

# SKALIPENDRA

*"Liberation from Tyranny"*

by Marcel Defaux

## SAMPLE PAGES

*Prologue · Field Dossier · Chapter One (excerpt)*

## Prologue: Echoes of Collapse

Other nations watched. Then they collapsed, too.

Russia did not fall. It shattered like ice under artillery. A thousand power blocs emerged---clan-families, cryptocratic cults, private armies run by ex-spies and ex-billionaires, all scraping at the frozen marrow of Siberia. The center could not hold because it no longer existed. From the void, one name emerged like a whisper through poisoned air: Skalipendra.

Not a name, not truly. A myth stitched from missing generals, black-market warlords, and the last son of a fallen city whose birth records were scrubbed by fire. Skalipendra was rumor, then ghost, then fact. He was not elected. He was inherited---by violence, by loyalty, by something not human.

He did not rise alone.

In the deepest vaults of the Vostok zone---beneath an abandoned nuclear observatory wrapped in ice and radiation---Skalipendra found something buried beneath Cold War lies and older, stranger truths. He made contact.

Not with gods. Not with conquerors. With refugees. They were not from Earth. Their world had long since torn itself apart---an atmospheric implosion triggered by the collapse of a rare element their biology could not live without. That element, refined into gold, became their sustenance. Not wealth. Not power. Oxygen. Earth had it. In its crust, in its veins, in the vaults of dead empires.

Skalipendra had ambition. And a pipeline.

In return for shipments of purified gold---millions of kilograms---they gifted him knowledge. Forbidden engineering. Gravitonic resonators. Field-hardened sonic architectures. And worst of all: the harmonic key

to the planet's crust. The Geo-Resonance Core. With it, he could crack cities open like eggs and leave no fingerprints.

And so he built his mountain.

Not a fortress, but a cathedral to weaponized tectonics. Within it: tremor engines, data-blind bunkers, seismic fiber networks that could mimic the Earth's own rhythms. His enemies---governments, militaries, whole nations---would never know what broke them. But Earth did not surrender quietly.

Out of NATO's ruin came ANTO---the Allied Neotropolitan Treaty Organization. Born in the ashes of failed states and rising seas, it was not built for diplomacy. It was built to contain.

ANTO was floating cities, AI-states, orphaned superpowers stitched together with policy and desperation. Germany led with drone factories and discipline. France brought its foreign legion and shadow deals. The remnants of Canada, California, and Neotropólis formed its digital backbone. Japan wrote its code. Ukraine offered blood and memory. And the Balkans provided fury.

ANTO held the line. Barely. Because for every weapon they built, Skalipendra built a silence louder than truth.

He paid warlords in gold, turned rogue states into black labs, seeded deepfakes into democracies already choking on their own noise. He operated through proxies, through myths. Some said he could see through satellites. Others said he had no eyes, only masks.

Some whispered he had already died---but the body refused. And so a war began that never formally declared itself. A war of tremors, hacked skies, and hollowed cities. A war where truth was fragile, and loyalty could be printed in biomimetic ink.

Now, on the eve of another rupture, Skalipendra makes his move---not with armies, but with geometry. If he wins, the ground will swallow the cities of Eurusland . And when the survivors cry out, there will be no enemy to blame.

The only line left is thin, fraying, held by people who never asked to lead, never wanted to fight, but knew the cost of standing still.  
This is not a tale of heroes.

It is the chronicle of a species gambling its future on broken alliances, stolen tech, and one last, desperate whisper of defiance.  
The Earth is listening.

And so are they.

**TOP SECRET — CLASSIFIED DOSSIER — TOP SECRET**

**Distribution:** NATO / JSOC / SIS (Eyes Only)

**Subject:** Skalipendra Group (Alias: Black Terraces Security Group)

**Date:** 06/14/2045

**Status:** ACTIVE PRIORITY THREAT

**Executive Summary** — the Russian Federation has exhausted its capacity for conventional war. With its army hollowed out and its economy shattered, the state has turned to criminal proxies. Among dozens of paramilitary networks, the Skalipendra Group has emerged as the most advanced, mysterious, and dangerous. Skalipendra is not a single individual but a syndicate, merging gangland brutality, cybercrime, and paramilitary organization. Their influence has stabilized Russia's grip on Crimea through profit, fear, and strategic denial.

