



Hell Island (Shane Schofield Book 4)

By Matthew Reilly

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Captain Shane Schofield and his elite team of marines is about to discover . . .

There is no hell like a man-made one.

It is an island that doesn't appear on any maps. A secret location where the government conducts classified experiments. Experiments that have gone terribly wrong. . . . When all contact with the mysterious island is suddenly and inexplicably lost, Captain Shane Schofield and four crack Special Forces units parachute in. Nothing prepares them for what they find—the island is a testing ground for a deadly breed of genetically enhanced supersoldiers. You could say they've just entered hell, but this place is much, much worse. . . .

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AIRSPACE OVER THE PACIFIC OCEAN

1500 HOURS, 1 AUGUST

The vicious-looking airCRaft shot aCRoss the sky at near supersonic speed.

It was a modified Hercules cargo plane, known as an MC-130 “Combat Talon,” the delivery vehicle of choice for U.S. Special Forces units.

This Combat Talon stayed high, very high, it was as if it was trying to avoid being seen by radar systems down at sea level. This was unusual, because there was nothing down there—according to the maps, the nearest land in this part of the Pacific was an atoll 500 clicks to the east.

Then the rear loading ramp of the Combat Talon rumbled open and several dozen tiny figures issued out from it in rapid sequence, spreading out into the sky behind the soaring plane.

The forty-strong flock of paratroopers plummeted to earth, men in high-altitude jumpsuits—full-face breathing masks; streamlined black bodysuits. They angled their bodies downward as they fell, so that they flew head-first, their masks pointed into the onrushing wind, becoming human spears, freefalling with serious intent.

It was a classic HALO drop—high-altitude, low-opening. You jumped from 37,000 feet, fell fast and hard, and then stopped dangerously close to the ground, right at your drop zone.

Curiously, however, the forty elite troops falling to earth today fell in identifiable subgroups, ten men to a group, as if they were trying to remain somehow separate.

Indeed, they were separate teams.

CRack teams. The best of the best from every corner of the U.S. armed forces.

One unit from the 82nd Airborne Division.

One SEAL team.

One Delta team, ever aloof and seCRetive.

And last of all, one team of Force Reconnaissance Marines.

They shot into the cloud layer—a dense band of dark thunderclouds—freefell through the haze.

Then after nearly a full minute of flying, they burst out of the clouds and emerged in the midst of a full-scale five-alarm ocean storm: rain lashed their facemasks; dark clouds hung low over the heaving ocean; giant waves rolled and CRashed.

And through the rain, their target came into view, a tiny island far below them, an island that did not appear on maps anymore, an island with an airCRaft carrier parked alongside it.

Hell.

Leading the Marine team was Captain Shane M. Schofield, call-sign “ScareCRow.”

Behind his HALO mask, Schofield had a rugged CREased face, black hair and blue eyes. Slicing down

Across those eyes, however, were a pair of hideous vertical scars, one for each eye, wounds from a mission-gone-wrong and the source of his operational nickname. Once on the ground, he'd hide those eyes behind a pair of reflective wraparound anti-flash glasses.

Quiet, intense and when necessary deadly, Schofield had a unique reputation in the Marine Corps. He'd been involved in several missions that remained classified—but the Marine Corps (like any group of human beings) is filled with gossip and rumor. Someone always knew someone who was there, or who saw the medical report, or who cleaned up the aftermath.

The rumors about Schofield were many and varied, and sometimes simply too outrageous to be true.

One: he had been involved in a gigantic multforce battle in Antarctica, a battle which, it was said, involved a bloody and brutal confrontation with two of America's allies, France and Britain.

Two: he'd saved the President during an attempted military coup at a remote USAF base. It was said that during that misadventure, the Scarecrow—a former pilot—had flown an experimental space shuttle into low earth orbit, engaged an enemy shuttle, destroyed it, and then come *back* to earth to rescue the President.

Of course none of this could possibly be verified, and so it remained the stuff of legend; legends, however, that Schofield's new unit were acutely aware of.

That said, there was one thing about Shane Schofield that they knew to be true: this was his first mission back after a long layover, four months of stress leave, in fact. On this occasion someone really *had* seen the medical report, and now all of his men on this mission knew about it.

They also knew the cause of his stress leave.

During his last mission out, Schofield had been taken to the very edge of his psychological endurance. Loved ones close to him had been captured . . . and executed. It was even said in hushed whispers that at one point on that mission he had tried to take his own life.

Which was why the other members of his team today were slightly less-than-confident in their leader.

