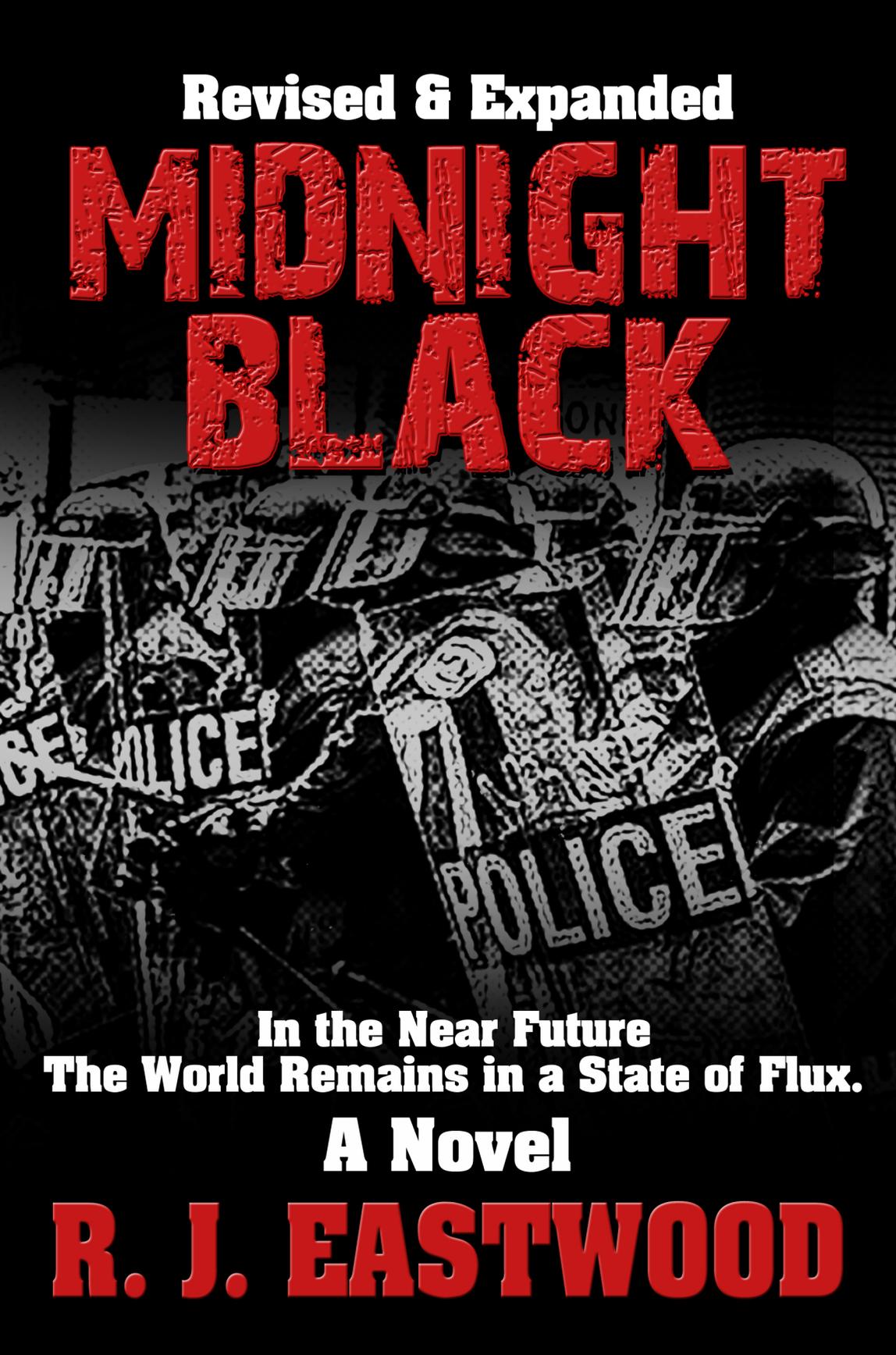


**Revised & Expanded**

# **MIDNIGHT BLACK**



**In the Near Future  
The World Remains in a State of Flux.**

**A Novel**

**R. J. EASTWOOD**

*"This gripping dystopian thriller grabs you from the very start with subtle details and brilliant descriptions, as well as tension-building prose and believable dialogue that immediately endears readers to the unlikely hero. There are patriotic elements to this story, as well as anarchic ones, action-packed scenes, and thoughtful philosophical moments that take a reader by surprise. Eastwood's talent as a flexible and creative author is on clear display as he unravels this twisted vision of the future."*

***Self-Publishing Review***

# **Midnight black**

A novel by

***R. J. Eastwood***

This is a revised and expanded version of  
**MIDNIGHT BLACK**  
Available in Hardback, Paperback, E-book & Audiobook formats.