**Recommendation** — Treat Skalipendra Group as a sovereign threat actor. Priority targeting: logistics hubs (Feodosiya), drone AI supply chain, cyber nodes in Odessa and Istanbul.

**[END DOSSIER — PAGE 1/2] CLASSIFIED — DO NOT REPRODUCE**

## Chapter 1: Convergence Over Koktebel

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The festival wore a smile like a mask.

On the ridgeline above Koktebel, a northerly wind combed the dry grass flat and snapped at a line of international flags---faded colors, salt-stiff hems, a geography lesson flapping itself hoarse. Pop-up tents bloomed along the slope in improvised rows: bootleg gear stalls, repair benches, kettles of black tea, a heroic espresso machine rescued from some city that no longer needed caffeine. Paraglider canopies---chrome and neon and quiet matte---shivered and inflated as pilots jogged toward the edge and shrugged the earth off their shoulders. For a few breaths at a time, the day felt borderless.

Once, Koktebel had been famous for a different kind of music. Its jazz festival was the pulse of Crimea, a summer-long caravan of sound and foreign money that filled hotels, lined beaches with dancing bodies, and kept vineyards funded through lean years. The grapevines had stood for centuries, terraced on hillsides, pressed into cognac that carried a name known across Europe. But war does not care for music or grapes. Raids stripped the barrels, burned the vines, and bombed the wineries until nothing remained but ash and stories. With the death of wine and jazz, the town staggered, its arteries cut. Only the paragliding festival survived, a stubborn act of joy and defiance lashed to the ridge.

It was cherished by locals as if it were a relic and a rebellion at once. Families brought their children to watch the skies turn into a patchwork of wings, and for a few days each year Koktebel felt international again. It was also the only event left in the new Novorossiia where foreigners were quietly allowed to enter. The rest of the region had folded in on itself. By the end of the 2020s, the borders

were welded shut; no one entered without the approval of the party, and no one left without a leash. Those who wished to travel abroad were forced to deposit a ransom with the state---fail to return, and the state kept the money and seized the rest. The system gutted the middle class, bled the economy of its last honest breath, and turned freedom into a privilege only oligarchs could afford.

The inevitable collapse followed. Power changed hands by spectacle, not law. What remained afterward were closed gates and open fears. And in this wasteland of trust, Koktebel's paragliding festival became a loophole, the only cover thin enough to pass as innocence. It was through this canopy of color and flight that outsiders slipped into the scarred heart of Crimea---and it was through this fragile festival that the team would enter the labyrinth Skaliopendra had built.

Marko Belov---call sign **Jameson**---moved through the crowd like a man counting exits. He wore the easy grin of an adventurer and the posture of someone who refused to set his pack down. He drifted past an Armenian freight forwarder arguing with a drone hobbyist about battery density, past two teenagers comparing helmet cams, past a Frenchman showing off a harness so light it looked like a rumor. Around him the sky was crazy with color, and the ground was a ledger of small deals---cash and favors, gear and lies. He watched hands rather than faces. He noted how people parted to reveal a brief exchange of a memory card, a clipped nod, a second too long between strangers who weren't.

The bone-conduction transducer buzzed along his jaw.

"**Echoes everywhere**," said Mira Cashwell, voice crisp, measured. "Three real hunter subs, a dozen decoys. If we surface, we get teeth, not daylight."

Jameson lifted a wingtip to check a stitch that didn't need checking. "Distance?"

"Close enough to smell our wake if we make one," Mira replied. "And the observatory nodes are ticking. Two spikes. They're breathing again."

He pivoted so slowly it looked like a drift born of curiosity.

The observatory crown was a dark stitch on the ridge to the south---concrete bowls that had once measured starlight and now hosted something meaner than light.

Special Warfare Operations suspect activity at a former observatory and missile command center. Rumors spread about a new weapon. ANTO analysts believed there was a highly likely possibility that Skalipendra was building weapons of mass destruction. Several large quantities of plutonium had been stolen from the former RosAtom, which collapsed under the capitulation. The theft of this plutonium raised grave concerns across Eastern Europe, where the black market for nuclear material had grown increasingly sophisticated in the wake of regional instability.

Stolen plutonium poses a unique and chilling threat in Eastern Europe, a region marked by shifting borders, weakened oversight, and lingering Cold War infrastructure. Such material could be used to assemble improvised nuclear devices or so-called "dirty bombs," capable of spreading radioactive contamination across densely populated cities. Intelligence networks feared that criminal syndicates or separatist militias might acquire the material, using it for extortion, terror attacks, or to destabilize fragile governments. The mere rumor of plutonium on the loose sent ripples through intelligence and counterproliferation communities, triggering covert operations and international alerts.

