
Chapter II

South American Jungle
December, the year 06 *acb*.

Harold Womack was reclining in the crook of a huge Mellaluca branch, high in the treetops. It was the first time in two months that he was actually able to let himself relax. Still constantly watchful, he was visually checking the positions of the sentinels who patrolled the zone. He was searching the sky for evidence of any airborne intruders, when a loud screech jolted him upright. He honed in on the source of the disturbance – his oldest daughter, Patsy.

The tall, well-proportioned brunette screeched again in outrage as she began to swipe at a green oozy mud on her chest. “Curtis Womack, I’m going to murder you, you...” The girl’s sonic scream was halted by another flying glob of the green gelatinous slim as it struck her squarely in the mouth.

“Bull’s eye!” squealed Patsy’s younger sister, Lily, as she collapsed into riotous laughter, “Good job, Curt. Nolan Ryan, eat your heart out!”

“Did you see that? POW! Right in the kisser,” Curt congratulated himself as he high-fived Lily.

The overgrown sixteen year old, youngest of the Womack children, kneeled momentarily to the stream and washed the gooey residue from his callused hands. As he stood and squared his wide shoulders, he raised one eyebrow and said to Patsy, “*Don’t* call me Curtis.”

The incensed Patsy yelled for her mother, “Mom! Would you please do something about *your* son?”

Shelby Womack rose from the edge of the stream, where she had been rinsing the last of the soap from her day’s laundry. Water

from the shirt she was wringing dripped onto her muddy hiking boots. "Curt, have you filled the water tanks like you were told?" she asked, trying to conceal how amused she was by her son's pranks.

The small, competent lady wearily picked up her washing bucket and headed for the treeline. Turning around slowly, she carefully watched her children. *My babies are all grown up*, she smiled to herself, *Babies...Curt is sixteen, Lily is eighteen, Patsy's nineteen and Linnie is...* Shelby swallowed hard as her eyes suddenly filled with tears. She raised her eyes to the sky and whispered, "God, please, please give us back our baby." The heaviness in Shelby's chest robbed her of her breath as she struggled to push the pain of her loss to the back of her mind.

She had mourned the disappearance of her eldest daughter for over two years. It filtered through her thoughts a dozen times a day and each time, Shelby would tell herself that *Lynn was alive*. *She just doesn't know where to find us*, she would chide herself. Shelby looked toward the trees that hid their home and thought of her husband. He had just returned from another sortie to find information on Lynn. *Still nothing!* Shelby huffed in frustration. She worried about her husband. Also disheartened at what he considered a personal failure, his attempts to find their daughter were often dangerous and bordering on the foolhardy to Shelby's way of thinking. Yet she could not bring herself to ask him to stop. *As long as there is a chance*, she thought, *it's worth any risk*.

Shelby stared at her other children for a moment longer and said a silent prayer for their continued safety. Then she quietly repeated her favorite mantra, "If you pray don't bother to worry, if you worry don't bother to pray."

"You girls finish cleaning those fish for supper," Shelby called to her daughters as she disappeared into the dense foliage. "And Patsy – not so loud, please."

"That still gives me the Willie's to see someone just disappear like that—even after all this time!" Lily said as she watched her mother walk behind the screen of foliage that had been designed and erected by her father.

“That’s the whole idea, Bimbo. That’s why Dad picked this place and why he showed us how to do that—you’re not supposed to see where people are going,” Curt explained. “What if a Eurocop was chasing you?!”

“We’d just give ‘em Patsy,” Lily snickered. “They’d catch her anyway—you know how she always falls down when she runs.”

“Yeah, like in all those movies, where the sweet, young thing always falls down and the slobbering goon gets her!” teased Curt.

“I do *not* always fall down when I run,” Patsy protested adamantly. “Besides, you know that I have a weak ankle after that time I broke it in the Falklands!”

She grabbed the bucket of cleaned fish and headed in the same direction as her mother had. A few steps later, an arrogant Patsy lost her footing on a stone and nearly tumbled to the ground. Naturally her ever-observant siblings caught the slip and baited her loudly, “Watch your step, Grace!”

Refusing to admit defeat, she ignored them masterfully as she, like her mother before her, disappeared into the surrounding foliage.

