

READER'S GUIDE TO THE TROUBLESHOOTER SERIES

Bestselling author Suzanne Brockmann blends high adventure, harrowing drama, and heart-racing passion into thrilling novels of suspense. Whether tackling danger or wrestling with desire, her elite heroes and heroines never fail to give their all, in stories that soar above and beyond expectations.

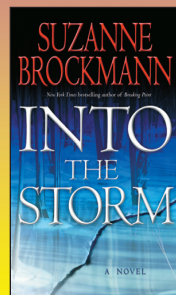
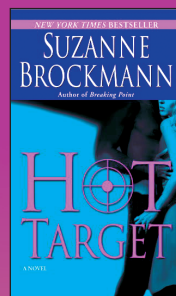
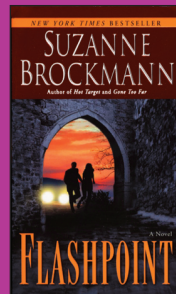
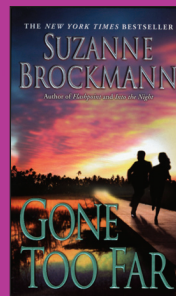
Here for the first time is a complete guide to Brockmann's Troubleshooter series, featuring the men and women of the Navy SEAL and Troubleshooters, Incorporated.

INSIDE YOU'LL FIND:

- In depth profiles of each character from Suzanne Brockmann's Troubleshooter series
- Two essays from Suzanne Brockmann
- Troubleshooter series book overviews
- Glossary of Troubleshooter terms
 - U.S. military ranks
- FAQ about the Troubleshooter series and Suzanne Brockmann's writing
- Character interviews written by Suzanne Brockmann
- Troubleshooter series fan survey results
- Plus, a sample chapter from *Into the Storm*, coming in hardcover August 15, 2006

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The Random House Publishing Group



COMPLIMENTARY—NOT FOR RESALE

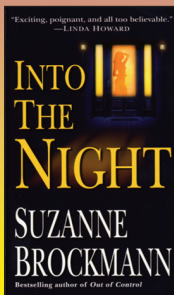
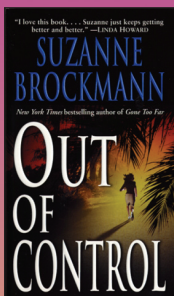
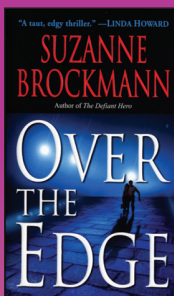
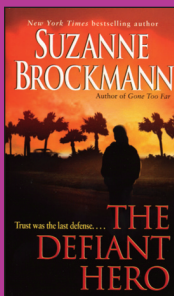
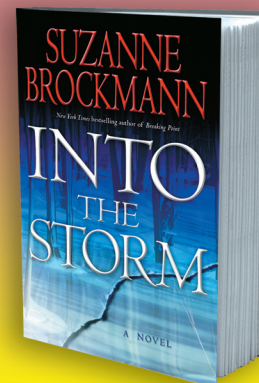
New York Times bestselling author

SUZANNE BROCKMANN

Reader's Guide to the TROUBLESHOOTER SERIES

High adventure. Harrowing drama. Heart-racing passion. Bestselling novels of romantic suspense.

Includes a sample chapter from
the newest book in the series
INTO THE STORM,
coming August 15, 2006



INTO THE STORM

SUZANNE BROCKMANN

9-780-345-48014-9

COMING IN HARDCOVER AUGUST 15, 2006

In a remote, frozen corner of New Hampshire, a Navy SEAL team and the elite security experts of Troubleshooters, Incorporated, are going head-to-head as fierce but friendly rivals in a raid-and-rescue training exercise. Despite the frigid winter temperatures, tension smolders between SEAL Petty Officer Mark Jenkins and former cop-turned-Troubleshooter Lindsey Fontaine after an impulsive night of passion goes awry. And then, suddenly, Tracy Shapiro, the Troubleshooters' new receptionist, vanishes while playing the role of hostage during a mock rescue operation.

Teaming up with the FBI to launch a manhunt in the treacherous wilderness, Jenk and Lindsey must put aside their feelings as a record snowstorm approaches, dramatically reducing any hope of finding Tracy alive. The trail is colder than the biting New England climate until a lucky break leads to a horrifying discovery—a brutally murdered young woman wearing the jacket Tracy wore when she disappeared. Suddenly there is a chilling certainty that Tracy has fallen prey to a serial killer—one who knows the backwoods terrain and who doesn't play by the rules of engagement. In a race against time, a raging blizzard, and a cunning opponent, Jenk and Lindsey are put to the ultimate test. Risking everything, they must finally come together in a desperate attempt to save Tracy—and each other.



Photo: © Natalie Schlossman

Since her explosion onto the publishing scene ten years ago, Suzanne Brockmann has written forty books, and is now widely recognized as one of the leading voices in romantic suspense. Her work has earned her repeated appearances on the *USA Today* and *New York Times* bestseller lists, as well as numerous awards, including the Romance Writer's of America's #1 Favorite Book of the Year—three years running in 2000, 2001, and 2002—two RITA Awards, and many Romantic Times Reviewer's Choice Awards. Suzanne lives west of Boston with her husband, Dell author Ed Gaffney.

Visit her Web site at www.suzannebrockmann.com

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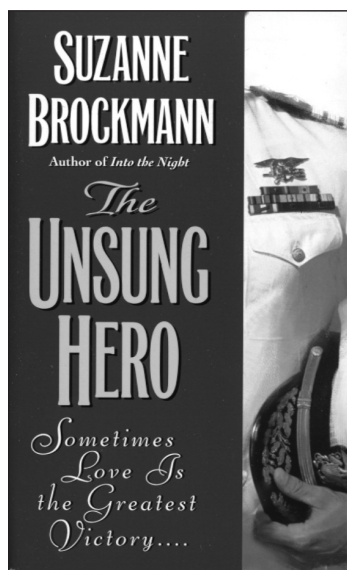
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Key to symbols found on pages 3–12:

– ongoing character’s first appearance in series

* character appears only in this book



THE UNSUNG HERO

First published in June 2000

Voted RWA's # 1 Favorite Book of the Year 2000

Setting: Baldwin's Bridge, Massachusetts

Timeframe: August, 2000

Main Characters: Tom and Kelly

Secondary Romance: Mallory and David

WWII Subplot: Resistance in Nazi-occupied France, a love triangle between Charles, Joe, and Cybele.

Sam & Alyssa Rating: Low. Sam Starrett and Alyssa Locke are introduced midway through this book.

POINT OF VIEW CHARACTERS:

- Lt. Tom Paoletti (U.S. Navy SEAL)
- Dr. Kelly Ashton (pediatrician)
- * Charles Ashton (Kelly's father)
- Joe Paoletti (Tom's great-uncle)
- * Mallory Paoletti (Tom's niece)
- * David Sullivan (comic book artist)

CHARACTERS FROM SEAL TEAM 16:

- Lt. (j.g.) Casper "Jazz" Jacquette
- Ensign Roger "Sam" Starrett
- Ensign John Nilsson
- Petty Officer Mark Jenkins
- Petty Officer Ken "WildCard" Karmody
- Petty Officer Jay Lopez
- Petty Officer Frank O'Leary

OTHER CHARACTERS:

- Admiral Morton "Chip" Crowley
- * Cybele Desjardin
- Lt. (j.g.) Alyssa Locke
- Rear Admiral Larry Tucker

After a near-fatal head injury, U.S. Navy SEAL Lieutenant Tom Paoletti catches a terrifying glimpse of an international terrorist in his New England hometown. When he calls for help, the Navy dismisses the danger as injury-induced imaginings. In a desperate last-ditch effort to prevent disaster, Tom creates his own makeshift counterterrorist team, assembling his most loyal officers, two elderly veterans of the Second World War, a couple of misfit teenagers, and Dr. Kelly Ashton—the sweet "girl next door" who has grown into a remarkable woman. Once known as the town's infamous bad boy, Tom has always longed for Kelly. Now he has one final chance for happiness, one last chance to win her heart, and one desperate chance to save the day. . . .

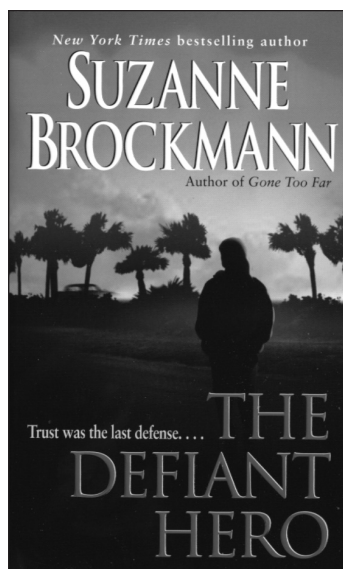
"Brockmann keeps the tension high. . . ."

—*Publishers Weekly*

"Richly textured, tenderly touching and utterly exciting."

—*Romantic Times BookClub*

Note from Suz: Point of view is often thought of as the movie camera through which the reader can see and hear the story. I use something that I call "deep point of view" in my books. This means that I get deep inside of the characters' heads and tell the story through their eyes, using their voices—their words and thoughts—as well as their interpretations of various events. I stay in one single character's point of view for each scene in the books in the Troubleshooters series.



THE DEFIANT HERO

First published in March 2001

Voted RWA's # 2 Favorite Book of the Year 2001

Setting: Washington, D.C. and Florida

Timeframe: Early 2001

Main Characters: Nils and Meg

Secondary Romance: Sam and Alyssa

WWII Subplot: The evacuation of Dunkirk (Eve and Ralph)

Sam & Alyssa Rating: High. Sam Starrett and Alyssa Locke repeatedly clash, and have their first romantic encounter.

POINT OF VIEW CHARACTERS:

- Lt. (j.g.) John "Nils" Nilsson (Navy SEAL)
- Meg Moore (freelance translator)
- *Eve Linden (Meg's grandmother)
- Ensign Roger "Sam" Starrett
- FBI Agent Alyssa Locke
- *The Bear

CHARACTERS FROM SEAL TEAM 16:

- Lieutenant Commander Tom Paoletti
- Lt. Casper "Jazz" Jacqueline
- Ensign Mike Muldoon
- Senior Chief Stanley Wolchonok
- Chief Frank O'Leary
- Petty Officer Mark Jenkins
- Petty Officer Ken "WildCard" Karmody
- Petty Officer Jay Lopez

OTHER CHARACTERS:

- FBI Negotiator Max Bhagat
- FBI Agent Jules Cassidy (Alyssa's partner)
- *Nicky Linden (Eve's brother)
- *Ralph Grayson (Nicky's tutor)
- Lt. (j.g.) Teresa Howe (U.S. Naval Reserves helo pilot)
- *Amy Moore (Meg's daughter)

"The United States refuses to negotiate with terrorists." Meg Moore remembered the warning from her job as a translator in a European embassy. Those same words will spell out a death sentence for her daughter and grandmother who have been kidnapped by a lethal group called the Extremists. Meg will do anything to meet their unspeakable demands; anything—even kill—to save her child.

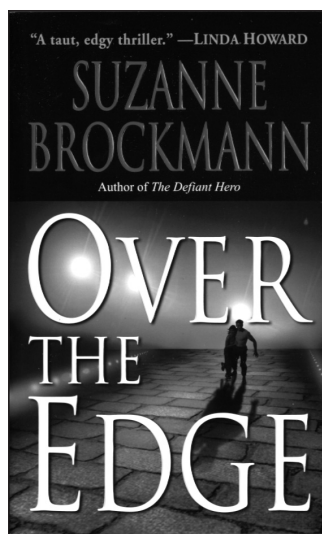
When Navy SEAL John Nilsson is summoned to Washington, D.C. by the FBI to help negotiate a hostage situation, the last person he expects to see holding a foreign ambassador at gunpoint is Meg. He hasn't seen her in years, but he's never forgotten how it feels to hold her in his arms. John could lose his career if he helps her escape. She will lose her life if he doesn't . . .

"A smart, thrilling keeper . . . this is one to recommend heartily to friends."

—*Publishers Weekly*

"An unforgettable, riveting adventure."

—*The Library Journal*



OVER THE EDGE

First published in September 2001

Voted RWA's # 1 Favorite Book of the Year 2001

Setting: San Diego and Kazbekistan (also known as “The Pit”)

Timeframe: Summer 2001

Main Characters: Stan and Teri

Secondary Romance: Sam and Alyssa

WWII Subplot: The Holocaust in Denmark

Sam & Alyssa Rating: High. Sam Starrett and Alyssa Locke are back for round two.

Story Arc Alert: Max and Gina, whose story continues throughout the series to their own book, *Breaking Point*, first appear together here.

POINT OF VIEW CHARACTERS:

- Senior Chief Stan Wolchonok (U.S. Navy SEAL)
- Lt. (j.g.) Teresa Howe (U.S. Naval Reserves helicopter pilot)
- Lt. (j.g.) Roger “Sam” Starrett
- FBI Agent Alyssa Locke
- Gina Vitagliano (college student, aboard the hijacked plane)
- *Helga Rosen Shuler (envoy from Israel)
- *Desmond Nyland (Helga’s assistant)

CHARACTERS FROM SEAL TEAM 16:

- Lieutenant Commander Tom Paoletti
- Lt. Casper “Jazz” Jacqueline
- Lt. John Nilsson
- Ensign Mike Muldoon
- Ensign “Big Mac” MacInnough
- Chief Wayne “Duke” Jefferson
- Chief Frank O’Leary
- Petty Officer Dan “Gilligan” Gillman
- Petty Officer Mark Jenkins
- Petty Officer Ken “WildCard” Karmody
- Petty Officer Jay Lopez
- Petty Officer Cosmo Richter
- Petty Officer Irving “Izzy” Zanella

OTHER CHARACTERS:

- FBI Negotiator Max Bhagat
- FBI Agent Jules Cassidy (Alyssa’s partner)
- Mary Lou Morrison (bar bunny)
- *Marte Gunvald Wolchonok (Stan’s mother)
- *Annebet Gunvald (Marte’s older sister)
- *Herschel Rosen (Helga’s older brother)
- *Wilhelm Gruber (a German soldier)

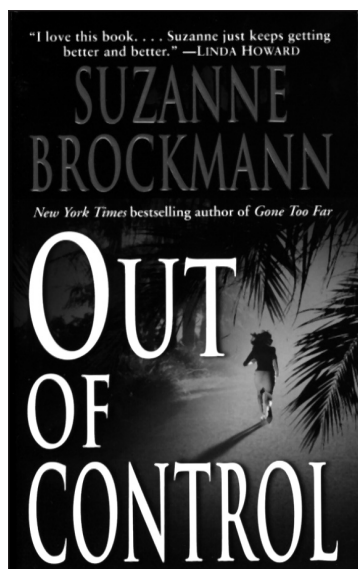
Her passion is flying. As one of the best helicopter pilots in the naval reserves, Lieutenant Teri Howe is tough, dedicated, and highly skilled—until a past mistake surfaces, jeopardizing everything she’s worked for.

Rock steady Senior Chief Stan Wolchonok has made a career of solving problems. He willingly comes to Teri’s aid, knowing that his personal code of honor—and perhaps his heart—will be at risk. But when a jet carrying an American senator’s daughter is hijacked, Stan’s unflinching determination and Teri’s steadfast courage are put to the ultimate test. The rescue mission will be daring and dangerous. But somewhere between peril and resolution, the line between friends and lovers begins to blur, pushing both their lives over the edge . . .

“Sterling prose and expert plotting. . . .” —*Publishers Weekly*

“A taut, edgy thriller,” —LINDA HOWARD

Note from Suz: In *Over the Edge*, terrorists hijack a commercial airliner filled with Americans, forcing it to land in a dangerous third world country. This book was released on August 28, 2001. Exactly two weeks later, the world was forever changed when terrorists hijacked commercial jets filled with Americans and flew them into the World Trade Center Twin Towers and the Pentagon. I set this story far from America in an attempt to make it realistic—because we all knew that a hijacking like that couldn’t happen here. I did a huge amount of research in order to find a European airport from which a believable hijacking might take place. When I finally settled on Athens, that former hotbed of international terrorism, little did I realize such an airport—Logan—was twenty minutes from my own backyard. . . .



POINT OF VIEW CHARACTERS:

- Chief Ken “WildCard” Karmody (U.S. Navy SEAL)
- Savannah von Hopf (attorney-at-law)
- FBI Agent Alyssa Locke
- Jones (American ex pat, living in Indonesia)
- Molly Anderson (volunteer with a Heifer Project-type mission in Indonesia)
- *Ingerose “Rose” Rainer von Hopf (Savannah’s grandmother)

CHARACTERS FROM SEAL TEAM 16:

Lieutenant Commander Tom Paoletti
 Lt. Casper “Jazz” Jacquette
 Lt. John Nilsson
 Lt. Roger “Sam” Starrett
 Ensign Alec Macinnough
 Senior Chief Stanley Wolchonok
 Petty Officer Dan “Gilligan” Gillman
 Petty Officer Mark Jenkins
 Petty Officer Jay Lopez
 Petty Officer Cosmo Richter
 Petty Officer Bill Silverman
 Petty Officer Irving “Izzy” Zanella

OTHER CHARACTERS:

- FBI Negotiator Max Bhagat
- FBI Agent Jules Cassidy (Alyssa’s partner)
- FBI Agent George Faulkner (the newest addition to Max’s CT team)
- Gordon MacKenzie (of the SAS)
- Haley Starrett (Sam’s baby daughter)
- *Alex von Hopf (Savannah’s uncle)
- *Heinrich “Hank” von Hopf (a former Austrian prince)

OUT OF CONTROL

First published in March 2002

Voted RWA’s # 1 Favorite Book of the Year 2002

Setting: San Diego and Indonesia

Timeframe: Pre-9/11

Main Characters: Kenny and Savannah

Secondary Romance: Molly and Jones

WWII Subplot: German Americans as spies in Nazi Germany (Rose and Hank)

Sam & Alyssa Rating: Medium low. Both characters appear, but Sam is married to Mary Lou. Only Alyssa is a point of view character.

Story Arc Alert: Molly and Jones, whose story continues in *Breaking Point*, first appear together here. Also, George Faulkner, who first appeared in the non-Troubleshooters book, *Body Guard*, is transferred to Max’s team.

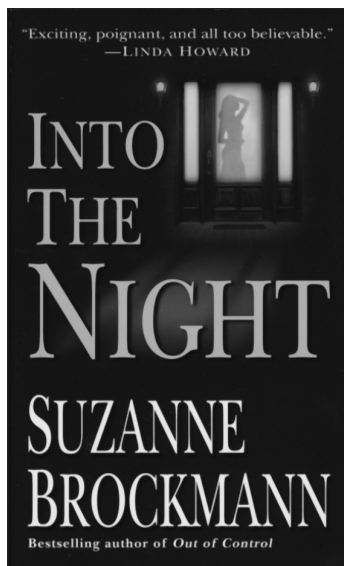
Savannah von Hopf has no choice. To save her uncle’s life, she goes in search of Ken “WildCard” Karmody, a guy she barely knew in college who is now a military operative. She must convince him to help her deliver a cache of ransom money into the hands of terrorists halfway around the world. What she doesn’t expect is to end up in WildCard’s arms before she can even ask for help.

WildCard has always had a soft spot for beautiful women. But when he discovers Savannah’s hidden agenda, he is determined to end the affair. But Savannah is bound for Indonesia, with or without his protection, and he can’t just walk away. When her plan goes horribly wrong, they are trapped in the forsaken jungle of a hostile country, stalked by a lethal enemy. As time is running out, they scramble to escape, risking both their lives to stop a nightmare from spinning even further out of control . . .

“Blending several humor-garnished love stories into the best sort of cocktail, veteran romance author Brockmann serves up a heady brew that readers are certain to savor. . . .”

—Publishers Weekly

“I love this book. . . . Suzanne just keeps getting better and better.” —LINDA HOWARD



INTO THE NIGHT

First published in December 2002

***New York Times* Bestseller**

Setting: San Diego, California

Timeframe: Post 9/11, late 2002

Main Characters: Mike and Joan

Secondary Romance: Mary Lou and Ibrahim

WWII Subplot: The battle of Tarawa and the formation of the UDT units—granddaddies to the SEALs (Vince and Charlie)

Sam & Alyssa Rating: Medium low. Both characters appear, but Sam is married to Mary Lou. Only Sam is a point of view character.

