

NINE LIVES

From warzones to ganglands — violence, murder, and the creation of a man even hell turned its back on.

A Fictional Novel

by **Paul Smith**

DEDICATION

For every soldier who believed they were fighting for
freedom,
only to learn it was profit they were dying for.
For the ones who came home in silence.
For the ones who never came home at all.
And for those who took their own lives — to stop the
screams.

What they gave was real:
the courage, the sacrifice, the bone-deep loyalty.
What they were given in return was a lie.
History will honour their names,
even if their leaders never did.

This book is for the fallen — the pawns, the ghosts,
the good people used by bad leaders.
And for the girl who pulled me from the wreckage,
and reminded me what was worth fighting for.

Paul Smith

Author

DISCLAIMER

This book is a work of fiction.

All characters, organisations, incidents, dialogue, and settings depicted in this book are fictitious.

Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or real events is **purely coincidental or the result of deliberate fictionalisation for narrative purposes.**

While elements may be inspired by **themes** of conflict, trauma, or military service, this story is **not based on any real individuals, operations, or crimes.**

No part of this book should be interpreted as factual, autobiographical, or representative of real-world events.

Government agencies, military units, and paramilitary groups referenced herein are used fictitiously — in the tradition of speculative fiction, political thrillers, and action-drama.

This book contains strong language, graphic violence, and fictional depictions of criminal acts.

It is intended for mature audiences and **is not suitable for individuals under the age of 18.**

For legal and security reasons — including **obligations under the Official Secrets Act** — the author affirms that all content must be read strictly as fiction.

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PROLOGUE

I don't dream much anymore.

Not since the faces started fading — the blood, the screams, the lives I took.

For years they haunted me. Now they just sit — quiet — like they've unpacked their bags and moved in for good.

They taught me how to lie without speaking.

How to move through a room without casting a shadow.

How to kill with my bare hands, with silence, with the weight of my stare. I got good at it. Too good.

I should've died nine times — fires, bombs, bullets, myself — but I didn't. That doesn't make me hard. Or lucky.

It just means I lived long enough to rot from the inside out.

I was a soldier. A mercenary. A ghost hiding in plain sight. I saw things no boy should see. Did things no man should do. I stopped counting the bodies because it didn't matter. They were gone. I wasn't.

This book isn't about glory.

It's about ghosts — the kind that don't haunt houses. They haunt heads. It's about what moves in when the war ends but the noise doesn't.

About the damage men carry when the killing stops, and the silence starts to speak.

Because in the end, the only thing harder than killing a man...

is not caring that you did.

1

YOU NEVER FORGET YOUR FIRST

I was twenty — still wet behind the ears, barely old enough to vote. Yet there I was: sat in a freezing flat in Belfast, holding an envelope that marked the line between who I'd been, and who I was about to become.

The heater clicked uselessly in the corner, coughing out lukewarm air while a cold draught slipped through the rattling window frames. My fingers trembled. Not from fear, not exactly, but from the quiet throb of adrenaline building beneath my skin.

Mike, my FRU handler, stood by the door — arms folded, face unreadable.

He wasn't there to offer reassurance; he watched, silent, sizing me up like a man checking a tool before putting it to work.

'This is what you're here for.'

He sat beside Carl as I opened the envelope and laid the contents on the table — a table stained with ash and tea from jobs gone by. I spread the photographs, surveillance notes, routes, and routines in front of me.

And there he was. My first target.

Who was he? Didn't matter. All I needed to know was he was a fucking scumbag, and if we didn't finish the job, more innocent women and children would die.

Our work wasn't about punishment or justice. It was about prevention. Quietly. Permanently. We only got called in when the system had already failed. If the Specials, the RUC, or the military could've taken him down, they would have.

But this one — he was unobtainable. A key player in a very active IRA cell. And he wasn't planning something small. This was headline violence — an imminent attack on innocent people in the heart of Belfast. Apart from causing more death and destruction in the region, it posed a significant threat to the already fragile peace process.

The FRU didn't exist on paper, so any evidence obtained by them was inadmissible. Worse still, as a very active IRA terrorist, an incited sectarian killing would create even more chaos for the peace agreement — so that wasn't an option.

This scumbag walked the streets with his head held high, taunting the RUC and the British Army to the point of unprecedented blatancy. Untouchable. And very dangerous.

There was only one way to deal with this kind of problem: unleash a highly trained lone wolf — a ghost in

the shadows, bound by no laws, no rules, no conscience, to erase the problem without a trace.

Carl looked it over, eyes sharp despite his laid-back posture. Mike, still stone-faced, skimmed the pages like he was checking a shopping list, not signing off on a kill.

It wasn't going to be an easy first job, but my oppos had been around the block, so I was confident a plan would soon be in place.

We had plenty of detail in the envelope, and the FRU had already bugged the bedroom, toilet, living room, and garden of his house. They'd also set up an OP in a derelict terrace across the street. That kind of coverage meant one thing: this was sanctioned from the highest level. We were just the sharp end.

We moved into the OP for three days and took turns watching him live his joyless little life. He was angry, paranoid, and confidently routine — which made him vulnerable.

Clearly unhappily married, with two gobshite teenagers at home — a midnight visit was out of the question.

But intelligence had identified that he liked a drink. Twice a week, like clockwork, he visited the same smoke-stained pub a mile from his house. Four hours, five pints of bitter, and two whisky chasers. Then he staggered home. Alone. And like most creatures of habit, always the same route — across an old, dimly lit river flyover. *Perfect.*

The flyover would be the stage: a tragic, drunken stumble into a swollen river. But we knew it wouldn't be that easy. This guy was highly trained. Even drunk, he could survive the fall — fight his way to the surface.

So someone would need to make sure he didn't come back up.

Guess who pulled that straw? Typical. New lad gets to take a swim. Can't say I was surprised.

To do it cleanly, I'd strap twenty kilos of weights to my back and thighs — enough to drag us both under, fast. I'd also take a compact oxygen tank — enough air to hold him down through the struggle and make the underwater withdrawal to the RV.

The irony didn't escape me. A few months earlier, I'd been sitting in a jail cell thinking my life was over. Now I was preparing to drown a man in a river. Funny what life turns you into when you stop asking questions.

With the job firmly planned, we waited for his next venture out to the pub.

Two nights later — green light. He was on the move.

We parked two streets away from the pub. Engine off. Condensation creeping up the windows.

Outside, Belfast was soaked in a thin, steady drizzle — the kind of night that hides everything.

Sat geared up in the back seat, oxygen tank secure, weights tight, compass bezel set for my underwater heading, it felt like my heart was trying to escape my chest.

Mike sat in the driver's seat. Carl watched the rear-view. No one spoke; we knew what was about to happen.

At 23:30, the target emerged — alone, slurring, lighting a cigarette with hands that barely worked; head down, collar turned up.

We tailed him slowly, tyres whispering across the wet tarmac. No one else around. He turned onto the bridge. The flyover was as expected — half-lit, one flickering lamp at the far end. River below, black and quiet, just a faint roar from the current. The street was empty, and the drizzle deflected the light from the pavement. It was like we'd planned the weather conditions. They were perfect cover for the job.

Mike drove past the target and pulled the car into a lay-by halfway across the bridge, then killed the engine. The hum of the road vanished, replaced by the low hiss of rain on metal.

We sat in silence, hidden behind steamed-up windows, blacked out like the kit we were wearing.

Silent shadows in a steel box.

The target staggered past, oblivious. His boots slapped the tarmac, too merry to notice the eyes watching him from six feet away.