



Code of Conduct: A Thriller (Scot Harvath Book 14)

By Brad Thor

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“Thor tops himself again and again.” —BookReporter.com

“Feels like the TV show *24* on the page.” —The Associated Press

#1 *New York Times* bestselling author Brad Thor presents his greatest thriller ever—an action-packed literary tour de force!

Hidden deep within one of the world’s most powerful organizations is a secret committee with a devastating agenda. Its members are afforded incredible protections—considered elites, untouchables.

But when four seconds of video is captured halfway around the world and anonymously transmitted to D.C., covert wheels are set in motion, and counterterrorism operative Scot Harvath is tapped to undertake the deadliest assignment of his career.

What begins as a favor will evolve into a globe-spanning drama of highly personal stakes played out against a backdrop of stunning international intrigue, duplicitous political gamesmanship, and the darkest, most clandestine fears of the espionage world.

With razor-sharp plotting, richly rendered characters, and heart-stopping surprises on every page, Thor isn’t just at the top of his game—he owns the *entire* genre.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Brad Thor puts the 'thrill' in thriller." (Dan Gainor, Media Research Center)

"Brad Thor has a knack for writing tense thrillers with complex and disturbing political underpinnings. If you like political thrillers...or shows such as *24*...you should definitely check out this series." (4LN--Four Letter Nerd)

"Hemorrhagic fever. Israeli spies. African revolutionaries. Secret organizations. Special ops...Mix these enticing ingredients together,...cook on high, and the outcome is a summer thriller worthy of the genre." (Chapter 16 Magazine)

"Counterterrorism operative Scot Harvath dives deep into another world-shattering plot with personal ramifications in *Code of Conduct*....Thor tackles the fear of terrorism and makes it both a scary and an exciting read." (Associated Press)

A great summer read!
(Jerry Doyle)

"[Brad Thor] and Harvath are the real deal, and you should accept no substitutes." (BookReporter.com)

"For those missing Jack Bauer and his 24 exploits, Harvath provides a page-turning alternative with a no-matter-what determination and 'Heck yeah, America!' patriotic machismo." (USA Today)

"Rockin' from cover to cover." (Charlie Daniels)

"One of the best writers you are ever going to read." (WROK)

"Thor's most ambitious, prescient and wondrously realized book yet reads like the best of James Bond sprinkled with just enough of a Vince Flynn's Mitch Rapp-like edge...a thinking man's thriller quilted in an action-adventure fabric that's Thor at his very best." (Providence Journal)

"The Master of thrillers" —Bookreporter.com

"Brad Thor continues to write like nobody else writes...Ain't nothing else like it!" (KCBQ)

"Fun to read." (WCBS)

"A prescient thriller by a writer with a knack for pointing the looking glass forward at what's about to come...I predict *Code of Conduct* will be one of the best hardcore thrillers of the year." (Providence Journal)

"In *Code of Conduct*, he has pushed the boundaries beyond what we have come to expect of a Brad Thor novel." (Bookreporter.com)

About the Author

Brad Thor is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Foreign Agent*, *Code of Conduct*, *Act of War*, *Hidden Order*, *Black List*, *Full Black* (one of *Suspense Magazine*'s best political thrillers of 2011), *The Athena Project*, *Foreign Influence* (one of *Suspense Magazine*'s best political thrillers of 2010), *The Apostle*, *The Last Patriot* (nominated best thriller of the year by the International Thriller Writers Association), *The First Commandment*, *Takedown*, *Blowback* (recognized as one of the "Top 100 Killer Thrillers of All Time" by NPR), *State of the Union*, *Path of the Assassin*, and *The Lions of Lucerne*. Visit his website at BradThor.com.

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Code of Conduct

CHAPTER 1

ITURI PROVINCE
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO
ONE WEEK EARLIER

The heavy truck rolled through the early morning darkness. Mist clung to the damp jungle road.

Scot Harvath pulled out his phone and watched the video again. How many times had he seen it now? A hundred? Two hundred?

It was shaky and parts were out of focus. A team in biohazard suits could be seen going into a small medical clinic. Moments later, there were muzzle flashes and gunfire. Then nothing.

The footage had been emailed to CARE International, the U.S.-based charitable organization that had helped establish the clinic. The video quickly made its way to CARE's founder, businessman cum philanthropist, Ben Beaman.

Over the next several hours, Beaman tried to contact the Matumaini Clinic in eastern Congo. No one replied. Finally, he hit the panic button and reached out to the most senior person he knew at the State Department. But with no Americans at the clinic at the time, there was little the State Department could do. It was "outside their mission," as his contact informed him. The man offered to make some calls on his behalf, but told Beaman not to get his hopes up.

Beaman saw CARE as a family. An attack on one of them was an attack on all of them. He made no distinction whether the person was from Kinshasa or Kansas City. If the State Department wouldn't help, he'd have to look elsewhere.

But where? Even if he knew someone there, the FBI and CIA were just as likely to say no. Some tiny African clinic in the middle of nowhere was outside everyone's "mission." But there had to be someone who could help him.

