

LOCKED & LOADED

RICHARD MARCINKO IS AN EX-NAVY SEAL WHO HAS GONE FROM JAIL TO FAME AND FORTUNE AS THE AUTHOR AND HERO OF A STRING OF NOVELS THAT ENTWINE FACT AND FICTION

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``Since I'm a Navy fella, let's examine the personality type who becomes a SEAL. He must tolerate pain and discomfort well. He must become part of a team but know how to think for himself. He must be willing to look an enemy in the face and pull the trigger without hesitation - whether that enemy be man, woman or child. Yes, child . . . Does that shock you? Well, let me remind you that SEALS were created . . . as killers first and foremost."

- Richard Marcinko, ``Rogue Warrior: Seal Force Alpha"

The Rogue Warrior is a hugger.

Who would have thought that Richard Marcinko - ex-SEAL, counter-terrorism expert and best-selling Rambo's-a-wimp author - would feel, well, cuddly.

He gives the proffered hand a look of disdain and says, ``I don't do that stuff." Then he engulfs the target in a giant squeeze.

``Did you eat on the way up?"

Yes.

``What did you have?"

Um . . . orange juice.

``That's not enough."

And Marcinko, standing in front of his condo, flings open the passenger door of a used car - a Black Pearl Mercedes 560 SL, half of a pair he bought from the husband of actress Jennifer Jones.

Soothing string music ripples from the radio. The sheepskin seats are cozy. Marcinko edges in behind the wheel - these cars are small - and we're off on a mission through Olde Towne Alexandria.

We ``Red Cell" the Port Royal Restaurant before the waitresses even know their most famous customer is in town.

Red Cell means to sneak undetected into important, secure places and do spy stuff. Marcinko, in his past life as a Navy SEAL, was ordered to create Red Cell - three officers and 11 enlisted sailors - to test Navy vulnerability.

In 1985, they Red Celled the Norfolk headquarters of the 2nd Fleet and the Atlantic Fleet with bombs, booby traps and smoke grenades. They raided sub pens, Air Force One and the European home of an admiral. Marcinko kidnapped the admiral. Twice.

Shortly thereafter, Marcinko was called ``an embarrassment" to the service, and a round of legal action began. Marcinko calls it a witch hunt. He spent 15 months in federal prison on a conspiracy charge.

We take the Port Royal Restaurant without incident. Sit anywhere, the counter girl says.

"I don't smoke," Marcinko says, so we eschew that side of the building. He OKs a window booth well removed from everyone else. A quiet place where we can talk, he calls it, and strolls to it looking like any other tourist wearing a plaid long-sleeved shirt, shorts, sandals and a waist-length ponytail.

Marcinko orders a ham, cheese and egg sandwich with coffee. Black. It comes in a white cup too small for his hand. He drinks it.

"I don't do anything easy," he is saying.

The sixth book in Marcinko's best-selling Rogue Warrior series - "SEAL Force Alpha" - has just been released in hardback. The fifth book, "Designation Gold," has just been released in paperback.

Marcinko is spending a few days at home in Northern Virginia in the midst of a book-signing tour. He'll return to his former hometown of Virginia Beach on Saturday to appear at WaldenBooks in Lynnhaven Mall at 1 p.m.

"Alpha" features Marcinko as the hero, as do all the Rogue Warrior books. This time, he's on a mission to "scuttle a Chinese freighter's cargo of nuclear hardware and its crack crew of naval commandos" (his publicist's words). Along the way he finds (A) a traitor in the White House; (B) an incompetent, vindictive admiral; and (C) combat that is frequently described in sexual terms. Business as usual for the Rogue Warrior.

Marcinko, savvy businessman that he is, owns that trademark. He is the Rogue Warrior. That's his picture on the cover of every novel. Marketing wanted to put something else on the cover of "Alpha." Marcinko differed. And, as he does in every one of his books, he won.

In real life, that wasn't always the case. Before the books, there was Marcinko the Navy commando, leader of the secret counter-terrorist SEAL Team 6, based at Dam Neck. He won a Silver Star and numerous other decorations, retiring from the Navy as a commander.