POINT OF VIEW CHARACTERS:

- Lt. (j.g.) Mike Muldoon (U.S. Navy SEAL)
- Joan DaCosta (White House Public Relations assistant)
- *Vince DaCosta (Joan's grandfather)
- *Charlotte "Charlie" Fletcher DaCosta (Joan's grandmother)
- Lt. Roger "Sam" Starrett
- Mary Lou Starrett (Sam's wife)
- *The Terrorist

CHARACTERS FROM SEAL TEAM 16:

- Lieutenant Commander Tom Paoletti
- Lt. Casper "Jazz" Jacquette
- Lt. John Nilsson
- Senior Chief Stanley Wolchonok
- Chief Ken "WildCard" Karmody
- Petty Officer Dan "Gilligan" Gillman
- Petty Officer Mark Jenkins
- Petty Officer Jay Lopez
- Petty Officer Cosmo Richter

OTHER CHARACTERS:

- *U.S. President Alan Bryant
- *Brooke Bryant (the President's unruly daughter)
- Donny DaCosta (Joan's brother)
- *Edna Fletcher (Charlotte's mother-in-law)
- Ibrahim Rahman (an American of Middle Eastern descent)
- FBI Negotiator Max Bhagat
- FBI Agent Alyssa Locke
- FBI Agent Jules Cassidy (Alyssa's partner)
- FBI Agent George Faulkner
- Admiral Morton "Chip" Crowley
- Rear Admiral Larry Tucker

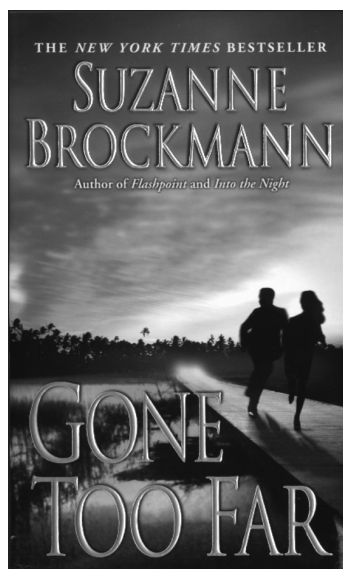
It was supposed to be a "dog and pony show" —an elaborate demonstration of SEAL rescue techniques—to celebrate a presidential visit to a California naval base. Professional, no-nonsense White House staffer Joan DaCosta arrives early to scope out the area. Assigned to be her SEAL liaison is Lt. (j.g.) Mike Muldoon, a born leader—strong, decisive, tough, and fearless.

Against her better judgment, Joan finds herself drawn to the handsome young officer. Skilled at being "one of the guys" in the mostly male world of politics, she is dismayed when Muldoon breaks through her defenses. While tension mounts between them, fueling their growing attraction, a far more sinister danger is lurking, as terrorists plot a daring attack against the president. To protect their commander in chief, Joan and Muldoon must not only risk their hearts—but their very lives . . .

"A worthy addition to the author's SEAL saga."

—*Publishers Weekly*

"Exciting, poignant, and all-too-believable." —LINDA HOWARD



GONE TOO FAR

First published in July 2003

New York Times Bestseller

Setting: Sarasota, Tampa, and central Florida, and Texas

Timeframe: June 2003

Main Characters: Sam and Alyssa

Secondary Romance: Max and Gina

WWII Subplot: Tuskegee Airmen and Women Airforce Service Pilots (Walt and Dot)

Sam & Alyssa Rating: High.

Story Arc Alert: *Gone Too Far* is the conclusion of both the Sam & Alyssa arc, and the Tom & Kelly arc. Max & Gina's story arc, however, is in full swing.

POINT OF VIEW CHARACTERS:

Lt. Roger "Sam" Starrett (U.S. Navy SEAL)
 Alyssa Locke (FBI Agent)
 Lieutenant Commander Tom Paoletti (Sam's CO)
 Max Bhagat (The head of the FBI's top counterterrorist team)
 Gina Vitagliano (The woman under Max's skin)
 Mary Lou Starrett (Sam's ex-wife)
 *Noah Gaines (Sam's best friend from childhood)

CHARACTERS FROM SEAL TEAM 16:

Lt. Casper "Jazz" Jacquette
 Lt. John Nilsson
 Lt. Mike Muldoon
 Senior Chief Stanley Wolchonok
 Chief Ken "WildCard" Karmody
 Petty Officer Dan "Gilligan" Gillman
 Petty Officer Mark Jenkins
 Petty Officer Jay Lopez
 Petty Officer Cosmo Richter
 Petty Officer Bill Silverman

OTHER CHARACTERS:

– Enrique Alvarado (detective with the Sarasota Police)
 Dr. Kelly Ashton (Tom Paoletti's significant other)
 FBI Agent Jules Cassidy (Alyssa's partner)
 Admiral Morton "Chip" Crowley (a SEAL)
 *Claire Gaines (Noah's wife)
 *Dorothy "Dot" Gaines (Noah's grandmother)
 *Walter Gaines (Noah's grandfather)
 Ibrahim Rahman (an American of Middle Eastern descent)
 Haley Starrett (Sam and Mary Lou's toddler daughter)
 Rear Admiral Larry Tucker (base commander)
 *Frank Turlington (Mary Lou's employer)
 *Whitney Turlington (Frank's daughter)

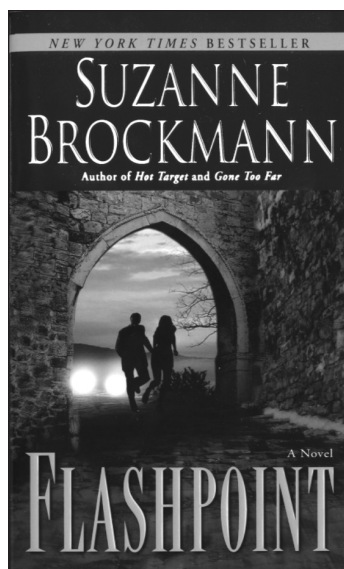
In his career as one of America's elite warriors, Lt. Sam Starrett can do no wrong. In his private life, he has done little right. Waiting for a divorce, Sam is determined to stay active in his young daughter's life. But when he shows up at the door of his ex-wife's home in Sarasota, Florida, he makes a grisly discovery. His daughter is gone and the body of a brutally murdered woman lies on the floor.

FBI agent Alyssa Locke's relationship with Sam has been intense and nearly catastrophic, yet it refuses to end. Now Alyssa is assigned to lead the murder investigation and once more the two are face-to-face. While Alyssa tries to fight their intense attraction, Sam tries to heat things up. And the complex case pushes them both to the wrong side of the law—and on the run to discover the truth. With Sam's daughter still unaccounted for, neither Alyssa nor Sam can predict just how hot this deadly situation is about to become . . .

"At last! Sam and Alyssa's book! *Gone Too Far* is Suzanne Brockmann's best book to date. There's everything anyone could want: action, danger, suspense, passion, and tears. This is one I'll read again." —LINDA HOWARD

"Sizzling with military intrigue and sexual tension, with characters so vivid they leap right off the page, *Gone Too Far* is a bold, brassy read with a momentum that just doesn't quit." —TESS GERRITSEN

"In this exceptionally suspenseful tale, Brockmann's sleek combination of taut plotting, superb characterization, and sizzingly sexy, emotionally intense romance is absolutely addictive." —*Booklist*



FLASHPOINT

First published in April 2004

New York Times Bestseller

Setting: Washington D.C. and Kazbekistan

Timeframe: Summer 2004

Main Characters: Tess and Nash

Secondary Relationships: Sophia and Decker; friendship between Decker and Nash

WWII Subplot: None

Sam & Alyssa Rating: Zero. Neither appear in this book. They are only mentioned.

Story Arc Alert: Sophia and Decker's story arc is introduced. Tom Paoletti's new personal and corporate security company, Troubleshooters Incorporated, is introduced.

POINT OF VIEW CHARACTERS:

- James “Diego” Nash (Decker's Second in Command)
- Tess Bailey (Team Computer Specialist)
- Lawrence Decker (Team Leader)
- Sophia Ghaffari (An American who stayed in Kazabek a little too long)

CHARACTERS FROM TROUBLESHOOTERS INCORPORATED:

- Tom Paoletti (CEO and CO of Troubleshooters Incorporated)
- Dave Malkoff (Former CIA agent, Team Spook)
- Vinh Murphy (Former Marine, Team Muscle and Weapons Expert)

BRIEF APPEARANCES FROM SEAL TEAM 16 CHARACTERS:

- Senior Chief Stanley Wolchonok
- Petty Officer Mark Jenkins
- Petty Officer Jay Lopez
- Petty Officer Cosmo Richter

OTHER CHARACTERS:

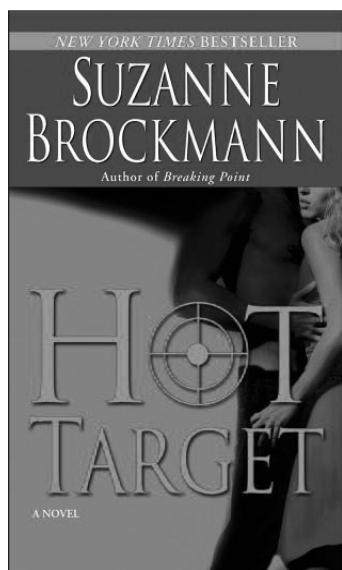
- *Padsha Bashir (Kazbekistani Warlord)
- Will Schroeder (Boston Globe Reporter)

Once an operative of a top secret government agency, Jimmy Nash has found a new job with Troubleshooters, Inc., a clandestine company that helps anyone in desperate need—which provides a perfect cover for its other, more perilous objective: covert special operations.

Now Nash and a team of expert operators have come in the guise of relief workers to the earthquake-ravaged country of Kazbekistan. There, they must track down a missing laptop computer that may hold secrets vital to national security. To fulfill his mission, Nash is not afraid to break the rules, but he may have met his match in Tess Bailey, an operative with all the right instincts. Now these two professionals must play out their dangerous games in the world's most dangerous place—isolated from their own government, cutting deals with people they can't trust, and guarding forbidden passions that threaten to compromise their crucial mission. . . .

“Powerhouse author Brockmann opens up a new chapter in the exploits of SEAL Team 16. Creating Troubleshooters, Incorporated opens the door to whole new vistas for her to explore.” —*Romantic Times BookClub*

Note from Suz: *Flashpoint* is set in the same world as my SEAL Team 16 books, but it features the men and women of Troubleshooters, Incorporated, a covert civilian team. This organization is made up of former military personnel—including SEALs, Rangers, Marines, SAS—and former law enforcement agents—CIA, FBI, police—as well as an ex-con wild card or two, just to spice things up. Owned and run by Tom Paoletti, the former commanding officer of SEAL Team 16, Troubleshooters, Inc. specializes in personal and corporate security, and, during these uncertain times, Tom's phone has not stopped ringing. Because of this, he's constantly looking to recruit trustworthy operatives to lead high-risk missions into dangerous places.



HOT TARGET

First published in January 2005

New York Times Bestseller

Setting: Hollywood, California

Timeframe: Early 2005

Main Characters: Cosmo and Jane

Secondary Romance: Jules and Robin

WWII Subplot: Jack and Hal and the ghost army of the Twenty-Third Headquarters Special Troops.

Sam & Alyssa Rating: Zero. Neither appear in this book. They are only mentioned.

Story Arc Alert: Sophia and Decker's story arc continues, as does Max and Gina's. Murphy's story arc takes a sad turn.

POINT OF VIEW CHARACTERS:

- Chief Cosmo Richter (U.S. Navy SEAL)
- Jane Mercedes Chadwick (screenwriter/producer of *American Hero*)
- Robin Chadwick (Jane's brother, an actor)
- Jules Cassidy (FBI Agent)
- Lawrence Decker (TS Inc. Team Leader)
- *Patty LeShane (Jane's assistant)
- *Jack Shelton (elderly Hollywood set designer and WWII veteran, upon whose life—and secret relationship with Hal Lord—the movie *American Hero* is based)

CHARACTERS FROM TROUBLESHOOTERS INCORPORATED:

- Tom Paoletti (CEO and CO of Troubleshooters Incorporated)
- Tess Bailey
- Lindsey Fontaine (formerly with the LAPD)
- Sophia Ghaffari
- Dave Malkoff
- Vinh Murphy
- James “Diego” Nash
- PJ Prescott (former Air Force Para-Rescue Jumper—a helo pilot)

CHARACTERS FROM SEAL TEAM 16:

- Lt. Mike Muldoon
- Lt. jg Alec MacInnough
- Ensign Joel Collins
- Petty Officer Danny “Gilligan” Gillman
- Petty Officer Mark Jenkins
- Petty Officer Jay Lopez
- Petty Officer Third Class Tony Vlachic
- Petty Officer Irving “Izzy” Zanella

OTHER CHARACTERS:

- Max Bhagat (legendary FBI counterterrorist team leader, and Jules's boss)
- Adam Wyndham (Jules' ex-lover, an aspiring actor)

Unwillingly facing a month's leave from the Navy SEALs, Cosmo Richter offers his services to Troubleshooters Incorporated, a private-sector security firm. Richter's first case, surrounding a Hollywood film by the maverick movie producer Jane Mercedes Chadwick, develops quickly. Jane's portrayal of a real-life hero's homosexuality has roused a storm of media buzz and the fury of extremist groups. The film's subject matter hits home for FBI agent Jules Cassidy, who's struggling with an ex-lover while fighting a growing attraction to Jane's brother. Then danger on the set escalates when angry e-mails become death threats. Though Jane resists the Troubleshooters' protection, she hasn't counted on the tight bond she forms with the quiet, capable Cosmo Richter. And when all hell erupts, desire and desperate choices will collide on a killing ground that may trap them both in the crossfire.

“The importance of both freedom and tolerance are the underlying messages in Brockmann's latest intense thriller. *Hot Target* is an emotional banquet served with lots of taut adventure.” —*Romantic Times BookClub*

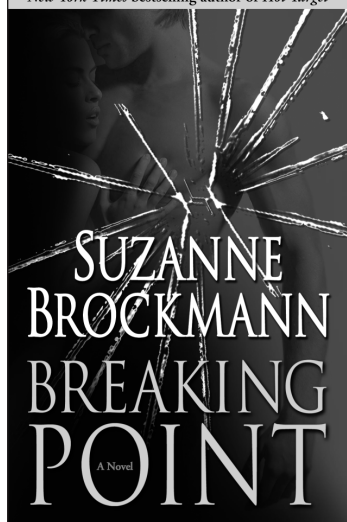
“Funny, sexy, suspenseful, and superb.” —*Booklist*

“[A] fast-paced thriller . . . edgy, exceptional . . . Brava!”

— *Library Journal* (starred review)

“This is a hot read, in more ways than one . . . *Hot Target* has better information than *Cosmopolitan Magazine* or *Dr. Phil*. And you won't have to hide in shame if you get caught reading it in public.” —*Contra Costa Times*

New York Times bestselling author of *Hot Target*



BREAKING POINT

First published in July 2005

***New York Times* Bestseller**

Setting: Washington D.C., Kenya, Germany, and Indonesia

Timeframe: Summer 2005

Main Characters: Max and Gina

Secondary Romance: Molly and Jones

Secondary Relationship: Friendship between Max and Jules

WWII Subplot: None

Sam & Alyssa Rating: Zero. Both are mentioned, Alyssa appears briefly.

Story Arc Alert: Max and Gina's story arc concludes, as does Molly and Jones's. Jules Cassidy's story arc continues.

POINT OF VIEW CHARACTERS:

Max Bhagat (legendary FBI counterterrorist team leader)

Gina Vitagliano (AIDS Awareness International volunteer)

Jules Cassidy (FBI Agent)

Molly Anderson (Gina's tent-mate in Kenya)

Jones, aka Grady Morant (American ex pat, former Special Forces)

CHARACTERS FROM MAX'S FBI TEAM:

– Deb Ehrlanger

George Faulkner

– Joe “Yashi” Hirabayashi

OTHER CHARACTERS:

*Sister Maria-Margarit (AAI volunteer)

*Ajay Moseley (patient at Sheffield Physical Therapy Center)

*Colonel Ramelan Subandrio (an old “friend” of Grady Morant's)

*Victor Vitagliano (Gina's brother)

As commander of the nation's most elite FBI counterterrorism unit, Max Bhagat puts absolutely nothing ahead of his work. But when Max hears that the love of his life, Gina Vitagliano, has been killed in a terrorist bombing, nothing can keep him from making a full investigation—and retribution—his top priority. At the scene of the attack, however, Max learns that Gina is still very much alive—and in jeopardy. A ruthless killer is bent on using Gina and a colleague, Molly Anderson, to bait a deadly trap. His quarry? Grady Morant, aka “Jones,” a notorious ex-Special Forces operative turned smuggler who is willing to forfeit his own life to save Molly, the woman he loves. Together with Max's top agent, Jules Cassidy, the unlikely allies plunge into a global hot zone of violence and corruption, embarking on a rescue mission of deadly proportions.

“An action-packed breathtaking thriller.”

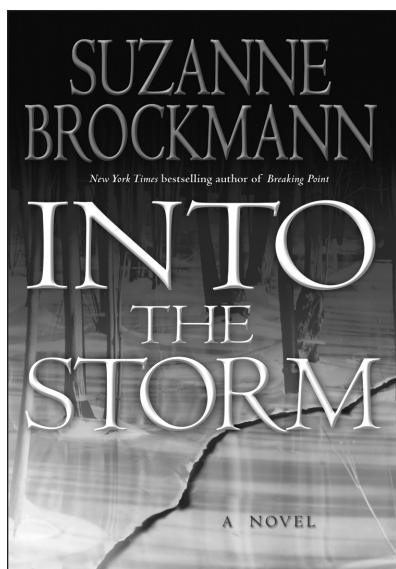
—*Romantic Times BookClub* (Top Pick!)

“[An] adrenaline-rich tale of suspense . . . With its realistically complex and conflicted characters, intense sexual tension and edgy humor, this is Suzanne Brockmann at her best.”

—*Booklist*

“Openly gay FBI agent Jules Cassidy (is) one of the most charming and original characters in popular fiction today. Brockmann's characters volley badinage like grenades, keeping *Breaking Point* moving at breakneck speed.”

—*Library Journal*



INTO THE STORM

Coming August 15, 2006

Setting: San Diego, California and Northern New Hampshire

Timeframe: December 2005

Main Characters: Jenk and Lindsey

Secondary Relationships: Sophia and Decker, Izzy and Jenk

WWII Subplot: None

Sam & Alyssa Rating: Zero. Both appear in small roles.

Story Arc Alert: Sophia and Decker's story arc moves forward. Izzy, Dave, and Tracy all have story arcs that begin.

POINT OF VIEW CHARACTERS:

- Petty Officer Mark Jenkins (U.S. Navy SEAL)
- Lindsey Fontaine (TS Inc. operative, former LAPD)
- Sophia Ghaffari (TS Inc. support staff)
- Dave Malkoff (TS Inc. operative, former CIA)
- Petty Officer Irving "Izzy" Zannella (U.S. Navy SEAL)
- Tracy Shapiro (TS Inc.'s new receptionist)
- Beth Foster (aka Number Five)

CHARACTERS FROM TROUBLESHOOTERS INCORPORATED:

- Tom Paoletti (CEO and CO)
- Tess Bailey
- Lawrence Decker
- James "Diego" Nash
- Alyssa Locke
- Sam Starrett

CHARACTERS FROM SEAL TEAM 16:

- Lt. Commander Lewis Koehl (Team CO)
- Lt. Casper "Jazz" Jacquette
- Lt. jg Alec "Big Mac" MacInnough
- Senior Chief Stanley Wolchonok
- Petty Officer Dan "Gilligan" Gillman
- Petty Officer Jay Lopez

OTHER CHARACTERS:

- *Lyle Andrews (Tracy's ex-boyfriend)
- Jules Cassidy (FBI agent)
- *Richard Eulie

In a remote, frozen corner of New Hampshire, a Navy SEAL team and the elite security experts of Troubleshooters, Incorporated are going head-to-head as fierce but friendly rivals in a raid-and-rescue training exercise. Despite the frigid winter temperatures, tension smolders between SEAL Petty Officer Mark Jenkins and former cop turned Troubleshooter Lindsey Fontaine after an impulsive night of passion goes awry. And then, suddenly, Tracy Shapiro, the Troubleshooters' new receptionist, vanishes while playing the role of hostage during a mock rescue operation.

Teaming up with the FBI to launch a manhunt in the treacherous wilderness, Jenk and Lindsey must put aside their feelings as a record snowstorm approaches, dramatically reducing any hope of finding Tracy alive. The trail is colder than the biting New England climate until a lucky break leads to a horrifying discovery—a brutally murdered young woman wearing the jacket Tracy wore when she disappeared. Suddenly there is a chilling certainty that Tracy has fallen prey to a serial killer—one who knows the backwoods terrain and who doesn't play by the rules of engagement.

In a race against time, a raging blizzard, and a cunning opponent, Jenk and Lindsey are put to the ultimate test. Risking everything, they must finally come together in a desperate attempt to save Tracy—and each other.

TROUBLESHOOTER SERIES CHARACTERS (alphabetical order)

KEY

POV— Point of view

TUH— *The Unsung Hero* (Tom & Kelly, and the terrorist spotted in a quiet little New England town)

TDH— *The Defiant Hero* (Nils & Meg, and the rescue of Meg's kidnapped daughter)

OTE— *Over the Edge* (Stan & Teri, and the takedown of the terrorist hijacked plane)

OOC— *Out of Control* (Kenny & Savannah, and their scramble through the Indonesian jungle)

ITN— *Into the Night* (Muldoon & Joan, and the terrorist assassination attempt at the Coronado Navy Base)

GTF— *Gone Too Far* (Sam & Alyssa, and the rescue of Sam's missing daughter)

FP— *Flashpoint* (Nash & Tess, and the search for a terrorist's missing laptop)

HT— *Hot Target* (Cosmo & Jane, and the protection of a Hollywood producer receiving death threats)

BP— *Breaking Point* (Max & Gina, and the rescue of Gina and Molly by Max, Jones, and Jules)

ITS— *Into the Storm* (Jenk & Lindsey, facing down a serial killer in the freezing mountains of New Hampshire)

ALVARADO, ENRIQUE. Nickname: Ric. First appeared in GTF. Ric was the detective in the Sarasota Police Department who made the scene when Gina Vitagliano's hotel room was robbed in GTF. Attracted to Gina, it didn't take him long to figure out that Max wasn't Gina's father, as he'd first mistakenly thought. Ric's family came to Florida from Cuba.