Which had gotten him thinking.

When one of his doctors had been kidnapped from the CARE hospital in Afghanistan, a particularly resourceful man had been hired to fly over and get her back. That was the kind of help he needed.

It took Beaman several phone calls to track Scot Harvath down. He was working for a private intelligence

company that didn't advertise. They didn't need to.

The majority of the Carlton Group's work had previously been via black contracts through the Department of Defense. Now, though, they were finding themselves repeatedly tasked on covert operations by the White House and the Central Intelligence Agency.

There had been a rough patch when the Carlton Group had no choice but to take anything that came their way, but that was in the past. They seldom took private assignments anymore. When they did, there had to be a compelling reason.

Similar to Doctors Without Borders, CARE went where few dared and even fewer wanted to go. From Mumbai to Mogadishu, they had set up shop in some of the worst poverty-stricken backwaters of the third world.

While there, CARE's western volunteers not only treated locals but helped local medical personnel improve their skills. They were good people who did good things for those in desperate need. The organization was also one that was no stranger to violence.

Over the years, their facilities and personnel had experienced a handful of attacks. They took security seriously, but there was only so much they could afford to do. They wanted to use as much of their money as possible helping people. That was their mission.

They had been planning to open two more clinics in Congo, but Beaman had put a temporary stop to those. Until they knew what had happened at the Matumaini Clinic, they weren't moving on anything.

While the U.S. Government didn't like to use NGOs for covert operations, the Carlton Group's founder had a different view. He had a couple of relationships already, but nothing like CARE. Getting them into his back pocket could be invaluable.

Even better, Beaman had offered to pay the Carlton Group a significant premium. It was a dangerous assignment and Beaman appreciated the risks. He only had one stipulation. He wanted Scot Harvath leading the operation.

Right out of the gate, they had a problem. Technically, Harvath wasn't available.

He had been working at a furious tempo and had just come off of a hellacious operation in Syria. Everything at home had been put on hold, and that included his relationship.

She lived in Boston and Harvath lived outside D.C., near Alexandria. The distance made things difficult enough. What was making it almost impossible, though, was how many times Harvath had rescheduled with her or had left the country entirely without giving her any notice at all. She had asked him to put one week on the books, then set it in stone, wrap it in bulletproof Kevlar, and bury it under fifty feet of concrete.

Harvath picked one, went to Carlton, and had him sprinkle holy water on the dates. The deal was done.

They would take in New England's fall colors. She pulled strings at work to have the same week off. She rented the perfect cottage on the water and convinced the Realtor to take delivery of two cases of their favorite wine. It would be a great surprise.

They would stop at her favorite general store on the way and stock up on supplies. Once they arrived at the cottage, the wine would be there and they wouldn't have to leave for anything. The master bedroom had enormous windows and they could watch the colors peak from there. It was exactly what they needed.

When Reed Carlton, or the "Old Man" as Harvath referred to him, called, he got right to the point. "You've got a meeting in the office tomorrow morning. Be here by seven-thirty. Wear a suit."

Obviously, somebody important was coming in, but Carlton hadn't offered up any details. Typical. The old spymaster never revealed more than he wanted anyone to know.

Harvath didn't mind. He was used to it by now. He was also already half checked out, looking forward to a week away up in New England.

The next morning, the five-foot-ten Harvath showed up at the Carlton Group's offices in Reston, Virginia, coffee in hand, wearing a coal gray Ralph Lauren suit, white shirt, and a dark blue tie. With only cardio for his workouts overseas, he had dropped about ten pounds from his already fit frame.

His blue eyes stood out against his tan skin, and his sandy brown hair appeared lighter. In the mirror that morning, he had looked more like a beach-going Southern California college student, than a U.S. Navy SEAL turned covert counterterrorism operative.

The Old Man was already in the conference room with their guest. Harvath stepped in and was introduced to Ben Beaman, the Director of CARE International.

After Harvath asked how the doctor he had rescued in Afghanistan was doing, Carlton invited everyone to take their seats and then steered the conversation to the matter at hand.

Beaman had brought his laptop and ran both men through a quick PowerPoint about the Matumaini Clinic. The slides included pictures of the facility, its staff, and the people they served, mostly families with children.

The clinic's name came from the Swahili word for hope. It was deep in the jungle near the border with Uganda—the only medical facility for over two hundred kilometers. It boasted fifteen beds, an exam room that doubled as a laboratory, and a small dispensary.

Beaman's final slide contained the video of the attack. He pushed the play button and the three men watched.

When it was over, Beaman closed his laptop and sat back in his chair. "That's all we know," he had said.

The Old Man activated a flat screen beyond the conference table. On it, he explained, was recent satellite footage he had acquired.

When he clicked a small wireless device, the image was magnified, coming to rest on a small clearing that had been hacked out of the dense jungle. In the center was Beaman's clinic.

There was no sign of anyone anywhere near it.

Carlton held up his index finger as if to say, "There's something else," and then drew their attention back to the screen.