Was he up to this mission? Was he a time-bomb waiting to explode? Was he a basketcase who would lose it at the first sign of trouble?

They were about to find out.

As he shot downward through the sky, Schofield recalled their mission briefing earlier that day.

Their target was Hell Island.

Actually, that wasn't quite true.

Their target was the aging supercarrier parked at Hell Island, the USS *Nimitz*, CVN-68.

The problem: soon after it had arrived at the isolated island to pick up some special cargo, a devastating tsunami had struck from the north and all contact with the *Nimitz* had been lost.

The oldest of America's twelve *Nimitz*-class carriers, the *Nimitz* had been heading home for decommissioning, with only a skeleton crew of 500 aboard—down from its regular 6,000. Likewise, its Carrier Battle Group, the cluster of destroyers, subs, supply ships and frigates that normally accompanied it

around the globe, had been trimmed to just two CRuisers.

Contact with the two escort boats and the island's communications center had also been lost.

Unfortunately, the unexpected tidal wave wasn't the only hostile entity in play here: a North Korean nuclear submarine had been spotted a day earlier coming out of the Bering Sea. Its whereabouts were currently unknown, its presence in this area suspicious.

And so a mystery.

Equally suspicious to Schofield, however, was the presence of the other special operations units on this mission: the 82nd, the SEALs and Delta.

This was exceedingly odd. You never mixed and matched special ops units. They all had different specialties, different approaches to mission situations, and could easily trip over each other. In short, it just wasn't done.

You added all that up, Schofield thought, and this smelled suspiciously like an exercise.

Except for one thing.

They were all carrying live ammunition.

Hurtling toward the world, freefalling at terminal velocity, bursting out of the cloudband . . .

. . . to behold the Pacific Ocean stretching away in every direction, the only imperfection in its surface: the small dot of land that was Hell Island.

A gigantic rectangular gray object lay at its western end, the *Nimitz*. Not far from the carrier, the island featured some big gun emplacements facing south and east, while at the northeastern tip there was a hill that looked like a mini-volcano.

A voice came through Schofield's earpiece. "*All team leaders, this is Delta Six. We're going for the eastern end of the island and we'll work our way back to the boat. Your DZ is the flight deck: Airborne, the bow; SEALs, aft; Marines, mid-section.*"

Just like we were told in the briefing, Schofield thought.

This was typical of Delta. They were born show-ponies. Great soldiers, sure, but glory-seekers all. No matter who they were working with—even today, alongside three of the best special forces units in the world—they always assumed they were in charge.

"*Roger that, Delta leader,*" came the SEAL leader's voice.

"*Copy, Delta Six,*" came the Airborne response.

Schofield didn't reply.

The Delta leader said, "*Marine Six? ScareCRow? You copy?*"

Schofield sighed. "I was at the mission briefing, too, Delta Six. And last I noticed, I don't have any short-term memory problems. I know the mission plan."

“Cut the attitude, ScareCRow,” the Delta leader said. His name was Hugh Gordon, so naturally his call-sign was “Flash.” *“We’re all on the same team here.”*

“What? *Your* team?” Schofield said. “How about this: how about you don’t break radio silence until you’ve got something important to say. ScareCRow, out.”

It was more important than that. Even a frequency-hopping enCRypted radio signal could be caught these days, so if you transmitted, you had to assume someone was listening.

Worse, the new French-made Signet-5 radio-wave decoder—sold by the French to Russia, Iran, North Korea, Syria and other fine upstanding global citizens—was specifically designed to seek out *and locate* the American AN/PRC-119 tactical radio when it was broadcasting, the very radio their four teams were using today. No one had yet thought to ask the French why they had built a locator whose only use was to pinpoint American tactical radios.

Schofield switched to his team’s private channel. “Marines. Switch off your tac radios. Listening mode only. Go to short-wave UHF if you want to talk to me.”

A few of his Marines hesitated before obeying, but obey they did. They flicked off their radios.

The four clusters of parACHutists plummeted through the storm toward the world, zeroing in on the *Nimitz*, until a thousand feet above it, they yanked on their ripcords and their chutes opened.

Their superfast falls were abruptly arrested and they now floated in toward the carrier. The Delta team landed on the island itself, while the other three teams touched down lightly and gracefully on the flight deck of the supercarrier right in their assigned positions—fore, mid and aft—guns up.

They had just arrived in Hell.

RAIN HAMMERED down on the flight deck.

Schofield’s team landed one after the other, unclipping their chutes before the great mushroom-shaped canopies had even hit the ground. The ch...

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