



NEW YORK TIMES AND USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

SUZANNE BROCKMANN

TALL, DARK AND DEVASTATING

"Sexy, suspenseful and irresistible."
—*Booklist*

Dear Reader,

Once upon a time, back when I was a fledgling romance author, I wanted to write a miniseries of connected books, and I did some brainstorming with my good friend Eric, searching for a unique hook to tie these books together.

In Eric's travels, he happened across a *Newsweek* article about the Navy SEAL BUD/S (Basic Underwater Demolition SEALs) "Hell Week" of training. He immediately called me and announced, "I have found your miniseries hook!"

I remember running to the library (this was pre-internet), reading that article and getting goosebumps because I knew Eric was right. Navy SEALs make great romance heroes. And with my lifelong admiration for the men and women of the U.S. Military, I knew I would be able to do them justice. (And I'd love doing the research, along the way....)

And so my Tall, Dark & Dangerous series about U.S. Navy SEAL Team Ten came to be. The book you're holding includes two installments—*Harvard's Education* and *Hawken's Heart* (originally published with the holiday title *It Came Upon A Midnight Clear*)—first published by Silhouette Books.

Don't miss the recently reissued *Tall, Dark and Dangerous (Prince Joe and Forever Blue)*, and *Tall, Dark and Fearless (Frisco's Kid and Everyday, Average Jones)*. And visit www.eHarlequin.com or my website, www.SuzanneBrockmann.com, for more information about upcoming releases and reissues!

Happy reading,

Suz Brockmann

Praise for the novels of *New York Times* bestselling author SUZANNE BROCKMANN

“Zingy dialogue, a great sense of drama, and a pair of lovers who generate enough steam heat to power a whole city.”

—*RT Book Reviews* on *Hero Under Cover*

“Brockmann deftly delivers another testosterone-drenched, adrenaline-fueled tale of danger and desire that brilliantly combines superbly crafted, realistically complex characters with white-knuckle plotting.”

—*Booklist* on *Force of Nature*

“Readers will be on the edge of their seats.”

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“Another excellently paced, action-filled read. Brockmann delivers yet again!”

—*RT Book Reviews* on *Into the Storm*

“Funny, sexy, suspenseful, and superb.”

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“Sensational sizzle, powerful emotion and sheer fun.”

—*RT Book Reviews* on *Body Language*

TALL, DARK AND DEVASTATING



CONTENTS

HARVARD'S EDUCATION

CHAPTER ONE

CHAPTER TWO

CHAPTER THREE

CHAPTER FOUR

CHAPTER FIVE

CHAPTER SIX

CHAPTER SEVEN

CHAPTER EIGHT

CHAPTER NINE

CHAPTER TEN

CHAPTER ELEVEN

CHAPTER TWELVE

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

EPILOGUE

HAWKEN'S HEART

PROLOGUE

CHAPTER ONE

CHAPTER TWO

CHAPTER THREE

CHAPTER FOUR

CHAPTER FIVE

[CHAPTER SIX](#)

[CHAPTER SEVEN](#)

[CHAPTER EIGHT](#)

[CHAPTER NINE](#)

[CHAPTER TEN](#)

[CHAPTER ELEVEN](#)

[CHAPTER TWELVE](#)

[CHAPTER THIRTEEN](#)

[CHAPTER FOURTEEN](#)

[CHAPTER FIFTEEN](#)

[CHAPTER SIXTEEN](#)

[CHAPTER SEVENTEEN](#)

For my fearless pointman, Ed.

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Thanks to the Harvard Project volunteers from the Team Ten list

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Thanks to the real teams of SEALs, and to all the courageous men and women in the U.S. military (especially the Marines! Forgive me for including the banana joke as an example of the healthy rivalry between the Navy and the Marines!), who sacrifice so much to keep America the land of the free and the home of the brave.

Last but not least, a heartfelt thank-you to the wives, husbands, children and families of these real-life military heroes and heroines. Your sacrifice is deeply appreciated.

Any mistakes I've made or liberties I've taken in writing this book are completely my own.

CHAPTER ONE

THIS WAS WRONG. It was all wrong. Another few minutes, and this entire combined team of FInCOM agents and Navy SEALs was going to be torn to bits.