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The author of this work is Robert J. Emery who writes fiction under the pen name R. J. Eastwood.

Join him online at: <http://www.robertjemeryauthor.com>

If you enjoyed *Midnight Black* consider writing a review.

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*This book is dedicated to my parents, Angie and Albert, who taught me to always be involved and engaged, never silent.*

*To my wife Susanne who patiently read each revision.*

*To publisher Lisa Orban who is always there to support her authors.  
Editor Jennie Rosenblum and cover designer Danielle Johnston.*

*And finally, a shout out to author Steven King who wrote,  
“**Description begins in the writer’s imagination but should finish in the readers.**”*

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*About the Author*

*“I agree with the Constitution with all its faults... I believe, further, that this is likely to be well administered for a course of years, and can only end in despotism, as other forms have done before it, when the people shall be so corrupted as to need a despotic government, being incapable of any other.”*

*Benjamin Franklin.  
1706 -1790*

# **MIDNIGHT BLACK**

**IN THE NEAR FUTURE, THE WORLD  
REMAINS IN A STATE FLUX.**



INDIES UNITED PUBLISHING HOUSE, LLC

*The Year is Wherever Your Imagination Takes You.*

## CHAPTER 1

### *The Execution*

*There's no turning back now from what I came to do... what I am compelled to do... consequences be damned... Lady Justice doesn't get her hands on this one... this one is mine... I've been sitting in my car now for ten minutes staring at the house... I've checked and rechecked the address... this is it, a gray two-story four-unit tenement with three ground floor entry doors... I assume the middle one leads upstairs... the one to the left, that's the correct number... this is it, it's now or never... screwing on the silencer to my Glock-22, I approach the door and knock... no response... I strike the door again... this time a voice responds.*

“Who is it?”

“I have a package for Mister Jack Kerfoot. It requires a signature.”

“I'm not expecting a package. Who's it from?”

“Amazon, sir.”

“I'm not expecting a package from Amazon.”

“If you'll just open the door and take a look, Mister Kerfoot.”

*A couple of seconds pass before a lock is released and the door slowly opens about a foot and Kerfoot peers out. Immediately, I kick at it and it swings open hitting Kerfoot's right shoulder and knocking him back... stepping in, I stick my gun in his face.*

“Hey! Who the hell are you?”

“Your worst nightmare.”

“Get out of here, I'm calling the cops!”

“Go ahead, piss ant, call them.”

*The last thing this lying son-of-a-bitch wants is the police to show up... not with his record... not with what he's done... Jesus, he can't be over twenty-five or twenty-six years old, thin face, dirty-blond hair, blue-green eyes... he's short... five-eight if he's lucky... coming face-to-face with him only increases my rage.*

“What the hell do you want, man?”

“You, Jack Kerfoot, you.”

“Me? What for? Get the hell out of my house!”

*Watch his right hand, Billy. Why is it behind his back? His hand whips around... shit, the fool's got a gun... instinctively, my right arm swings up and out the Glock smashing against his left ear just as he pulls his trigger... the bullet whizzing within inches of my left ear slamming into the wall behind me... blood's gushing from his ear... his hand goes to it... he squeals like a wounded animal... his gun slips from his hand to the floor... he turns and quick-steps down the hall through a door slamming it behind him like the repulsive rodent he is... hey, jerk off, that's not gonna save you... kicking the door with a flat right foot, it swings open on the first try... it's an oversized closet... the feral pig is on his ass behind a couple of large boxes and hanging clothes, legs bent to his chest, arms wrapped around his knees, fingers intertwined tight, eyes shut like maybe if he doesn't see me I'm not really here and won't do what I've come to do. "You know why I'm here, Kerfoot?" No answer. "Open your eyes, look at me." His eyelids slowly open, his gaze going first to my gun then up to meet mine... here it comes, the prick is gonna plead for his miserable life, but I'm not offering options here... forget it creep, they'll be no negotiations on this your last day sucking air.*