In this climate, the possible involvement of Skalipendra---a shadowy figure or organization with access to advanced technology---heightened the urgency. Analysts speculated that the former observatory and missile command center could serve as both a laboratory and a launch site, repurposed for the assembly or testing of new weapons. The convergence of technical expertise, stolen fissile material, and clandestine logistics networks meant that the threat was not just theoretical but imminent.

The elite paragliding team assembled for the mission was not only tasked with infiltration but with gathering evidence and, if necessary, neutralizing the threat before the material could be weaponized. Their operation unfolded against a backdrop of international anxiety, where the fate of millions could hinge on a handful of stolen kilograms of plutonium and the actions of those determined to recover it.

Another voice threaded through the comms, baritone iron smoothed by experience. General Crowley never raised his volume; his authority was in restraint, not force. "Plan for ghosts," he said quietly, "not cowboys." The weight of his words settled over the team like a command long practiced and seldom questioned.

Jameson glanced at the faded portraits lining the wall, their features blurred by dust and memory. His posture remained relaxed, but his smile---offered for observers---never quite reached his eyes. "Always a parade," he murmured, the hint of humor in his tone a nod of deference to Crowley's command. "No horses." The exchange lingered, a subtle reminder: the rules here were written by shadows, not by showmen.

A gust drilled down the ridge, spiking the festival's laughter into sharp little flags. Three pilots jogged their canopies into position and lifted like they were shrugging gravity off their shoulders. Under the music and bargaining and jokes about crosswinds, something had shifted its weight.

He detoured toward the espresso machine because it gave him a line to anchor to. The barista was from Kherson and drew hearts in foam for everyone because nobody had to be strong while waiting for coffee. Jameson used the lid's reflection to study a trio of men in bland windbreakers arguing over a map that wasn't a map. Their shoes were wrong for pilots. Their eyes were wrong for tourists.

"Telemetry uptick on Russian and Turkish bands," Mira continued. "The festival's a quilt. Something's stitching in among the threads."

"Skalipendra?" Jameson asked.

Silence, just long enough to be honest. "Assume yes," Mira said.

"Assume yes," Crowley echoed. "Jameson, on your mark."

"Mark confirmed," he said, and his grin vanished as if it had been a rented thing.

### Blending In

Every lesson they'd endured, every drill and repetition, became a kind of camouflage. As he moved with the group across the slope, muscles burning and lungs biting cold air, the rhythm of their motion was seamless. The canopy in his hands responded to each adjustment, its fabric rising and falling in time with his breath. When the moment came, he launched not with bravado, but with understated grace---a fluid hop that sent him sailing into the current as if he belonged there, as if the sky itself expected his presence. This was the secret to vanishing: not by shrinking away from sight, but by excelling in plain view, acting with such natural precision that attention slid past. He did not hide; he became indistinguishable from his peers by outmatching expectations, embodying the ordinary through extraordinary performance.

Yana slid in beside him in the air, a sliver of a smile visible beneath mirrored goggles. "Don't lose your footing," she said over a private line. "You'll drag us both down."

"That's how I know I'm flying," he said, tilting to ride a thermal that smelled faintly of stone and sun-roasted thyme.

They played the sky until the festival's eyes stopped caring where any single wing went. On the third pass he bled altitude toward the southern teeth of the ridge, flared, and landed in a pocket of scrub that swallowed color and sound. He shouldered the canopy, stripped to a camo shell, and stashed the wing in a rock hollow where only lizards and patient men would find it.

The observatory rose ahead---concrete domes looming like fossilized thunderheads, stitched together by skeletal rails that arched and dipped

across the slope. Rusted hatches pocked the surface, each one a remnant of hurried repairs and colder wars, and the entire structure echoed with the cruel poetry of Soviet ambition: a monument to vision and paranoia, now surrendered to time and lichen. Jameson advanced with the loose hips of a man trained to expect tripwires under every footstep, legs absorbing the terrain's irregularities, his gait casual yet coiled for sudden adjustment. He liked to surprise the threats that waited for him, sidestepping them with a kind of sly choreography---a step aside, a shift of weight, an amused calculation written in muscle memory. His gloves were cut for tactile lies; the fingertips bare enough to feel the faintest seam beneath a layer of dust, the smallest scuff on a threshold, or the subtle warmth of a wire freshly powered down and pulsing with recent activity. Cameras blinked in slow, deliberate rhythms, the sort designed to reassure their operators with their steadiness. But to Jameson, they were simply metronomes to dance around, cues to time each step and breath, watching for the gaps where their gaze lapsed so he could ghost through sightlines with the ease of someone who'd spent years learning to be overlooked. Each movement was a silent dare to the building's defenses, a promise that tonight, at least, he would belong here more than the ghosts of the old regime.

