“Say goodbye to the sun, gents,” SBG said. He made us wave at the setting sun. A symbolic acknowledgement of an inconvenient truth. We were about to freeze our natural butts off.

After an hour, we fell back into our six-man boat crews, and stood close together, huddling tight to get warm, but it was futile. Bones were rattling up and down that beach. Guys were jackhammering and sniffling, a physical state revealing the quaking conditions of splintering minds, which were just now coming to grips with the reality that this nightmare had only just begun.

Even on the hardest days of First Phase prior to Hell Week, when the sheer volume of rope climbs and push-ups, pull-ups, and flutter kicks crushes your spirit, you can find a way out. Because you know that no matter how much it sucks, you’ll head home that night, meet friends for dinner, see a movie, and sleep in your own bed. The point is, even on miserable days you can fixate on an escape that’s real.

Hell Week offers no such love. Especially on day one, when an hour in they had us standing, linking arms, facing the Pacific Ocean, wading in and out of the surf for hours. In between we were gifted soft sand sprints to warm up. Usually they had us carry our rigid inflatable boat or a log overhead, but the warmth, if it ever arrived, was always short-lived because every ten minutes they rotated us back into the water.

The clock ticked slowly that first night as the cold seeped in, colonizing our marrow so thoroughly the runs stopped doing any good. There would be no more bombs, no more shooting, and very little yelling. Instead, an eerie quiet expanded and deadened our spirit. In the ocean, all any of us could hear were the waves going overhead, the seawater we accidentally swallowed roiling in our guts, and our own teeth chattering.

When you’re that cold and stressed, the mind cannot comprehend the next 120-plus hours. Five and a half days without sleep cannot be broken up into small pieces. There is no way to systematically attack it, which is why every single person who has ever tried to become a SEAL has asked himself one simple question during their first dose of surf torture:

“Why am I here?”

Those innocuous words bubbled up in our spinning minds each time we got sucked under a monster wave at midnight, when we were already borderline hypothermic. Because nobody *has* to become a SEAL. We weren't *drafted*. Becoming a SEAL is a choice. And what that single softball question revealed in the heat of battle is that each second we remained in training was also a choice, which made the entire notion of becoming a SEAL seem like masochism. It's voluntary torture. And that makes no sense at all to the rational mind, which is why those four words unravel so many men.

The instructors know all of this, of course, which is why they stop yelling early on. Instead, as the night wore on, Psycho Pete consoled us like a concerned older brother. He offered us hot soup, a warm shower, blankets, and a ride back to the barracks. That was the bait he set for quitters to snap up, and he harvested helmets left and right. He was taking the souls of those who caved because they couldn't answer that simple question. I get it. When it's only Sunday and you know you're going to Friday and you're already far colder than you've ever been, you're tempted to believe that you can't hack it and that nobody can. Married guys were thinking, *I could be at home, cuddled up to my beautiful wife instead of shivering and suffering*. Single guys were thinking, *I could be out meeting girls right now*.

It's tough to ignore that kind of glittering lure, but this was my second lap through the early stages of BUD/S. I'd tasted the evil of Hell Week as part of Class 230. I didn't make it, but I didn't quit. I was pulled out on a medical after contracting double pneumonia. I defied doctor's orders three times and tried to stay in the fight, but they eventually forced me to the barracks and rolled me back to day one, week one of Class 231.

I wasn't all the way healed up from that bout of pneumonia when my second BUD/S class kicked off. My lungs were still filled with mucus and each cough shook my chest and sounded like a rake was scraping the inside of my alveoli. Still, I liked my chances a lot better this time around because I was prepared, and because I was in a boat crew thick with real savages.

BUD/S boat crews are sorted by height because those are the guys who will help you carry your boat everywhere you go once Hell Week begins. Size alone didn't guarantee your teammates would be tough, however, and our guys were a crew of square-peg misfits.

There was me, the exterminator who had to drop 100 pounds and take the ASVAB test twice just to get to SEAL training, only to be rolled back almost immediately. We also had the late Chris Kyle. You know him as the deadliest sniper in Navy history. He was so successful, the hajjis in Fallujah put an $80,000 bounty on his head and he became a living legend among the Marines he protected as a member of SEAL Team Three. He won a Silver Star and four Bronze Stars for valor, left the military, and wrote a book, *American Sniper*, that became a hit movie starring Bradley Cooper. But back then he was a simple Texas hayseed rodeo cowboy who barely said a word.

Then there was Bill Brown, aka Freak Brown. Most people just called him Freak, and he hated it because he'd been treated like one his whole life. In many ways he was the white version of David Goggins. He came up tough in the river towns of South Jersey. Older kids in the neighborhood bullied him because of his cleft palate or because he was slow in class, which is how that nickname stuck. He got into enough fights over it that he eventually landed in a youth detention center for a six-month stretch. By the time he was nineteen he was living on his own in the hood, trying to make ends meet as a gas station attendant. It wasn't working. He had no coat and no car. He commuted everywhere on a rusted out ten-speed bike, literally freezing his tail off. One day after work, he stopped into a Navy recruitment office because he knew he needed structure and purpose, and some warm clothes. They told him about the SEALs, and he was intrigued, but he couldn't swim. Just like me, he taught himself, and after three attempts he finally passed the SEAL swim test.