*"Who are you... what do you want!"*

*"Does the name Russell ring a bell?"*

*"I don't know no Russell. You got the wrong guy."*

*The hell I have... aiming for his right knee, I squeeze the trigger... the silencer muffles the sound of the exploding bullet... the shell strikes peeling away his kneecap... he's howling like a squealing pig... his body's oscillating like an electric toothbrush. My second shot is to his left kneecap ripping away flesh, cartilage, and bone... his mouth flaps open wide... out comes another chilling scream. Go ahead, you pussy, make all the noise you want, nobody's coming to your rescue... look at me, asshole, look at me before your lights go out and you come face to face with your maker... whoever the hell that is... Satan, maybe. "Just in case you didn't know her name, it was Diedre."*

*"What?"*

*"Diedre, her name was Diedre." He's shaking badly, breathing hard, and having trouble putting one word in front of the other.*

*"I... don't... know... any ... Diedre!"*

*Enough chitchat... do it, do it now, Billy... squeeze the trigger... the bullet's racing down the barrel at twenty-five-hundred feet per second striking his forehead just above and between his eyes, leaving not a neat hole, but tearing away the top of his skull splattering flesh, bone, blood and gray matter over boxes, clothes and walls... Lucifer's bastard son is dead... it felt right and righteous and all the other words in the English lexicon that justifies what I've done in Diedre's name... now get out of here. Whoa, wait! What the hell was that? An earsplitting horn-blast! Jesus, it sounds like it's coming from inside this closet... there it is again only louder... a sharp stab to the middle of my back... zap, zap... an electrical charge is surging through me doubling me over... someone's in my face yelling.*

“Get up, get your lazy ass up!”

“What?”

“You heard me 556, get your miserable ass out of that bunk now.”

*That voice... that accent... it can't be... its Quasi.* “What the hell are you doing here?”

“I’m everywhere, 556, always watching and waiting for you to screw up. Now get your goddamn criminal ass up.”

## CHAPTER 2

### *This Place Sucks*

*When my earthly expiration date arrives, I'll be whisked off to heaven because I've already experienced hell. I no longer have a sense of what is real and what is not... the memories that once lifted my spirits when all hope seemed lost are gone... like I'm seeing life through heavy gauze. That's what this hellhole has done to my once-functioning brain... but I will endure, I will survive. Until then, like the missing tab of a thousand-piece puzzle, apocalyptic dreams are in control of my nights... those precious memories that once kept me going when I thought I couldn't, are distorted and fragmented... those I wish I could erase forever linger within the deep recesses of my consciousness haunting me night after night after night. When I arrived here, I was twenty-six years old, six-feet-two, weighing in at two-hundred and fifteen pounds... I'm one-hundred and ninety now thanks to six days a week hard labor... my hair remains dark brown except for the streaks of white that have invaded my temples... dark circles live under my light brown eyes, and my face has forgotten how to smile. Like everyone back on Earth, I had only heard stories of this place that painted a grim picture... little did I know what I was in for. On the day we landed in this nether world, management had us strip and marched past a line of leering, catcalling inmates... the brass's way of removing any sense of self-esteem we had left... from that moment on, time and space was altered... I had descended into a black hole of punishment. We were issued identification numbers... names are not used here... my number is 11349556... I'm addressed only as 556 which is stitched on the front of the two shirts I was issued. We sleep in four cold, dark, gray cramped spaces called 'Bays', fifty men to each... I'm in bay three... the bunks are two-feet apart in earshot of every snort, belch, cough, sneeze, grunt, fart, along with a cacophony of constant distractions coming from some of the scariest men I've had the displeasure of coming into contact with... that's saying a lot considering my profession before being sent here. You have to set bunkmates straight right off or they'll make life a living hell of harassment... I did... they know not to screw with me. To make matters worse, apartheid is alive and well thanks to a complicated mix of races... if you're black, brown, red, or yellow, life is a nightmare of racism that leads to an occasional battle royal, nurtured along by the all-white goon*