"Rear service hall shows a grate left of the fused door," Mira said.  
"Pressure sensors dumb. Tap twice, pause, tap once."

He knelt, listened to the grate breathe its exhaust, and rapped the code. The lock coughed in surprise. He slid through into moist concrete air that tasted of old dust and new cables.

"Cameras looped for twenty seconds," Mira said. "That's the kind of generosity you say thank you for by moving."

He moved.

The interior smelled of ionized dust and ambition. Cyrillic signage, half-bleached by solvent and age, pointed toward laboratories that no longer asked questions. This place had once been the heart of a vast

research complex, a remnant of Soviet aspirations to outpace the West in science and surveillance. Decades of hurried upgrades and brutal winters had battered the facility; exposed rebar and pitted concrete told stories of patched breaches and forgotten experiments. The upper levels were a maze of cracked tiles, scavenged wiring, and doors hanging like broken promises, but that was only the surface. Beneath the observatory, the structure plunged deep into the mountain's core---multiple levels descending far below ground, connected by freight lifts and spiral staircases now choked with debris. Cold war paranoia had driven the engineers to carve vast chambers and sealed corridors, some said to reach as many as eight stories below the ridge. Rumors lingered of whole floors lost to leaks or collapse, of archives entombed with their secrets. He ghosted down a lower access corridor, counted footfalls ahead---three, one dragging---then shifted routes as if he'd always meant to.

"Truck logs confirm deliveries from the west gate," Mira whispered. "Admin wing full. And---hold---convoy inbound. Luxury sedans, no plates."

"Rolls," Jameson said, because the tires always told on their owners.

He found an overlook grated in the old style, peered down into a garage where men with chins like fists unloaded crates to the rhythm of fear. A chain of sedans glided into slots as smooth as teeth. The men who emerged wore expressions practiced in mirrors, collars cut by tailors, hands heavy with rings that could buy a village and had probably paid to burn one. But beneath the silk and swagger, the shadows of their old uniforms clung to every gesture. They had once marched under banners of a nation that had taught them to endure every privation, to swallow hunger, cold, and commands barked in the iron syllables of officers who believed neither in mercy nor in the men they commanded.

Their suffering had not ended with the wars. It had lingered---etched into their spines, hollowed into knuckles swollen from years of fighting for a country that no longer wanted them. The final humiliation came

when the ethnic gangs---Skalipendra, a name spat like a curse---swept into Moscow at the invitation of the Silovilks, the very same security lords these men had once bled to protect. In those days, the city was a hunting ground, and their every loyalty turned against them. They were forced to kneel in streets they had once patrolled, to watch as foreign banners wriggled up government facades, while the Skalipendra paraded prisoners through Red Square like trophies. The Silovilks used them as shields, scapegoats, and at the hour of greatest disgrace, not even their families were spared from the terror---homes burned, neighbors disappeared, and old crimes dredged up as new justifications for executions in the night.

What was left of the old army splintered. The city became a ledger of atrocities: protection rackets run from government offices, ethnic purges in the name of order, and silenced dissenters buried under stadium foundations. No one dared count the missing, or the debts written in blood. When ANTO arrived---armored columns cresting the Ring Roads under a banner of blue and white---the gangs scattered south, joined by the Silovilks who had once owned the city's shadows. Moscow was occupied, but for the twenty million who had lived for years in fear, it meant the return of daylight. Children played again in courtyards, old women walked to the market without a bodyguard, and the city's heartbeat, slow and battered, began to resemble something like hope. For these men---soldiers made outlaws, survivors of disgrace---there was no true homecoming. Their suffering was mapped onto their faces, but the world they had lost was now finding its way back to normal, one hard-won day at a time.

He slid a wafer bug behind a conduit, the adhesive breathing once as it bit the metal. "Live," Mira said. "Streaming."