Next thing he knew, Brown was in BUD/S, where that Freak nickname followed him. He rocked PT and sailed through First Phase, but he wasn't nearly as solid in the classroom. Navy SEAL dive training is as tough intellectually as it is physically, but he scraped by and got within two weeks of becoming a BUD/S graduate when, in one of his final land warfare evolutions, he failed reassembling his weapon in a timed evolution known as *weapons practical*. Brown hit his targets but missed the time, and he flunked out of BUD/S at the bitter end.

But he didn't give up. No sir, Freak Brown wasn't going anywhere. I'd heard stories about him before he washed up with me in Class 231. He had two chips on his shoulders, and I liked him immediately. He was tough as nails

and exactly the kind of guy I signed up to go to war with. When we carried our boat from the Grinder to the sand for the first time, I made sure we were the two men at the front, where the boat is at its heaviest. “Freak Brown,” I shouted, “we will be the pillars of Boat Crew Two!” He looked over, and I glared back.

“Don’t call me that, Goggins,” he said with a snarl.

“Well don’t you move out of position, son! You and me, up front, all week!”

“Roger that,” he said.

I took the lead of Boat Crew Two from the beginning, and getting all six of us through Hell Week was my singular focus. Everyone fell in line because I’d already proven myself, and not just on the Grinder. In the days before Hell Week began I got it into my head that we needed to steal the Hell Week schedule from our instructors. I told our crew as much one night when we were hanging in the classroom, which doubled as our lounge. My words fell on deaf ears. A few guys laughed but everyone else ignored me and went back to their shallow conversations.

I understood why. It made no sense. How were we supposed to get a copy of the schedule? And even if we did, wouldn’t the anticipation make it worse? And what if we got caught? Was the reward worth the risk?

I believed it was, because I’d tasted Hell Week. Brown and a few other guys had too, and we knew how easy it was to think about quitting when confronted with levels of pain and exhaustion you didn’t think possible. One hundred and thirty hours of suffering may as well be a thousand when you know you can’t sleep and that there will be no relief anytime soon. And we knew something else too. Hell Week was a mind game. The instructors used our suffering to pick and peel away our layers, not to find the fittest athletes. To find the strongest minds. That’s something the quitters didn’t understand until it was too late.

Everything in life is a mind game! Whenever we get swept under by life’s dramas, large and small, we are forgetting that no matter how bad the pain gets, no matter how harrowing the torture, all bad things end. That forgetting

happens the second we give control over our emotions and actions to other people, which can easily happen when pain is peaking. During Hell Week, the men who quit felt like they were running on a treadmill turned way up with no dashboard within reach. But, whether they ever figured it out or not, that was an illusion they fell for.

I went into Hell Week knowing I put myself there, that I wanted to be there, and that I had all the tools I needed to win this twisted mind game, which gave me the passion to persevere and claim ownership of the experience. It allowed me to play hard, bend rules, and look for an edge wherever and whenever I could until the horn sounded on Friday afternoon. To me this was war, and the enemies were our instructors who'd blatantly told us that they wanted to break us down and make us quit! Having their schedule in our heads would help us whittle the time down by memorizing what came next, and more than that, it would gift us a victory going in. Which would give us something to latch onto during Hell Week when the instructors were beating us down.

"Yo man, I'm not playing," I said. "We need that schedule!"

I could see Kenny Bigbee, the only other black man in Class 231, raise an eyebrow from across the room. He'd been in my first BUD/S class, and got injured just before Hell Week. Now he was back for seconds too. "You gotta be kidding me," he said. "David Goggins is back on the log."

Kenny smiled wide and I doubled over laughing. He'd been in the instructors' office listening in when the doctors were trying to pull me out of my first Hell Week. It was during a log PT evolution. Our boat crews were carrying logs as a unit up and down the beach, soaked, salty, and sandy. I was running with a log on my shoulders, vomiting blood. Bloody snot streamed from my nose and mouth, and the instructors periodically grabbed me and sat me down nearby because they thought I might drop dead. But every time they turned around I was back in the mix. Back on that log.

Kenny kept hearing the same refrain over the radio that night. "We need to get Goggins out of there," one voice said.

“Roger that, sir. Goggins is sitting down,” another voice crackled. Then after a beat, Kenny would hear that radio chirp again. “Oh no, Goggins is back on the log. I repeat, Goggins is back on the log!”

Kenny loved telling that story. At 5’10” and 170 pounds, he was smaller than I was and wasn’t on our boat crew, but I knew we could trust him. In fact, there was nobody better for the job. During Class 231, Kenny was tapped to keep the instructors’ office clean and tidy, which meant that he had access. That night, he tiptoed into enemy territory, liberated the schedule from a file, made a copy, and slipped it back into position before anyone ever knew it was missing. Just like that we had our first victory before the biggest mind game of our lives had even begun.

Of course, knowing something is coming is only a small part of the battle. Because torture is torture, and in Hell Week the only way to get past it is to go through it. With a look or a few words, I made sure our guys were putting out at all times. When we stood on the beach holding our boat overhead, or running logs up and down that sand, we went hard, and during surf torture I hummed the saddest and most epic song from *Platoon*, while we waded into the Pacific Ocean.