There was a small army of terrorists out there in the steamy July night. The Ts—or tangos, as the SEALs were fond of calling them—were waiting on their arrival with assault rifles that were as powerful as the weapon P. J. Richards clutched in her sweating hands.

P.J. tried to slow her pounding heart, tried to make the adrenaline that was streaming through her system work for her rather than against her as she crept through the darkness.

FInCOM Agent Tim Farber was calling the shots, but Farber was a city boy—and a fool, to boot. He didn't know squat about moving through the heavy underbrush of this kind of junglelike terrain. Of course, P.J. was a fine one to be calling names. Born in D.C., she'd been raised on concrete and crumbling blacktop—a different kind of jungle altogether.

Still, she knew enough to realize that Farber had to move more slowly to listen to the sounds of the night around him. And as long as she was criticizing, the fact that four FInCOM agents and three SEALs were occupying close to the same amount of real estate along this narrow trail made her feel like if she were part of some great big Christmas package, all wrapped up with a ribbon on top, waiting under some terrorist's tree.

“Tim.” P.J. spoke almost silently into the wireless radio headset she and the rest of the CSF team—the Combined SEAL/FInCOM Antiterrorist team—had been outfitted with. “Spread us out and slow it down.”

“Feel free to hang back if we're moving too fast for you.” Farber intentionally misunderstood, and P.J. felt a flash of frustration. As the only woman in the group, she was at the receiving end of more than her share of condescending remarks.

But while P.J. stood only five feet two inches and weighed in at barely one hundred and fifteen pounds, she could run circles around any one of these men—including most of the big, bad Navy SEALs. She could outshoot nearly all of them, too. When it came to sheer, brute force, yes, she'd admit she was at a disadvantage. But that didn't matter. Even though she couldn't pick them up and throw them any farther than she could spit, she could outthink damn near anyone, no sweat.

She sensed more than heard movement to her right and raised her weapon.

But it was only the SEAL called Harvard. The brother. His name was Daryl Becker and he was a senior chief—the naval equivalent of an army sergeant. He cut an imposing enough figure in his street clothes, but dressed in camouflage gear and protective goggles, he looked more dangerous than any man she'd ever met. He'd covered his face and the top of his shaved head with streaks of green and brown greasepaint that blended eerily with his black skin.

He was older than many of the other SEALs in the illustrious Alpha Squad. P.J. was willing to bet he had a solid ten years on her at least, making him thirty-five—or maybe even older. This was no green boy. This one was one-hundred-percent-pure grown man—every hard, muscled inch of him. Rumor had it he'd actually attended Harvard University and graduated *cum laude* before enlisting in Uncle Sam's Navy.

He hand-signaled a question. “Are you all right?” He mouthed the words as well—as if he thought she'd already forgotten the array of gestures that allowed them to communicate silently. Maybe Greg Greene or Charles Schneider had forgotten, but she remembered every single one.

“I'm okay,” she signaled to him as tersely as she could, frowning to emphasize her disapproval.

Damn, Harvard had been babying her from the word go. Ever since the FInCOM agents had first met the SEALs from Alpha Squad, this man in particular had been watching her closely, no doubt ready to catch her when she finally succumbed to the female vapors and fainted.

P.J. used hand signals to tell him what Tim Farber had ignored. *Stop. Listen. Silent. Something's wrong.*

The woods around them were oddly quiet. All the chirping and squeaking and rustling of God only knows *what* kinds of creepy crawly insect life had stopped. Someone else was out there, or they themselves were making too much racket. Either possibility was bad news.

Tim Farber's voice sounded over the headphones. "Raheem says the campsite is only a quarter mile ahead. Split up into groups."

About time. If *she* were the AIC—the agent in charge—of the operation, she would have broken the group into pairs right from the start. Not only that, but she would have taken what the informant, Raheem Al Hadi, said with a very large grain of salt instead of hurtling in, ill-informed and half-cocked.

"Belay that." Tim's voice was too loud in her ears. "Raheem advises the best route in is on this path. These woods are booby-trapped. Stay together."

P.J. felt like one of the redcoats, marching along the trail from Lexington to Concord—the perfect target for the rebel guerrillas.