ANDERSON, MOLLY. First appeared in OOC. POV character in OOC and BP. Having lived through the tragic loss of her first love as a young woman, Molly dedicated her life to helping others. A volunteer with a Heifer Project-type organization, in OOC Molly lived in a remote village on Parwati Island in Indonesia, where she first met and fell in love with the American ex pat and allegedly wanted criminal known only as Jones. Fearing her connection to him would put her life in danger, Jones disappeared. Years later, while she was a volunteer with a group called AAI in Kenya, Africa, Jones surfaced. Without hesitation, Molly jumped back into their relationship, and it wasn't long before they were married and expecting their first child. But a cancer scare during her pregnancy sent her to Germany for further medical tests, where she was abducted, along with her friend Gina Vitagliano, by desperate men who saw her as their path to finding Jones. Ready, once again, to sacrifice his very life for her, Jones came to her rescue. Molly has a daughter, now an adult, that she gave up for adoption as a teenager, as well as a granddaughter. Now married, Molly and Jones also have a child of their own.

ASHTON, CHARLES. Appeared only in TUH. POV character in TUH. WWII subplot. Kelly's father. A veteran of WWII, Charles was stricken with cancer in TUH. He wanted nothing more than to be left alone, but his daughter, Kelly, persisted in using his limited time to reconcile. A long-time friend of Joe Paoletti.

ASHTON, KELLY. Heroine of TUH. Married to Tom Paoletti. First appeared in TUH. POV character in TUH. Also appeared in OTE, ITN, GTF, HT, mentioned in ITS. A pediatrician, Kelly gave up a thriving practice in Boston to move to California to be with Tom. Gun-shy after a failed marriage, she needed time before tying the knot again, but finally gets it done in GTF, only to be seriously wounded in a car bomb attack. She recovers and is happily pregnant in HT. She and Tom now have one son, Charlie, named after her father.

BAILEY, TESS. Heroine of FP. Troubleshooters, Incorporated operative. First appeared in FP. POV character in FP. Also appeared in HT and ITS. Trained to be a field operative, Tess worked in support at a mysterious government agency for years, waiting for a chance to prove herself. Tired of waiting, she walked – right into Tom Paoletti's office, where he immediately hired her to be the computer specialist for a small team going into the very

TROUBLESHOOTER SERIES CHARACTERS (CONT.)

dangerous country of Kazbekistan. Much to Tess's dismay, another former Agency operative with whom she'd had a one-night stand, James Nash, was also part of this team. She and Nash had to work together, pretending to be husband and wife as they helped team leader Larry Decker search for a terrorist's missing laptop. To her embarrassment, she fell once again under Nash's spell. With her freckles and sweet face, she appears to be more girl next door than Bond girl, but looks can often deceive. Engaged to be married to Nash.

BASHIR, PADSHA. Appeared only in FP. A Kazbekistani warlord who kills Sophia Ghaffari's husband and marries her to gain possession of her property and funds. A graduate of Boston University, Bashir shuns all things Western and particularly American. He holds Sophia prisoner in his palace until she escapes during an earthquake. He is killed at the end of FP.

BEAR, THE. Real name unknown. Appeared only in TDH. POV character in TDH. A young member of the terrorist cell that kidnaps Amy Moore and Eve Grayson.

BHAGAT, MAX. Hero of BP. The head of the FBI's top counterterrorist team. First appeared in TDH. POV character in GTF, BP. Also appeared in OTE, OOC, ITN, HT. Max has a reputation for being impeccably dressed and unflappable under pressure. He only loses his temper when the mics are turned off and the doors are closed. And then, watch out. Grown men have wept at the force of his death glare. Max stopped sleeping after he failed to prevent the brutal rape of college student Gina Vitagliano on board a hijacked airplane in OTE. Max wasn't sure how it happened because Gina was both much too young and terribly traumatized, but somehow she got completely under his skin. He fought his attraction to her for years, but in GTF his legendary willpower crumbled and he and Gina shared a night of passion that scared him to death. He started running—hard and fast—but in BP he received false news of her death that changed his life. When he found out she was still alive but in peril, he made sure he wouldn't lose her again. Now married, Max and Gina are expecting their first child.

BRYANT, ALAN. First appeared in ITN. The U.S. President and Commander in Chief.

BRYANT, BROOKE. Only appeared in ITN. Over forty and still referred to as the President's "Wild Child," Brooke had terrible luck when it came to making mistakes—the press was always around to take pictures to put on page one of USA Today. She went to the Coronado Naval Base during ITN in hopes of getting some positive press for a change. Sadly, she didn't. Even more sadly, she brought unwanted attention to Navy SEAL Lt. Mike Muldoon, who found his face on all the TV news broadcasts, thanks to his supposed relationship with Brooke.

CASSIDY, JULES. FBI agent. First appeared in TDH. POV character in HT and BP. Also appeared in OTE, OOC, ITN, GTF, ITS. An openly gay man, Jules puts the fabulous in FBI. Alyssa Locke's former FBI partner. Quite possibly the funniest, sweetest guy in the world (and enormously popular among readers—see poll results), Jules first appeared in TDH—much to SEAL Sam Starrett's horror. But by OTE, Sam came to respect Jules, and the two men began a tentative friendship which solidified by OOC. In ITN, Jules was shot during the takedown of a terrorist cell, but in GTF, he was back on his feet. In HT, Jules was in charge of an investigation in Los Angeles—which put him in close proximity to his former lover, Adam, who managed to hurt him again. One of the top FBI agents in the country, Jules isn't as savvy when it comes to matters of the heart. The one man he can't forget—actor Robin Chadwick—is still questioning his own sexual orientation. And then there's Marine Captain Ben Webster, who is unable to be fully out, due to military policies. . . .

CHADWICK, JANE MERCEDES. Heroine of HT. First appeared in HT. POV character in HT. Hollywood is the only place in the world where a 26-year-old movie producer could have a "come-back." After writing and producing a smash hit movie in film school at age 19, Jane's next few pictures failed and investors vanished. When she reinvented herself as J. Mercedes Chadwick, "Party Girl Producer," things once again picked up. In HT, she wrote and produced a movie that dared to reveal the truth

TROUBLESHOOTER SERIES CHARACTERS (CONT.)

about celebrated World War II hero Harold Lord's homosexuality, and a hate-based group called the "Freedom Network" targeted her for death. Jane was frustrated by the idea of a round-the-clock security team—and then she met Navy SEAL Cosmo Richter. Married to Cosmo.

CHADWICK, ROBIN. First appeared in HT. POV character in HT. Jane's little brother and the star of her movie, *American Hero*. With his über-handsome face and first-rate acting chops, Robin was on the verge of becoming a major, bankable Hollywood player. But playing the role of a closeted gay man made the over-indulging ladies' man question his own sexuality. Sparks flew whenever he was with openly gay FBI agent Jules Cassidy, but it was his co-star and Jules' ex-lover, Adam Wyndham, with whom Robin experimented, despite claiming to hate the man. Still unable to admit that he was gay, Robin turned more and more to alcohol to numb himself. In desperate need of help.

CROWLEY, MORTON. Nickname: Chip. SEAL officer—Admiral. First appeared in TUH. Also appeared in ITN. Mentioned in TDH and GTF. Served in Vietnam, now a high ranking officer in SOCOM. A good friend to Tom Paoletti.

DECKER, LAWRENCE. Nickname: Deck. Troubleshooters Incorporated team leader. First appeared in FP. POV character in FP, HT. Also appeared in ITS. A former Navy SEAL chief, Decker left the teams back in 1996. A quiet man, capable of blending into the background, Deck and his longtime partner Nash signed on with TS Inc. after seven years with the top secret government organization known only as the Agency. Deck rarely makes mistakes, but he made a big one when he first met Sophia Ghaffari in the earthquake-ravaged city of Kazabek, Kazbekistan. Believing her to be a prostitute, with her allegiance bought by warlord Padsha Bashir, Deck found himself in a power struggle that escalated into sexual intimacy. In truth, Sophia believed her life in danger, and was merely trying to survive. Deck is both attracted to and repelled by Sophia—he can't so much as look at her without feeling guilt and remorse. He tries his best to stay out of her way, but they both now work for Tom Paoletti, so it isn't easy.

DESJARDIN, CYBELE. (Pronounced See-bell.) Only appeared in TUH. WWII subplot. A French resistance fighter whose husband and young son had been killed in the war. Love interest of both Charles Ashton and Joe Paoletti.

DACOSTA, CHARLOTTE. Nickname: Charlie. Also known as Charlotte Fletcher. Only appeared in ITN. POV character in ITN. WWII subplot. Charlie first met Vince DaCosta, young war widow, working in a senator's office in Washington, D.C. during WWII. Despite her fear of losing another husband to the war, Charlie married Vince and had a large family with him, including grandchildren Joan and Donny.

DACOSTA, DONALD. Nickname: Donny. First appeared in ITN. Also appeared in GTF. Joan's mentally ill brother, Donny rarely left his house but made a fortune in the stock market. He was killed when a bomb set his house on fire, and he still refused to leave.

DACOSTA, JOAN. Heroine of ITN. First appeared in ITN. POV character in ITN. A White House Public Relations Assistant, Joan was assigned to set up photo ops on the Navy Base in Coronado for the President's notoriously ill-behaved daughter. Thirty-something and vivacious with a keen sense of humor, Joan is a real-sized woman who is used to being treated like one of the guys. Navy SEAL Lt. Mike Muldoon, however, had other plans for her. Now married to Muldoon.

DACOSTA, VINCE. Only appeared in ITN. POV character in ITN. WWII subplot. Joan's grandfather. A veteran of WWII, Vince fought and was injured at "Bloody Tarawa," in the Pacific, the battle that made the U.S. realize the need for the UTD—the granddaddies of the SEALs. Vince met young widow Charlotte Fletcher and fell in love on the spot. Still recovering from his injuries, she nursed him back to health. He realized she still hadn't gotten over the loss of her husband, James, but still convinced her to marry him—thanks to a little matter of her being pregnant—before he returned to the fighting. Vince and Charlie remain happily married.

EHRLANGER, DEB. FBI agent. First appeared in BP. A member of Max Bhagat's elite FBI team, Deb is partnered with Joe Hirabayashi.

TROUBLESHOOTER SERIES CHARACTERS (CONT.)

FAULKNER, GEORGE. FBI agent. First appeared in OOC. Also appeared in GTF and BP. George's father was a friend and colleague of former FBI agent Rose von Hopf. When Rose's son, Alex, went missing in Indonesia, George was brought in, in an attempt to "handle" the unpredictable Rose. Temporarily assigned to the legendary Max Bhagat's elite FBI team, George did his best to make sure the assignment became permanent. It did. George originally appeared as a POV character in *Bodyguard*, a non-Troubleshooters book that tells the story of his former FBI partner, Harry O'Dell.

FLETCHER, EDNA. Appeared only in ITN. WWII subplot. Edna was the mother of James, Charlotte Fletcher DaCosta's first husband. Edna moved in with Charlotte and hung a Gold Star in their window after James died at Pearl Harbor. Edna welcomed Charlotte's second husband, Vince DaCosta, with open arms.

FONTAINE, LINDSEY. Heroine of ITS. Troubleshooters Incorporated Operative. First appeared in HT. POV character in ITS. Formerly with the LAPD, Lindsey may shop in the petite department, but she's one of Tom's best bodyguards. She meets Navy SEAL Mark Jenkins when some genius Admiral decides it would be fun to pit Tom's new civilian team against his former SEALs in a series of training exercises. She catches Jenk's eye right from the start with her quick wit and her sense of humor. Lindsey's grandmother was born in Japan.

FOSTER, BETH. First appeared in ITS. POV character in ITS. Formerly in the U.S. Army, Beth has not had an easy life.

GAINES, CLAIRE. Appeared only in GTF. Noah's wife. Claire was friends with both Noah and Sam Starrett back in high school. She and Noah have two children.

GAINES, DOROTHY (nee Starrett). Nickname: Dot. Also Dorothy Smith from a previous marriage. Appeared only in GTF. WWII subplot. Noah's grandmother. Dot was a WASP, a member of the Women Airforce Service Pilots when she first met Lt. Col. Walter Gaines of the Tuskegee Airmen. Despite the difference in their skin colors, she became fast friends with both Walt and his wife, Mae. When Mae died while Walt was fighting the

war in Europe, Dot cared for his daughter. Upon Walt's return home, he and Dot were married, and lived together happily for years, breaking down barriers of racial intolerance. Unknown to Noah's best friend Sam Starrett, Sam's father was Dot's brother. Not only were Sam and Noah friends, but they were also cousins.

GAINES, NOAH. Appeared only in GTF. POV character in GTF. Sam Starrett's best friend from childhood, Noah lives with his wife and children in Sarasota, Florida.

GAINES, WALTER. Appeared only in GTF. WWII subplot. Noah's grandfather. Walt served in WWII with the elite African American flyers, the Tuskegee Airmen. During the war, he met white female WASP, Dorothy "Dot" Smith, who became his wife despite Texas laws forbidding interracial marriage. Together Dot and Walt raised Noah, when his father died in Vietnam and his mother was killed in a car accident. Walt also was a major role model and friend to Noah's best friend, young Roger "Sam" Starrett.

GHAFFARI, SOPHIA (nee Miles). Troubleshooters Incorporated Support Staff. First appeared in FP. POV character in FP and ITS. Also appeared in HT. The daughter of two world-traveling American freespirts, Sophia was abandoned in a foreign country at an early age and forced to use her wits to survive. She became an astute businesswoman, but living in Kazbekistan with its male-oriented society, she used her husband as her front. When the K-stan government fell, a local warlord took control. He beheaded Sophia's husband and married her to gain control of her property and wealth, keeping her prisoner. Rescue came in the form of a team from Troubleshooters, Incorporated, and in particular from Lawrence Decker, to whom Sophia feels she still owes a great debt.

GRAYSON, EVE (nee Linden). Appeared only in TDH. POV character in TDH. WWII subplot. Meg Moore's grandmother. Transplanted from Hollywood to Ramsgate, England after her actress mother and film director father died in a plane crash, Eve appeared to be in her early twenties when she was, in fact, merely fifteen. She was extremely protective of her younger brother, Nicky, and fell in love with and married his tutor, Ralph Grayson, who was

TROUBLESHOOTER SERIES CHARACTERS (CONT.)

missing and believed dead after the Nazis invaded France in 1940. She continued to live in England after the war. She was kidnapped by terrorists along with her great-granddaughter Amy in TDH.

GRAYSON, RALPH. (pronounced Rafe). Appeared only in TDH. WWII subplot. An enthusiastic teacher in late 1930s England, Ralph was hired to tutor American Nick Linden, and fell in love with and married his student's older sister, Eve. With trouble brewing in Europe, he was called upon to join the British Expeditionary Forces, and was serving in France when Hitler invaded. He was part of a unit who held the Germans back while over a quarter of a million soldiers were evacuated from the beaches of Dunkirk. Fond of butterscotch candies.

GUNVALD, ANNEBET. (See Rosen, Anna.)

GUNVALD, MARTE. (See Wolchonok, Marte.)

HOWE, TERESA. Heroine of OTE. Nickname: Teri. First appeared in TDH. POV character in OTE. Also appeared in ITN and HT. A helicopter pilot and former lieutenant junior grade in the Navy Reserves, Teri now serves with the Coast Guard in San Diego. Desperate for help with a sexual harassment problem, she went to Senior Chief Stan Wolchonok for help and found herself swept along as a training mission turned into a real world takedown of a hijacked plane—in one of the most dangerous countries in the world. Married to Stan.

HIRABAYASHI, JOE. Nickname: Yashi. FBI agent. First appeared in BP. Joe is a good friend of Jules Cassidy's, and is partnered with Deb Ehrlanger.

JACQUETTE, CASPER. Nickname: Jazz. SEAL officer. First appeared in TUH. Also appeared in TDH, OTE, OOC, ITN, GTF, ITS. Executive Officer (XO) of SEAL Team Sixteen. Jazz would follow Tom into hell if necessary. Tom pushed for Jazz to be his permanent replacement as the team's CO, but the powers that be disagreed.

JENKINS, MARK. Hero of ITS. Nickname: Jenk. SEAL enlisted. First appeared in prologue of TUH. POV character in ITS. Also appeared in TDH, OTE, OOC, ITN, GTF, FP, HT. With the face of an innocent altar boy, Jenk is one of the team's best liars. After a near-death experience in Afghanistan, Jenk realizes that he wants to find the same kind of

connection that Tom's found with Kelly and that Stan's found with Teri. When his sister's best friend and his seventh grade crush, Tracy Shapiro, comes to California to escape a cheating boyfriend, it feels like kismet. Jenk helps Tracy get a job as a receptionist at Troubleshooters Incorporated, but it's TS Inc. operative Lindsey Fontaine with whom he really sets off sparks.

JONES, DAVE. An alias for Grady Morant. First appeared in OOC. POV character in OOC and BP. An American ex-pat black marketeer and smuggler, Jones lived on an abandoned airfield, built by the Japanese during WWII, on Parwati Island in Indonesia. As the only man in the neighborhood with an airplane, he was approached by volunteer worker and fellow American Molly Anderson, and asked to fly a sick child to the hospital. Attracted to Molly, Jones tried to keep his distance. He knew, as a man wanted not just by the Americans but also by a dangerous and vindictive drug lord, that a relationship with him would put Molly in danger. Trying to prove that he was as bad as he said he was, he stole some money and ran—only to return in an attempt to save the day. Not convinced he was no longer a danger to Molly, he kept his distance from her for years. In BP, he appeared as if from the dead, hoping to start anew, and ended up married to Molly. But he misjudged the determination of the men who wanted him dead or alive, and once again Molly was put into danger—this time while pregnant with their child. With the help of unlikely allies, FBI agents Max Bhagat and Jules Cassidy, Jones and Molly were reunited, and able finally to return to the United States. Jones was given a new identity—William Davis Jones. He and Molly have one child.

KARMODY, KEN. Hero of OOC. Nickname: WildCard. SEAL chief. First appeared in prologue of TUH. POV character in OOC. Also appeared in TDH, OTE, ITN, GTF. Mentioned in ITS. The team's computer wizard and hacker extraordinaire. Well known for saying exactly the wrong thing at exactly the wrong time, Kenny makes up for it with his unswerving loyalty to his friends and teammates. (Also, in a certain light he looks rather like George Clooney . . .) After quite a rocky start, Ken finds true love with heiress and New York lawyer Savannah von Hopf in OOC. For years they had a

TROUBLESHOOTER SERIES CHARACTERS (CONT.)

bicoastal marriage, but Savannah has recently moved to California.

KOEHL, LEWIS. SEAL Officer. First appeared in ITS. First mentioned in HT. The new CO of SEAL Team Sixteen, Lt. Commander Lew Koehl has very large shoes to fill.

LESHANE, PATTY. Appeared only in HT. POV character in HT. The assistant to movie producer Jane Mercedes Chadwick. Infatuated with gleamingly handsome actor Robin Chadwick, Patty came to Los Angeles from Broken Arrow, Oklahoma. She was far tougher and more savvy to the business of Hollywood than she looked.

LINDEN, EVE. (see Grayson, Eve)

LINDEN, NICKY. Appeared only in TDH. WWII subplot. Eve Linden Grayson's younger brother. Staunchly defended by his sister Eve, Nicky faced more challenges than merely losing his parents in a plane crash at an early age. Nick repeatedly failed at school due to what would now be identified as a learning disability. But in the late 1930s, such children were more often labeled stupid or slow and pushed aside. Nick lucked out when forward-thinking Ralph Grayson was hired as his tutor.

LOCKE, ALYSSA. Heroine of GTF. Former Navy, former FBI. Currently executive officer (second in command) of Troubleshooters Incorporated. First appeared in TUH. POV character in TDH, OTE, OOC, GTF. Appeared in ITN and ITS. Formerly a sharpshooter in the U.S. Navy, Alyssa resigned her commission when she was tapped to join first the FBI, and then Max Bhagat's famed CT (counterterrorist) Team. As a strong, intelligent woman of color—with perhaps a few more issues than most women when it comes to trust—she finds it hard to believe she could be foolish enough to fall in love with red-neck Texas boy, Roger “Sam” Starrett. The road to love, however, was rocky. She was injured in the takedown of a terrorist cell in ITN, and briefly fancied herself capable of finding happiness with Max. But it's Sam who haunts her dreams. Two minutes after they are face-to-face again, she's in trouble. And she discovers there's far more to him than meets the eye. She and Sam finally got it right in GTF. Now married, both work for Tom Paoletti's Troubleshooters Incorporated.