But he also faced a \$60 million Navy investigation, which resulted in no charges, and then a federal court convicted him of conspiracy to defraud in a case involving alleged overcharges of \$118,000 for grenades.

Marcinko has said he was railroaded for making "the bean counters and paper pushers who run the Navy" look bad. When he came out of prison, he teamed with author John Weisman and wrote "Rogue Warrior," his autobiography. It not only confirmed some of the local rumors about the rowdy boys of SEAL Team 6 but also catapulted Marcinko to fame and success.

The waitress comes by. Marcinko treats her like an old friend. For some reason, she isn't playing.

That's odd. Women love Marcinko. And that's odd, too, because in the earlier books, the SEALs spend a lot of time chasing . . . er, "kitty cat."

Now, women are among his most ardent fans. Because he listens - intently - to what his fans want, the new book, "Alpha," includes two female operatives.

"There is no sex with them," Marcinko says. "They're true operatives to demonstrate how women get places I can't go and how to defeat a good ol' boy

network."

The books weren't even marketed to women at first, he says, and adds his favorite refrain: "Who'da thunk it?"

On "Alpha's" page 165, the Rogue Warrior chastely shakes hands with a woman. She's wearing her hair in a bun - as, probably, do lots of his fans. Many of them are in their 70s and 80s, he notes.

"They'll call and say, 'You're a son of a bitch, Mr. Marcinko, but you're a good son of a bitch,'" he mimicks in a high-pitched voice. "Or, 'That's mighty rough language, but I read two chapters of Billy Graham afterward.' It probably brings back memories to them of how men used to talk, and John Wayne's dead."

The man across the blue-checked tablecloth looks like his book covers. He has the black, ferocious eyebrows, the intent stare, the skinned-back hair into the flowing ponytail. All he lacks in person is the handgun featured on so many dust jackets.

But his conversation takes you by surprise. You expect the Rogue Warrior to be virtually unquotable. The books are.

Take a sample passage. In place of the expletives, we'll substitute the words . . . oh, let's see . . . "sweetie pie."

Page 111 of "Alpha": "*Merci, trouduc,*" *I grunted gratefully, calling them sweetie pies-for-brains, which as you know by now is a term of endearment in Frog Frogspeak. 'But if that's the case, why the sweetie pie are we still standing here with our fingers up our sweetie pies? Sweetie pie, even though I'd been working nonstop on the flight I knew there was still a sweetie pie to do before I'd be locked, loaded and ready to see the Chairman.'*"

In person, Marcinko speaks whole sentences - lots of them - without using a single obscenity.

Who'da thunk it?

The real Rogue Manor is in the woods of Fauquier County, 63 miles from the Alexandria condo where he holds "briefings" about his books and his motivational training company and his security service for governments and corporations around the world.

The welcome sign says, "Trespassers will be shot. Survivors shot again."

He has a stocked pond, although he doesn't fish, but he swims in it and splits wood for four fireplaces and a wood-burning boiler. He has a private shooting range out there and he likes to tool around in his flying parachute: a metal frame with four wheels, a propeller on the back and a big parachute on top. It's good for three hours of flying and 10,000 feet of altitude.

"You can't be dull all the time," Marcinko points out. "You gotta do something."

He has two daughters - one about to start college, one an aspiring actress - and a wife at home. His ex-wife, two grown children and three grandchildren live in Hampton Roads. His World Wide Web site (www.simonsays.com/rogue/main.html) features pictures of him with his grandchildren and goddaughter.

And Marcinko is braver than even his fans suspect: at nearly 58 years old, he has just adopted a newborn boy.

“Imagine that poor little kid’s first PTA meeting,” Marcinko says, putting on a kid’s voice: “Is that your grandpappy or what?” He changes to the quaver of a toothless old codger: “You mess with my boy, I’ll whup ya.”

The Rogue Grandpappy says he doesn’t sleep much at night, which is just as well with a newborn in the house. Says he averages 4 1/2 hours of sleep a night, and he’s prone to getting up at odd hours to jot down an idea for his next book.