squads who watch over us. Each day begins on an elevator that accommodates twenty-five at a time... down we go some thirty-five-feet where the tunnel shafts begin. Except for a half-hour box-lunch break, the rest of the day is spent operating machinery that scrapes loose the precious ore deep under the frozen surface of Europa, the smallest of the four Galilean moons orbiting Jupiter. The ore is called Phostoirore... it's French... it's black like coal and smells like rotting chicken parts, an odor that will forever be embedded in my sinus cavities. None of us would be here if not for an unmanned spacecraft called Clipper that was launched in 2024 by NASA to probe beneath Europa's frozen surface. What the good ship Clipper brought back changed the way the world consumed energy. Scientists turned giddy when they heated a sample and it liquified into metallic hydrogen, a super energy source that had been researched for years with no positive results. There followed a massive coming together of US space agencies and private space firms to launch a manned flight to Europa... it was a miraculous accomplishment given how quickly it came together... the American flag was planted on Europa's surface and the United States claimed all rights to the ore. Next came the construction of a ship large enough to send manpower, materials, and machinery to build an underground facility. That same ship plus two more would shuttle manpower to Europa and bring the ore back to Earth. The rest is history. MAXMinerai, the mining conglomerate headquartered in Marseille, France, would oversee the mining operation... they're the ones who named the ore Phostoirore. To ensure a continuous flow of manpower to work the mines, Europa was designated a penal colony since no one in their right mind would volunteer to go there. If a country wanted a share of the liquid gold, they paid a price set by the US Government in addition to providing an agreed upon number of men convicted of heinous crimes to work the mines. Medical assistance is all but non-existent... there's always a fresh supply of manpower waiting in the wings... since I've been here, I've lost count of the number of men that have died. The guards are a mixed bag of mostly ex-military tough-guys from around the world... the accents are all over the place... half the time you can't decipher what's coming out of their mouths. How do I begin to describe seventeen years living deep underground never seeing the surface, sky, or whatever else might be out there in frozen no man's land beside the landing/launch pad? One day rolls into the next without reference to anything outside the dark, dusty, smelly mines, the clamor of heavy machinery, the brutal Neanderthal guards, the marginal food, and inmates looking to blow off steam, or worse, a carnal roll in the sack in the middle of the night with a willing or unwilling participant... each minute, each hour, each passing day plays out without place, time, meaning or documentation... physical pain and emotional stress have a way of turning you into someone you might not have otherwise become. On my bluest days, I remind myself that if I endure, if I retain my sanity, my sentence will be up and life will resume where it left off, albeit damaged physically and mentally. We have no contact with the outside world... nothing, nada, zip... a family member could die

*back home and you'd never know it... there's no existence beyond the spaces we occupy. I recall with relish that my early school years established that I would be the class clown. To this day, I have no idea why I saw, and continue to see, the humor, if not the absurdity, of life. Unfortunately, my warped sense of humor was never embraced by my teachers, which all too often landed me in hot water. When I entered my first year of high school, I began taking a serious interest in this crazy undefined world... life was all around us abundant and diverse and that interested me. What did it actually mean to be alive, and why for such a short time? How foolish and arrogant of me to think that I, William 'Billy' Evan Russell, would discover the answers to such deep questions. Perhaps one day, I thought, I would meet someone who can... I'm still waiting... my sense of humor remains as perverted as ever. On the other hand, like all clueless youth, I reveled in being alive convinced I would live forever. The seven stages of life that begin with infancy and ended somewhere between dotage and death didn't apply to me... now all these years later, I'm dwelling more and more on that end stage... no longer do I see the light at the end of the tunnel as a ray of hope, but a speeding train coming to squash me like a disease-spreading insect. This morning, like all mornings, a bone-shaking siren shakes us awake at five AM reminding us of the lingering aches and pains of the previous day... we're up and standing by our bunks awaiting the arrival of a sorry excuse of a human, an ill-tempered oaf of a man whose first name is Vladimir... don't know his last... we call him Quasi, short for Quasimodo because his shoulders hunch forward like his head's too heavy for his fleshy frame. He speaks with a tongue-twisting European accent... the mere sight of him sticks in my throat like the foul-smelling Phostoirore. All guards carry a two-foot instrument resembling a cattle prod that delivers the same electrical results... Quasi's damn quick to use his for the most minor of infractions... this morning he shows up looking more pissed off than usual.*

*“Leon Wilson, Christopher Hewitt Henley, William Evan Russell, stall przy lozhach.”*

*Quasi has this irritating habit of slipping in and out of his mother tongue... not sure, but it sounds slavic. ”Sorry, sir, didn't get that last part.”*

*“You three assholes stood by beds.”*

*The word is ‘stand’, learn the language, you imbecile... whoa, wait a damn minute... did he just call us by our actual names, not our numbers? Not a good sign... no, not a good sign at all.*

*“The rest of you know drill. Move it.”*

*In a chorus of disenfranchised voices, forty-seven men drone in unison.*

*“Yes, sir!”*

*Quasi follows the men to the door counting heads until the last man files out for their morning latrine break and a bowl of mushy, overcooked oatmeal... why he counts heads only he knows. Where the hell would one go if they did try to escape, ice skating on the surface maybe? Chris Henley, with a shit-eating grin*