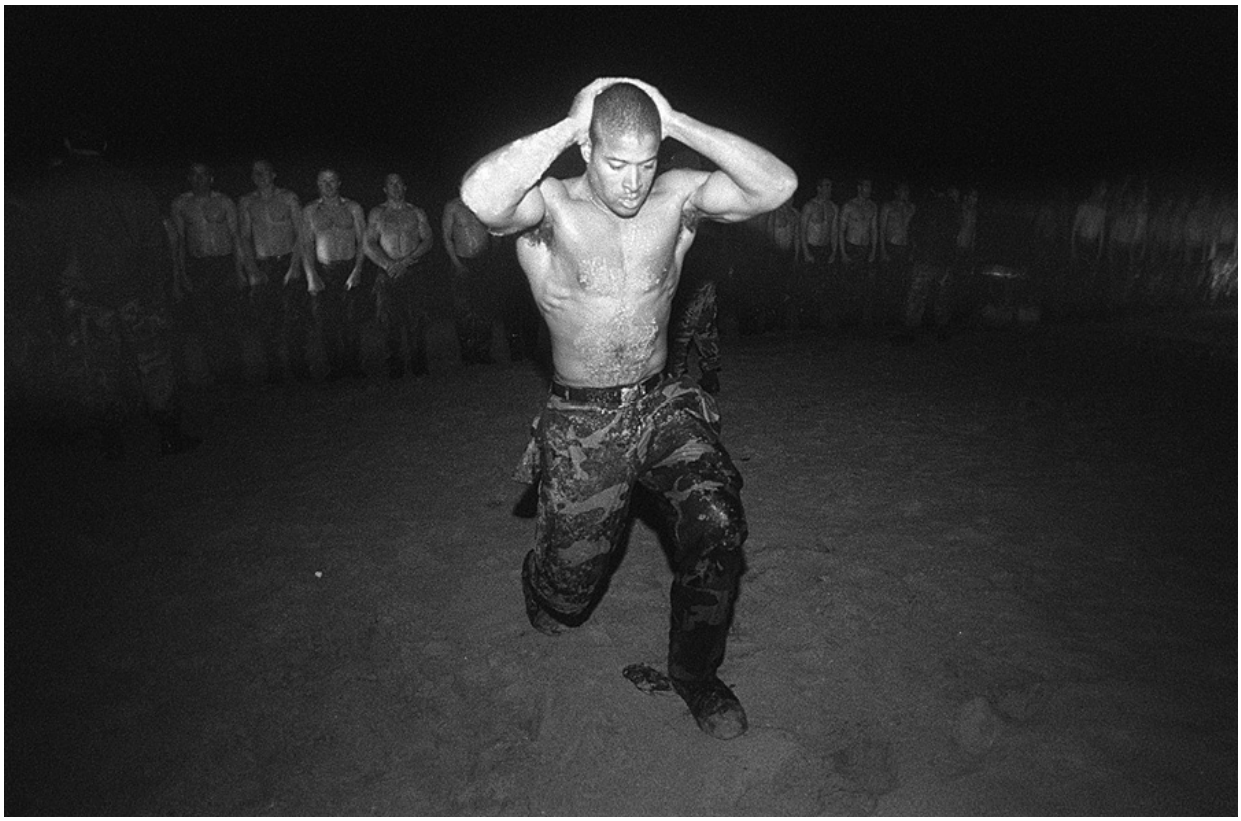
I’ve always found inspiration in film. Rocky helped motivate me to achieve my dream of being invited to SEAL training, but *Platoon* would help me and my crew find an edge during the dark nights of Hell Week, when the instructors were mocking our pain, telling us how sorry we were, and sending us into the head-high surf over and over again. *Adagio for Strings* was the score to one of my favorite scenes in *Platoon* and with bone-chilling fog wrapping all around us, I stretched my arms out like Elias when he was getting gunned down by the Viet Cong, and sang my butt off. We’d all watched that movie together during First Phase, and my antics had a dual effect of ticking off the instructors and firing up my crew. Finding moments of laughter in the pain and delirium turned the entire melodramatic experience upside down for us. It gave us some control of our emotions. Again, this was all a mind game, and I wasn’t going to lose.

But the most important games within the game were the races that the instructors set up between boat crews. Everything in BUD/S was a competition. We’d run boats and logs up and down the beach. We had paddle

races, and we even did the O-Course carrying a log or a boat between obstacles. We'd carry them while balancing on narrow beams, over spinning logs, and across rope bridges. We'd send it over the high wall, and we dropped it at the foot of the thirty-foot-high cargo net while we climbed up and over that stupid thing. The winning team was almost always rewarded with rest and the losing teams got extra beat downs from Psycho Pete. They were ordered to perform sets of push-ups and sit-ups in the wet sand, then do berm sprints, their bodies quivering with exhaustion, which felt like failure on top of failure. Psycho let them know it too. He laughed in their face as he hunted quitters.

"You are absolutely pathetic," he said. "I hope you quit because if they allow you in the field you're gonna get us all killed!"

Watching him berate my classmates gave me a dual sensation. I didn't mind him doing his job, but he was a bully, and I never liked bullies. He'd been coming at me hard since I got back to BUD/S, and early on I decided I would show him that he couldn't get to me. Between bouts of surf torture, when most guys stand as close together as possible to transfer heat, body to body, I stood apart. Everyone else was shivering. I didn't even twitch, and I saw how much that bothered him.



During Hell Week

The one luxury we had during Hell Week was chow. We ate like kings. We're talking omelets, roast chicken and potatoes, steak, hot soup, pasta with meat sauce, all kinds of fruit, brownies, soda, coffee, and a lot more. The catch is we had to run the mile there and back, with that 200-pound boat on our heads. I always left chow hall with a peanut butter sandwich tucked in my wet and sandy pocket to scarf on the beach when the instructors weren't looking. One day after lunch, Psycho decided to give us a bit more than a mile. It became obvious at the quarter mile marker, when he picked up his pace, that he wasn't taking us directly back to the Grinder.