He writes on a computer, and his laptop has three entry codes and a diffused screen so the passenger in the next seat can’t see what he’s writing.

He has a contract with Pocket Books for a novel a year until 2001, plus his nonfiction business books, plus his book about the real SEALs who are fictionalized in the Rogue Warrior books.

He travels about 200 days a year, signing books in about 80 cities and giving motivational speeches to companies such as General Motors and Motorola. He’s working on a Rogue Warrior movie and negotiating with Sierra for CD-ROM games.

“Who’d’a thunk prison would do all that?” Marcinko asks. “Gave me a career.”

From among his eight vehicles, he chooses to drive a Chrysler LHS to New York for meetings, but he has a four-wheel-drive pickup with attached snowblade for his little manor in the big woods.

“We live past the end of state maintenance,” he says. “Two years ago, I started plowing on a Saturday and didn’t get to the highway until Tuesday.”

Why plow your way to civilization when you live out there to avoid it?

Marcinko looks surprised. “Because the morning paper doesn’t get delivered out there,” he says.

Marcinko’s next business venture is under construction: a 99-acre training center in Freedom, Ind., with business seminars, shooting ranges and play space. It will have, he says, separate ranges for families and law enforcement officers, an obstacle course, paintball for what he calls the teenyboppers and wannabes (defined in his new book’s glossary as the sort of folks you meet at Soldier of Fortune conventions), plus multiday business seminars on team building and management.

That’s really what the Rogue Warrior books are all about, he says. How to build a cohesive team. How to lead it. How to win.

“The theme always comes back to management vs. leadership,” he says.

The formula attracts college-age fans who like the go-for-the-throat competition, he says, and younger teens who like the action. It attracts military men and in-their-dreams military men and women of all sizes and ages.

“It’s marginally close to cult,” Marcinko says, noting that his book-signing sessions are mini-reunions for fans who come again and again. One woman in California, he says, highlights certain Rogue Warrior sections for use in her Bible studies.

“Never thunk it,” he says. “But that is definitely an extreme application of it.”

The training center will have courses just for women, on motivation and team

building ``and basically how to be a better bitch," Marcinko says. ``That will include anti-rape techniques and networking. Women don't have the good ol' boy network the guys do. And when somebody gets close to challenging, the bitch comes out and they eat their own."

``I don't know," he says reflectively, ``if I'll ever solve that one."

The Navy, he says, won't let him autograph books on its bases, but he still has a fondness for the SEALs. In fact, he employs some ex-SEALs in his other businesses, which include SOS Temps Inc., a private security consulting firm - which, according to the web site, claims among its clients the Detroit Metropolitan Airport and the U.S. Army War College - and Richard Marcinko Inc., a motivational training and team-building company. His various jobs take him, he says, to Africa, China and places in between.

As an example, he says he is on the board of advisers for a fuel-processing firm. ``I am there to get things done, to cut through the (expletive), and my company would provide security to the container that does the processing," he says. ``All of these outside things end up as research for more books. It keeps some ex-SEALs and operatives working with me, for me and around me."

Marcinko concludes the conversation with the same surprisingly peaceful tone that ``Alpha" takes at the end.

Page 322: *``By the time we'd lost sight of land, the breeze picked up and the seas became following. On the eastern horizon, the first glimmer of dawn started to rise out of the sea - a hint of vibrant color painting the dark sky. I let my head loll back onto the gunwale, and felt the water's motion; allowed myself to respond to its incredible strength and power. I felt a sailor's sense of absolute belonging. What is perfection, you ask? Perfection is being here - on the ocean, out of sight of land - with my Warriors. But it was also time to move on. To go home."*

Indeed. The baby is waiting.

Outside the restaurant, Marcinko looks over his shoulder for traffic before steering the Mercedes away from the curb. He stops at the stop sign. Lets another driver go first. Obeys the speed limit.

Drive carefully, he says. You shouldn't have any traffic at this time of day. We part professionally, and I almost offer my hand.

In an instant, he sees the arm tense, looks me in the face and reacts with a killer's lightning reflexes.

He kisses my cheek. What a rogue.