*on his lips, leans close and whispers.*

*“Jesus, man, he called us by our names!”*

*Chris is a smallish wiry white guy about my age... close cropped dark brown hair with piercing, menacing eyes, and a wisecracking mouth not even a loving mother would tolerate.*

*Near as I remember, he showed up a year after I did... on his left shoulder is a tattoo of a 300 Winchester Magnum M24 sniper rifle. Leon Grover is a tall black guy in his sixties with strong facial features... he arrived a couple of years after Chris... Leon's quiet and mostly keeps to himself... he coughs a lot... there's always a cigarette hanging from his lips... just about everyone smokes since cigs are free... our one and only perk. Now Quasi's strolling back with his usual smug, kick-ass look.*

*“You three have appointment with Commandant. Get dressed.”*

*The Commandant? No one gets an invitation to the Commandant's office unless they're gonna get their ass handed to them for some infraction of their endless rules. As usual, Chris can't keep his bloody mouth shut.*

*“What does Herr Commandant want with us?”*

*Quasi scowls... he scowls a lot... and sticks his cattle prod within an inch of Chris' nose.*

*“Keep mouth shut. Get dressed.”*

*Chris grabs his crotch with both hands and groans.*

*“Can we hit the head first, I gotta vacate some water really bad?”*

*Quasi grunts... he also grunts a lot.*

*“Make it quick.”*

## CHAPTER 3

### *Get Out of Jail Card*

*Sleeping bays, latrines, mess hall, staff quarters, and support facilities are on one level twenty-five-feet deep below Europa's frozen surface... the Commandant's office is located at the extreme West end causing us to trek through a maze of twisting narrow passageways with a few emergency airlocks along the way... the entire operation is a technological marvel, but if heat, oxygen, or water purifications systems ever fail, we're mince-meat. The Commandant's name is Oleg Maksymchak, a former colonel in the Ukrainian army... Colonel Maks, as we call him, is short, five-six maybe, thin face, hollow cheeks, eyes coal black like his hair... in all the years I've been here I've only seen him five or six times during his infrequent inspections of the mines marching around quick-step like Napoleon Bonaparte reincarnated with his entourage of armed security following a few steps behind like animated robots. When we're ushered into his office Little Napoleon Maks is sitting at his desk reading... his chair's been jacked up to make him appear taller... Quasi, like the dim-witted loyal soldier he is, clicks his heels and salutes.*

"Commandant, sir, inmates Leon Patrick Grover, William Evan Russell, Christopher Michael Henley."

*With his eyelids narrowed to slits, Maks glances up with an austere expression that would melt the planet's surface... he sizing us up... when he's satisfied, he picks up whatever he was reading, holds it above his head, and rattles it.*

"This communiqué arrived late last night. For whatever reason—which I am not privy to—directs me to return you on Europa Two when it departs later today."

*The three of us exchange confused glances.*

"Whoever pulled your ticket on such short notice believes you would be of more use back home."

*Did I hear right? We're leaving this cesspool and returning to Earth? Is that what he said? Maks looks as confused as we do... dropping the communique to the desk, he shakes his head.*

"I am left to ponder why anyone would consider you three of any use beyond your duties here."

*Chris opens his mouth to speak... Maks stops him with a sharp look.*

“Which one are you?”

“678, sir.”

“Not your number, your name.”

“Oh, yeah, sure... Christopher Henley, sir.”

“Inmate Henley, just stand there and listen.”

“Yes, sir, just wondering—”

“Don’t. Further instructions will be provided upon your arrival at Base-Arizona. You do remember Base-Arizona?”

*Leon and I nod... Chris, well, Chris is Chris.*

“It’s in Arizona, sir.”

*Maks’ left eyebrow shoots up... here it comes... Chris is about to get his ass handed to him.*

“Was that meant to amuse, Inmate Henley?”

“No, sir, I just—”

“Be quiet. Officer Sokolov will see you are prepared for departure.”

*Sokolov... so that’s Quasi’s last name.*

“Now you may ask questions. Inmate Russell?”

*Think fast, Billy, make it mundane.* “This is welcome news, Commandant, sir.”

*Maks chuckles low.*

“I would think it would be. Inmate Grover, you look unwell?”

“A bug, sir. It’s getting better.”