* * * * *

“You’re awake,” commented Shelby as she stepped from the ladder onto the wooden platform that made up the first deck of their tree house.

“They heard that scream in Miami, Shelby!” retorted Womack, hotly. “I’ve told that girl a hundred times about her big mouth!” he continued, “One of these days it’s going to cost us. We’ve all been too careless lately. Loud music, screaming kids, lights on late at night, it’s got to stop!”

“We’re in the middle of the jungle, Harold, a thousand miles from nowhere and all alone with the snakes and monkeys, *for crying out loud!*” Shelby scolded. “They’re children and they need to act like children every once in a while.”

"Patsy is nineteen years old! She is *not* a kid. I had already done my first tour of duty by the time I was her age."

"Harold, Patsy isn't you and this isn't the United States Army," said Shelby patiently as she climbed the steps leading to the second level where the galley and eating quarters were located.

"NO! This is a helluva lot worse. This is a tour of duty without an end date. We can't count down our days left in country on some perverted calendar or look forward to R&R in some nice safe little tourist trap," said Womack, "And you have to realize *that* in order to increase our chances of survival. There is no place left to be children. They have to grow up now or not at all!"

Shelby slammed down the basket of clothes. "You've made your point..."

"I'm not out to make a point here, Shelby!" Womack interrupted, "I want you to understand..."

"I UNDERSTAND!" snapped his wife as fire sparkled in her large brown eyes. "I'll talk to the kids! End of conversation!"

"You got it, Toots!" said Womack mockingly.

Shelby began to violently yank the freshly washed laundry from the basket and pin it to the wire which was strung between two sturdy branches of their living home. Harold could tell by the stiff set of her shoulders that she was angry and would now ignore him.

It's her way of getting even, because I got the last word, he thought grinning behind her back.

Quite pleased with himself, he reached for the waterbag that hung from a peg attached to the second-floor brace. He removed the cap and raised the canvas bag to his lips for a long, refreshing drink of the cool liquid.

Thank God, we have good water! he thought as he began to climb the steps to the third level—the living quarters of the tree house.

Womack walked to a partitioned area in the far corner that served as his and Shelby's bedroom. Under the window, set a large wooden trunk covered with a camouflaged poncho liner. He walked to it and removed the Master Lock from the latch. He flipped open the lid and began to remove the items that he needed

for weapons cleaning. Securing the lock once again and neatly replacing the poncho liner, he returned to the living room and systematically arranged the gear on his workbench—cleaning cloths, ramrods, WD40, screwdrivers, plastic bowl to hold the small, disassembled parts. The neat order of the table gave him a sense of comfort, as he pulled a stool across the wooden platform to the back of the bench. His father had taught him the importance of organization and cautious preparation when performing the most menial of tasks, a lesson that was often painfully administered, but in later years, gratefully practiced. *Me and the old man had a lot of differences, but he taught me some mighty useful habits*, thought Womack as he began to carefully dismantle the first of the rifles that he intended to clean.

From his position, Harold could look out at the surrounding area and see only trees. The other houses were not easily spotted from this viewpoint. The bottom levels and the remaining top three levels had also been carefully concealed amid the heavy forest of trees. If the location of one of the tree houses were to be compromised, it did not necessarily put the other residences in jeopardy. Womack and Greg Baldwin, his partner in tree house architecture, had deliberately planned it that way. It had meant that fewer structures could be placed in the area, but there would be more security for the ones that were built there. Womack had felt all along that only a few places should be built in one area anyway. He didn't want a large number of people to inhabit any one area at one time—too many people, too much noise—more of a chance for discovery and capture. Greg, of course, with his typical suburbanite attitude of the more the merrier, had not been easy to convince. It was only after the first discovery of their village in the trees by a squad of Eurocops that Greg began to see things Womack's way.