LOPEZ, JESUS. Nickname: Jay. SEAL enlisted. First appeared in prologue of TUH. Appeared in TDH, OTE, OOC, ITN, GTF, FP, HT, and ITS. The team's hospital corpsman or medic.

MACINNOUGH, ALEC. Nickname: Big Mac. SEAL officer. First appeared in OTE. Also appeared in OOC, ITN, HT, ITS. Brawny and red-haired, MacInnough is a good officer, well liked by his teammates.

MACKENZIE, GORDON. Nickname: Gordie. SAS Enlisted. First appeared in the prologue to OOC. Gordon MacKenzie's SAS “boys” are up against Chief Ken Karmody and his SEALs, in a training op. Gordon plays an important role in Alyssa's rescue in the second Sam & Alyssa short story.

MALKOFF, DAVE. Troubleshooters Incorporated Operative. First appeared in FP. POV character in ITS. Also appeared in HT. A former CIA agent, Dave once made the MIB squad look colorful. But he's since thrown away all his dark suits, embraced his inner grunge rocker, and grown his hair long. His good friend Sophia describes him as looking like an accountant who is dressed up as Jerry Garcia for Halloween. Extremely skilled and very intelligent, Dave is an asset to any team. He's made it clear to Tom, though, that he absolutely never wants to be a team leader.

MOORE, AMY. Only appeared in TDH. Meg's daughter. Ten-year-old Amy is kidnapped, along with her great-grandmother Eve, in TDH.

MOORE, MARGARET DELANCY. Heroine of TDH. Nickname: Meg. First appeared in TDH. POV character in TDH. Also appeared in ITN. A translator, Meg was working in the American Embassy in Kazbekistan when she first met Ensign John Nilsson. She was married to diplomat Daniel Moore, but even though their marriage was on the rocks, she kept her distance from the very attractive young SEAL. Years later, after Daniel's death in a car accident, when both her grandmother Eve and ten-year-old daughter Amy were kidnapped by terrorists, Meg called Nils to help her get them back. Now married, Nils and Meg have a second daughter named Robin.

MORRISON, MARY LOU. (Also known as Mary Lou Starrett and Mary Lou Rahman.) First appeared in OTE. POV character in ITN and GTF. Also

TROUBLESHOOTER SERIES CHARACTERS (CONT.)

appeared in OOC. A SEAL groupie who thought she'd hit the jackpot when she met Lt. Sam Starrett—as he was rebounding from his first encounter with Alyssa Locke. Believing that being married to a SEAL would bring her automatic happiness, recovering alcoholic Mary Lou managed to get pregnant. She gave birth to Sam's daughter, Haley, but was quick to discover that happiness was still elusive. Sam didn't love her—he was merely doing what he believed to be the right thing. In ITN, Mary Lou finally learned of the importance of finding real love with the help of gentle landscaper and Arab American Ibrahim Rahman. Targeted by a terrorist because of her connection to the SEALs and access to the Navy Base, Mary Lou went on the run in GTF to protect Haley. Now married to Ibrahim, Mary Lou shares custody of Haley with her ex-husband, and continues to face challenges as the wife of an Arab American in these troubled times.

MOSELEY, AJAY. Appeared only in BP. The young accident victim whom Max got to know during his time in the Sheffield Physical Therapy Center, Ajay died from an infection.

MULDOON, MIKE. Hero of ITN. SEAL officer. First appeared in TDH. POV character in ITN. Also appeared in OTE, GTF, HT. Mentioned in ITS. Incredibly good-looking, brilliant and humble, too, Muldoon quickly won the respect of the enlisted members of Team Sixteen despite his reluctance to use salty language. While on assignment in Afghanistan, he ran down a mountain trail with a broken kneecap after rescuing a journalist from a terrorist cell. The senior chief tried to set Muldoon up with helo pilot Teri Howe in OTE, and in ITN, White House staffer Joan DaCosta tried to set him up with the U.S. President's daughter. But it was Joan that Muldoon wanted—and he won her heart and married her.

MURPHY, VINH. Former Troubleshooters Incorporated Operative. First appeared in FP. Also appeared in HT. Part African American, part Vietnamese, with just enough Irish thrown in to make things completely confusing to anyone walking into a room and looking for a guy named Murphy, he spent ten years with the Marines before joining TS Inc. Part of the team that located a missing laptop in K-stan in FP, Murphy was helping out with what

was supposed to be an easy assignment, protecting a Hollywood producer from death threats, when a gunman opened fire. His wife Angelina was killed in the attack, and Murphy was badly injured. Numb with grief, he disappeared after being released from the hospital. No one from TS Inc. has seen him since.

NASH, JAMES. Hero of FP. Nicknames: Diego, Jimmy, Jim. Troubleshooters Incorporated Operative. First appeared in FP. POV character in FP. Also appeared in HT and ITS. Jim Nash is a man of mystery. No one quite knows where he came from or how he came to work for the Agency, but rumors abound. He was with the covert Agency for fifteen years, seven of those partnered with Lawrence Decker, yet some people still question his loyalty. Tall, dark, and movie-star handsome, Nash had a one nighter with Tess Bailey and terrified himself because he liked her so much. Forced to work with her in close quarters in FP, he fell in love. He's engaged to be married to Tess, but there's still so much she doesn't know about him.

NILSSON, JOHN. Hero of TDH. Nickname: Nils. SEAL officer. First appeared in prologue of TUH. POV character in TDH. Also appeared in OTE, OOC, ITN, GTF, ITS. The team's language specialist. Good friends with SEAL teammates Sam Starrett and Kenny Karmody. Nils's talents include more than mastering languages—he's also tremendously skilled at deceit. In fact, his own best friends believe him to be the product of a wealthy family and expensive private schools. In truth, his father was a Vietnam vet who didn't come back from the war completely whole, and struggled just to feed his family. Nils finds his match in Meg Moore, whom he meets while she's still married to a diplomat. Years pass before they meet again—when her daughter Amy is kidnapped by terrorists. An overachiever even among his SEAL teammates, when faced with a no-win scenario, Nils refused to quit—and won both Meg's heart and Amy's freedom. Now married, Nils and Meg have a daughter of their own named Robin.

NYLAND, DESMOND. Only appeared in OTE. POV character in OTE. Nickname: Des. The assistant to the envoy from Israel, Helga Rosen Shuler, Des Nyland was a former American soldier who converted to Judaism and became a citizen of Israel after falling in love with and marrying an

TROUBLESHOOTER SERIES CHARACTERS (CONT.)

Israeli woman. He formerly worked for Israeli intelligence gathering agencies—and possibly continues to work for them.

O'LEARY, FRANK. SEAL Chief. Deceased. First appeared in TUH. Also appeared in TDH. Mentioned in HT and ITS. Killed in a terrorist attack at the Grande Hotel in Kazabek, Kazbekistan, in OTE. Loved Elvis's gospel years, and left behind a sweetheart named Rosie.

PAOLETTI, TOM. Hero of TUH. Former SEAL officer. First appeared in TUH. POV character in TUH, GTF. Appeared in every book (to date) in the series, except BP, in which he was only mentioned. Tom was the commanding officer of SEAL Team Sixteen, but was removed from command shortly after ITN. Rather than ride a desk, Tom left the Navy and created Troubleshooters Incorporated, a team of civilians specializing in personal and corporate security. Easygoing and quietly in command, he's got the total respect of everyone he's ever worked with. In GTF, he finally married Kelly Ashton, his long-time love, with whom he reconnected in TUH. Tom and Kelly have one child, a son named Charlie, born shortly after HT.

PAOLETTI, JOE. First appeared in TUH. POV character in TUH. Also appeared briefly in ITN. Tom's elderly great-uncle. WWII Medal of Honor winner, he worked for the OSS, helping the Resistance in Nazi-occupied France.

PAOLETTI, MALLORY. Appeared only in TUH. POV character in TUH. Tom's 18-year-old niece. An aspiring photographer, but her single mom doesn't have the money to send her to college. At loose ends after high school, she found true love with David Sullivan. Mentioned in ITS.

PRESCOTT, PJ. Troubleshooters Incorporated Operative. First appeared in HT. A former Airforce Para-rescue-jumper, hence the nickname. PJ's a helo pilot, complete with the gun-snapping helo-pilot attitude.

RAHMAN, IHBRAHAM. First appeared in ITN. Also appeared in GTF. Mary Lou Morrison Starrett thought of him as "the yard guy," because he was always in her neighborhood, cutting someone's lawn. The owner of his own landscaping company, Ihbraham was born in Saudi Arabia. He looks like a poster

boy for al-Qaeda, but he's a naturalized and patriotic American citizen. After 9/11, he found it sometimes helped to wear a T-shirt saying "I'm an American, too." As a recovering alcoholic, Ihbraham felt a connection to Mary Lou, offering her friendship and kindness as she struggled to make sense of a loveless and unfulfilling marriage. Injured by an angry mob during an attack by real terrorists, Ihbraham spent months in the hospital. When he was released, Mary Lou had vanished. When he found her again in GTF, he was determined to never let her go. Married to Mary Lou.

RAHMAN, MARY LOU. (See Morrison, Mary Lou.)

RICHTER, COSMO. Hero of HT. SEAL Chief. First appeared in OTE. POV character in HT. Also appeared in ITN, GTF, FP, ITS. Mentioned in OOC. The SEAL with the mirrored sunglasses. Taciturn. Mysterious. Cos took a temporary assignment with Troubleshooters Incorporated while on leave and found himself protecting Hollywood producer Jane Mercedes Chadwick from death threats. Attracted to Jane, he discovered they had far more in common than he'd first believed. It didn't take him long to fall for her, hard. Married to Jane Chadwick.

ROSEN, ANNA (nee Annebet Gunvald). Appeared only in OTE. WWII subplot. Sister of Marte Gunvald Wolchonok and aunt of Navy SEAL Chief Stan Wolchonok. A medical student in Copenhagen before the Nazi occupation of Denmark, Annebet helped protect her Jewish neighbors, the Rosens. Despite his parents' disapproval, she married Herschel Rosen, who died during his family's escape from the Nazis. After the war, Annebet went to America with her sister Marte. She became a doctor and lived in Chicago until her death, never remarrying.

ROSEN, HERSCHEL. Appeared only in OTE. WWII subplot. The older brother of Helga Rosen Shuler, he was frustrated by his parents' naive belief that the German occupation would not affect their lives. A medical student at the university in Copenhagen, he fell in love with the beautiful Annebet Gunvald—a woman his father was sure was only after his wealth. He married Annebet despite their disapproval, but when the Nazis finally rounded up the Danish Jews he was killed in his attempt to bring his family to safety.

TROUBLESHOOTER SERIES CHARACTERS (CONT.)

SCHROEDER, WILL. First appeared in FP. A reporter from the Boston Globe, sent to cover the earthquake in Kazbekistan, Will poses as a relief worker. Red-headed Will also covered the terrorist bombing in Bali—he met both Jim Nash and Larry Decker there. Divorced.

SHAPIRO, TRACY. First appeared in ITS. POV character in ITS. Troubleshooters Incorporated's new receptionist. Tracy went to high school with Navy SEAL Mark Jenkins. She was best friends with Jenk's sister Ginny. Beautiful and somewhat incompetent, she came to California after her longtime live-in boyfriend cheated on her again.

SHELTON, JACK. Appeared only in HT. POV character in HT. WWII subplot. The elderly Hollywood set designer and WWII veteran, upon whose life—and secret love affair with Hal Lord—the movie *American Hero* was based.

SHULER, HELGA (nee Rosen). Appeared only in OTE. POV character in OTE. WWII subplot. The envoy from Israel, Helga is a Holocaust survivor who has spent her life making sure people around the world “never forget.” Ironically, she discovered that she suffers from early stages Alzheimer's. While a ten-year-old Jewish girl in Nazi-occupied Denmark, her best friend was twelve-year-old Marte Gunvalt, Navy SEAL Chief Stan Wolchonok's mother.

SILVERMAN, BILL. SEAL enlisted. First appeared in OOC. Also appeared in GTF and ITS. Mentioned in HT. Friends with Chief Cosmo Richter.

STARRETT, HALEY. First appeared in OOC. Also appeared in ITN and GTF. Sam and Mary Lou Starrett's daughter. Just a toddler in GTF, she disappeared and Sam was determined to find her. Haley currently spends her time with her two sets of parents—Mary Lou and her husband, Ibrahim Rahman, and Sam and his wife, Alyssa Locke.

STARRETT, MARY LOU. (See Morrison, Mary Lou.)

STARRETT, ROGER. Hero of GTF. Former SEAL officer. Nicknames: Sam, Ringo, Houston. First appeared in TUH. POV character in TDH, OTE, ITN, GTF. Appeared in OOC, ITS. The man with all the nicknames took a pair of bullets in *The Unsung Hero*, then returned in *The Defiant Hero* with his cowboy drawl and his addiction to

chocolate. He was back in *Over the Edge*, driving sharpshooter and FBI special agent Alyssa Locke crazy—only to end up marrying his former girlfriend, Mary Lou Morrison, who was pregnant with his child. Things went from bad to worse in *Out of Control* and *Into the Night*, especially when Sam went to Alyssa's hotel room in the middle of the night—just to make sure she was all right—only to have FBI Agent Max Bhagat answer the door. But Sam finally got it right in *Gone Too Far*. Married to Alyssa Locke, both work for Tom Paoletti's Troubleshooters Incorporated.

SULLIVAN, DAVID. Appeared only in TUH. POV character in TUH. A comic book writer/artist, David proves that sometimes nice guys finish first. Found true love with Mallory Paoletti. Mentioned in ITS.

TUCKER, LARRY. Rear Admiral in the U.S. Navy. First mentioned in TUH. Also appeared in ITN and GTF. The Base Commander. Rumor has it he tried to become a SEAL, but rang out of BUD/S. Tucker has a rep for infidelity. He also has it in for Tom Paoletti. Not a nice guy.

TURLINGTON, FRANK. Only appeared in GTF. Known among the locals in Florida as “King Frank,” this obscenely wealthy man hired Mary Lou Morrison Starrett as a nanny for his wayward teenage daughter, Whitney, and her young daughter, Amanda. Frank lived in a gated compound south of Sarasota, with a huge collection of weapons and guns.

TURLINGTON, WHITNEY. Only appeared in GTF. The troubled and spoiled daughter of a man with too much money, Whitney got pregnant and had a daughter, Amanda, when she was barely more than a child herself. Even though Mary Lou was hired not just to be Amanda's nanny but also Whitney's security guard, the two women became friends. Whitney spent years with her father at his shooting range, and is a crack shot.

VITAGLIANO, GINA. Heroine of BP. First appeared in OTE. POV character in OTE, GTF, BP. Mentioned in OOC, ITN, and HT. Strong and tough, Gina is a Long Island girl—a New Yorker, through and through. A beautiful, real-sized woman with Sophia Loren curves, Gina's the only daughter in a big Italian American family. In OTE, Gina was held hostage and assaulted by terrorists on a

TROUBLESHOOTER SERIES CHARACTERS (CONT.)

commercial airliner, creating a bond via radio with FBI negotiator Max Bhagat. She worked hard over the years to move past the trauma, and all of the mental health professionals she worked with told her that her feelings for the much older Max were “transference.” But try as she might, she couldn’t forget him. She encountered him once again in GTE, only to be disappointed by his emotional distance. Still, she rushed to his side after he was shot, and stayed with him during his recovery. But when it became clear he wouldn’t let her get close, Gina finally left. Searching for a job that would bring meaning to her life, she lived and worked in a remote part of Kenya, Africa, as part of a group of volunteers whose goal was to teach AIDS prevention. As a result of her friendship with fellow volunteer Molly Anderson, Gina was thrown into danger once again. She didn’t expect Max to come to her rescue, but he did, surprising her even more with his admission that he’d been wrong—he wanted her in his life. Gina and Max are married and expecting their first child.

VITAGLIANO, VICTOR. Appeared only in BP. Gina’s brother. In the fine tradition of brothers everywhere, he always knows exactly what not to say. Victor came to visit Gina when Max was in physical therapy. He was terribly broken up at the false news of her death. Vic moved to New Jersey after 9/11. Still single.

VLACHIC, TONY. Nickname: Chickie. SEAL enlisted. First appeared in HT. Vlachic was part of the SEAL team that rescued three nuns held by insurgents in a so-called orphanage.

VON HOPE, ALEX. Appeared only in OOC. Savannah’s uncle and Rose’s son. Kidnapped and held for ransom in Indonesia.

VON HOPE, HEINRICH. Nickname: Hank. Appeared only in OOC. WWII subplot. A former Austrian prince, Hank met and fell in love with German American Rose Rainer when she visited Berlin in 1939. Opposed to Germany’s annexation of Austria, but forced to join the Nazi SS, Hank became a double agent, working for an Allied victory. Married to Rose, they had twin sons, Alex and Karl.

VON HOPE, INGEROSE. (nee Rainer).

Nickname: Rose. Appeared only in OOC. POV character in OOC. WWII subplot. Savannah von Hopf’s grandmother, Rose worked for the FBI and the OSS during WWII, as one of the first female American double agents. Her autobiography, *Double Agent: From Brooklyn to Berlin* hit the *Times* list in OOC—everyone was reading it. Approached by the FBI when her son, Alex, went missing in Indonesia, she soon realized that the granddaughter she doesn’t know very well, Savannah, was gone, too. Not accustomed to sitting on the sidelines, Rose is forced to wait while the FBI and SEALs search for her missing family. Married during WWII to Heinrich von Hopf, they were the parents of twin sons, Alex and Karl.

VON HOPE, SAVANNAH. Nickname: Van. Heroine of OOC. First appeared in OOC. POV character in OOC. Mentioned in ITN. A criminal appeals attorney, Savannah is a von Hopf—the closest thing, along with the Kennedys and the Hiltons, that America has to royalty. In fact, Savannah is the only child—and heiress—of billionaire Karl von Hopf. When she gets a call for help from her eccentric uncle Alex, she goes to Jakarta with a suitcase filled with cash. She also takes an acquaintance from college, Navy SEAL Chief Ken “WildCard” Karmody, a man she’s always had a crush on. Slight of stature, with wispy blond hair, Savannah’s idea of camping is staying at a motel, so when she and Ken are forced to flee into the jungle, she’s faced with some significant challenges. But she rises to the occasion, and wins Ken’s heart in the process. Married to Ken Karmody.

WOLCHONOK, MARTE (nee Gunvald). Appeared only in OTE. WWII subplot. Senior Chief Stan Wolchonok’s mother. Marte lived in Denmark during the Nazi occupation. Her father was a laborer, her mother helped out in the home of the wealthy Rosens. Marte was best friends with ten-year-old Helga Rosen, despite their social and religious differences. She helped plot and scheme to get her sister Annebet together with Helga’s brother Herschel, and was a witness at their wedding. But Herschel was killed when the Nazis rounded up the Danish Jews. After the war, their parents dead, Marte and Annebet came to America, to Chicago.

TROUBLESHOOTER SERIES CHARACTERS (CONT.)

It was there that Marte met Stan's father, who was in the U.S. Navy. They were married after only a brief courtship and lived happily for years. Marte died of cancer when Stan was only eighteen.

WOLCHONOK, STANLEY. Hero of OTE. SEAL senior chief. Nickname: Stan. First appeared in TDH (mentioned only in TUH). POV character in OTE. Also appeared in OOC, ITN, GTF, BP, ITS. As the saying goes, the chiefs run the Navy, and SEAL Team Sixteen's senior chief has proven it many times over. With a reputation as the team's miracle man, Stan is known for being able to mop up any mess or fix any situation. When Teri Howe, a pretty, young helo pilot and a junior grade lieutenant in the Reserves came to him for help, Stan arranged for her to accompany the SEALs on a training op—which turned into a real life mission when a plane was hijacked by terrorists. The situation rapidly spiraled out of Stan's control when, after giving Teri lessons in assertiveness, she asserted herself into his personal life. Married to Teri Howe.

WYNDHAM, ADAM. First appeared in HT. Mentioned in OTE and OOC. Several years ago, Adam lived in Washington, D.C. with FBI agent Jules Cassidy. When they broke up, Adam moved to Hollywood, hoping to make it as a movie actor. But it was only with Jules's help that he was given a meeting with a real producer—and cast in a major role in her movie, *American Hero*. Despite professing to a desire to win Jules back, Adam spent the night with his movie co-star, Robin Chadwick, destroying Jules's budding relationship with Robin, as well as any hope for reconciliation.

Note from Suz: I've found that many romance novels focus completely on one man and one woman—using “lone wolf” type heroes. Well, in my books, my SEALs work together in seven- or eight-man teams. They're with their teammates day and night for months at a time. They're closer and more loyal than brothers—they'd literally die for each other. And yeah, although I've written stories where the hero is on his own, away from his teammates, most of my books also deal with the relationships the hero has with the other guys in the team. I can and do bring elements of “buddy movies” into my books. I think readers enjoy that.

SUZ'S GLOSSARY OF TROUBLESHOOTER TERMS

AK-47: An automatic rifle, first manufactured by Kalashnikov in Russia in 1947. Capable of firing 600 rounds per minute.

