

# STONELANDS

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# I

## EMERGENCE

*The consul Atilius Regulus, when encamped at the Bagradas river in Africa, fought a stubborn and fierce battle with a single serpent of extraordinary size, which had its lair in that region. When it was finally killed, its skin, a hundred and twenty feet long, was sent to Rome.*

—Aelius Tubero (74-11 B.C.), *Histories*

Brothers Wilderness, Olympic National Forest, Washington

Liam's father was a Marine.  
It was the only thought in Liam's head as he ran. A Marine.  
A Colonel. The toughest man anyone had ever met. Killed a guy in a cave in Afghanistan by sticking a knife in his eye.

Liam was not a Marine.

Limbs clawed and swatted him in the murk of forest twilight. Roots and vines snagged his feet. His back twinged as he stumbled, an old injury from Iraq.

*Not Iraq. Kuwait.* He jerked himself upright and ran on.

Branches broke behind him, rotten logs thundering under inhuman weight on clawed feet moving fast.

*Kuwait is not a combat deployment.*

The monsters were close.

*Oh, Dad, help me. I was a bad son. I wasn't brave. I didn't fight. I'm not fighting now.*

Brittany screamed somewhere ahead. Beautiful Brittany, from the rock-climbing gym, with her steady hands on belay and wide-eyed questions about his time in the Army.

Her .44 snubby shattered the night. Her bear gun.

A tomahawk hung from Liam's belt, not much more than a small trail axe for making camp. He was an idiot for coming out here without his own bear gun.

He was an idiot for coming out here, period.

It was time to stop running. He'd need his wind, and if he was going to die, he would die here and now, and he'd die fighting, dammit. He ducked behind a massive trunk, gnarled and six feet wide, flipped the leather guard off the 'hawk, and slipped the lanyard around his wrist. He choked up on it a few inches, back down a few, found the sweet spot.

*Help me, Dad.*

The tomahawk was the ideal weapon for this, he remembered from a week of training at Ft. Bragg, what seemed like an eternity ago. Edged weapons controlled space. Edged weapons controlled time.

*Help me be brave.*

Edged weapons got you out of shit like this.

As if there'd ever been shit like this.

Liam gripped the handle as the crashing became immediate and there it was, a massive shape in the darkness, bipedal, ogrimish, a sense of tusks and clawed hands. He swung as it rocketed past, landing late and biting deep into glute and hamstring. It pivoted, roaring, and swiped at him with—it took a moment to register—a sword. He smashed the weapon arm with the tomahawk's shaft, felt the bone snap, and yanked.

Instructors had called it a "degloving action"; the sharpened juncture of blade and haft sheared a fillet from elbow to wrist and

took the thumb as well. The sword fell into moss and tangles and the monster howled and flailed, and Liam was right back at Bragg, robotic, working by rote: shoulders, biceps, thighs, stepping away from swipes and lunges and treating anything it threw at him as a target.

*Cut the strings and the puppet can't dance.*

It collapsed, twitching and gurgling in the dark.

He contemplated looking for the sword, but time was short; there were more whatever-they-were behind it.

Brittany screamed again, deep in the woods. Screams beyond fright, cascading like shuddering heaves of vomit.

He raised the tomahawk and ran toward the sounds of death.

~~TOP SECRET//SPECIAL ACCESS REQUIRED ASCENDANT WARDEN//WAIVED~~

DECLASSIFICATION REVIEW  
 Change/Classify to: (U) per GENERAL RELEASE  
 With concurrence of: SAG G2  
 After: 20210501  
 By: Stevenson, R. SIA GS-15

*Signature*

UNCLASSIFIED

COPY 001 of 010

SPECIAL ANALYSIS GROUP

Washington, DC 20340

OPORD [REDACTED] PROJECT ARCHSTONE (~~TS//SAR-ASW//WAIVED~~)

## (U) References:

(U//FOUO) FM 3-05.102 Army Special Operations Forces Intelligence, September 2001; ADP 2-0 Intelligence, August 2012 (U); FM 3-05.130 Army Special Operations Forces Unconventional Warfare, September 2008 (U//FOUO); [REDACTED]

(U) Time Zone Used Throughout the Order: UNIFORM

(U) Task Organization. REF 3.(d)(2)(c) BELOW.

1. (~~TS//SAR-ASW//WAIVED~~) SITUATION. [REDACTED] requires immediate technical and tactical support to a critical CONUS mission. Enemy forces UNK; REF Annex F 5.(a-e). Participation supports the intent of [REDACTED]

(a) (~~TS//SAR-ASW//WAIVED~~) Area of Interest. OTHER. REF Annex F 4.(a)(3)(a) BELOW.

(b) (~~TS//SAR-ASW//WAIVED~~) Area of Operations. OTHER. REF Annex H 1.(c)(1) (b) BELOW.

2. (~~TS//SAR-ASW//WAIVED~~) MISSION. [REDACTED] will support Special Analysis Group at FOB WINTERSTONE REF Annex H. 1.(a-f) in accordance with [REDACTED] will perform Special Reconnaissance Operations in preparation for anticipated [REDACTED] necessary supporting actions in order to establish an enduring mechanism for future missions.