"You boys better keep up!" he yelled, as one boat crew fell back. I checked my guys.

"We are staying right up on this guy! Screw him!"

"Roger that," said Freak Brown. True to his word, he'd been with me on the front of that boat—the two heaviest points—since Sunday night, and he was

only getting stronger.

Psycho stretched us out on the soft sand for more than four miles. He tried his hardest to lose us, too, but we were his shadow. He switched up the cadence. One minute he was sprinting, then he was crouching down, wide-legged, grabbing his crotch and doing elephant walks, then he loped at a jogger's pace before breaking into another wind sprint down the beach. By then the closest boat was a quarter mile behind, but we were clipping his heels. We mimicked his every step and refused to let our bully gain any satisfaction at our expense. He may have smoked everybody else but he did not smoke Boat Crew Two!

Hell Week is the devil's opera, and it builds like a crescendo, peaking in torment on Wednesday and staying right there until they call it on Friday afternoon. By Wednesday we were all broken, and every inch of our bodies were chafed raw. Our whole body was one big raspberry, oozing pus and blood. Mentally we were zombies. The instructors had us doing simple boat raises and we were all dragging. Even my crew could barely lift that boat. Meanwhile, Psycho and SBG and the other instructors kept close watch, looking for weaknesses as always.

I had a real hate for the instructors. They were my enemy and I was tired of them trying to burrow into my brain. I glanced at Brown, and for the first time all week he looked shaky. The whole crew did. Honestly, I felt miserable too. My knee was the size of a grapefruit and every step I took torched my nerves, which is why I was searching for something to fuel me. I locked in on Psycho Pete. I was sick of that guy. The instructors looked composed and comfortable. We were desperate, and they had what we needed: energy! It was time to flip the game and own real estate in their heads.

When they clocked out that night and drove home after a weak eight-hour shift while we were still going hard, I wanted them thinking about Boat Crew Two. I wanted to haunt them when they slipped into bed. I wanted to occupy so much space in their minds that we were all they could think about. I wanted Boat Crew Two to consume their every thought. So I deployed a process that I now call "Taking Souls."

I turned to Brown. “You know why I call you Freak?” I asked. He looked over as we lowered the boat, then lifted it up overhead like creaky robots on reserve battery power. “Because you are one of the baddest men I’ve ever seen in my life!” He cracked a smile. “And you know what I say to these chumps right here?” I tipped my elbow at the nine instructors gathered on the beach, drinking coffee, smoking and joking. “I say, they can go screw themselves!” Bill nodded and narrowed his eyes on our tormentors, while I turned to the rest of the crew. “Now let’s throw this boat up high and show them who we are!”

“Beautiful,” Bill said. “Let’s do it!”

Within seconds my whole team had life. We didn’t just lift the boat overhead and set it down hard, we threw it up, caught it overhead, tapped the sand with it and threw it up high again. The results were immediate and undeniable. Our pain and exhaustion faded. Each rep made us stronger and faster, and each time we threw the boat up we all chanted.

“YOU CAN’T HURT BOAT CREW TWO!”

We now had their full attention as we soared on a second wind. On the toughest day of the hardest week in the world’s toughest training, Boat Crew Two was moving at lightning speed and making a mockery of Hell Week. The look on the instructors’ faces told a story. Their mouths hung open like they were witnessing something nobody had ever seen before. Some averted their eyes, almost embarrassed. Only SBG looked satisfied.

* * *

Since that night in Hell Week, I’ve deployed the Taking Souls concept countless times. Taking Souls is a ticket to finding your own reserve power and riding a second wind. It’s the tool you can call upon to win any competition or overcome every life obstacle. You can utilize it to win a chess match, or conquer an adversary in a game of office politics. It can help you rock a job interview or excel at school. And yes, it can be used to conquer all manner of physical challenges, but remember, this is a game you are playing within yourself. Unless you’re engaged in physical competition, I’m not suggesting that you try to dominate someone or crush their spirit. In fact,

they never even need to know you're playing this game. This is a tactic for you to be your best when duty calls. It's a mind game you're playing on yourself.

Taking someone's soul means you've gained a tactical advantage. Life is all about looking for tactical advantages, which is why we stole the Hell Week schedule, why we nipped Psycho's heels on that run, and why I made a show of myself in the surf, humming the *Platoon* theme song. Each of those incidents was an act of defiance that empowered us.

But defiance isn't always the best way to take someone's soul. It all depends upon your terrain. During BUD/S, the instructors didn't mind if you looked for advantages like that. They respected it as long as you were also kicking butt. You must do your own homework. Know the terrain you're operating in, when and where you can push boundaries, and when you should fall in line.

Next, take inventory of your mind and body on the eve of battle. List out your insecurities and weakness, as well as your opponent's. For instance, if you're getting bullied, and you know where you fall short or feel insecure, you can stay ahead of any insults or barbs a bully may throw your way. You can laugh at yourself along with them, which disempowers them. If you take what they do or say less personally, they no longer hold any cards. Feelings are just feelings. On the other hand, people who are secure with themselves don't bully other people. They look out for other people, so if you're getting bullied you know that you're dealing with someone who has problem areas you can exploit or soothe. Sometimes the best way to defeat a bully is to actually help them. If you can think two or three moves ahead, you will commandeer their thought process, and if you do that, you've taken their soul without them even realizing it.

Our SEAL instructors were our bullies, and they didn't realize the games I was playing during that week to keep Boat Crew Two sharp. And they didn't have to. I imagined that they were obsessed with our exploits during Hell Week, but I don't know that for sure. It was a ploy I used to maintain my mental edge and help our crew prevail.