ALL HANDS: A meeting or an event where attendance is mandatory.

ALPHABET AGENCIES: Slang for government agencies identified by acronyms such as the FBI and CIA.

AO: Area of Operations.

AWOL: Absent without leave.

BATTALION: A unit of 800 to 1000 troops.

BDUs: Battle dress uniforms.

BUD: Basic Underwater Demolition/SEALs. The intensive training all candidates complete in order to become SEALs.

BEQ: Bachelor Enlisted's Quarters. Housing for unmarried enlisted personnel.

BOQ: Bachelor Officers' Quarters. Housing for unmarried officers.

C4: An easy-to-carry, versatile, pliable plastic explosive with a texture similar to Play-Doh. Lightweight and stable, it can be dropped, shot and even lit on fire, but it won't explode without a detonator. Often used in place of Sterno to heat coffee. Originally called Composition C, it was developed during WWII by the British.

CAMMIES: Military uniforms in various camouflage print patterns, including woodland, jungle, desert, and urban.

CDRNAVSpecWARCOM: Commander of Naval Special Warfare

CHARLIE FOXTROT: Radio call signs for the letters C and F, Charlie Foxtrot is a more polite name for Clusterfuck. (See clusterfuck.)

CHIT: A permission slip, usually for leave.

CIA: Central Intelligence Agency.

CLUSTERFUCK: A total screwup or disaster, usually caused by incompetence, ignorance, or sheer stupidity, this term makes good use of a word that is a favorite among sailors. (See also goatfuck.)

CNO: Chief of Naval Operations.

CO: Commanding Officer. (SEAL Team Sixteen's CO was originally Tom Paoletti. Lt. Commander Lewis Koehl is the current CO of the team.)

COMPANY: A unit of 150 to 200 troops.

COMSPESH: Computer specialist. Tess Bailey is Troubleshooters Incorporated's Comspesh.

CONUS: Continental United States. (See OCONUS.)

COVER: Hat.

DECK: A floor of a building or ship.

DEFCON: Defense Condition. The USA's graduated security alert system. DEFCON 1 is the highest level of alert, DEFCON 5 is the lowest.

DIVISION: A unit of 10,000 to 15,000 troops.

DOD: Department of Defense.

DRESS WHITES: The US Navy's white, lightweight summer uniform. Can be the Class-A uniform or Service Dress Whites, or formal attire. Also known as an ice-cream suit.

DZ: Drop zone.

E&E: Escape and evasion.

EXFILTRATE: Departure of SEALs, usually with stealth, from an area of operations.

EXTRACTION: To be removed from an area of operations, usually by air. SEALs often extract by sea.

FBI: Federal Bureau of Investigations.

FIREFIGHT: A skirmish involving the exchange of gunfire between enemy combatants.

FROGMEN: Nickname for U.S. Navy UDT operators. (See UDT.)

GEEDUNK: A vending machine or ship's store selling soda and/or junk food. Geedunk can also be the soda/junk food itself. The name comes from the sound of a can of soda falling from a vending machine.

GOATFUCK: A total screwup, a mission gone bad, a disaster. (See also clusterfuck.)

Note from Suz: In compiling and researching this glossary, I think I may have found clues leading us closer to the answer for that timeless question “What is the difference between a goatfuck and a clusterfuck?” I recently found a military definition site which proclaimed the definition of “goat” to be similar to “loser.” This site identified a goat as the lowest ranking man in a group of service personnel, but a goat could also be those officers from the very bottom of a military school’s graduating class. (Joke: What do you call a goat who graduates bottom of the class from West Point? You call him “Sir.”) So it’s possible that a goatfuck is a slightly more inevitable screwup caused by the incompetence or stupidity of the participating officers. But, if goat is interchangeable with loser, then anyone caught in a disastrous situation could, in a true military manner, with glass-half-full thinking, consider themselves to be the loser or goat who is getting, you know, disastered. Whereas “cluster” seems to imply a more impromptu screwup on a far grander scale . . .

GRINDER: The assembly area at the Coronado Naval Base, designated for PT.

GWOT: Global War on Terror.

HALO JUMP: High Altitude Low Opening parachute jump.

HEAD: Toilet or bathroom on board a ship.

HELO: Helicopter.

HK-MP4: Heckler & Koch submachine gun—a favorite of the SEALs. A compact 9mm weapon that is reliable even after salt-water immersion.

HK-MP5: Heckler & Koch submachine gun, even smaller than the MP4, also known as a “room broom.” Also a 9mm, it’s often used for close combat urban situations. Small enough to conceal under a jacket. (If you’re a SEAL, that is, but probably not if you’re Lindsey Fontaine.)

HOT BUNKING: Sharing a bed, but sleeping at different times. Used in cases of limited billeting or housing, usually on board a ship. If Sam Starrett and Kenny Karmody were hot bunking, Sam would sleep for the first shift. Kenny would wake him when it was his turn to sleep. Sam would roll out of the bunk and Kenny would roll in—and the bunk would

still be hot from Sam’s body heat. At the end of WWII, troop transport ships were frequently filled beyond capacity. The men chose to hot bunk or even sleep on deck in order to get home to their families as quickly as possible.

ICE-CREAM SUIT: Nickname for any white uniform, particularly Navy dress uniforms.

IED: Improvised explosive device.

INFILTRATE: Entry by SEALs, usually with stealth, into an area of operations.

INSERTION: To be placed in an area of operations, usually by air. SEALs often insert by sea.

INTEL: Intelligence.

JARHEAD: Nickname for Marines. Also known as Uncle Sam’s Misguided Children (USMC).

K-BAR: A very deadly fighting utility knife issued to SEALs. Also known as a Kabar knife.

KEVLAR: The material used in bullet-proof vests and body armor.

KIA: Killed in action.

CLICKS OR CLICKS: Kilometers. Military measurement of distance. One click equals 0.6214 miles.

LZ: Landing zone.

M16: Nickname for the Colt M16A2 rifle issued to the SEALs. Unloaded, it weighs over twelve pounds. Fires a small, high velocity bullet, with a range of 460 meters.

MEDAL OF HONOR: Highest military award of the United States.

MEDEVAC: Medical Evacuation, usually by helicopter, to field hospital or aid station.

MESS HALL: Dining facility.

MIA: Missing in action, usually from a battle situation. If someone is declared MIA, it’s not known if they are dead or alive.

MP: Military Police.

MRE: Meal ready to eat.

MURPHY’S LAW: “Whatever can go wrong, will go wrong.” A good SEAL officer will expect Mr. Murphy to accompany him on every mission, and be prepared.

SUZ'S GLOSSARY OF TROUBLESHOOTER TERMS (CONT.)

NAVINTEL: Naval intelligence.

NCO: Non-commissioned officer. Senior Chief Stan Wolchonok and Chief Cosmo Richter are both NCOs.

NCONVs: Night vision goggles. (See also NVGs.)

NVGs: Night vision goggles or glasses.

O COURSE: Obstacle Course. An important part of BUD/S training.

OC: Officer Candidate. (See OCS.)

OCS: Officers Candidate School. Originally used to train enlisted men for special wartime assignments, it's now a 26-week program for enlisted who want to become commissioned officers. Sam Starrett began his Navy career as an enlisted man. He attended OCS and became an officer.

OFFICER'S COUNTRY: The places where officers work and even live, such as the BOQ. Particularly relevant onboard ship.

OSS: Office of Strategic Services. Developed in 1942, the OSS was an early version of the CIA and Special Forces.

OTS: Officer Training School. (See OSC.)

OCONUS: Outside the continental United States. (Pronounced Oh-koh-ness.)

PJ: The nickname for the U.S. Air Force Para-Rescue Jumpers or Parajumpers.

PLATOON: A unit of 30 to 50 troops.

POINT MAN: The SEAL responsible for taking the lead in an advancing squad. The point man will be the first to contact the enemy or trip booby traps. Related terms: On point or taking the point.

PSYOPS: Psychological Operations. The use of propaganda or misinformation to affect the morale of the enemy.

PT: Physical training.

PUCKER FACTOR: A rating system for fear or tension. A high pucker factor indicates that all muscles are extremely tight.

PX: Post exchange. A store, usually on base, selling general merchandise for servicemen and women and their families.

REAL WORLD OP: The real thing, as opposed to a training operation.

RECON: Reconnaissance. To investigate, gather information and intel, to scout.

REGIMENT: A unit of 2500 to 3500 troops.

RE-UP: To reenlist.

RING OUT: To fail the intensive BUD/S training program. SEAL candidates actually must ring a bell upon their departure, and announce that they are quitting. The majority of all SEAL candidates ring out.

RTO: Radio telephone operator.

SAR: Search and rescue.

SAS: Special Air Service. The United Kingdom's Special Operations Forces.

SAT COM: Satellite communications.

SEA BAG: A duffel bag used by SEALs and sailors.

SEAL: Special Operations force of the U.S. Navy. SEALs operate on SEA, in the Air, and on Land.

SECDEF: Secretary of Defense.

SERE TRAINING: A military program that teaches survival, evasion, resistance, and escape.

SHORE PATROL: The Navy's version of the MPs or Military Police.

SILVER BULLET ASSIGNMENT: An easy assignment in a comfortable setting, usually given as a reward to deserving personnel.

SITREP: Situation Report.

SNAFU: Situation normal—all fucked up.

SOF: Special Operations Forces, such as SEALs. (Not to be confused with Special Forces. For the difference between Special Operations and Special Forces, see next page.)

Q: What's the difference between Special Operations and Special Forces—and how do the SEALs fit in?

Suz: Special Operations and Special Forces are two very different things. Special Forces go in with lots of firepower, lots of force, lots of noise.

Spec Ops is something else entirely. They operate in small, covert groups. In other words, they go in or “insert” silently, get the job done, and leave or “extract” without anyone knowing they've been there. (Or at least not until things start blowing up!)

SEALs are the U.S. Navy's contribution to U.S. Special Operations, so they're frequently used when water—oceans, lakes, rivers—are involved.

SOCOM: Special Operations Command.

SOP: Standard Operating Procedure.

SPEC OPS: Special Operations.

SQUAD: A unit of 8 to 15 troops.

STERILE: An item, usually a uniform or a weapon or other gear, that has been stripped of any marking that could attribute it to the U.S. Military. Also known as sanitized.

STERILIZE: To make an item or place sterile. To remove all evidence of occupation or ownership. To sanitize.

TAD: Temporary Additional Duty. The Navy's version (they've always got to be different, don't they?!) of TDY or Temporary Duty.

TANGO: Radio call sign for the letter T. Also nickname for a terrorist.

TDY: Temporary Duty, used by the Army and Air Force. (See also TAD.)

UA: Unauthorized absence. The Navy equivalent to AWOL.

UDT: Underwater Demolition Teams. The WWII granddaddies of the SEALs. Also known as Frogmen.

USO: United Service Organization, established in 1941 to build morale by entertaining servicemen.

WATCH ONE'S SIX: From a clock face position, twelve is immediately in front of you, six is directly

behind you. If someone is watching your six, they are watching your back, to help protect you.

WESTPAC: The Western Pacific area of operations. Also used to refer to a tour aboard a Navy ship, usually six months in length. For example, before entering the BUD/S program, Mark Jenkins did two WESTPACs in a row, one aboard the U.S.S. Enterprise.

WHEELS UP: Slang for leaving town or going out on a mission. (Example: Jenk grabbed his seabag and ran for his truck after getting the call that Team Sixteen was going wheels up.) Refers to an aircraft lifting off. As the plane heads for cruising altitude, the landing gear, including the wheels, goes up.

WTFO: What the fuck, over? A question commonly raised among sailors.

WWII: World War II, the war against the Axis of Germany, Japan, and Italy. It began on September 1, 1939 and ended on August 14, 1945.

Note from Suz: The WWII subplot in *Over the Edge* focuses on the heroic civilian rescue effort in Denmark, which saved most of the 7800 Danish Jews from the Nazi roundup in the autumn of 1943. If you want to read some fascinating accounts of the rescue, try *Darkness*, *Over Denmark* by Ellen Levine, *The Rescue of the Danish Jews (Moral Courage Under Stress)* edited by Leo Goldberger, and *Boats in the Night* (Knud Dyby's Story of Resistance and Rescue) as told by Martha Loeffler, and my personal favorite, *In Denmark, It Could Not Happen* by Herbert Pundik.

XO: Executive Officer. Second in command to the CO or Commanding Officer. Lt. Jazz Jacquette was Lt. Commander Tom Paoletti's XO of SEAL Team Sixteen.

Navy Enlisted**:

- E-1 Seaman Recruit
 - E-2 Seaman Apprentice
 - E-3 Seaman
 - E-4 Petty Officer Third Class
 - E-5 Petty Officer Second Class
 - E-6 Petty Officer First Class
 - E-7 Chief Petty Officer
 - E-8 Senior Chief Petty Officer
 - E-9 Master Chief Petty Officer
 - E-9 Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy
- Marines Enlisted:
- E-1 Private
 - E-2 Private First Class
 - E-3 Lance Corporal
 - E-4 Corporal
 - E-5 Sergeant
 - E-6 Staff Sergeant
 - E-7 Gunnery Sergeant
 - E-8 Master Sergeant
 - E-8 First Sergeant
 - E-9 Master Gunnery Sergeant
 - E-9 Sergeant Major
 - E-9 Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps

Army Enlisted:

- E-1 Private ("Buck" Private)
- E-2 Private
- E-3 Private First Class
- E-4 Specialist
- E-4 Corporal
- E-5 Sergeant
- E-6 Staff Sergeant
- E-7 Sergeant First Class
- E-8 Master Sergeant
- E-8 First Sergeant
- E-9 Sergeant Major
- E-9 Command Sergeant Major
- E-9 Sergeant Major of the Army

Air Force Enlisted:

- E-1 Airman Basic
- E-2 Airman
- E-3 Airman First Class
- E-4 Senior Airman
- E-5 Staff Sergeant
- E-6 Technical Sergeant
- E-7 Master Sergeant
- E-7 First Sergeant
- E-8 Senior Master Sergeant
- E-8 First Sergeant
- E-9 Chief Master Sergeant
- E-9 First Sergeant
- E-9 Command Chief Master Sergeant
- E-9 Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force

Navy Officers:

- O-1 Ensign
- O-2 Lieutenant Junior Grade
- O-3 Lieutenant
- O-4 Lieutenant Commander
- O-5 Commander
- O-6 Captain
- O-7 Rear Admiral Lower Half (one star)
- O-8 Rear Admiral Upper Half (two stars)
- O-9 Vice Admiral (three stars)
- O-10 Admiral (four stars)
- O-11 Fleet Admiral (five stars)**

Marines Officers:

- O-1 Second Lieutenant
- O-2 First Lieutenant
- O-3 Captain
- O-4 Major
- O-5 Lieutenant Colonel
- O-6 Colonel
- O-7 Brigadier General (one star)
- O-8 Major General (two stars)
- O-9 Lieutenant General (three stars)
- O-10 General (four stars)

Army Officers:

- O-1 Second Lieutenant
- O-2 First Lieutenant
- O-3 Captain
- O-4 Major
- O-5 Lieutenant Colonel
- O-6 Colonel
- O-7 Brigadier General (one star)
- O-8 Major General (two stars)
- O-9 Lieutenant General (three stars)
- O-10 General (four stars)
- General of the Army (five stars)**

Air Force Officers:

- O-1 Second Lieutenant
- O-2 First Lieutenant
- O-3 Captain
- O-4 Major
- O-5 Lieutenant Colonel
- O-6 Colonel
- O-7 Brigadier General (one star)
- O-8 Major General (two stars)
- O-9 Lieutenant General (three stars)
- O-10 General (four stars)
- General of the Air Force (five stars)**

*The use of the word "rank" for Navy enlisted personnel is incorrect. The term is "rate." (source: www.navy.mil)
**Reserved for wartime only. (source: www.defenselink.mil)

SOME NOTES ABOUT MILITARY RANKS

Officer ranks in the United States military consist of commissioned officers and warrant officers. The commissioned ranks are the highest in the military. These officers hold presidential commissions and are confirmed at their ranks by the Senate. Army, Air Force and Marine Corps officers are called company grade officers in the pay grades of O-1 to O-3, field grade officers in pay grades O-4 to O-6 and general officers in pay grades O-7 and higher. The equivalent officer groupings in the Navy are called junior grade, mid-grade and flag.

Service members in pay grades E-1 through E-3 are usually either in some kind of training status or on their initial assignment. The training includes the basic training phase where recruits are immersed in military culture and values and are taught the core skills required by their service component.

Basic training is followed by a specialized or advanced training phase that provides recruits with a specific area of expertise or concentration. In the Army and Marines, this area is called a military occupational specialty; in the Navy it is known as a rate; and in the Air Force it is simply called an Air Force specialty.

Leadership responsibility significantly increases in the mid-level enlisted ranks. This responsibility is given formal recognition by use of the terms noncommissioned officer and petty officer. An Army sergeant, an Air Force staff sergeant, and a Marine corporal are considered NCO ranks. The Navy NCO equivalent, petty officer, is achieved at the rank of petty officer third class. At the E-8 level, the Army, Marines and Air Force have two positions at the same pay grade. Whether one is, for example, a senior master sergeant or a first sergeant in the Air Force depends on the person's job. The same is true for the positions at the E-9 level. Marine Corps master gunnery sergeants and sergeants major receive the same pay but have different responsibilities. All told, E-8s and E-9s have 15 to 30 years on the job, and are commanders' senior advisers for enlisted matters.

A third E-9 element is the senior enlisted person of each service. The sergeant major of the Army, the sergeant major of the Marine Corps, the master chief petty officer of the Navy and the chief master sergeant of the Air Force are the spokespersons of the enlisted force at the highest levels of their services.

SOURCE: www.defenselink.mil

Note From Suz: I've received many emails from readers who are confused by military ranking. I hope this chart helps clear up the mystery!

- The combined letter and number (E-1, O-1, etc.) is called the pay grade. E stands for enlisted, O for officer. Note that the Marines, Army, and Air Force all have similar rankings for officers, from second lieutenant (O-1) to general (O-10). But the Navy is different. In the U.S. Navy, the lowest ranking officer is an ensign. A Navy lieutenant with an O-3 ranking is the equivalent to a captain in the Marines, Army, or Air Force. And a Navy captain (O-6) is the equivalent of an Army colonel, and so on. (See how that works?)
- Enlisted ranking (called rating for the Navy) is even more confusing. Check out, for example, the E-8 pay grade. In the Navy, an E-8 is a senior chief petty officer. In the Marines and the Army, an E-8 can be either a first sergeant or a master sergeant.

Another Note from Suz: There are expectations in the military—particularly for officers—that people will advance to the next highest rank within a certain amount of time. For example, anyone who’s been an ensign for more than a limited amount of time is going to get looked at with raised eyebrows. What did they do (or not do?) to prevent them from becoming a lieutenant junior grade?

There’s less expectation of advancement among enlisted. In fact, you could find a petty officer third class (E-4) who is wearing a gold stripe, indicating twelve or more continuous years of good conduct.

However, I had a good friend who was an E-6 petty officer first class—who, upon facing completion of twenty years in the Navy, either had to take the chief’s exam or retire. He chose to retire. Some people just don’t want the headaches that come with being a chief petty officer!

In a similar way, many enlisted personnel don’t want the headache (and paperwork!) that comes with being an officer. For example, both enlisted and officers complete the incredibly difficult and intense BUD/S training required to become a SEAL. In fact, the training is done side by side—which is unusual in the military, where there is frequent separation of officers and enlisted. But here’s the thing—along with the rigors of BUD/S training, officers must also lead—and complete their usual paperwork.

More from Suz about promotions: I try, in my books, to keep track of the passage of time, and promote my characters accordingly. For example, when Ken “WildCard” Karmody first appeared in the prologue to *The Unsung Hero*, which took place in the spring of 2000, he was an E-6, petty officer first class. Several books later, in the prologue to *Over the Edge*, which takes place just pre-9/11, in 2001, Karmody has just made chief.

Suz’s Fun Fact: In the Navy, an enlisted person who becomes an officer is called a mustang. Making the switch includes attending OCS or Officer’s Candidate School.

SUZ TALKS WITH HER MOST POPULAR CHARACTERS

Conversation with Navy SEALs Mark “Jenk” Jenkins, Dan Gillman, Jay Lopez, and Irving “Izzy” Zanella

IZZY: (coming into the room) Was, *too*.

GILLMAN: (following him, along with Jenk and Lopez) Was *not*.

IZZY: Was, *too*.

GILLMAN: Was *not*.

JENK: Guys. Knock it off. Seriously. Don't piss Suz off. She'll be in here any second.

IZZY: I'm not afraid of her. She's just a writer.

LOPEZ: (exchanging a look with Jenk) *Just* a writer. She's *our* writer.

IZZY: Dude, I make her laugh. She likes me.

LOPEZ: Look, if you want my advice, don't do anything to catch her attention. I mean, yes, it worked out well for Jenkins. He got his happy ending in this latest book, but . . .

JENK: What if she decides you're the next Sam Starrett?