"There's safety in numbers," Greg had argued as he returned from a trip north with a group of over twenty PIAs taken from the *Seattle Repository*. He was unaware that he had been tracked and followed by an elite search-and-destroy Eurocop squad. Womack had told him to split any large groups of PIAs into smaller groups of no more than eight or ten when returning to the base camp. Greg

was to assign the remainder of the numbers to another team leader for placement in other Places of Safety. But in the beginning months, Greg would not always listen to Harold, feeling himself to be of superior intelligence to Womack the Tradesman from next door. After all, he had a Masters degree in Architecture from Yale University and he was pulling down "eighty-thou a year", while ole Harold, with his G.E.D. diploma and two years of trade-school, spent four months out of the year on unemployment. It wasn't until Greg returned with his twenty saved souls to the base camp and he was helplessly watching his son struggle in the grasp of a knife wielding Eurocop that he learned to respect ole Harold's judgment on matters of security.

The morning after his return from the Seattle run, Greg had been down by the stream, bragging of his masterful accomplishment to his wife, Judy, and reaffirming his supremacy over Womack when he heard a threatening voice say, "Turn around and put your hands out in front of you."

As Greg spun around to see the source of the command, he was confronted by the sight of a camouflaged soldier holding a large knife to his son's young throat.

"He snuck up on me by the water tanks, Dad," pleaded Doug Baldwin, "I didn't hear or see a thing." The lanky teenager squirmed resentfully in the arms of his captor.

"Hold still, Kid!" growled the intruder. Never diverting his attention from Greg and his wife, he said, "Both of you lay down, spread eagle on the ground, face down. DO IT NOW!" He laid the edge of his knife against the boy's throat.

"Please don't hurt him," cried Judy Baldwin as she dropped to the forest floor.

"What happens to him is entirely dependent on your actions," said the stranger, "Place your hands behind your heads and clasp your fingers together." He pushed the boy to the ground next to his mother and said, "Now you do the same thing, Kid".

He drew a pistol from the belt around his waist and replaced the knife in its sheath that was strapped to his left hip. As he walked behind his captives, he removed a roll of silver duct-tape from his

pack. He placed his foot in the middle of Greg's back and reached for his hands. He tightly wound the tape around Greg's wrists and then clutched a handful of hair as he pulled Greg's head back and wrapped more tape around his prisoner's mouth. He followed the same pattern in securing the woman and the boy. As he completed his task, the aggressor traded the pistol again for his knife.

"Lights out, Folks," scoffed the assailant. While the captor drew back the youth's head to cut his throat, a horrified and helpless Greg screamed into his gag.

As Greg closed his eyes to block out the death of his only son, he heard a distinctive *thunk!* He opened his eyes to see the man with the knife soundlessly pitch forward. Harold Womack stepped over him and picked up the fallen man's knife from his clinched hand. Without hesitation, Womack ransacked his victim's pack and extracted the duct-tape. He followed the same pattern as the captor before him and wound the tape securely around the man's hands, mouth and feet. Only then did he turn his attention to the three bound members of the Baldwin Family. He slipped the knife between Greg's feet, cut the tape and then roughly pulled him to his feet. He reached forward, ripped the silver tape from Baldwin's mouth, spun him around and slit the tape binding his hands. Before Greg could assimilate what was happening, Harold shoved the hilt of the knife into his hand saying,

"Cut them loose while I prepare our guest for a few questions. He didn't come all of this way by himself, but he may have accidentally found the camp without the knowledge of his squad. I have to know what he knows."

"Let me get them back to camp and I'll come with you," said Greg.

"NO! You get the camp secured. Be prepared to evacuate to the jungle. Tell Curt to set the perimeter traps, then get into position and wait for me. We have to take out every one of these guys before they give away our location, *If* they haven't already done just that!" Womack said nastily.

Greg turned to release his family as Womack disappeared into the jungle with the captured invader. Greg stood for a moment,

clutching his wife and his son to him. The realization of just how much he had screwed up filled him with humiliation and fear, while gratitude for Womack finally prevailed.

Womack and Curt had disappeared from the camp for over fourteen hours, leaving Greg and the others filled with fear and anxiety. As the camp waited to be overrun or to be liberated, Womack and Curt led the invading squad of what turned out to be Eurocops on a grueling chase deeper into the bush. They left them in the capable hands of a native tribe about fifteen kilometers from the base. Womack and the local tribesmen had an understanding. Womack and his people would furnish a certain amount of game to the native villages and avoid all personal contact with them. In return, the natives would also avoid the Womack group and refrain from including them in their food chain! The delivery of the eight-member squad of Eurocops served to fulfill a large percentage of Womack's contract with the *Feijoadas*, (Curt's nickname for them coined from a local Brazilian Stew).