In the same way, if you are up against a competitor for a promotion, and you know where you fall short, you can shape up your game ahead of your interview or evaluation. In that scenario, laughing at your weaknesses won't solve the problem. You must master them. In the meantime, if you are aware of your competitor's vulnerabilities you can spin those to your advantage, but all of that takes research. Again, know the terrain, know yourself, and you'd better know your adversary in detail.

Once you're in the heat of battle, it comes down to staying power. If it's a difficult physical challenge you will probably have to defeat your own demons before you can take your opponent's soul. That means rehearsing answers to the simple question that is sure to rise up like a thought bubble: "Why am I here?" If you know that moment is coming and have your answer ready, you will be equipped to make the split-second decision to ignore your weakened mind and keep moving. Know why you're in the fight to stay in the fight!

And never forget that all emotional and physical anguish is finite! It all ends eventually. Smile at pain and watch it fade for at least a second or two. If you can do that, you can string those seconds together and last longer than your opponent thinks you can, and that may be enough to catch a second wind. There is no scientific consensus on second wind. Some scientists think it's the result of endorphins flooding your nervous system, others think it's a burst of oxygen that can help break down lactic acid, as well as the glycogen and triglycerides muscles need to perform. Some say it's purely psychological. All I know is that by going hard when we felt defeated we were able to ride a second wind through the worst night in Hell Week. And once you have that second wind behind you it's easy to break your opponent down and snatch a soul. The hard part is getting to that point, because the ticket to victory often comes down to bringing your very best when you feel your worst.

* * *

After rocking boat presses, the whole class was gifted an hour of sleep in a big green army tent they'd set up on the beach and outfitted with military

cots. Even without mattresses, those cots may as well have been a cotton topped cloud of luxury because once we were horizontal we all went limp.

Oh, but Psycho wasn't done with me. He let me sleep for a solitary minute, then woke me up and led me back onto the beach for some one-on-one time. He saw an opportunity to get in my head, at last, and I was disoriented as I staggered toward the water all alone, but the cold woke me up. I decided to savor my extra hour of private surf torture. When the water was chest high I began humming *Adagio for Strings* once more. Louder this time. Loud enough for him to hear me over the crash of the surf. That song gave me life!

I'd come to SEAL training to see if I was hard enough to belong and found an inner beast within that I never knew existed. A beast that I would tap into from then on whenever life went wrong. By the time I emerged from that ocean, I considered myself unbreakable.

If only.

Hell Week takes its toll on everybody, and later that night, with forty-eight hours to go, I went to med check to get a Toradol shot in my knee to bring the swelling down. By the time I was back on the beach, the boat crews were out at sea in the midst of a paddling drill. The surf was pounding, the wind swirling. Psycho looked over at SBG. "What are we gonna do with him?"

For the first time, he was hesitant, and tired of trying to beat me down. I was good to go, ready for any challenge, but Psycho was over it. He was ready to give me a spa vacation. That's when I knew I'd outlasted him; that I had his soul. SBG had other ideas. He handed me a life jacket and attached a chem light to the back of my hat.

"Follow me," he said as he charged up the beach. I caught up and we ran north for a good mile. By then we could barely see the boats and their bobbing lights through the mist and over the waves. "All right, Goggins. Now go swim out and find your boat!"

He'd landed a hollow point on my deepest insecurity, pierced my confidence, and I was stunned silent. I gave him a look that said, "Are you kidding me?" I was a decent swimmer by then, and surf torture didn't scare

me because we weren't that far from shore, but an open water, hypothermic swim a thousand yards off shore in a storm, to a boat that had no idea I was heading their way? That sounded like a death sentence, and I hadn't prepared for anything like it. But sometimes the unexpected descends like chaos, and without warning even the bravest among us must be ready to take on risks and tasks that seem beyond our capabilities.

For me, in that moment, it came down to how I wanted to be remembered. I could have refused the order, and I wouldn't have gotten in trouble because I had no swim buddy (in SEAL training you always have to be with a swim buddy), and it was obvious that he was asking me to do something that was extremely unsafe. But I also knew that my objective coming into SEAL training was more than making it through to the other side with a Trident. For me it was the opportunity to go up against the best of the best and distance myself from the pack. So even though I couldn't see the boats out past the thrashing waves there was no time to dwell on fear. There was no choice to make at all.

"What are you waiting on Goggins? Get your butt out there, and do not screw this up!"

"Roger that!" I shouted and sprinted into the surf. Trouble was, strapped with a buoyancy vest, nursing a wounded knee, wearing boots, I could barely swim and it was almost impossible to duck dive through the waves. I had to flail over the white wash, and with my mind managing so many variables, the ocean seemed colder than ever. I swallowed water by the gallon. It was as if the sea was prying open my jaws and flooding my system, and with each gulp, my fear magnified.

I had no idea that back on land, SBG was preparing for a worst-case scenario rescue. I didn't know he'd never put another man in that position before. I didn't realize that he saw something special in me and like any strong leader wanted to see how far I could take it, as he watched my light bob on the surface, nervous as can be. He told me all of that during a recent conversation. At the time I was just trying to survive.

I finally made it through the surf and swam another half-mile off-shore only to realize I had six boats bearing down on my head, teeter tottering in and

out of view thanks to a four-foot wind swell. They didn't know I was there! My light was faint, and in the trench I couldn't see a thing. I kept waiting for one of them to come barreling down from the peak of a swell and mow me down. All I could do was bark into the darkness like a hoarse sea lion.

