

**STEPHEN
COONTS'**

**DEEP
BLACK:
BIOWAR**

**Written by Stephen Coonts
and Jim DeFelice**



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STEPHEN COONTS' DEEP BLACK: BIOWAR

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Authors' Note

The National Security Agency, Central Intelligence Agency, Space Agency, Federal Bureau of Investigation, National Security Council, Centers for Disease Control, U.S. Special Operations Command, Air Force, and Marines are, of course, real. While based on an actual organization affiliated with the NSA and CIA, Desk Three and all of the people associated with it in this book are fiction. The technology depicted here either exists or is being developed.

Some liberties have been taken in describing actual places and procedures to facilitate the telling of the tale.

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Athens, New York, was founded in the great rush of enthusiasm following the Revolutionary War, when Americans first came to understand that their destiny in the world involved more than religion and capitalism. Its inhabitants saw the experiment in freedom and democracy as a link with the great Greek and Roman republics, which had produced not merely riches or military might—though both were important—but intellectual and artistic achievements unparalleled in human history. The men and women who settled in upstate New York were as optimistic as any. If, like the majority of their countrymen, their lives tended more toward hardscrabble than polished marble, they nonetheless were aimed in the right direction.

This Dr. James Kegan firmly believed, and had told Charlie Dean often. It was why he had decided to relocate to the small town, buying and restoring a dilapidated Federal period house perched precariously on a cliff just off the main drag. He could see the Hudson River from his porch. He would sit there some nights and gaze at the glittering reflections in the distance, reminding himself of man's potential and nature's power—or so he told Charlie.

Dean tolerated his friend's starry-eyed philosophizing for two reasons. One, he'd known Kegan just about all his life and, even though they hardly saw each other more than once or twice a year, still counted him among his best friends.

Two, he figured Kegan meant pretty much everything he said, whether or not Dean understood it—and most of what the microbiologist said Dean didn't understand.

Kegan and Dean had grown up together in Missouri in the late 1950s and early '60s. While in many ways the two men could not be more different, their friendship had endured the many twists and turns of their convoluted and complicated lives. Kegan—more often “Keys,” a nickname earned during their first jayvee basketball practice a million years ago—was one person Dean felt he really knew. Their many differences somehow encouraged their friendship. Dean was relatively taciturn; Kegan was always talking and making friends. Dean had, if not a skeptical view of the world, at least a somewhat hardened one. Kegan remained an optimistic do-gooder, despite the fact that his early forays into altruism had ended badly.

Two years ago, Kegan had been diagnosed with cancer. But he'd come through it okay, survived the chemo with his optimism intact. He talked it about it matter-of-factly, didn't bullshit about it—he hit it straight-on, just like he played basketball. It was one of the things Dean liked about him.

Dean turned off Route 9W, driving his rented Malibu through the tiny downtown as he hunted for the crossroad that led to Kegan's. He missed it and had to turn around; as he waited for a bus to pass he saw an old phone booth and thought of calling his friend to make sure he was home. But the trip had begun as a surprise, and it seemed ridiculous to spoil it now, five minutes from his driveway. He made the U-turn and went back, cutting down toward the river and driving slowly so he could find the sharp cut that led to the house. The Malibu dipped and groaned as he took the switchbacks on the gravel lane.

Dean's attention was attracted to a large car carrier making its way upriver to Albany past a pack of Sunfish sailboats. He jerked his attention back on the driveway just before he would have sideswiped an eighty-year-old maple. He corrected and took the next switchback, avoiding the temptation to look down the rock gorge to his left. One more

turn and he reached the macadam that ran around the back of the house to the garage and barn. Dean pulled around the side of the barn, glad to see Kegan's Saab; he made sure as he parked to leave enough space for the afternoon of hoops he anticipated.

A wooden porch extended around three-fourths of the building. Dean jogged up the steps and rapped on the wooden portion of the large front door—the house did not have a bell and Kegan refused to add even a wireless one.

“Hey, Keys, it's Charlie!” he yelled before rapping again. “Surprise, Keys!”

Dean glanced at his watch. It was a little past 9.00 A.M.; Kegan was a notorious early riser. He rapped again. Kegan rarely locked his front door; there was less need to here than back home in Missouri, and there was little need to do so there. Sure enough, when Dean tried the handle, the door opened.

It was possible—just—that Kegan was upstairs bedding some nubile lab assistant. Dean hesitated on the threshold, caught between wanting to be discreet and sensing the inherent humor of just that sort of situation. In the end he settled for cracking the door open and calling in.

“Hey, anybody home?” Dean yelled. “Any verifiable biology genius scientists at home?”

Kegan didn't answer. Dean pushed the door open and took a few steps inside to the edge of the Persian rug—authentic though not an antique.

“Keys! Keys! Hey, it's Charlie! What, are you in bed?” He took a step toward the wide staircase, which began about halfway down the hallway. “Keys, get your butt out of bed! I'm going to make some coffee. Then I'm going to whip your ass in a game of b-ball. Happy birthday, by the way.”

Dean heard something move in the rooms to his left. He stepped back toward the large front parlor, his eyes glancing from the restored nineteenth-century claw-foot couch to the large brick fireplace with its early-twentieth-century spark catcher. The floor immediately before it was made of brick, arranged in an elaborate quadruple-fan pattern, and it was

this symmetry that made it easy to spot the leg lying on one corner of the bricks.

“Jesus.” Dean took a step toward the leg but stopped as the noise sounded again. He spun, heart pounding; in the same motion he reached to the back of his belt for the hide-away weapon his new employer had insisted he carry.

The tiny Glock felt like a toy in his hand. Dean took a step toward the kitchen at the rear of the hallway.

“Come out slowly with your hands where I can see them,” he said.

There was no reply.

Dean went to the doorway, flattening himself against the wall, listening. Slowly, he lowered himself into a crouch. Just as he started to spring he heard the sound again, but it was too late to stop himself; he twirled and pointed his gun into the kitchen, both hands steadying it, ready to fire.

His heart jolted as a cat jumped down from the counter island. The cat was as startled as Dean and bolted from the room.

Casper, a kitten Keys had picked up at the shelter about a month or two ago. He’d mentioned him in an E-mail.

Dean dropped to his knee, listening, waiting for what seemed like hours before convincing himself he and the cat were the only ones moving in the house. He rose and walked back to the parlor.

“Keys. Keys,” he repeated. “Is everything okay? Keys?”

A pool of blood extending out from the fireplace to the rug told him it wasn’t.