LOPEZ: Five, count 'em. Five books of torment. You definitely don't want that. So just do what I do. Don't say too much. Just hang in the background, steady and reliable. (Puts his fingers to his lips) Shhhh.

GILLMAN: But on the flip side, what does that get you? You're, like, number twenty on her list of heroes for upcoming books.

JENK: Here's how you know you're gonna be the hero of her next book. Ready for this?

(They nod.)

JENK: You stop having sex.

GILLMAN: (laughing) What? No way.

JENK: Yeah. No more flings, no more two-weekers, and *definitely* no one-nighters. You gotta earn the right to find your soulmate, and the first thing that vanishes is the urge to tomcat. It's kind of weird actually.

IZZY: So, in other words, you meet some gorgeous woman at a bar and she lets you know she's available, and you end up going home early and watching *American Idol* on TV, alone in your apartment?

JENK: Pretty much.

GILLMAN: God, you scared me for a minute there. I thought you meant that you stop having sex entirely. Like forever. I mean, I thought that was the point of being the hero in a romance novel. You meet this woman who's perfect for you and then you have a lot of sex and get married at the end.

JENK: Yeah, except for the internal conflict, which is a total pain in the ass. And except for the part where you don't really have a lot of sex. You have *great* sex, but it can't really be defined as a lot until the book ends. I mean, these are romantic suspenses—there's a lot of plot.

LOPEZ: Like I said. Shhhh. I'm dating someone right now that Suz doesn't even know about. I want to keep it that way. It's a comfortable arrangement, no crises, no conflict. Much better than getting caught up in a five-book story arc like Starrett was.

IZZY: (uneasy) So how do you know if Suz is planning to toss you into one of those story arcs? I mean, shit. We were all major characters in *Into the Storm*.

GILLMAN: Obviously, Jenk's safe. But damn, I could be in serious trouble. I've got a major crush on Sophia Ghaffari.

IZZY: (scoffing) Yeah, like you're going to be the hero of *her* book. Two words. Dream on, fool.

GILLMAN: Two words—

JENK: Guys. Stop.

LOPEZ: I know I'm not the hero of the next book because Minnie's cooking dinner for me right now.

IZZY: Minnie?

LOPEZ: Shhh. I shouldn't have said her name. Bad karma.

GILLMAN: Someone light a match.

IZZY: (to Lopez) You're actually dating a woman named Minnie?

JENK: (to Gillman) He didn't fart, he just said her name.

GILLMAN: I thought it might help.

LOPEZ: Make fun of me all you want, Zanella. You just wish you were getting some of her manicotti tonight.

SUZ TALKS WITH HER MOST POPULAR CHARACTERS (CONT.)

GILLMAN: (cracking up) I've heard it called a lot of things . . .

IZZY: Back on topic. This story arc thing . . .

JENK: I think you're in trouble if you appear in a book, and you're not the hero, but you're something that Suz calls a point of view character.

IZZY: What the fuck is that?

LOPEZ: It's like Sam Starrett in *The Defiant Hero* and *Over the Edge*. Part of the story is told from his point of view, like he's describing what's happening in those particular scenes.

JENK: Only he's not the hero of those books, like I was in *Into the Storm*.

GILLMAN: I think I'm safe.

LOPEZ: Me, too.

(They look at Izzy.)

IZZY: I'm totally fucked. In the really not good way.

SUZ: (entering the room) Hey, guys. Thanks for dropping by today. I'm sorry to do this to you, but I really only have about two minutes. I'm doing an on-line chat, and I've got to run, but—

IZZY: Am I your next Sam Starrett?

SUZ: Well, Izzy, you know there's really only *one* Sam Starrett, so—

IZZY: You know what I mean. Am I in one of those story arc things? Five books of torment . . . ?

SUZ: Let's just say that I have plans for *all* of you. I don't want to make you any promises, because it could turn out to be seven books of torment and then you'll be mad at me. Madder. (to Lopez) Hey, Jay, how's Minnie? I heard she just got a terrific job offer in New York City.

LOPEZ: Ah, crap.

SUZ: Oh, come on. Don't you want excitement and passion? Don't you want to fall in love with that one person that you absolutely can't live without?

LOPEZ: I kind of liked manicotti and clean laundry.

SUZ: Don't be a baby. Learn to cook and buy a washer and dryer. (To Jenk) Are you happy? Tell them how happy you are.

JENK: I am extremely happy.

SUZ: (to the others) See? I gotta run. Later, guys. Thanks again for stopping by.

IZZY: (calling after her) But Jenk didn't have five books of . . . (to Jenk, because she's gone) What does five books translate to, time-wise?

JENK: Two, three years. But I'm pretty sure she was looking right at you when she said it was going to be seven books of torment.

GILLMAN: (to Izzy) Dude, you're screwed.

IZZY: Well . . . you are, too.

GILLMAN: No, I'm not.

IZZY: Yeah, you are.

GILLMAN: Not like you.

JENK: Guys, stop. (He closes the door tightly behind them.)

A conversation with Suz Brockmann and Jules Cassidy

Originally published to celebrate the release of the German translation of *Hot Target*, in March 2006

JULES: Okay, this is weird. Usually, as an FBI agent, I'm the one doing the interviewing.

SUZ: This won't hurt a bit, I promise.

JULES: Yeah, that's what you said when you suggested I play a major role in your book, *Hot Target*.

SUZ: Yes, but what else did I say?

JULES: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I'll earn my happy ending one of these days. Blah, blah, blah. That's what you tell all your characters. And then wham, you kill 'em off. If you kill me, I *will* haunt you.

SUZ: I'm not going to kill you. Writers aren't supposed to have favorites, but, shh, don't tell anyone. (Whispered) You're one of my very favorites.

JULES: Oh, that is so sweet.

SUZ: Look at you. You're an openly out gay man who holds a position of authority in the top FBI counterterrorist team in America. You're the first openly out gay character to have not just a subplot but a romantic subplot in a mainstream American romance novel. I'm so proud of you.

JULES: Well, thank you. I was very excited when I found out you were writing a book that gave me a romantic subplot, and then I found out you were setting it in Los Angeles—in Hollywood. I wasn't too happy about that.

SUZ: Because your ex, Adam, lives there.

JULES: Ding, ding, ding. Correct for ten points. God, I dreaded seeing Adam again. I knew you were going to make him a character in the book, though. I just knew it.

SUZ: I couldn't resist.

JULES: Yeah, right. I'm one of your favorites, so you torture me.

SUZ: That's right. Although I prefer the word *challenge*. I challenge my characters. That forces them to reach inside and react heroically. You're an incredible hero. You know, something happened recently that made me think of you. My son, Jason, lives in New York City. He's attending a

conservatory program that trains future Broadway performers. Jason's an amazing tap dancer, and he's no slouch when it comes to acting and singing, either.

JULES: Proud mother moment! God, my mother is so much like you, it's scary.

SUZ: (smiling) Yes, I know. Anyway, Jason got into this really elite tap workshop, and they meet on Wednesday nights. Three hours of tap dancing, it's pretty intense. He does the class, and it's dark when he gets out, and he stops over at Tower Records, because he wants to pick up the new Mariah Carey CD. And the new Madonna—

JULES: Oh, I just got that, too. It's very good.

SUZ: And he gets the special edition DVD of *The Wizard of Oz*, too. Oh, and he also picks up a CD of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto. Anyway. So Jason has his Tower Records bag, and he's walking home, and it's very dark and very rainy—which means there are far fewer people out on the streets.

JULES: He lives on the West Side, right?

SUZ: Yeah, it's a decent part of town. So he's walking down Amsterdam Avenue, and he's talking to a friend on his cell phone, and he realizes there's someone not too far behind him, following him. And he usually makes a point to turn around and look whoever is behind him directly in the face.

JULES: Oh, that's smart. Very "hello, not only will I make a bad victim, but I will be able to identify you in the line-up if you try to rob me."

SUZ: Yes, but for some reason he doesn't do that this time. Hold on, I'm feeling a little faint. This is the part of the story where I have to sit down.

JULES: How old is Jason again?

SUZ: He's about to turn twenty. And you know, he's a big guy. He's over six feet tall, and he's strong.

JULES: Dancing'll do that, yeah. So, okay, what happened?

SUZ: The moment he hangs up his phone, this guy who's behind him comes running around in front of him. With a *knife*.

JULES: Oh, shit.

SUZ: Yeah. Jace said it was freaky, because he didn't say anything. No "Give me your wallet." Nothing.

SUZ TALKS WITH HER MOST POPULAR CHARACTERS (CONT.)

He was just coming at him with that knife. And Jason, he's taken lots of stage combat classes, fencing and sword fighting, and he told me he just reacted. I believe the phrase he used was "I went *Buffy* on his ass." He used his Tower Record bag to parry. In fact, he swung that bag so hard, he knocked the knife out of the mugger's hand. Broke the man's umbrella, too. He thinks he might have broken the man's hand. But he didn't wait around to find out. He ran like hell towards a busier street.

JULES: Good boy!

SUZ: I'm pretty sure the mugger targeted him because he's gay. He looks gay, he sounds gay . . .

JULES: If it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck . . . You know what I really love, though? The bag Jason was carrying? It was like a big bag of gay. Madonna, Mariah Carey . . . ? That's hysterical, don't you think? I mean, after you get over the shock that someone pulled a knife on your son . . .

SUZ: It reminded me of that scene in *Hot Target* where someone tries to mug you because they think, as a gay man, you'll be an easy target. And you, just like Jason, went *Buffy* on his ass.

JULES: Are your German readers going to understand what that means? *Buffy*, as in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*—an American TV show that's a huge gay icon?

SUZ: I'm pretty sure that German romance readers are familiar with *Buffy*. But if they're not, they should be. Joss Whedon, who wrote and produced *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Firefly* is one of my favorite writers. I'm a big *Firefly* fan, too.

JULES: And *Star Trek*. Don't forget that. What was it that Mr. Spock used to say? *Infinite diversity in infinite combinations*. That's pretty much your philosophy for both your life and your books. Your characters come in all colors, shapes, sizes, and orientations.

SUZ: Yeah, I think as a society we get too hung up on labels. A gay man. A widowed woman. An African American lawyer. A Muslim accountant. Really, bottom line, we're all just people. We all have hearts beating in our chests. We're all looking for that ultimate connection, we're looking for love. We're so much more alike than we are different—yet

our society focuses on the most minute differences. My daughter is left-handed. My son is gay. They both have freckles, too. Why should we choose to make a bigger deal over being gay than having freckles or being left-handed?

JULES: Amen, sister. Okay, so answer a question for me. Why are you so excited that your books are finally being released in Germany?

SUZ: Because I'm a fourth-generation German American. My great-great-grandparents came to America from Bremerhaven at the end of the 19th century. They were bakers, and they opened a bakery in Brooklyn, New York. Our family names include Hopf and Bose and Kramer. When I was fifteen, my grandmother and her cousin, Elise, took my sister and me to Germany. We toured the entire country—it was West Germany back then—as well as Austria. It was a wonderful summer. We visited our relatives in Bremerhaven. Elise's brothers and sisters and their families still live there. It was so much fun meeting my distant cousins. Maybe they'll read this—hello, Emmy and Rita and Janine and Marlies! Watch for *Hot Target*, coming to a bookstore near you this March!

Suz's interview with Kenny and Savannah

"So what's been going on in your lives?" I asked, as we all sat down in my office.

Navy SEAL Chief Ken Karmody was dressed for work, which today meant desert print cammie BDUs. He was going to spend the afternoon crawling around in the San Borrego desert, trying out some new gear.

"You want to tell her?" Savannah asked him.

"Tell me what?" I looked from one to the other.

Savannah was wearing a T-shirt and jeans, sneakers on her feet. It didn't surprise me—she'd been dressing far more casually since she'd met and married Ken. Her blond hair was cut short and it wisped around her face. She looked far more like a college student than a high-powered attorney.

"Van had a little bit of a meltdown the other day," Ken admitted.

I looked to her for confirmation, and she nodded, wincing slightly, embarrassment on her pretty face. "It was more like a big meltdown."

"No, it wasn't," her husband scoffed. "Believe me, from someone who's had big meltdowns a time or two—yours was very small."

"A time or two," I repeated. "More like ten."

He laughed because he knew what I was thinking. No doubt he, too, was remembering the night he drove his car onto his ex-girlfriend's lawn, music blaring from his stereo speakers, drunk out of his mind, hoping she'd take him back. Fortunately for him, she hadn't, leaving him solidly single when Savannah came along.

"They all happened years ago," Savannah pointed out.

But there had been a more recent incident—back when Ken was living in San Diego, and Savannah was still living in New York. They'd met in the middle, in Dallas or Denver, as often as they could, but spent far too many weeks apart.

It was hard for both of them—newly married, living on different coasts. Especially since Ken frequently went overseas with SEAL Team Sixteen. Days off for either of them were few and far between.

"Remember that time," Ken told Savannah, "that you came to San Diego to surprise me, only I went to New York to surprise you?"

Savannah laughed. "Like I'm ever going to forget?" Shaking her head, she turned to me. "I walked into our house in San Diego at about three a.m. The place was quiet, it was obvious Ken was asleep, so I didn't turn on the lights. It was a surprise—my being there. I was supposed to be in New York at some legal thing, a conference that was cancelled. So I went into the bedroom, got undressed, climbed into bed and—" She cracked up.

"I had given my keys to Sam and his wife, Alyssa," Ken said, far less amused. "They were painting their house, and the fumes were intense, so . . . I figured since Van and I weren't going to be there, they could sleep at our place. Meanwhile, I was in New York, wondering where my wife was at three o'clock in the morning."

"Having a menage a trois with your best friend and his wife." Savannah laughed. "The look on Sam's face when he turned on the light . . . And Alyssa . . .!" She howled. "She got a little mad at Sam because she thought he was enjoying himself too much."

"Yeah, I bet he was." Ken was pretending to be disgruntled, but he clearly thought it was funny, too.

"It was so embarrassing," Savannah covered her face with her hands. "And can you imagine being Sam, and waking up with some strange woman pawing at you?"

"You don't paw," Kenny said.

"Yeah, well . . ." Mischief danced in her eyes. "I now know Sam Starrett a little too well."

"Imagine if you'd climbed into Alyssa's side of the bed," Ken said. He grinned, and did a pretty horrendous Grouch Marx imitation. "I've actually spent quite a lot of time imagining that."

Savannah kicked his boot with her sneaker. "That's awful. I probably would've thought you were cheating on me. I mean, when I grabbed Sam, I knew right away that he wasn't you. But if I'd climbed into bed and found a woman there . . . I would've had a heart attack. I would've died of shock. Instantly." She looked at me. "Ken would never be unfaithful. There are few things I'm certain of in life, but that's one of them."

SUZ TALKS WITH HER MOST POPULAR CHARACTERS (CONT.)

Ken took her hand, bringing it to his lips. "Thanks, babe," he said, his eyes soft.

She smiled at him, and for a moment, I wasn't even there in the room.

But I cleared my throat and brought them back on track. "We were talking about Ken's meltdown."

"Okay," he said. "So Van's having her comedy of errors in San Diego. Meanwhile, I'm in her less crowded apartment in Manhattan, with an armload of flowers." He shook his head. "I knew immediately what had happened. I saw some memo about the conference being cancelled. I saw her notes about her flight to San Diego. And I just . . . lost it. I just . . . sat down on the floor and, well, I cried."

This was clearly the first time Savannah had heard this. Her eyes were wide. "Oh, Kenny."

"I missed you so much," he admitted. "It was killing me, not seeing you."

"That was the same weekend you started talking about moving to New York," she realized. She turned to me. "I couldn't believe he was serious. Leave the SEALs? I went home and started packing. I couldn't let him do that. I couldn't."

"She actually talked the partners in her firm into opening a San Diego branch," Ken told me. "The woman has balls."

"But now I've gone and quit," Savannah said. She turned a little pale. "Oh, my God, I've actually quit."

"She's running for office," Ken announced. "For Congress."

"We haven't decided that yet," she warned him.

He was unperturbed. "Yeah, we have. You want to run, you're running. You're sick of sitting around, watching civil rights erode. What am I fighting for, you know? It drives her nuts, so she's running."

"I have some clients who are Arab Americans," Savannah explained. "These are good people, but they happen to have the same name as someone on the terrorist watch list. Turns out my phones have been tapped. My office was searched."

"She actually stood on a table in a restaurant," Ken said admiringly, "and gave her first campaign speech."

"I had my meltdown at the Cafe Bistro," she admitted to me.

"You got a standing O," her husband said.

"I kind of did," she told me, as if she still couldn't quite believe it.

"She's running. And she's going to win." Ken stood up. "We've got to go, babe. I don't want to be late."

"Thanks for stopping by," I told them, standing too, and giving them both a hug and kiss.

Savannah gave me an extra squeeze. "Thank you so much for writing Kenny into my life," she whispered.

I just smiled and waved goodbye. I was having too much fun picturing Ken Karmody as first husband of U.S. President Savannah von Hopf.

Now *there* was a story that would be fun to write . . .

Suz's interview with Tom and Kelly

"I got the word just before noon," Tom said, laughter dancing in his eyes as he held his seven-month-old son, Charlie, on his shoulder. "I was no longer needed, so I managed to get a seat on a commercial flight home that left at 2:15."

"The assignment was really just saber-rattling," Kelly interjected, reaching out to wipe their baby's chin as we sat in Tom's home office in San Diego.

Well, actually, *they* sat in San Diego. I was in front of my computer, in *my* office, writing this scene. But, shhhh. Don't tell them that. I'm not sure they know they're fictional characters. Tom Paoletti is the former CO of SEAL Team Sixteen and the current owner of Troubleshooters Incorporated, a private security firm. Dr. Kelly Ashton Paoletti is his wife.

Kelly continued. "He was brought in to stand there and look important and, I don't know, scary, I guess."

"Am I scary?" Tom asked his son. He made a face that was nowhere near scary and the baby chortled with laughter. "I think that's a solid no."

"He can be *very* scary," Kelly told me, laughing, too. "Don't let him fool you. Anyway, the point is that he finally called to tell me he was coming home, which was wonderful news. He'd been gone for nearly three weeks. That's the longest he's been away since Charlie was born."

"Yeah, I missed you pretty badly," Tom said to Charlie. "And I missed your mommy, too." He looked at me. "But everything fell perfectly into place. Like someone waved a magic wand and made it all easy."

So okay, I was wrong. Tom clearly knew he was a character and that I was his writer.

Still, I shook my head at his unspoken question. It wasn't me who'd made things easy for him. I like to challenge my characters, throw them into situations that are difficult—just to see what they'll do, how they'll react.

"That seat on the plane—there was only one left, but it was mine," Tom continued. He obviously didn't believe me. "I was flying into Germany, where I'd catch a connecting flight to New York, and on to San Diego. Again, I got the last seat on *that* flight,

too. Then when I was packing, the zipper on my bag broke. I was ready to leave everything behind, just take my laptop, but I got a new bag at a store that was right in the hotel lobby. Of course, it was pink, with a picture of Minnie Mouse on it. Thanks so much for that."

Again, I shook my head. It really wasn't me. I'd spent the past few months writing *Into the Storm*, Navy SEAL Mark Jenkins' story.

"And then there was the taxi," Kelly prompted him.

"Yeah," Tom said. "The entire three weeks I'm in Kazabek, it's impossible to get a cab, but suddenly one's available. I just opened the door and got in. Traffic was usually terrible, but we made it to the airport early. I checked in, everything was great. I got on the plane, and they were actually giving out free drinks and real sandwiches—when does that ever happen? We had a delay before take-off, but even that was okay. We managed to make up the time while we were in the air. We landed in Germany, and I had just enough time to make it to the gate and . . ." He shook his head ruefully. "I didn't get on the plane."

"What happened?" I asked, looking to Kelly. But she was watching Tom holding Charlie, her eyes soft. No doubt about it, she loved her two men.

"There was this kid," Tom said, but then he corrected himself. "A young man. In an Army uniform. Corporal Tyrell Richards. He was standing near the check-in desk, clearly anxious. And he's looking at me like I'm the grim reaper as I approach. I'm a little late, but I can still make the flight. And as I hand my ticket to the man behind the counter, he turns to Richards and says, *That's it, we're full*. The look on that kid's face was . . ." He shook his head.

"So Tom asked him where he's from," Kelly told me. "He says Hartford, Connecticut. He's only got a few more days of leave. He was trying to get home to see his wife, meet his daughter. *Meet*. She was Charlie's age. Can you imagine? He hadn't been home in a year."

I shook my head. No, I couldn't imagine.

"So Tom gave him his seat," Kelly continued.

I turned to look at him.

"It really wasn't that big a deal." Tom was embarrassed.

"It probably was to Tyrell Richards," I pointed out.

"And it *definitely* was to Tyrell's wife," Kelly agreed.

Again, Tom shrugged. "It was the least I could do. Hey, champ, you tired?"

In his arms, the baby was starting to fuss. He rubbed his eyes.

Kelly scooped him up. "Nap time," she announced. "It was nice to see you, Suz," she said to me as she and Charlie left the room.

Tom and I sat in silence for a moment, just looking at each other.