"Boat Crew Two! Boat Crew Two!"

It was a minor miracle that my guys heard me. They wheeled our boat around, and Freak Brown grabbed me with his huge hooks and hauled me in like a prized catch. I lay back in the middle of the boat, my eyes closed, and jackhammered for the first time all week. I was so cold I couldn't hide it.

"Wow, Goggins," Brown said, "you must be insane! You okay?" I nodded once and got a hold of myself. I was the leader of that crew and couldn't allow myself to show weakness. I tensed every muscle in my body, and my shiver slowed to a stop in real time.

"That's how you lead from the front," I said, coughing up saltwater like a wounded bird. I couldn't keep a straight face for long. Neither could my crew. They knew good and well that crazy swim wasn't my idea.

As the clock ran down on Hell Week, we were in the demo pit, just off Coronado's famous Silver Strand. The pit was filled with cold mud and topped off with icy water. There was a rope bridge—two separate lines, one for the feet and one for the hands—stretching across it from end to end. One by one, each man had to navigate their way across while the instructors shook the life out of it, trying to make us fall. To maintain that kind of balance takes tremendous core strength, and we were all cooked and at our wits' end. Plus, my knee was still messed up. In fact, it had gotten worse and required a pain shot every twelve hours. But when my name was called, I climbed onto that rope, and when the instructors went to work, I flexed my core and held on with all I had left.

Nine months earlier, I had topped out at 297 pounds and couldn't even run a quarter mile. Back then, when I was dreaming of a different life, I remember thinking that just getting through Hell Week would be the biggest honor of my life so far. Even if I never graduated from BUD/S, surviving Hell Week alone would have meant something. But I didn't just survive. I was about to

finish Hell Week at the top of my class, and for the first time, I knew I had the capabilities of being a hard man.

Once, I was so focused on failing, I was afraid to even try. Now I would take on any challenge. All my life, I was terrified of water, and especially cold water, but standing there in the final hour, I wished the ocean, wind, and mud were even colder! I was completely transformed physically, which was a big part of my success in BUD/S, but what saw me through Hell Week was my mind, and I was just starting to tap into its power.

That's what I was thinking about as the instructors did their best to throw me off that rope bridge like a mechanical bull. I hung tough and got as far as anyone else in Class 231 before nature won out and I was sent spinning into the freezing mud. I wiped it from my eyes and mouth and laughed like mad as Freak Brown helped me up. Not long after that, SBG stepped to the edge of the pit.

"Hell Week secure!" he shouted to the thirty guys still left, quivering in the shallows. All of us chafed and bleeding, bloated and stiff. "You guys did an amazing job!"

Some guys screamed with joy. Others collapsed to their knees with tears in their eyes and thanked God. I stared into the heavens too, pulled Freak Brown in for a hug, and high-fived my team. Every other boat crew had lost men, but not Boat Crew Two! We lost no men and won every single race!

We continued to celebrate as we boarded a bus to the Grinder. Once we arrived, there was a large pizza for each guy along with a sixty-four-ounce bottle of Gatorade and the coveted brown T-shirt. That pizza tasted like manna from heaven, but the shirts meant something more significant. When you first arrive at BUD/S you wear white T-shirts every day. Once you survive Hell Week, you get to swap them out for brown shirts. It was a symbol that we'd advanced to a higher level, and after a lifetime of mostly failure, I definitely felt like I was someplace new.

I tried to enjoy the moment like everyone else, but my knee hadn't felt right in two days and I decided to leave and see the medics. On my way off the Grinder, I looked to my right and saw nearly a hundred helmets lined up.

They belonged to the men who'd rung the bell, and they stretched past the statue, all the way to the quarterdeck. I read some of the names—guys who I liked. I knew how they felt because I was there when my Pararescue class graduated without me. That memory had dominated me for years, but after 130 hours of Hell, it no longer defined me.

Every man was required to see the medics that evening, but our bodies were so swollen they had a hard time discerning injuries from general soreness. All I knew was my right knee was jacked-up and I needed crutches to get around. Freak Brown left med check bruised and battered. Kenny came out clean and barely limped, but he was plenty sore. Thankfully, our next evolution was walk week. We had seven days to eat, drink, and heal up before everything got real once again. It wasn't much, but enough time for most of the insane guys that managed to remain in Class 231 to get well.

Me, on the other hand? My swollen knee hadn't gotten any better by the time they snatched my crutches away. But there was no time for boo-hooing. First Phase fun wasn't over yet. After walk week came *knot tying*, which may not sound like much but was way worse than I expected because that particular drill took place at the bottom of the pool, where those same instructors would do their best to drown me, the one-legged easy target.

It was as if the Devil had been watching the whole show, waited out intermission, and now his favorite part was coming right up. The night before BUD/S kicked back up in intensity I could hear his words ringing in my stressed-out brain as I tossed and turned all night long.

They say you like suffering, Goggins. That you think you're a warrior. Enjoy your extended stay in Hell!

CHALLENGE #4

Choose any competitive situation that you're in right now. Who is your opponent? Is it your teacher or coach, your boss, an unruly client? No matter how they're treating you there is one way to not only earn their respect, but turn the tables. Excellence.

That may mean acing an exam, or crafting an ideal proposal, or smashing a sales goal. Whatever it is, I want you to work harder on that project or in that class than you ever have before. Do everything exactly as they ask, and whatever standard they set as an ideal outcome, you should be aiming to surpass that.