She had discussed Raheem with Tim Farber before they'd left on this mission. Or rather, she'd posed some thought-provoking questions to which he'd responded with off-the-cuff reassurances. Raheem had given information to the SEALs before. His record had proven him to be reliable. Tim had reassured her, all right—he'd reassured her that he was, indeed, a total fool.

She'd found out from the other two FInCOM agents that Farber believed the SEALs were testing him to see if he trusted them. He was intending to prove he did.

Stay close to me, Harvard said with his hands.

P.J. pretended not to see him as she checked her weapon. She didn't need to be babysat. Annoyance flooded through her, masking the adrenaline surges and making her feel almost calm.

He got right in her face. *Buddy up*, he signaled. *Follow me.*

No. You follow me. She shot the signal back at him. She, for one, was tired of blindly following just anyone. She'd come out here in these wretched, bug-infested, swampy woods to neutralize terrorists. And that was exactly what she was going to do. If G.I. Joe here wanted to tag along, that was fine by her.

He caught her wrist in his hand—Lord, he had big hands—and shook his head in warning.

He was standing so close she could feel body heat radiating from him. He was much taller than she was, more than twelve inches, and she had to crane her neck to glare at him properly.

He smiled suddenly, as if he found the evil eye she was giving him behind her goggles amusing. He clicked off his lip mike, pushing it slightly aside so that he could lean down to whisper in her ear, "I knew you'd be trouble, first time I saw you."

It was remarkable, really, the way this man's smile transformed his face, changing him from stern, savage warrior to intensely interested and slightly amused potential lover. Or maybe he was just mildly interested and highly amused, and her too vivid imagination had made up the other parts.

P.J. pulled her hand away, and as she did, the world exploded around her, and Harvard fell to the ground.

He'd been shot.

Her mind froze, but her body reacted swiftly as a projectile whistled past her head.

She brought her weapon up as she hit the ground, using her peripheral vision to mark the positions of the tangos who had crept up behind them. She fired in double bursts, hitting one, then two

then three of them in rapid succession.

~~All around her, weapons were being fired and men were shouting in outrage and in pain. From what she could see, the entire CSF team was completely surrounded—except for the little hole she'd made in the terrorists' line of attack.~~

"Man down," P.J. rasped, following FInCOM procedure as she crawled on knees and elbows toward Harvard's body. But he'd taken a direct hit. She knew from one glance there was no use pulling him with her as she moved outside the kill zone.

"Backup—we need backup!" She could hear Tim Farber's voice, pitched up an octave, as she moved as silently as possible toward the prone bodies of the terrorists she'd brought down.

"By the time help arrives—" Chuck Schneider's voice was also very squeaky "—there'll be nothing left here to back up!"

Yeah? Not if *she* could help it.

There was a tree with low branches just beyond the terrorists' ambush point. If she could get there and somehow climb up it...

She was a city girl, an urban-street agent, and she'd never climbed a tree in her life. She absolutely *hated* heights, but she knew if she could fire from the vantage point of those branches, the tangos wouldn't know what hit them.

P.J. moved up and onto her feet in a crouching run and headed for the tree. She saw the tango rising out of the bushes at the last possible second and she fired twice, hitting him squarely in the chest. He fell, and only then did she see the man behind him.

She was dead. She knew in that instant that she was dead. She fired anyway, but her aim was off. His wasn't.

The force of the double impact pushed her back, and she tripped and went down. She felt her head crack against something, a rock, the trunk of a tree—she wasn't sure what, but it was granite hard. Pain exploded, stars sparking behind her tightly closed eyes.

"Code eighty-six! Eighty-six! Cease and desist!"

Just like that, the gunfire stopped. Just like that, this particular training exercise was over.

P.J. felt bright lights going on all over the area, and she struggled to open her eyes, to sit up. The movement made the world lurch unappealingly, and she desperately fought the urge to retch, curling instead into a tight little ball. She prayed she'd somehow find her missing sense of equilibrium before anyone noticed she was temporarily out for the count.

"We need a hospital corpsman," the voice over her headset continued. "We've got an agent down with a possible head injury."

P.J. felt hands touching her shoulder, her face, unfastening her goggles. So much for no one noticing.

"Richards, yo. You still with me, girl?" It was Harvard, and his voice got harsher, louder as he turned away from her. "Where the hell is that corpsman?" Softer again, and sweeter, like honey now. "Richards, can you open your eyes?"