Manipulating the wireless device, he refocused the image, northwest of the clinic. There, they could see what looked like a long, scorched trench at the base of a hill. Tendrils of black smoke curled into the air from it.

“Any idea what that is?” the Old Man asked.

Beaman shook his head.

“Looks like a burn pit,” Harvath replied. “A big one.”

Carlton nodded. “I agree. Any thoughts on what they were burning?”

“I don’t think it was trash.”

Beaman looked from one man to the other, and the volume of his voice dropped. “Do you think they were burning bodies?”

The Old Man switched off the satellite footage. “It could be anything.”

“But what if it is bodies?” he replied. “What if those are women and children? Our staff and patients?” He shifted his gaze to Harvath and asked, “If it’s not trash, what is it?”

Harvath had been to more war-ravaged areas than he cared to remember. He had seen things beyond horrible. The worth of a culture, in his opinion, could be boiled down to one thing—how well that culture took care of its weakest members, particularly its women and children.

The satellite image of the burn pit brought back a flood of memories, none of them pleasant, none of them things he wanted to remember. Something about it, though, was odd. He tried to put his finger on it and when he couldn’t, he relegated it to the back of his mind.

“Mr. Carlton is right,” Harvath conceded. “It could be anything.”

For a moment, Beaman didn’t know how to respond. “But we all agree, it probably wasn’t trash.”

Harvath looked to the Old Man, then back at Beaman, and nodded.

An uncomfortable silence fell over the conference room. Finally, Beaman broke it. “Mr. Harvath, I want to find out what happened. Scratch that,” he said, correcting himself. “I have to find out what happened. I owe it to those people, to all of my people. If this had happened to a team you were responsible for, I don’t doubt that you’d feel the same way.”

Harvath began to understand where this was headed. Beaman wanted him to lead the operation.

If their places were reversed, of course Harvath would want to know what had happened to his team. But this wasn’t about a team of his. This was about Beaman’s people, and there was a lot more to this story. It wasn’t as simple as flying over and figuring out what had happened.

Congo was the world’s deadliest conflict zone. Five and a half million dead in less than twenty years. Invasions from neighboring countries, wars, political instability—it was like a match factory, if match factories also stored buckets of gasoline and hung lit sparklers from the ceiling. Calling it unstable was too

generous by half.

The danger and instability of the region were just two of the many problems Harvath saw with this situation. There was also a host of unanswered questions. No one even knew who had sent the video to CARE and worse still, no one could explain why the gunmen entering the clinic had been wearing biohazard suits.

According to Beaman, Matumaini was a small family medicine clinic. They didn't treat highly communicable illnesses. They didn't have the capacity. The furthest they went was performing minor surgeries. If something exotic or unusual walked in their door, they knew to call for help.

But as far as Beaman, or anyone at CARE knew, no such call had gone out.

Harvath didn't like it any of it. He hated loose ends. There were too many things stacked one upon another that didn't make sense.

Beaman was also running out of time. The longer it took to get a team over to Congo, the colder the trail would become. If something wasn't done soon, they might never know what happened and who was responsible.

Once again, a rush of unpleasant images moved across the screen of his mind's eye. The scenes of families were the hardest to stomach. He had witnessed what monsters could do. He knew what monsters continued to do when not stopped. In this case, the monsters embodied an amplified evil. They had preyed not only on the sick and infirm, but also upon those who had helped to care for them.

His mind then drifted to his trip to New England, but only as an afterthought. He had already decided what he was going to do. What he told himself he had to do. The Carlton Group didn't have anyone else who could take on this kind of assignment with so little advance warning.

If he didn't agree to take charge, it wouldn't get done. The State Department had passed, and Beaman was right, the FBI and CIA weren't going to help him either. Harvath was CARE's only hope.

It would be an absolute ballbuster of an assignment, and he would have to figure out a lot of it on the fly, but he knew he could do it. Just like he knew he could convince Lara that he had no choice but to postpone their trip to New England. He would find leaves for her someplace else, someplace even better. It would all work out.

And with his decision made, he had jumped in with both feet. Logistics, equipment, funds, support . . . it was chaos, but he relished the challenge because chaos was the arena in which he excelled. The Old Man had left him with one final directive. "Get in and get the hell out as fast as you can."

Within twenty-four hours, he was on the ground in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Twelve hours later, he had assembled his team and they were on their way north to the Matumaini Clinic.

Exiting out of the video player, he took another look at his text message screen before returning the phone to his pocket and powering down the tiny Iridium cube he used to access the satellite network. He had texted Lara when he had touched down to let her know that he had arrived safely. She had not responded and Harvath tried to put it out of his mind. He needed to get his head in the game.

If everything went according to plan, they would be in and out. At least that's what he had told himself. He

had also told himself that he'd be able to sway Lara about cancelling, or as he had put it, rescheduling their trip. That had not gone over well with her at all.

But Scot Harvath had a bad habit of telling himself things he knew weren't true.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Asia Haynes:

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Paul Williams:

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Preston Garza:

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