If your coach doesn't give you time in the games, dominate practice. Check the best guy on your squad and show out. That means putting time in off the field. Watching film so you can study your opponent's tendencies, memorizing plays, and training in the gym. You need to make that coach pay attention.

If it's your teacher, then start doing work of high quality. Spend extra time on your assignments. Write papers for her that she didn't even assign! Come early to class. Ask questions. Pay attention. Show her who you are and want to be.

If it's a boss, work around the clock. Get to work before them. Leave after they go home. Make sure they see what you're doing, and when it's time to deliver, surpass their maximum expectations.

Whoever you're dealing with, your goal is to make them watch you achieve what they could never have done themselves. You want them thinking how amazing you are. Take their negativity and use it to dominate their task with everything you've got. Take their soul! Afterward, post about it on social and add the hashtag #canthurtme #takingsouls.

CHAPTER FIVE

ARMORED MIND

"YOUR KNEE LOOKS PRETTY BAD, GOGGINS."

Thank you, Doctor Obvious. With two days to go in walk week, I'd come by medical for a follow-up. The doctor rolled up my camo pants and when he gave my right kneecap a gentle squeeze, pain seized my brain, but I couldn't show it. I was playing a role. I was the beat up but otherwise healthy BUD/S student ready for the fight, and I couldn't so much as grimace to pull it off. I already knew the knee was messed up, and that the odds of getting through another five months of training on one leg were low, but accepting another roll back meant enduring another Hell Week, and that was way too much to process.

"The swelling hasn't gone down much. How's it feel?"

The doctor was playing a role too. SEAL candidates had a don't ask, don't tell agreement with most of the medical staff at Naval Special Warfare Command. I wasn't about to make the doctor's job easier by revealing anything to him, and he wasn't gonna take caution's side and pull the rip cord on a man's dream. He lifted his hand and my pain faded. I coughed and pneumonia once again rattled in my lungs until I felt the cold truth of his stethoscope on my skin.

Ever since Hell Week was called, I'd been coughing up brown knots of mucus. For the first two days I lay in bed, day and night, spitting them into a Gatorade bottle, where I stored them like so many nickels. I could barely breathe, and couldn't move much either. I may have been a savage in Hell

Week, but that was over, and I had to deal with the fact that the Devil (and those instructors) branded me too.

“It’s all right, Doc,” I said. “A little stiff is all.”

Time is what I needed. I knew how to push through pain, and my body had almost always responded with performance. I wasn’t going to quit just because my knee was barking. It would come around eventually. The doc prescribed medicine to reduce the congestion in my lungs and sinuses, and gave me some Motrin for my knee. Within two days my breathing improved, but I still couldn’t bend my right leg.

This would be a problem.

Of all the moments in BUD/S that I thought could break me, a knot-tying exercise never registered on my radar. Then again, this wasn’t the Boy Scouts. This was an underwater knot-tying drill held in the fifteen-foot section of the pool. And while the pool didn’t strike mortal fear into me like it once did, being negatively buoyant, I knew that *any* pool evolution could be my undoing, especially those that demanded treading water.

Even before Hell Week, we’d been tested in the pool. We had to perform mock rescues on the instructors and do a fifty-meter underwater swim without fins on a single breath. That swim started with a giant stride into the water followed by a full somersault to siphon off any momentum whatsoever. Then without kicking off the side, we swam along the lane lines to the end of our twenty-five-meter pool. On the far side we were allowed to kick off the wall then swim back. When I arrived at the fifty-meter mark I rose up and gasped for air. My heart hammered until my breath smoothed, and I grasped that I’d actually passed the first of a series of complicated underwater evolutions that were supposed to teach us to be calm, cool, and collected underwater on a breath hold.

The knot-tying evolution was next in the series and it wasn’t about our ability to tie various knots or a way to time our max breath hold. Sure, both skills come in handy on amphibian operations, but this drill was more about our capacity to juggle multiple stressors in an environment that’s not

sustainable for human life. Despite my health, I was heading into the drill with some confidence. Things changed when I started treading water.

That's how the drill began, with eight students strung out across the pool, moving our hands and legs like eggbeaters. That's hard enough for me on two good legs, but because my right knee didn't work, I was forced to tread water with just my left. That spiked the degree of difficulty, and my heart rate, which sapped my energy.

Each student had an instructor assigned to them for this evolution and Psycho Pete specifically requested me. It was obvious I was struggling, and Psycho, and his bruised pride, were hungry for a little payback. With each revolution of my right leg, shockwaves of pain exploded like fireworks. Even with Psycho eyeballing me, I couldn't hide it. When I grimaced, he smiled like a kid on Christmas morning.

"Tie a square knot! Then a bowline!" he shouted. I was working so hard it was difficult to catch my breath, but Psycho didn't care. "Now!" I gulped air, bent from the waist and kicked down.

There were five knots in the drill altogether and each student was told to grab their eight-inch slice of rope, and tie them off one at a time at the bottom of the pool. We were allotted a breath in between, but could do as many as all five knots on a single breath. The instructor called out the knots, but the pacing was up to each student. We weren't allowed to use a mask or goggles to complete the evolution, and the instructor had to approve each knot with a thumbs up before we were permitted to surface. If they flashed a thumb down instead, we had to re-tie that knot correctly, and if we surfaced before a given knot was approved, that meant failure and a ticket home.

Once back at the surface, there was no resting or relaxing between tasks. Treading water was the constant refrain, which meant soaring heart rates and the continual burning up of oxygen in the bloodstream for the one-legged man. Translation: the dives were beyond uncomfortable, and blacking out was a real possibility.