"So it took me three days to get home," he told me. "All that good luck? Instantly gone. I missed my connecting flight to California out of New York, ended up in Dallas for twenty-three hours, six of 'em spent sitting on the runway. Wasn't *that* fun? Still, it was worth it. We got the nicest note from Tyrell's wife." Tom's smile widened. "I also got something of a hero's welcome home. Have I mentioned that nap time is my new favorite time of day? I just wish Charlie'd stay asleep a *little* longer. And I think he's starting to teethe, so he hasn't been falling asleep as quickly anymore. Hint, hint?"

I laughed. Message received.

"That was just the funniest thing," Kelly said as she came back into the room. "Charlie fell right to sleep. He never does that. Although, sometimes babies reach a certain age, and they suddenly nap like clockwork."

"He'll probably sleep through the night now, too," I said.

"Oh, wouldn't *that* be nice?"

"It certainly will be," Tom said with a smile, pulling his wife onto his lap.

"Hey!" She laughed, glancing over at me.

"Suz was just leaving," Tom told her. He kissed her, snapped his fingers, and the scene faded to black.

FAQs ANSWERED: INTERVIEW WITH SUZ

The following is compiled from a series of online interviews. My thanks to all who posed such interesting questions.

Q: You began your career as a romance writer, but now your books are labeled romantic suspense or romantic military action/adventures. Does this influence what you write?

SUZ: No, it doesn't. But I have to admit that I've used labels like those—and even the broader label of “romance novel,” to “get away” with writing exactly what I want to write.

I think labels are something that publishers, booksellers, and even readers use to help them organize the purchase and sales and selection of books. What's this book about? Well, it's about this man who comes to believe that terrorists targeted his ex-wife and daughter. Oh, so it's a thriller. Well, yeah, sort of. Except there's more. Our hero comes face-to-face with a woman he's had a couple of brief but intense affairs with in the past, and as they spend time together, they're finally able to begin to build a real relationship. Oh, so it's a romance. Well, yeah, sort of, except there's more. An awful lot of time is spent on the hero's childhood and . . .

And so on.

You know, the first book in my Troubleshooters series, *The Unsung Hero*, is really a novel about Charles Ashton, an 80-something WWII veteran with terminal cancer. This character's story, both his adventures as a downed pilot in Nazi-occupied France and his contemporary struggles with his own impending demise, is the soul of this book.

And yet there's enough going on in the book so that it is a romance. And a military action/adventure. And there's a sweet secondary romance between two teenagers. And . . . it's a lot of things, all in one book.

I could give you a log line for *The Unsung Hero*: “A Navy SEAL commander recovering from a near-fatal head injury spots a terrorist in his sleepy New England home town . . .”

Where's the romance? Where's 80-year-old Charles? Well, they're in there—they're the heart and soul of this book that's most easily labeled a romantic suspense!

Q: What comes to you first, character or story?

SUZ: For me, it's almost always character that comes first. I spend a lot of time writing books with recurring characters—people whose personalities have been solidly established in previous books. I often move former secondary characters into main character roles and devise their story by asking the question, “What type of conflict or situation would push this particular character beyond their personal edge? How can I make them really suffer?” Because really, the best stories deal with characters who must face their personal vulnerabilities.

Here's an example of what I mean. Say you had a hero who was a mountain climber. You could create a plot that involved him scaling a cliff to save a stranded child. You could throw in an impending thunderstorm—no, make it a hailstorm with high winds. He's got to get up there and rescue that child—no, make her a toddler, trapped with her father who had a heart attack right there on the trail.

That could be sort of exciting, right?

Well, no. Because the hero's a mountain climber. It's no big deal for him to scale that cliff. He'll probably yawn while he's doing it.

And the reader will yawn, too.

But what if the hero isn't a mountain climber? What if he's the opposite of a mountain climber—what if he's terrified of heights? I'm talking Jimmy Stewart-level vertigo a la the Hitchcock movie of that very name.

Toss *this* hero into that scenario I sketched out above, and no one's yawning now! When this hero rescues that child, he's not just climbing a cliff, he's facing his demons. So what I do when I plot my books is figure out who my hero is going to be, what his vulnerabilities are, and what type of situation I can throw him into, to make him really suffer!

The same rule applies, of course, to my heroines.

Q: Sam and Alyssa are probably your most popular couple. Where did the idea come from, to stretch their story out over five books?

SUZ: When I outlined Sam and Alyssa's story arc, my intention was to present a fairly traditional romance backstory in “real time.”

It's fairly typical to find a book in which the hero and heroine have had a romantic and/or sexual

FAQs ANSWERED: INTERVIEW WITH SUZ (CONT.)

encounter in the past (in their backstory), and have, after that encounter, gone in two different directions. But in the actual book, these two characters come face-to-face again, and are forced to work together and deal with their history, as well as feelings that are still in play.

With Sam and Alyssa, I wanted to bring my readers along for a ride, having what would typically be that backstory play out over the course of six or seven books, as subplots.

For example, in *The Unsung Hero*, I introduced the two and even though they are minor secondary characters, it's clear that they are throwing sparks and clashing.

In the next book, *The Defiant Hero*, there is a major romantic subplot, in which these two characters again clash in a hate/love relationship that explodes, with the help of overindulgence in alcohol, in a one-night stand. Neither character is mature enough to deal with a real relationship, and the morning after is filled with regrets and additional mistakes. At the end of the book, they decide to pretend that night never happened, and go about their separate lives.

The third book, *Over the Edge*, takes place six months later, and the two characters again meet and are forced to work together. Again they clash and spark, and there's another one-night stand. But this time, both are older and wiser, and they realize there could be something more between them. But the book ends with an external conflict—a girlfriend Sam dated during those six months he and Alyssa spent apart is pregnant and he feels he must “do the right thing” and marry her—that sends the pair in separate directions.

The fourth book, *Out of Control*, has more of a minor subplot from Alyssa's point of view, in which she is attempting to get on with her life. Sam, meanwhile, is trying to make his loveless marriage work for the sake of his new baby.

The fifth book, *Into the Night*, shows Sam trying to make the best of his marriage to a woman he doesn't love—in this book, he comes to the realization that marriage without love is not “the right thing.”

And the sixth book, *Gone Too Far*, is Sam & Alyssa's story. Again, they're thrown together. Sam is single

again. Both are even older and wiser, and prove through their journey in the book that they have earned the right to a happy ending—which they achieve at the end of the story.

I outlined Sam and Alyssa's story arc way back after I wrote *The Unsung Hero*. I suspected that telling Sam and Alyssa's story in this manner, in an arc that spread across so many books, would be compelling. Keep in mind that, up to *Gone Too Far*, Sam and Alyssa's story was told in subplots to the main plot/main romance of each book. This was something different from traditional romances—romantic subplots that ended unhappily or without absolute closure. Readers were drawn to this, as I'd hoped!

Q: Were you surprised at the response to Sam and Alyssa's story arc?

SUZ: It was my intention to create a stir with Sam and Alyssa. I'd hoped that people would connect to them—I actually had no idea, though, just how strong that connection would be!

The biggest shock—to me—came when quite a few readers assumed that Sam and Alyssa's story ended with *Over the Edge*. Because—oh my gosh!—in my mind it was so clear that their story was FAR from over!

Q: Which character in the Troubleshooters books (aside from Sam or Alyssa) is the most popular?

SUZ: That would be Jules Cassidy. When I go on book tours, I do a Q&A session at nearly every signing. And one of the first questions asked—it doesn't matter where we are—is “Will we be seeing more of Jules in future books?” (My answer is “Yes!”)

Q: You've been accused of “waving your rainbow flag” in *Hot Target*. Care to comment?

SUZ: I happen to disagree. Yes, this book features Jules Cassidy, who is gay. Yes, this book features other characters who are gay. Yes, this book goes into those characters' backstories (their childhoods, their histories) in some detail—just as I do for all my characters in this book and in every other book I've ever written. And yes, the backstories for these gay characters deal with their coming out—which (as is the case for all gay people) required enormous courage for them to do.

I believe strongly that my books are entertainment. I

hope you might learn a thing or two while reading them, but first and foremost, my job is to entertain you.

If I'm waving a flag in *Hot Target*, it's the same flag I've always waved in all my books—the American flag. And that's a flag that's supposed to stand for tolerance and understanding. For freedom for ALL—and not just freedom for all Americans, but freedom for all of the diverse and wonderful people living on this planet; freedom to live their lives according to their definitions of freedom. It's a flag that's supposed to stand for honoring real American values like honor and honesty and peace and love and hope.

Q: Readers enjoy the diversity of the characters in your books. Jules is gay, Alyssa is African American, Lindsey is Asian American, Max's grandfather came from India . . . How hard is it to write those characters?

SUZ: Not hard at all.

Here's the deal—the world I live in, a fairly urban, blue collar-ish suburb of Boston, is ethnically diverse. I chose to live here, on a busy street with buses running past my house, and neighbors and friends of all different colors, shapes, lifestyles, and sizes, because I love diversity. I believe it's what makes America great. (Differences of opinions, too, are so important to a true democracy!)

I love meeting people who, on the surface, appear to be different from me. But it never takes long for me to recognize that our similarities far outweigh those superficial differences. Bottom line—people are people. We all tend to want the same big things—love, security, adventure, success, peace of mind . . .

And yet at the same time, people are individuals. It's important to see people without being burdened by the labels and definitions that our society imposes upon them. (Upon us!) Sure, you can define individuals by the color of their skin: A black man, a white woman. Or you can define them by their religion: A Muslim woman, a Jewish man, a Wiccan woman. There are dozens of labels we throw onto people all the time: Gay, straight, bi. Democrat, Republican, Independent. New Yorker, Midwesterner, Texan.

What does this mean? To me, I don't see a black straight Christian man who's a Democrat from Chicago.

I see a man.

And that man has dozens upon dozens of individual characteristics—both those superficial yet easily labeled differences, as well as differences such as his love of mocha ice cream (Mocha Ice Cream Lover! There's a label!) and his dislike of peanut butter, his ability to do complicated multiplication in his head, his inability to spell, his fear of tornados, his musical talents, his need to check in on his children before he goes to sleep at night even though he knows they're all right, his undying love for the woman he first met at a party in college that time he was so drunk he threw up on his best friend's shoes and she wouldn't have anything to do with him for months but he knew she was the one so he didn't give up . . .

If you take the time to look beneath the labels and generalizations, you will always find a person who is more like you than not. (When Sam sat down and talked to Jules—really talked to him—he realized they were more alike than different!)

This is why, to me, things like skin color and background and age differences aren't that big a deal in terms of a romantic relationship, and why diverse characters aren't hard to write.

Q: Let's talk a little more about that—about looking beneath the labels and generalizations—as well as the facades that people create to hide behind. This seems to be a theme that runs throughout your books.

SUZ: That's absolutely right. One of the themes that I frequently tackle in my books deals with perception and facades. We present ourselves to the world in a certain way, and people identify us, judge us, and label us. This happens all the time in our society. It's easy, it's quick, and it requires little effort.

My goal with my books is always to grow tolerance. To encourage people to look beyond the things that they *expect* to see, to try to see individuals instead of stereotypes.

Sam Starrett, for example, starts out as an alpha male who has some preconceived notions about other people—particularly about Jules Cassidy, who is gay. Sam is homophobic and Jules freaks him out. He doesn't see Jules-the-individual, he sees “one of those creepy (to him!) gay guys.”

But at the same time, Alyssa Locke is doing the very

FAQs ANSWERED: INTERVIEW WITH SUZ (CONT.)

same thing to Sam. She sees a white guy from Texas, with his cowboy boots and Texas drawl—a good ol’ boy, or a “cracker,” if you will. She jumps to some conclusions about him. Redneck. Small-minded, racist . . . When, in truth, he’s nothing of the sort.

Throughout Sam’s journey in these books, he comes to know Jules. He works with Jules and learns that Jules is worthy of his respect and admiration. He gets to know Jules as an individual, and the two men become friends. Real friends. At the end of the story arc, Sam is no longer homophobic—his ignorance about what being gay means is replaced with understanding—and tolerance.

Likewise, Alyssa’s assumptions are changed as, throughout her story arc, she discovers who Sam truly is.

Q: But at the same time, Sam has to stop hiding—he has to reveal himself to Alyssa.

SUZ: Yes, he does. You know, I think the ultimate human story is that of finding a true connection with another person—finding real, honest love. The thing about *that* is, in order to find such a real connection, you’ve got to be willing to reveal yourself completely, which takes true courage.

One of my favorite scenes in a movie is in *Bridget Jones’ Diary*, where the Colin Firth character says to Bridget, “I like you just the way you are.” What an incredible moment!

We come from a society that infuses us with dissatisfaction and fear. Not only are we taught to believe that we’re not good enough, but we’re taught that we better pretend to be something better or we will be made fun of, or worse—ignored.

We also, as a society, are quick to label. Like I said earlier, we feel more comfortable putting people into categories—defining people in easy to understand ways. She’s a lawyer. He’s a science teacher. She’s Jewish. He’s Latino. She’s the mother of three. He’s a grandfather.

But the labels we give also judge. He’s an ex-con—he’s dangerous. She’s well-endowed—she’s a slut. She’s blond—she’s a ditz . . . etc., etc.

Of course, not all labels and judgments are negative. He’s a Harvard grad—he’s a good job candidate. She’s a nun—she’s kind and forgiving. Just like

negative assumptions, it may or may not be true!

Everyone who lives and breathes and walks the earth (and I’ll include my characters in with that group, since I try my best to breathe life into them!) has to deal with the labels that others in our society put on them. They also have to deal with the labels that they put onto other people. And they have to try to see the truth behind the labels that the rest of the world puts on other people.

AND they themselves can take advantage of others’ needs to label and define—by playing into others’ expectations. For example—Cosmo Richter is a Navy SEAL. He’s tall and muscular with exotically colored eyes and striking features. He looks dangerous, and he’s quiet—he doesn’t talk much. He also keeps what he’s feeling to himself—he’s very private. People look at him and see his lack of reaction and think, “Yikes—he doesn’t feel a thing—he’s like a dangerous robot.” And he lets them think that. He finds it’s easier to go through life protected by that shield—people keep their distance from him.

But what happens when Cosmo finds someone to whom he’d like to get close? It’s this unpeeling of layers that truly fascinates me—because no two people unpeel the same way. Some reveal themselves voluntarily and hopefully—others resist, kicking and screaming. Some never really unpeel completely (like Nash in *Flashpoint!*)—but they try. And sometimes that’s enough for the people who love them—just knowing that they’re trying.

Q: Why do certain fictional characters become so popular among readers?

SUZ: I’ll answer that as a reader/viewer. I become invested in characters who are consistently brought to life by their writers. Not only must the characters live and breathe and be real to me, but they must continue to act true to their character and to their beliefs and values. Yes, of course, they are allowed to learn and grow, but that growth must be continuous and constant.

Q: Last question. We’re currently at war. This is difficult for people who support our servicemen and women, but don’t condone war as a viable solution to a conflict. What can you say to them?

SUZ: I happen to think that war is a terrible, awful human invention. But I also believe, with all my heart, that there are things—especially freedom—that are well worth fighting for.

Think of it this way—if someone approached you and said, “There could be peace on earth from now until the end of time. All you have to do is read what we tell you to read, work where we tell you to work, think what we tell you to think, pray to the god we tell you to pray to, and never say anything bad about us.” Well, I’m sorry, I don’t know about you, but that doesn’t work for me.

That’s what people were (and still are!) running away from when they came to America. America is all about diversity and freedom. Freedom of speech, freedom of religion—FREEDOM TO DISAGREE! It’s this diversity and this difference of opinions and ideas that makes America truly great.

Lately there’s been this terrible implication that anyone who speaks up against the war in Iraq is “un-American.” Well, I’m sorry, but I believe that intolerance is un-American. I believe that silencing voices and avoiding debate is un-American.

I know, though, that even someone with staunch anti-war beliefs can appreciate the dedication and sacrifices made by the men and women who serve in the U.S. military. We might question the decisions of our country’s leaders, we might disagree with methods of solving conflict, we might oppose the idea of war altogether, but we cannot help but respect and support the individual servicemen and women who believe so completely in the idea of freedom that they’re willing to give so much—sometimes their very lives—for their country.

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Traditionally, Valentine's Day is about heart-shaped boxes of candies, romantic cards, a dozen roses, a candlelit dinner for two . . . All lovely traditions, but face it, they just don't compare to the Valentine's Day gift that the servicemen and women in the U.S. armed forces give—not just to their loved ones but to every American.

My friend Rob is a petty officer in the U.S. Navy, and his ship recently returned to port after six months at sea. He and the rest of the crew spent Thanksgiving and Christmas away from their families. They were all glad to be home in time for Valentine's Day.

Not that they needed Valentine's Day to make their return to port romantic. In fact, recently Rob told me about a particularly sweet Navy ritual called "The First Kiss."

As they approach their home port, all of the married men and women aboard the ship participate in a lottery. And oh, the competition for this is very fierce. Because the winner is the first to disembark, the first to greet—and kiss—his or her spouse after six very long months away from home.

It's the sheer romantic sentimentality of this custom that gets to me. The very first person to set foot on shore isn't chosen by rank or rate or power. That honor is given to someone lucky enough to be in love.

This is the big, bad U.S. Navy, an arm of the most powerful military force in the world. And yet everyone—from admirals to seamen recruits—unabashedly recognizes that the most important part of their homecoming lies in the arms of the men and women waiting for them.

But maybe that's not such a surprise. Anyone willing to sacrifice so much to serve their country, to help ensure that America remains the "land of the free" has to have a good understanding of the power of love.

For our servicemen and women, love isn't about heart-shaped boxes of chocolate.

It's about spending every minute of your long-awaited shore leave desperately trying to find a telephone to call your daughter on her birthday.

Love isn't a candlelit dinner for two, it's a hurried meal at 1530 hours in the mess hall for fifty, because the ship's in hostile waters and you've got to get back on duty.

Love isn't a lacy greeting card, it's moving slowly in the darkness, one careful foot at a time, searching for booby traps in a cave that was once a terrorist hideout in Afghanistan.

Love isn't a dozen roses, it's fifteen dozen nights at sea, sleeping in a rack in a crowded cabin, half a world away from your lover's arms.

Love isn't just the First Kiss—it's *every* kiss that every man and woman in military service willingly gives up when they volunteer. It's every moment away from home and family that they sacrifice for another love—love of country.

And love of freedom.

Happy Valentine's Day to all the servicemen and women in all branches of the U.S. Military.

Thanks for the terrific gift.

And hurry home.

Originally published in *Romantic Times BookClub*,
November, 2005

“Happy Thanksgiving, Chief.”

Navy SEAL Chief Cosmo Richter caught the MRE—meal, ready to eat—that Lt. Jazz Jacquette tossed to him.

It was dark in the cave they were using as shelter from an early winter storm, but Cosmo could read the printing on the plastic packet in the last trace of daylight there at the entrance.

Spaghetti with meatballs.

Cosmo stuck the MRE under his arm to warm it.

It was not your traditional turkey-day fare, but Cosmo was thankful just the same. He and his squad had been living off the land since they were ambushed two weeks ago.

He had much to be thankful for tonight. That Jacquette’s team had picked up their signal and helped carry their wounded out of the mountains was high on his list. That they were all still alive was also worth celebrating.

Cosmo used his knife to open the MRE, thinking not about the turkey and cranberry sauce he wasn’t eating, but about his wife. When Jane realized he wouldn’t be home in time for the holidays, she’d emailed him, telling of her plans to have dinner with his mother and her crazy brother. And letting him know they’d have their own, private Thanksgiving celebration when Cosmo returned.

Another thing to be thankful for—that Janey would never know just how close Cosmo had been to never coming home.

“Remember last year,” Dan Gillman mused, “when Team Sixteen was adopted by that reader’s group who sent us all those boxes of homemade cookies? That was a great Thanksgiving.”

“This one’s pretty good, too,” Cosmo said.

And no one disagreed.

SUZ BROCKMANN’S TROUBLESHOOTERS SERIES FAN SURVEY RESULTS

What is your favorite book in the Troubleshooters series?

Over the Edge (Stan & Teri) (23%)
Gone Too Far (Sam & Alyssa) (22%)
Out of Control (Kenny & Savannah) (19%)
Breaking Point (Max & Gina) (8%)
Hot Target (Cosmo & Jane) (8%)
Into the Night (Mike & Joan) (5%)
The Unsung Hero (Tom & Kelly) (4%)
Flashpoint (Nash & Tess) (3%)
The Defiant Hero (Nils & Meg) (2%)
(2808 total votes)

In the Troubleshooter universe, who is your favorite main couple?

Sam and Alyssa (43%)
Kenny and Savannah (12%)
Max and Gina (12%)
Stan and Teri (10%)
Tom and Kelly (7%)
Mike and Joan (4%)
Cosmo and Jane (4%)
Nash and Tess (3%)
Nils and Meg (1%)
(2812 total votes)

Who is your favorite secondary (subplot) couple?

Max and Gina (22%)
Jones and Molly (20%)
Jules and Robin (18%)
Sam and Alyssa (17%)
Decker and Sophia (11%)
David and Mallory (7%)
Ihbraham and Mary Lou (1%)
(2826 total votes)

Which WWII subplot was your favorite?