When they returned to the base camp, Womack immediately took Greg for a walk to a private part of the camp. "You killed your wife and son today because you're so damn much smarter than everybody else!" Womack attacked as soon as they were alone. "They were DEAD! Do you realize that? That maniac was in the process of slitting your son's throat!"

"YES! I know," Greg responded, "I know." He hesitated and then added, "And I know it was my fault."

"That's not good enough, Greg!" pressed Womack. "After the sonofabitch finished with your family, he would have started on mine! That's totally unacceptable!"

Womack clinched his fists at his side and continued, "The mistakes you made were all avoidable ones. You have been told time and time again about moving large numbers of people at one time. You have been warned at least a dozen times *not* to bring *PIAs* or *BUGS* directly to the base camp. But you won't listen, because you're so damn much smarter than me! You think some damn degree from an Ivy League college makes you an authority on everything. Well, let me ask you, Did your fancy degree or eighty

thou a year salary save your family last night?"

"You're absolutely right, Harold," said Greg quietly. "I was wrong and you were right and I owe you everything for what you did."

"I don't want you to owe me, Greg," said Womack unrelentingly.

"What do you want from me, Harold?"

Womack stroked his moustache with his thumb and index finger, sighing heavily. He shook his head in frustration and said, "I want to know that you can do your job! Because, if you can't, I want you to leave. I'll *never* let you endanger my family again. Guaran-damn-teed."

Womack had left Greg standing there in the woods to contemplate some serious choices for his family's future.

To his credit, he made the right ones, too. That Seattle thing was the last major mistake Greg made, thought Womack as he snapped the firing pin into place. *Greg is one of the best team leaders.* And the camp had become permanent homes only to the Womack's and Baldwin's. All other *BUGS* were only temporary residents, moved on to other camps and safe havens as quickly as possible.

"Harold?"

The voice dragged Womack's attention back to his surroundings as he looked toward the ladder to the lower level.

"Harold, dinner is ready," said Shelby as she popped her head up the ladder and looked around for her husband.

Womack became aware of the children's voices and the rattling of dishes from below. He stood, wiped his hands on a grease rag, and then tossed it aside.

"I'll be there as soon as I lock up this stuff," he answered.

"Hey Dad, look—fish for dinner," teased Curt. "Is this some sort of special occasion?"

"Yeah, we're celebrating how you actually filled the water tanks," Shelby retorted. "Here—have an extra piece."

She slid two large, golden brown pieces of fried fish onto her son's Army Surplus mess plate and handed the wooden platter to Womack. Then she reached for the bowl of steamed rice, passing it

to Curt.

"Toss me a tortilla, Dad," mumbled Curt as he stuffed his mouth with a jalapeno pepper. With lightning speed, Womack grabbed a floury tortilla from the basket and slung it like a Frisbee towards his son, who without looking up, raised his hand and caught the projectile directly in front of his face. "Thanks!"

"Oh right! I can see going out in public with the two of you," said Patsy indignantly. "Oink and Oink, Jr.," she added as she seeded an overripe avocado.

"So what do we call you, sitting there with all of that slimy green shit oozing between your fingers?" asked Womack straight-faced.

"She has a fascination for green slime, Dad," quipped Curt. "Why just today, down at the creek, she was smearing the stuff all over her chest and hell...I think she was even trying to eat some of it."

Patsy shot her brother a smoldering look of disgust and said, "Dad, the little butthead slopped that river mud all over me again. I had to rewash my hair and everything." She wiped the creamy avocado residue from her fingers and passed the dish to her brother.

"Not me," said Curt pushing the offending dish from him. "I don't eat anything that reminds me of snot...avocados, okra, eggs cooked like Dad eats them, moussaka..."

"Enough all ready, just shut up and eat your fish!" interrupted Shelby. She turned to her husband and asked, "Well, did you and Greg decide what to do about the new security systems in the processing plants?"