“Do you have a question?”

“I have none, sir.”

“Inmate Henley?”

“No, sir.”

“Very well. Sign your transfer papers on your way out.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“For what, Inmate Henley?”

“I, uh... well, sir, we’re going home and—”

“Be forewarned, much has changed back on Earth. Perhaps you will not find it to your liking.”

*What’s that supposed to mean... what could possibly be worse than remaining here? We’re going home, period, full stop.*

“I caution you to be on your best behavior during your voyage or you’ll find yourselves on the next transport back.”

*In unison, we answer, “Yes, sir.” Maks swipes a hand through the air.*

“Leave now.”

*Oh hell, Henley’s raising his hand... for Christ’s sake, Chris, for once keep your trap shut.*

“Inmate Henley, are you hearing impaired?”

“Not that I’m aware of, Commandant.”

“Then lower your hand and remove yourself from my presence.”

“Yes, Commandant, sir.”

*Quasi clicks his heels, straightens his hunched back as best he can, and salutes... we file out behind him... with luck this was the last time we'll encounter Bonaparte Maks... on the way out, his aide has us sign our discharge papers, which I sign without reading. As we follow Quasi back through the passageways, there's a renewed spring in my step, but as elated as I am, my emotions are conflicted... who wants us back on short notice and why and what for in a world I barely remember? Why would that even cross your mind, Billy Boy, it's enough that you're going home. So, for reasons yet to be revealed, I bid you goodbye Europa... may your permafrost one day melt, knock you off your axis, and suck you into a black hole. And yet, I have this dreaded feeling the other shoe has yet to drop.* “Guys, this doesn't pass the smell test.” *Leon shoots me a stern look.*

“Who cares what it smells like, we're going home.”

“Aren't you the least bit curious who wants us back so badly they'd cut our sentences short and ship us out hours later?”

“Billy, my boy, who gives a damn?”

“I do, Chris, I do.” *Leon let's out a long sigh.*

“Will you too get your act together, please, just this once?”

*Henley, smiling from ear-to-ear, whispers the same stale joke he repeats at the end of every mine shift.*

“What did the shepherd say when he saw the storm coming?”

*Leon's trying to stifle a laugh... he's knows the answer all too well.*

“When the storm came, the Shepard said... ‘let's get the flock out of here.’”

“Thank you, Leon... drum roll please.”

***Forty-minutes later, the three of us are in the shower washing off the stink and grime of this insufferable planet, followed by our last bowl of overcooked, mushy oatmeal... for as long as I live, I will never again eat oatmeal, nor will I trust anyone who does. We're issued black jumpsuits, five pair of new socks, underwear and a small pouch containing a toothbrush, toothpaste, shaving cream, razor, a bar of soap, a comb, a laminated credit-sized card bearing our photo and ID number, and a green pin-on badge with nothing more than a black barcode running along the bottom... that's it, that's all I have to show for the past seventeen years... not much of a resumé. Now Quasi's growling like the attack dog he's been trained to be.***

“ID card and badge only proof you exist. Lose it, you become non-entity.”

*Thanks, you jelly-faced prick, rabid dogs are treated with more dignity. Before this day is over, we'll be free of the isolation, mines, bad food, inmates, grizzly guards, and you, Quasi, will still be here. Amen, amen, and one hell-of-a joyful halleluiah.*



**Author Robert J. Emery**

Affiliations:

The Directors Guild of America  
The Alliance of Independent Authors  
The Association of Editors and Writers.

**Robert J. Emery** writes non-fiction under his real name and fiction under the pen name R.J. Eastwood. Over his long career as a member of the Directors Guild of America, he has written, produced, and directed both feature films and television programming and everything in between. Over his career, his film work garnered him over seventy-five industry awards. This release of the revised and expanded version of **MIDNIGHT BLACK** marks the publication of Mr. Emery ninth book, five of which were nonfiction.

When not writing, Bob can be found in the kitchen creating and preparing sumptuous Italian meals. He credits his culinary expertise to his Sicilian mother, Angelina Carmela Arico Emery, who taught him and his siblings to cook. They had to pay close attention because she never measured ingredients. It was all by taste.

Visit Mister Emery's author website to learn more about his work as a writer/director in the entertainment industry as well as his current writing projects. He enjoys hearing from readers and encourages them to connect with him on his social-media sites.

<http://www.facebook.com/robertjemeryauthor>.

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What Reviewers Wrote About Eastwood's Previous Novel.

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