Rose and Hank and Nazi spies in America (31%)
Walt and Dot and the Tuskegee Airmen (21%)
Charles, Joe, and Cybele in Nazi-occupied France (15%)
Eve and Ralph and the rescue at Dunkirk (15%)
Vince and Charlotte and the Battle of Tarawa (8%)
Jack and Hal and the ghost army (7%)
(2673 total votes)

Who is your favorite SEAL?

Roger “Sam” Starrett (36%)
Ken “WildCard” Karmody (17%)
Cosmo Richter (12%)
Stan Wolchonok (11%)
Mike Muldoon (8%)
Tom Paoletti (8%)
John Nilsson (2%)
Jazz Jacquette (1%)
Irving “Izzy” Zanella (0%)
Mark Jenkins (0%)
Jay Lopez (0%)
Danny “Gilligan” Gillman (0%)
(2788 total votes)

Which character do you most want to see more of in future books? (listed in alphabetical order)

Jules Cassidy (49%)
Larry Decker (18%)
Sophia Ghaffari (8%)
Jay Lopez (6%)
Other (4%)
Vinh Murphy (3%)
Izzy Zanella (3%)
Dave Malkoff (1%)
Danny Gillman (1%)
Robin Chadwick (1%)
PJ Prescott (0%)
(2788 total votes)

This series includes many multi-book story arcs—stories like that of Sam and Alyssa, that continued over the course of many books. Which story arc was your favorite?

Sam and Alyssa (45%)
Max and Gina (22%)
Jules and Robin/Adam/??? (11%)
Tom and Kelly (8%)
Molly and Jones (8%)
Sophia and Decker (4%)
(2823 total votes)

Keeping it simple: Stan or Kenny?

Kenny (55%)
Stan (45%)
(2758 total votes)

World War II subplots: Some readers love ‘em, some don’t. How do you feel?

Depends on the story (56%)
Love ‘em (30%)
Don’t love ‘em (14%)
(2781 total votes)

It’s not too late to add your opinion to the poll!
Visit www.SuzanneBrockmann.com and click on “Poll!” to participate!

This poll was created on 2006-03-03 23:39:36 by Suz Brockmann.

Excerpt from

INTO THE STORM

SUZANNE BROCKMANN

ON SALE IN HARDCOVER AUGUST 15, 2006

Lindsey Fontaine knocked on her boss's door. It was ajar, so she pushed it open, peeking in. "You wanted to see me, sir," she started, but then realized there was someone in a Navy uniform sitting across from his desk. "Oh, I'm sorry."

"No, come on in, Linds." Her boss, Tom Paoletti, waved her into the room. "You've met Mark Jenkins, haven't you?"

"Not officially," Lindsey told him. She'd seen Jenkins earlier this morning. Hanging out at the new receptionist's desk.

Reading rank wasn't one of her strengths, but Tom was a former Navy SEAL. His company, Troubleshooters Incorporated, did a great deal of business with the government, including the military. Which meant lots of uniforms walked through their door.

The very young man—Jeez, were they really taking them this fresh out of diapers these days?—pushing himself to his feet while favoring his left side was a Petty Officer, First Class.

And oh, yes, he was definitely First Class—in more ways than one. Extra cute, with muscles.

But wait. His rank meant he'd been in the Navy for a number of years, because petty officers started at third class and worked their way up to first. And *that* meant he couldn't be as young as he looked.

Shame on her for making assumptions. She should've known better—as someone who still got carded. At the movies. When she went to see an R-rated film.

Lindsey knew firsthand what a pain in the butt it was to look far younger than her years.

"Nice to meet you," Jenkins said as he shook her hand.

Good grip. Solid eye contact. Pretty, *pretty* hazel eyes. Great smile. Cute

freckles. And not too tall, either. She liked him already.

Except for the fact that he was clearly infatuated with Tracy Shapiro, Troubleshooters Incorporated's remarkably inept new receptionist. Of course, most men seemed to turn into idiots around women who looked like Tracy, the brainless hair-do.

Not that Lindsey had exchanged more than a casual greeting with Tracy, who'd started working there just a few days ago. But there was no doubt about it, Tracy had set Lindsey's Brainless Hair-Do-o-meter clacking right away. It might've had something to do with Tracy bumming five bucks for lunch off of Alyssa—after flat-out flirting with Alyssa's husband Sam.

But okay, to be fair, it wasn't the flirting-with-Sam part that was a problem. Alyssa had to be good and used to that.

The Real Hair-Do Action came from Tracy lamenting her lack of money for lunch, accepting a fiver from Alyssa with only the vaguest of promises to pay it back and then, without taking a breath, launching into an explanation of how she'd seen the shoes she was wearing on sale, and she just had to buy them, and could they believe she'd actually gotten them for only three hundred dollars?

When Lindsey came to work, she wore sneakers or clunky-heeled boots, bought on sale for \$29.95, so . . . no. She could not believe that any pair of shoes, even those made by mermaids off the coast of Sicily, could be worth three hundred dollars.

"Jenk found Tracy for us," Tom Paoletti told Lindsey now. "They were friends back in high school."

"Ah," she said. *They were friends back in high school* was guy code for *Jenk had always wanted to jump her bones*. Apparently, he hadn't given up trying. He no doubt thought helping her get a job might work. "That explains it."

Oops, she probably shouldn't have said that aloud.

"I mean, I'm sure she's just . . . feeling her way, first days and all," Lindsey added, putting on what she hoped would be perceived as an optimistic expression. "I mean, we've all had 'em, right? First days . . . Kind of scary . . . Kind of overwhelming . . ."

"Absolutely," Jenk said, flashing her a grateful smile.

And first days of work had to be doubly hard for Tracy, who'd apparently been intercepted midway through her quest to see the Wizard and finally get a brain.

"Have a seat," Tom ordered in that easygoing way he had of making a demand sound like an invitation.

She sat. Jenkins sat, too.

“We’re going to be playing the part of Red Cell—the terrorists—in a training op with SEAL Team Sixteen,” Tom told her now. “Jenk is going to be liaison as we work out the logistics.”

“Really” Lindsey looked at the SEAL. “How . . .” *Convenient*, she was about to say, since his being liaison would give him even more access to Tracy. Except, Tracy was not a multitasker, and his distracting presence would be far less convenient for everyone else in the office. She, for one, was extremely tired of answering the phones because Tracy had managed to screw up the voicemail system again. “Interesting,” she said instead, because they were both waiting for her to finish her sentence.

Day-am, the freckles across Jenk’s nose were positively adorable, especially when he frowned. Combined with those hazel eyes, rimmed by thick, dark lashes . . .

He was beyond cute, but it was probably in a way that he himself hated. Baby-faced cute. His mouth tightened slightly, because he misunderstood her comment. *Interesting* . . . “I’m twenty-eight years old.”

“Oh,” she said. “No, I wasn’t—”

“You were wondering,” Jenk said. “I could see that you were wondering, so . . . Now you know. I’m old enough to vote.”

“Actually, I wasn’t wondering,” Lindsey glanced at Tom, who smiled, apparently in no hurry to talk about that training op. Red Cell. That was going to be some kind of fun. “I mean, I was earlier, but then I did the math, figuring that you probably went to college and then . . . I had you at more like thirty, if you want to know the truth.”

She’d surprised him. “You really thought . . . ?”

She shrugged. “Hey. Without makeup, I look about twelve.”

He looked at her—really looked.

“Being flat-chested helps with the illusion,” she said. “I’m five feet and three-eighths of an inch tall—you better believe I count every eighth. I’m also the same age as my bra size. 30A. The A is for my four-oh average at UCLA, which I attended before my seven years with the LAPD.” She smiled at him. “I’m one of Tom’s best bodyguards, by the way. I specialize in the protection of people who might not want their friends, business associates, and/or enemies to know they’re being protected. Because I could tell that *you* were wondering.” She’d stunned him, so she turned to Tom who was now flat-out grinning. “Red Cell, huh? So you called me in here, boss, because you want me to play the part of Dr. Evil, the terrorist mastermind, right?”

She liked Tom for a lot of reasons, but particularly because she made him laugh. Some people didn’t get her sense of humor, although Cutie-pie Jenkins

seemed to be on the same page after he'd shaken off his shock.

"Sorry, I'm the terrorist mastermind of this one," Tom told her. "It was a direct request from Admiral Tucker."

Ah. "Which makes me . . ." She let her voice trail off. "Mini Me?"

Tom laughed again. "Tempting, but no. Not quite."

Uh-oh. "Please don't say that I'm . . ."

He spoke in unison with her. "The hostage."

Lindsey stared at him.

"Someone's got to be the hostage," Tom pointed out, undaunted by her scathing disbelief.

"Yeah, but come on. How realistic is it for the hostage to weigh only ninety-two pounds?" she leaned forward to argue. "Don't you want to give the SEALs a challenge?" Lindsey turned to Jenk. "Tell him you want a challenge. Tell him you want, I don't know, Sam Starrett to play the hostage. What is he? Six and a half feet tall? Two ten? Now if only he had a heart condition, too, he'd be a perfect hostage."

"This time it's going to be you," Tom told her.

She knew when to stop pushing, so instead she sighed heavily. "All right." She stood up.

"We'll talk more later," Tom said, four little words made even more intriguing by the gleam in his eyes. Was it possible she was going to be more than the hostage? Suddenly this was back to maybe being fun.

Maybe.

"I just wanted you to meet Jenk," Tom continued. "If he needs help with the scheduling—or really anything," he added, addressing Jenkins directly, "he's going to come to you, Linds."

Oh, good. She was going to get to be the secretary, as well as the hostage, helping out with scheduling. Whoo-freakin'-hoo. She would have complained that she never saw Tom assigning Sam Starrett to help out with the scheduling—except for the fact that Sam was bitching about Tom giving him a similar task just last week.

"I was thinking it might be a good idea to have the two teams meet, sometime in the next week," Jenk suggested. "Maybe over at the LadyBug Lounge . . .?"

"Really?" Lindsey was skeptical. "That doesn't seem very realistic. Meeting in advance, at a bar . . .?"

"This is a silver bullet assignment," Jenk informed her, then translated.

“Just short of R&R. Or it was supposed to be. Before Admiral Tucker got it into his head that it would be a kick to pit Tommy here against the new CO of Team Sixteen.”

Lindsey looked at her boss. “Your old team versus your new?” she asked. “That’s gotta suck. For your old team.” She turned back to Jenk. “We are so going to kick your butts.”

“Yeah, I don’t think so. We’re SEALs. And—no offense, Tommy—Commander Koehl’s a good CO, so—”

“The poor guy,” Lindsey said. “Because, like, isn’t Team Sixteen still referred to as ‘Tom’s Team?’ I mean, that’s gotta sting. He’s been there, what? At least a year already. That must be frustrating. And now if he loses—*when* he loses—”

Tom interrupted. “Training ops are not about winning and losing. They’re about learning. About improving.”

Lindsey looked at Jenk, who *was* looking back at Lindsey with an expression equally disbelieving. Not about winning? Who did Tom think he was kidding?

“And yes,” Tom continued. “This *was* supposed to be fun. So let’s see if we can’t find the time for that social event. Don’t forget to invite Lew Koehl. Let’s try to downplay the winning and losing thing. Starting right here and now.”

Lindsey looked over at Jenk again. “I’m down with learning,” she said, even as she gazed pointedly at the spot where his rear was planted in that chair, making a tiny kicking motion with her foot.

“Totally into improving,” he agreed, shooting her back a discreet L for loser, shaped with his thumb and forefinger, out of Tom’s line of sight.

Lindsey couldn’t help it. She laughed, covering it quickly with a cough.

Tom, of course, wasn’t fooled. He rubbed his forehead. “I’m serious, people. This is going to be . . . at best, difficult. Both for Commander Koehl and for me. I want you working together. Let’s turn this into a win for everyone.” He smiled tightly. “Except maybe Admiral Tucker.”

“We should look at a calendar,” Jenk told Lindsey. “And exchange cell phone numbers.”

Those words coming from those lips should have made her heart beat harder. Mark Jenkins wanted her phone number. He was cute and funny and smart—and tremendously flawed. He had, after all, the hots for the Hair-Do. And his wanting Lindsey’s number was purely work-related.

No doubt about it, he was Lindsey’s type. Perfectly, cleanly out of reach, unless, of course he got a little drunk and ended up going home with Lindsey

as his solid second choice.

Oh, yeah, if she played her cards right, she could get totally skewered by this one.

* * * *

Jenk sat in silence as Izzy drove them over to Tom Paoletti's house.

That hadn't gone the way he'd hoped it would.

In his fantasy version, he'd walk into the Troubleshooters Incorporated reception area to find that Tracy was finally getting the hang of manipulating the voicemail system. She'd smile at him, holding up one perfectly manicured finger, asking him to wait just a sec as she flawlessly connected the caller who'd requested operator assistance. Then she'd smile at him again, thanking him for helping her find this wonderful job.

He'd remind her that he'd promised to take her to the furniture store with his truck, to pick up the dinette set she'd gotten on sale. He'd also promised he'd help bring it up to her second floor apartment, help her put it together.

She'd suggest they go that evening, right after work. At which point he'd tell her he was babysitting for little Charlie Paoletti, and her eyes would widen the way Lindsey's had.

Izzy glanced at him now. "Dude, I hate to break it to you, but your girlfriend wants to jump me."

What?

Izzy nodded. "It's true."

"Why do people say *I hate to break it to you* when they're obviously gleeful about the news they're going to share?" Jenk asked.

"I'm not gleeful," Izzy said.

"Yeah, *dude*, you are."

"I'm actually depressed, because I really think I could have scored with her tonight."

God. "Yeah, I don't think so."

Instead of his fantasy with its meaningful eye contact and warm smiles, Tracy had been on the phone with Lyle. Her scum-sucking ex-boyfriend. Jenk had walked into the reception area to find every other phone line ringing, as Tracy took a personal call—forgetting to switch on the voicemail system.

Lindsey was right behind him, and the two of them got the phones back under control. Of course, by then Tracy was focusing all of her energy on trying to hide the fact that talking to Lyle had made her cry.

The news that Jenk was babysitting for Tom tonight got absolutely zero reaction.

Nothing at all. Not even a blink in his direction.

“Tracy’s got this ex who just won’t leave her alone,” Jenk told Izzy now. “He’s trying to get them back together, and . . . She’s pretty hung up on him. I have to figure out a way to—”

“Jenkins. Read my lips, okay? You’re seriously deluded about this girl. And even if she was interested in you, I’d be advising you to hit and run. Did you check out her shoes? And her handbag? She’s a shopper. Shag her, for sure, but then move on—before you’re stuck paying her credit card bills for the rest of your life.”

Shag her and move on. Jenk had done *shag her and move on*. His almost dying in Afghanistan had woken him up to a new reality. He didn’t want *shag her and move on* anymore. He wanted the kind of closeness that Tom and his wife Kelly shared. He wanted the magic that the senior chief shared with his wife.

He wanted someone waiting for him when he came home at night.

Even crazy-assed Chief Karmody had found his soulmate. If *he* could do it, Jenk could, too.

And why shouldn’t it be Tracy Shapiro?

Sure, okay, she still didn’t know he existed. She still saw him as Ginny Jenkin’s annoying little brother. That was a perception he was going to have to change.

Was it going to be easy? No.

Was the fact that it wasn’t going to be easy going to stop him?

No.

He was a Navy SEAL. He’d done difficult things in the past.

He *would* get Tracy to notice him, to fall in love with him, and yes, even to marry him, if that’s what he decided he wanted.

It might take a while, but there was one thing he’d learned about himself over the past few years—he was a patient man.

“That Lindsey’s pretty hot,” Izzy said, as they took the turn onto Tommy’s street. “I think she liked me, too.”

“Lindsey?” Jenk couldn’t keep the disbelief from his voice.

“You don’t think she’s hot?” Izzy misunderstood.

Oh, God. “Lookit, do me a favor,” Jenk said. “And just . . . stay away from Lindsey, okay? She’s—”

“Whoa,” Izzy said. “Time out, Marky-Mark. You can’t call dibs on everyone. One at a time, right? Fair’s fair. So which is it, Tracy or Lindsey?”

Shit. “Tracy,” Jenk said. “But seriously, Zanella, Lindsey’s . . . different.”

“Is she, you know, a friend of Ellen?” Izzy parked in front of the Paoletti’s house. “That would be so cool. Do you think she’s got a girlfriend, because I’ve always wanted to get with some lesbians.” He laughed at the expression on Jenk’s face. “Look at you. I’m kidding. That’s the joke, right? Some asshole’s all like, *Lesbians are so hot, do you think they’ll do me?* Only he’s too stupid to know that they’re lesbians because they’re not into men and . . . never mind.”

“No, I get it,” Jenk said. “But Jesus, Izzy, sometimes you frighten me.”

“So what do you think? Is she a dyke?”

Jenk exhaled his exasperation as he got out of Izzy’s truck. “I don’t know—it wasn’t on the questionnaire I gave her about her sexual preferences. And frankly, I don’t care. I like her, all right? As a friend. I don’t want you to mess with her.”

“You can call dibs on her if you want, but then you’ve gotta toss Tracy back. Otherwise, you’ve got no right.”

Jenk followed Izzy up the path to the front door. “I don’t know what I’m worried about. Lindsey’s gonna break your balls.”

“Perfect,” Izzy said. “I’m into pain. Weeble.”

Jenk stared at him. Had he just said . . .

“Tracy told me she used to call you that—right after she implied that she wanted to do me.”

It was probably all true. Tracy had dreadful taste in men. Izzy was almost as big of an asshole as Lyle, so why shouldn’t she be attracted to him?

This was going to be more difficult than he’d imagined.

Izzy grinned. “I’m guessing you were rounder when you were a kid, Wobble-Man.”

“Fuck you.”

“Fuck *you*,” Izzy said cheerfully, as if it were some sort of blessing Jenk had bestowed on him, and that he was bestowing on Jenk in return.

From inside of the house, they could hear a baby crying. Ferociously. Izzy rang the doorbell. “Two Navy SEALs versus one angry nineteen-month-old,” he mused. “The odds could go either way.”

* * * *

Location: Uncertain

Date: Unknown

She was cold. Always cold.

Hungry, too.

He kept the damp basement freezing, kept her carefully underfed.

And almost always in the dark. There were no windows. No way to tell the difference between night and day.

She tried to keep track of time, but it was impossible to do, especially during days like these, when she hadn't heard his footsteps in the kitchen overhead for what felt like weeks on end.

She couldn't remember the last time he'd brought her food. All she knew was that the supply she'd been hoarding was gone. She started to believe that she would starve to death, locked down here, cold and alone.

She tried to tell herself that that would be okay. It would be better than what he'd done to Number Four.

But then she heard it. Footsteps overhead.

His footsteps. She'd know them anywhere.

He was sliding something across the kitchen floor.

Someone.

She knew that he hadn't been shopping while he was gone all that time. She knew it wasn't a hundred pound bag of potatoes that he'd dragged in from his car.

There was little she could be certain of in her life—in this nightmare that her life had become. But that he hadn't come home alone was definite.

And sure enough, he opened the door and came partly down the stairs. The glow from the kitchen spilled into the basement, lighting him from behind, making it hard for her to see his face.

"I'm back, Number Five. Did you miss me?"

She couldn't remember what he looked like. And she'd never really seen his eyes. Not without the sunglasses he'd worn when she'd gotten into his car. Time was a blur, but she knew it had been months since he'd first locked her down here. Maybe even years.

She'd had a name once—Beth. But now she was a number. Number Five.

He called her that, called her his champion, too, in his flat Yankee accent, when he opened the door to bring her food. Sometimes he brought fresh water, so she wouldn't have to drink the brackish liquid that seeped up in a pool, in the corner of this prison.

God, how she hated him, how she feared him—yet how she looked forward to those dazzling moments of light.

This time, he threw something at her. She ducked, and it hit the wall before she realized what it was. A loaf of bread. A jar of peanut butter. She tore it open and ate it, as quickly as she could. Because she'd learned that everything he gave her, he could easily take away.

She would have liked to save it, because she never knew if the food and water he'd brought was all she'd get for God knows how long. If he'd gone right back up the stairs, she would have rationed it, both dreading and praying for his swift return.

Sometimes he left food well out of range of her chains, with no way for her to reach it. She'd sit in the darkness, smelling it. Starving.

Sometimes he took and emptied the bucket he'd given her for her waste. Sometimes he wouldn't bring it back downstairs again for days on end. Sometimes he did. Sometimes he threw it at her, covering her with her own filth if she didn't move quickly enough out of the way.

All the while calling her Number Five. "You've been a good girl, Number Five."

"You've been a bad girl, Number Five."

It didn't matter what she did. God knows she tried being good, doing what she thought he wanted, but it soon became clear that the very thing she was praised for on one day would invoke his wrath on the next.

It was an awful way to live.

Only one thing was certain.

After he'd been gone for so long, he'd tell her it was time to get cleaned up. He'd get out his hose and spray her with water that stung and bruised her, that left her soaked and colder than ever. He'd toss her the key that would unlock the chain around her ankle.

But before that, he'd say the words she dreaded hearing, words she could count on hearing, words he spoke to her now.

"I've brought you a new friend."

* * * *