She opened one eye and saw Harvard's camouflaged face gazing at her. His chin and cheeks were splattered with yellow from the paint ball that had hit him in the center of his chest.

"I'm fine," she whispered. She still hadn't quite regained her breath from the paint ball that had caught her directly in the midsection.

"Like hell you're fine," he countered. "And I should know. I saw you doing that George of the Jungle imitation. Right into that tree, headfirst..."

One Harvard became two—and Lord knows one was more than enough to deal with. P.J. had to close her eyes again. "Just give me another minute...."

"Corpsman's on the way, Senior Chief."

“How bad’s she hurt, H.?” P.J. recognized that voice as belonging to Alpha Squad’s commanding officer, ~~Captain Joe Catalanotto—Joe Cat~~, as his men irreverently called him.

“I don’t know, sir. I don’t want to move her, in case she’s got a neck injury. Why the *hell* didn’t one of us think about the danger of firing a paint ball at someone this girl’s size? What is she? A hundred, hundred and five pounds at the most? How the hell did this get past us?”

The breathlessness and dizziness were finally fading, leaving a lingering nausea and a throbbing ache in her head. P.J. would have liked a few more minutes to gather her senses, but Harvard had just gone and called her a girl.

“This is no big deal,” P.J. said, forcing her eyes open and struggling to sit up. “I was moving when the projectile hit me—the force caught me off balance and I tripped. There’s no need to turn this into some kind of a national incident. Besides, I weigh one-fifteen.” On a good day. “I’ve played paint-ball games before with no problem.”

Harvard was kneeling next to her. He reached out, caught her face between his hands and lightly touched the back of her head with the tips of his fingers. He skimmed an incredibly sore spot, and she couldn’t help but wince.

He swore softly, as if it hurt him, as well. “Hurts, huh?”

“I’m—”

“Fine,” he finished for her. “Yes, ma’am, you’ve made that clear. You’ve also got a bump the size of Mount Saint Helens on the back of your head. Odds are, you’ve got a concussion to go along with that bump.”

P.J. could see Tim Farber standing in the background, all but taking notes for the report she knew he was going to file with Kevin Laughton. *I recommend from now on that Agent Richards’s role in the antiterrorist unit be limited to dealing with administrative issues...* Some men couldn’t abide working in the field alongside a woman. She glanced at Harvard. No doubt *he’d* be first in line to put his initials right next to Farber’s recommendation.

She silently composed her own note. *Hey, Kev, I fell and I landed wrong—so sue me. And before you pull me off this team, prove that no male FInCOM agent ever made a similar mistake and... Oh, wait, what’s that I’m remembering? A certain high-level AIC who shall remain nameless but whose initials are K.L. doing a rather un-graceful nosedive from a second-story window during a training exercise back about a year and a half ago?*

P.J. focused on the mental image of Laughton grinning ruefully as he rubbed the newly healed collarbone that still gave him twinges of pain whenever it rained. That picture made Farber’s lofty smirk easier to bear.

No way was Kevin Laughton pulling her from this assignment. He had been her boss for two years, and he knew she deserved to be right here, right through to the end, come hell or high water or Tim Farber’s male chauvinist whining.

The corpsman arrived, and after he flashed a light into P.J.’s eyes, he examined the bump on the back of her head a whole lot less gently than Harvard had.

“I want to take you over to the hospital,” the corpsman told her. “I think you’re probably fine, but I’d feel better if we got an X-ray or two. You’ve got a lot of swelling back there. Any nausea?”

“I had the wind knocked out of me, so it’s hard to tell,” P.J. said, sidestepping the question. Harvard was shaking his head, watching her closely, and she carefully made a point not to meet his gaze.

“Can you walk or should we get a stretcher?”

P.J. was damned if she was going to be carried out of these woods, but truth was, her legs felt like rubber. “I can walk.” Her voice rang with false confidence as she tried to convince herself as well as everyone else.

She could feel Harvard watching as she pushed herself unsteadily to her feet. He moved closer, still looking to catch her if she fell. It was remarkable, really. Every other woman she knew would've been dying for a good-looking man like Senior Chief Daryl Becker to play hero for them.

But she wasn't every other woman.

