prints toward the jungle that framed the building on that side. Almost up to the point where the path started into the forest, James noticed that a deeper footprint was visible. It appeared as if the flipflop wearer stopped to connect with a soldier, police officer, or armed guard. Those were the only personnel James knew who would frequently wear heavy boots in the Congo. This nagged at his mind as well, as he returned to his room and chair to resume his meditating.

He first opened his big notepad. It had blank pages on one side and lined on the other. He took a pencil and ruler, drew out the perimeter of the compound as close to scale as he could get it, and filled in the buildings as he had seen them. He noted where the trees needed to be trimmed back and the place in the forest where they had spotted the lesula monkeys. He then marked an X at the window behind his room and an arrow pointing in the direction of the retreating footprints. He thought again about the path near the wall on that side of the compound and knew that there was a locked entrance that opened to another one that led to the northwest part of

Domiongo village.

He decided to put a pin in that and transitioned his thoughts back to the monkeys. He couldn't figure out why they were inside the walls of the compound, and why they seemed so comfortable being that close to humans. Wanting to learn more, he moved from the chair to the long worktable and opened his laptop. He needed to do some research on this species and their unique qualities. Unfortunately, the ones he glimpsed today were too distant for a good inspection.

Wikipedia was always the easiest link to find, and James opened an article on the lesula monkey. He began perusing its contents, learning first that it was considered an “old world monkey.” He made a note to himself to look up that term.

“Well, Katey was nearly correct,” James said out loud to himself, a habit he'd formed when learning a new subject. It continued as he began to read the article aloud. “The lesula was made sensationally known to the world in 2012, but it was first discovered by westerners in 2007 in the town of Opala, where one had been tied to a post as a pet. It wasn't until 2012 that the media's attention was caught.” *Hmm*, James thought, silencing himself. *I wonder why it took westerners so long to see this monkey. Traders and missionaries have been in this country for centuries. Very odd.* He turned off his inner dialogue and returned to reading the article. “The males have a blue back side, and the species has very human-like qualities to the look of its face.”

James stopped for a minute. He was chewing on why this small troop of monkeys, and a rare species at that, was so close to the epicenter of the Ebola outbreak. A disturbing thought entered his mind that he attempted to push away without success. *What if these monkeys had been used for experiments or research? What if one of them was infected? What kind of destruction could spread as a result?* He wiped his hand across his forehead as if it would remove the thought. A quick glance at his watch showed that it was almost time to meet Pressman for an overall job description and objective. He made a note to ask Katey about a two-way radio operator in the village or a way to buy a cheap disposable phone. He wanted information.

Chapter 13

James opened the door to his room, peered out, then closed and locked it behind him. This was the first time that he decided that locking was a good idea. He had this strange feeling that something was not right. The combined recent events were sending up whispered warnings and sounding mental alarm bells. He felt his muscles tense up and his gut do a somersault.

Walking over to the cafeteria to fill his water bottle and get both a small cup of coffee and a slice of bread with peanut butter, James knew he only had ten minutes before his meeting with Pressman. As he stepped into the large room, he noticed that all the tables had been cleaned up from breakfast. A few, like him, were looking for some mid-morning calories and hydration. He didn't see any of the Americans, though. As he passed the kitchen window, he heard someone call his name. James turned to see a familiar Congolese face, albeit more mature than the last time they had seen one another. "Kongolo? Is that you? I can't believe it! What are you doing here?"

"I am working here," Kongolo replied, almost too shocked to speak. Recovering, he continued, "Since I last saw you, I have married and moved to the village of Domiongo. I wanted to be far from Eastern Congo and the unrest. My wife and I have two small boys. I had to earn income somewhere, so when I heard from my cousin of this job, I applied and got it."

"Working in the kitchen?" James asked, a little surprised that Kongolo was okay with such domestic employment.

"Well, I mean, it wasn't my first choice, but with a family to provide for, I had to take what I could get. It is woman's work, but I am not ashamed. The money is very good."

"I get it," James replied. "I have two boys as well. Fathers have responsibilities, so good for you."

"Thank you, James. Now, what about you? I thought once you left Congo you would not return."

"Same here. I had no intention of coming back, but I was called out of a teaching job to come do security for this international response. I'm actually very glad that you're here. I believe that before this assignment is finished I'll need some trusted Congolese friends. I'll talk to you again later. I have a meeting to get to."