3. (~~TS//SAR-ASW//WAIVED~~) EXECUTION. Commander's Intent: [REDACTED]

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## II

### MY BROTHER'S KEEPER

*Dépaysement: Fr.; the feeling of not being in one's home country; the sense of being a foreigner.*

Cape Anguille, Newfoundland

**L**ogan Shines-at-Night looked for all the world like a man kneeling in his own grave.

Bent beneath filtered sunlight, working with his hands in a depression in the earth, he was a lean man, deeply tanned, in a faded khaki T-shirt and an olive-green ballcap smeared gray with old mud dried hard, a dark braid dangling. Surf sighed a few hundred feet away.

Scraping with a trowel, he swore and stabbed the ground, freeing a fist-sized knot of dirt with blackened fingers and an oath.

"Dr. S.?" called an undergrad from the edge of the dig. Her name was Millie, and she was pale and freckled with a red ponytail beneath a once-pink knitted hat, as dirty as he was from shoulders to toes in mechanics coveralls. She was also, he forced himself to remember, wildly off-limits no matter how fiercely she flirted. "There's a car."

His voice was a bright baritone, resonant and measured. "One sec," he said, rubbing with a thumb where he'd thought he'd seen a

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flash of—of all things—silver.

Ancient Norse silver.

Sand and loam crumbled with gentle pressure from numbed fingers, and he had it, the object of his attention, perhaps the very reason he'd come to this rain-swept rock pile.

A 1952 Roosevelt dime.

"Son of a bitch," he growled.

"Got something?"

"No. What are you doing right now?" His words had a distinct Blackfeet cadence and clarity, a holdover from a life on a Reservation that felt light-years from here.

"Bagging," she sang. Millie liked bagging.

He raised his voice above a squeaking drove of gulls as the wind kicked up again. "Okay, go see what they want. How's Kenny coming on the drone?"

"The transmitter's shot. We'll need to order another one."

Logan grunted. He hadn't foreseen *repair quadcopters attacked by birds of prey* as a line item, and this was the third incident in as many months. The eagles native to this area apparently viewed the drones as territorial threats and destroyed them in diving attacks at nearly a hundred miles per hour. "Go see about the car," he said. "I'll be up in a sec."

She pouted showily. "I was bagging."

He waved her toward the road. "Just go see what that is."

Logan saw a black SUV through a break in the trees as he climbed a rope ladder out of the pit. The SUV had been black when it had left wherever it had come from, anyway. Silver-white road grime spackled the sides, which made sense; the nearest airport was at St. John, a four-hour drive. They'd have arrived on the island in

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the dark.

The engine shut off, and a door opened with a warning bell from the ignition, followed by two more doors opening and closing. Feet hit the brushy rock with crunching noises.

Whoever they were, they were staying.

Voices approached. Sharp, martial projection, not academics.

Logan was a rangy man in his early forties, marathoner-thin and light brown, with hard dark eyes and Algonquian cheekbones above a scraggly beard. Six feet three inches in the air, the dirt-encrusted yellow flash of a Ranger tab was barely discernible against the jungle green of a baseball hat spattered in the same months-old mud as the rest of him.

Approaching him was a medium-sized, very white, office type guy—clean-shaven, soft hands, dressed for anything *but* Newfoundland in a tie and charcoal overcoat around a slight paunch. Tan wingtips jutted from beneath tailored trousers that broke in the way only suspenders can cause pants to break. Two even whiter guys, if that was possible, stood behind him: clipped hair, manicured beards, and expensive mountaineering jackets in muted colors. Despite the facial hair, every inch of them read military.

“Help you?” Logan asked.

“Steve Paulsen,” said the suit.

Logan shook his hand as it was offered. “Logan Shines-At-Night,” he said.

“Good to see you again, *Mon Adjutant*,” said Paulsen. “I guess it’s ‘Doctor,’ now?”

“‘Professor,’ thank you,” said Logan.

“Apologies. Your assistant said ‘Doctor.’”

“My assistant says a lot of things,” said Logan. “Have we met?”

“OEF Trans-Sahara,” Paulsen said. “We met at the French Embassy in Addis. You were a *sergeant-chef* with the Legion at the time. I was a short colonel with Third Group.”

Logan took in a long breath. A Special Forces commander.

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Former, by the look of him. “I apologize. It’s been a long minute.”

“It was a diplomatic function,” Paulsen said. “I wouldn’t expect you to remember. You had a great story about an Issa man who’d had his hand bitten off by a camel.”

The memory stirred. Logan spoke to the others behind Paulsen as the details came back. “The guy had a camel he used to beat,” he said. “Finally, he sold it. Ten years later, at a market, a camel sneaks up behind him and bites his hand off. Turned out to be the same camel. A lot of lessons there. What can I help you with?”

“Do you still drink rum?” Paulsen asked, and one of the bearded guys—a non-commissioned officer, judging from his beefy build and black square-toed shoes—offered Logan a varnished wooden box, roughly the size that would comfortably hold a bottle of liquor. Gothic letters burned into the wood spelled DIPLOMATICO above an inset reproduction of a gold doubloon. Venezuelan. Probably older than most of his students on this dig.

“I do,” Logan answered. “You have my attention. What’s this about?”

“Is there a place we can talk?” Paulsen asked.