"What new system?" demanded Curt. "Hell, a guy misses *one* trip and..."

"Shut up!" Lily said impatiently, "Maybe you'll learn something." She dodged as her brother flicked a pepper stem at her.

Ignoring the commotion, Womack answered his wife, "It's that sonofabitch, Murphy. He's still pissed off over the Falklands." He glared at Curt to refresh the boy's guilt.

"It never should have happened," Shelby said ruefully, "But..."

“But nothing...what Curt did made the whole thing personal for Murphy. And that makes our job a helluva lot harder. It was already like pulling hen’s teeth to get by their security system, but after Wonder Boy’s little stunt, all access coders are now built right into the individual weaponry. They no longer can be accessed from a central computer. This isn’t just for personal weaponry now; it has been done for *all* weapons. This means that we have to find and disable each weapon individually instead of being able to disarm or disable them from a central point. We will need more men and it will increase our time inside. All of these things increase the risk factor...beyond what I consider to be acceptable,” Womack shook his head. “Baldwin agrees.”

“Dad! You can’t be serious,” said Curt rising to his feet. “You mean *QUIT*? We can’t just quit, what about all those people? Besides, I can come up with a program to combat this...”

“Dad...” started Patsy.

“Everybody just wait a minute and let your father finish,” commanded Shelby. “Curt, sit down!” She raised her eyes questioningly to Womack, “Tell me what you’ve decided to do?”

“We have to kidnap Terrence Blackwell,” Womack said matter-of-factly.

“Who’s Terrence Blackwell?” Lily smiled and took the bait.

“Dr. Terrence Blackwell, PhD in Computer Sciences from M.I.T., original designer of the configuration for the Smart Weaponry System. The current system is sort of a stepchild to his design,” Womack said.

“I don’t get it,” said Curt, “His system is obsolete, he’s a has-been in Uni-Corp. Hell, he’s probably floating in blue Jell-O in some *Type II Repository* somewhere.”

“He is,” said Womack simply. “He’s in the *New Mexico Facilities* and so is his son. His wife was slated for processing there also, but they diverted her to Mexico City.”

“Oh, not good enough for a *Type II* plant, huh?” Shelby said resentfully. “What—was she too fat, or wait—don’t tell me—not blonde enough, right?”

“Kelley said that the woman had some sort of congenital heart

problem. They checked out the boy too, but he showed no sign of it, so they felt he was a good enough risk for the gene bank. He's computer smart, like his old man," said Womack.

"You spoke to Kelley again?" asked Lily. "How is she?"

"He's probably fine." Curt said sarcastically.

"Did *she* tell you how to find this guy, Blackwell?" countered Lily.

"He..." Curt started again.

"Kelley left an information chip for me at one of our checkpoints," continued Womack, "The chip was neither *male nor female*."

Shelby allowed a smirk to crease her face while her husband went on to explain the nature of the chip's contents. The on-going war over the mysterious Kelley's sex would continue for some time to come.

"This chip contains information about Blackwell's career, the *Repository* where he is stored, and possibilities of how we can abduct him. He is being stored at a *Type II Repository* in New Mexico. He was put in storage as a gene donor, which means that they have no intentions of restoring him—they just want his genetic material for cloning at a later point in time. His son demonstrated the same superior intelligence and proclivity for computers; therefore, they stored him in the cell next to him. We'll take the son to insure the father's cooperation," Womack said.

Patsy asked, "Once he finds out what they did to his wife, won't he *want* to cooperate with us, Dad?"

"You'd think so, eh? But we don't know this guy and neither does Kelley, so why take the chance? He may have known what they did to his wife and agreed. We've seen *a lot* of that shit...husbands turning in wives, mothers turning in children, sister turning in brothers...They all think they're doing the best thing for their loved ones..." Womack paused a moment, measuring the extent of the disordered reasoning that had engulfed the entire world. "*A man's foes shall be they of his own household...thus saith Micah the Morashite,*" he added.

"You're right, we need the son for insurance," agreed Patsy.

"So what's the plan?"