He took a minute to fill a plastic plate with bread; some with peanut butter and jam, others with peanut butter and hazelnut spread. He downed some water, filled his bottle, and fixed a coffee. He

balanced everything on his notebook and headed two doors down to the lounge.

It was his first time completely inside the room. He took a moment to study the lay of it, the furniture, and the position of the windows and doors. Pressman had not yet arrived. James chose a simple couch with a coffee table in front and put down his refreshments. He organized his notebook, pens, and pencils. Just then, Pressman walked in. James stood up to shake hands but finally remembered at the last second just to wave in greeting.

"Howdy."

"Hey, James. How was your hike around the perimeter? Anything noteworthy?"

"Sure. A few things. Do you mind if I go through the notes I took?"

"Go ahead," Pressman offered in his softly spoken British accent, "and seriously, if something bothers you, please let me know. It's your job to take care of security, but I am also answering to colleagues higher up the food chain, so to speak."

"Of course. Well, first is the need to cut back some overhanging trees. In several locations along the western wall, following the road, they are hanging over it which gives easy access to any good climber who wants into the compound. Katey noticed it and pointed it out to me. How do I go about hiring someone for the task of cutting back

the branches?”

“I believe you can work directly with Katey and the local FARDC army on that. What else?”

“There is a new part of the perimeter that is only chain-link fence. It is not very tall or secure. We all felt that razor wire needed to be added to the top.”

“I would be surprised if that could be purchased nearby,” Pressman noted. “But maybe the compound has some lying around. There’s an ancient depot behind this building. Give that a look. Otherwise, maybe you could email Sebastian and see if he has a contact in the capital that could expedite a shipment.”

“One more thing. As I was drifting off to sleep, I thought I heard the distinct sound of a helicopter. Did one land here last night?”

“A helicopter?” Pressman snickered, a little too condescending for James’ taste. “That is highly unlikely. No one outside of the response community has access to the field. I’m sure it was just a part of your dreams, James. Nothing to worry about.” Pressman finished and took a quick glance at the floor.

Suddenly James was wary. The action of looking down while speaking often meant that a person was being dishonest. *Is Pressman hiding something?* he wondered.

“So,” James restarted, “aside from what I’ve discussed, what are your overall objectives for me?”

“Here’s a typed-out report form and another sheet with general duties,” Pressman responded. “Mainly, I need you to get to know everyone; their routines, why they’re here, and which organization they represent. Be aware of the general schedule of the operation.”

“Okay.”

“Then pay attention to the physical security duties like your local and UN personnel; their shifts, locations, and so forth. I also want you to know this compound like the back of your hand. Memorize each path.”

“Good,” James said.

“Every week, I want this form filled out and emailed to me. It’s not necessary for you to report to your own military superiors, but you are permitted if you feel like you need some advice. That about sums it up,” Pressman said standing. “I have a meeting with the press corps in five minutes. I’m glad we were able to get this started right away this morning so we can get after some of these things. Looks like we’re headed in the right direction. How are your accommodations? Everything all right?”

“Yes, of course.” James said as he rose to say goodbye. He sat back down on the couch to think about their conversation as he finished his bread and drink. He made mental notes of the details, primarily Pressman’s strange behavior when he had mentioned the helicopter. James couldn’t help but wonder if it was real or if, perhaps, he was

just being paranoid. He had hoped his meeting with Pressman was going to provide answers, but it seemed like it was causing more questions instead.

About the Author

In 2003, Chrisann Dawson found herself with a broken leg and a toddler to care for. Each afternoon during nap time, she would work on her first book, "Congo Crisis." She has since written two additional books in the series: this one and the upcoming "Congo Ebola," with plans for more.

Chrisann and her husband Gale, along with their three children, lived in the Congo, Africa (formerly Zaire) for seven years doing mission work. They learned the Lingala language, became emersed in the culture, and established lifelong friendships with the Congolese people, who continue to do the work of their non-profit mission, Rise Congo.

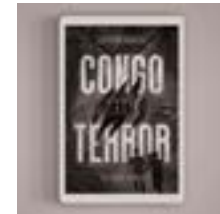
Chrisann now lives in Payson, Arizona, where she works part-time for the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension, doing vision and hearing screenings for preschool children in her county. She also works as a member of a chaplain team with Gale at Payson Christian Clinic, and she continues to pursue her writing dreams.



Also by Chrisann Dawson



Congo Crisis



Congo Terror



Principles and Proverbs
from
Pride and Prejudice



Relationship Secrets
of
Pride and Prejudice