She'd come this far on her own two feet and she wasn't about to let some silly bump on the head undermine her tough-as-nails reputation.

It was hard enough working at FInCOM, where the boys only grudgingly let the girls play, too. But for eight weeks, she was being allowed access to the absolutely-no-women-allowed world of the U.S. Navy SEALs.

For the next eight weeks, the members of SEAL Team Ten's invincible Alpha Squad were going to be watching her, waiting for her to screw up so they could say to each other, *See, this is precisely why we don't let women in.*

The SEALs were the U.S. Navy's special operations units. They were highly trained warriors with well-earned reputations for being the closest things to superheroes this side of a comic book.

The acronym came from sea, air and land, and SEALs were equally comfortable—and adept—operating in all of those environments.

They were smart, they were brave and they were more than a little crazy—they had to be to make it through the grueling sessions known as BUD/S training, which included the legendary Hell Week. From what P.J. had heard, a man who was still in the SEAL program after completing Hell Week had every right to be cocky and arrogant.

And the men of Alpha Squad at times could be both.

As P.J. forced herself to walk slowly but steadily away, she could feel all of Alpha Squad's eyes on her back.

Especially Senior Chief Harvard Becker's.

HARVARD DIDN'T KNOW what the hell he was doing here.

It was nearly 0100. He should have gone back to his apartment outside the base. He should be sitting on his couch in his boxers, chillin' and having a cold beer and skimming through the past five days' videotapes of *The Young and the Restless* instead of making a soap opera out of his own life.

Instead, he was here in this allegedly upscale hotel bar with the rest of the unmarried guys from Alpha Squad, making a sorry-assed attempt to bond with FInCOM's wunderkinder.

Steel guitars were wailing from the jukebox—some dreadful song about Papa going after Mama and doing her in because of her cheatin' heart. And the SEALs—Wes and Bobby were the only ones Harvard could see from his quick scan of the late-night crowd—were sitting on one side of the room, and the three male FInCOM agents were on the other. Not much bonding going down here tonight.

Harvard didn't blame Wes and Bob one bit. FInCOM's fab four didn't have much in common with the Alpha Squad.

It was amazing, really. There were something like seventy-three-hundred agents in the Federal Intelligence Commission. He'd have thought the Chosen Four would have come equipped with superhero capes and a giant S emblazoned on the fronts of their shirts at the very least.

Timothy Farber was FInCOM's alleged golden boy. He was a fresh-faced, college-boy type, several years shy of thirty, with a humorless earnestness that was annoying as hell. He was a solid subscriber to the FInCOM my-way-or-the-highway way of thinking. This no doubt worked when directing traffic to allow clear passage for the President's convoy, but it wouldn't do him quite as well when dealing with unpredictable, suicidal, religious zealots.

No, in Harvard's experience, a leader of a counterterrorist team needed constantly to adjust his plan of attack, altering and revising as unknown variables become known. A team leader needed to know how to listen to others' opinions and to know that sometimes the other guy's idea might be the best idea.

Joe Cat had consulted with Alan "Frisco" Francisco—one of the best BUD/S training instructors in Coronado—and had purposely put blustery Tim Farber in command of the very first training scenario in an attempt to knock him off his high horse. A former member of the Alpha Squad who was off the active duty list because of a permanent injury to his knee, Frisco had duties that kept him in California, but he was in constant contact with both Alpha Squad's captain and Harvard.

Still, judging from the way Farber was holding court at the bar, surrounded by his two fellow agents, it was obvious to Harvard that Frisco's ploy hadn't worked. Farber was totally unperturbed by his failure.

Maybe tomorrow, when Alpha Squad reviewed the exercise, the fact would finally sink in that Farber had personally created this snafu, this grand-scale Charlie Foxtrot.

But somehow Harvard doubted it.

As Harvard watched, Farber drew something on a napkin, and the two other FInCOM agents nodded seriously.

Greg Greene and Charles Schneider were around Harvard's age, thirty-five, thirty-six, maybe even older. They'd spent most of the preliminary classroom sessions looking bored, their body language broadcasting "been there, done that." But in the field, during the evening's exercise, they'd shown little imagination. They were standard issue FInCOM agents—finks, as the SEALs were fond of calling them. They didn't make waves, they followed the rule book to the last letter, they waited for

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