"I think it would be better to unload the whole idea all at once. I've called a strategy meeting for tomorrow morning. Everyone should be there," explained Womack. "There's a lot of technical shit involved in taking someone out of the Blue. Lily, you'll study the manuals for that." Looking at Curt, he said, "Is the key finished?"

"Last night," Curt said, licking the sugar from a fried tart, "Works like a charm!"

"Well we'll know that when we get there, won't we?" Womack said rhetorically. Then turning to Patsy, he said, "You better sit this one out, don't you think?"

Patsy struggled within her head to find a way to justify her going, but putting her family's well-being first came to the forefront as she said, "I've been working the ankle everyday. I'm sure it will be ready for the next trip." She smiled sweetly at her father and added, "I'll sure miss being with you, Dad."

Womack winked at his daughter and then spoke to his son, "Curt, I'm taking Douglas on this trip. I expect you to stay here and help your mother get ready for the Blackwells."

"Dad!" Curt moaned as if in pain, "I already stayed home the last time. It's not fair, dammit!" He shoved his plate away from him and continued, "Look I know I screwed up, but I learned my lesson, okay? Hell I made the damned *key* to get you into the place and now you're saying I can't even go and see how it works."

"Douglas and Lily can tell you how it worked," Harold said, unrelentingly. He pushed back his chair and rose from the dinner table. "Next trip, with Patsy, okay?" he said.

"Oh thanks a whole Helluva lot!" Curt said snidely, glaring first at his father and then into space.

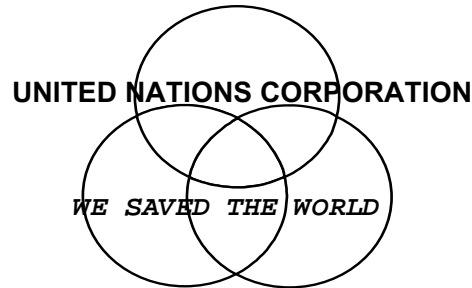
"I'm going for a walk," Womack said blatantly ignoring his son's pout.

He walked to the ladder and began his descent without a backward glance.

Date 03-05-8acb
P.01

From Kelley

To 033031050



Type of File: Personal Dossier

Category: U.C.P. B.U.G.S. P.I.A. R.I.P. ✓ L.A.P.

Name: Gregory Patrick Baldwin **D.O.B.:** 06/12

Place of Birth: Washington, DC., USA.

Current Address: Unknown - (Subject slated for Type II Repository; refuses to comply).

Personal Data -

Height: 5 ft. 10 in.

Weight: 165 lb.

Hair: Lt. Brown

Eyes: Blue

Distinguishing marks: Surgical scar on top, right arm, extending from wrist to elbow.

Marital Status: Married

Spouse's Name: Judith Brenner (P.I.A.)

Dependent information: One child; son, Douglas, b.06/12.

Primary Occupation: Architectural Engineer

Secondary Occupation: None

Education: Primary and Secondary Schools, Washington, DC; United States Coast Guard Academy, New London, Connecticut, USA.; Associates Degree in Architecture and BS. Degree in Engineering from Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana; MA. Degree in Architectural

Engineering, Yale University, Scholars of the House Program, Graduate and Professional Divisions, New Haven, Connecticut, USA.

Military Experience: The United States Coast Guard; Division: International Ice Patrol, Newfoundland, Canada, (Grade: Lt. Commander; Icebreaker Vessel); Engineer Corp, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA, (Grade: Commander; administering the construction, ownership, and use of deepwater ports to transfer oil from tankers to shore).

Type of Separation: Discharge **Character of Service:** Honorable

Primary Specialty Number and Title: 07G5D Scientific Research & Reconnaissance.

Special Affiliations: Boy Scouts of America; Member, American Legion; Member, John Birches Society; Member, Washington, DC Utilitarian Society; Member, Denver Mile-High Club.

Special Abilities and Hobbies: Hiking; Diving; Parachuting; Survivalist Training; Wrestling; Coin collecting.

Comments: *Rebel Insurgent Personnel.* Subject is known affiliate of Harold Womack (R.I.P.); Considered antagonistic. Not appropriate storage material. Termination on sight or immediate transfer to Type III Repository suggested.

Date 03-05-8acb
P.02

From Kelley

To 033031050