Psycho glared at me through his mask as I worked my knots. After about thirty seconds he'd approved both and we surfaced. He breathed free and

easy, but I was gasping and panting like a wet, tired dog. The pain in my knee was so bad I felt sweat bead up on my forehead. When you're sweating in an unheated pool, you know something's wrong. I was breathless, low on energy, and wanted to quit, but quitting this evolution meant quitting BUD/S altogether, and that wasn't happening.

"Oh no, are you hurt, Goggins? Did you get some sand in your crotch?" Psycho asked. "I'll bet you can't do the last three knots on one breath."

He said it with a smirk, like he was daring me. I knew the rules. I didn't have to accept his challenge, but that would have made Psycho just a little too happy and I couldn't allow that. I nodded and kept treading water, delaying my dive until my pulse evened out and I could score one deep, nourishing breath. Psycho wasn't having it. Whenever I opened my mouth he splashed water in my face to stress me out even more, a tactic used when trainees started to panic. That made breathing impossible.

"Go under now or you fail!"

I'd run out of time. I tried to gulp some air before my duck dive, and tasted a mouthful of Psycho's splash water instead as I dove to the bottom of the pool on a negative breath hold. My lungs were nearly empty which meant I was in pain from the jump, but I knocked the first one out in a few seconds. Psycho took his sweet time examining my work. My heart was thrumming like high alert Morse code. I felt it flip flop in my chest, like it was trying to break through my rib cage and fly to freedom. Psycho stared at the twine, flipped it over and perused it with his eyes and fingers, before offering a thumb's up in slow motion. I shook my head, untied the rope and hit the next one. Again he gave it a close inspection while my chest burned and diaphragm contracted, trying to force air into my empty lungs. The pain level in my knee was at a ten. Stars gathered in my peripheral vision. Those multiple stressors had me teetering like a Jenga tower, and I felt like I was about to black out. If that happened, I'd have to depend on Psycho to swim me to the surface and bring me around. Did I really trust this man to do that? He hated me. What if he failed to execute? What if my body was too burned-out that even a rescue breath couldn't rouse me?

My mind was spun with those simple toxic questions that never go away. Why was I here? Why suffer when I could quit and be comfortable again? Why risk passing out or even death for a knot drill? I knew that if I succumbed and bolted to the surface my SEAL career would have ended then and there, but in that moment I couldn't figure out why I ever cared.

I looked over at Psycho. He held both thumbs up and sported a big goofy smile on his face like he was watching a comedy show. His split second of pleasure in my pain, reminded me of all the bullying and taunts I felt as a teenager, but instead of playing the victim and letting negative emotions sap my energy and force me to the surface, a failure, it was as if a new light blazed in my brain that allowed me to flip the script.

Time stood still as I realized for the first time that I'd always looked at my entire life, everything I'd been through, from the wrong perspective. Yes, all the abuse I'd experienced and the negativity I had to push through challenged me to the core, but in that moment I stopped seeing myself as the victim of bad circumstance, and saw my life as the ultimate training ground instead. My disadvantages had been callousing my mind all along and had prepared me for that moment in that pool with Psycho Pete.

I remember my very first day in the gym back in Indiana. My palms were soft and quickly got torn up on the bars because they weren't accustomed to gripping steel. But over time, after thousands of reps, my palms built up a thick callous as protection. The same principle works when it comes to mindset. Until you experience hardships like abuse and bullying, failures and disappointments, your mind will remain soft and exposed. Life experience, especially negative experiences, help callous the mind. But it's up to you where that callous lines up. If you choose to see yourself as a victim of circumstance into adulthood, that callous will become resentment that protects you from the unfamiliar. It will make you too cautious and untrusting, and possibly too angry at the world. It will make you fearful of change and hard to reach, but not hard of mind. That's where I was as a teenager, but after my second Hell Week, I'd become someone new. I'd fought through so many horrible situations by then and remained open and ready for more. My ability to stay open represented a willingness to fight for my own life, which allowed me to withstand hailstorms of pain and use it to callous over my victim's mentality. That mindset was gone, buried under

layers of sweat and hard flesh, and I was starting to callous over my fears too. That realization gave me the mental edge I needed to outlast Psycho Pete one more time.

To show him he couldn't hurt me anymore I smiled back, and the feeling of being on the edge of a blackout went away. Suddenly, I was energized. The pain faded and I felt like I could stay under all day. Psycho saw that in my eyes. I tied off the last knot at leisurely pace, glaring at him the whole time. He gestured with his hands for me to hurry up as his diaphragm contracted. I finally finished, he gave me a quick affirmative and kicked to the surface, desperate for a breath. I took my time, joined him topside and found him gasping, while I felt strangely relaxed. When the chips were down at the pool during Air Force pararescue training, I'd buckled. This time I won a major battle in the water. It was a big victory, but the war wasn't over.

After I passed the knot-tying evolution, we had two minutes to climb out on to the deck, get dressed, and head back to the classroom. During First Phase, that's usually plenty of time, but a lot of us—not just me—were still healing from Hell Week and not moving at our typical lightning pace. On top of that, once we got through Hell Week, Class 231 went through a bit of an attitude adjustment.

Hell Week is designed to show you that a human is capable of much more than you know. It opens your mind to the true possibilities of human potential, and with that comes a change in your mentality. You no longer fear cold water or doing push-ups all day. You realize that no matter what they do to you, they will never break you, so you don't rush as much to make their arbitrary deadlines. You know if you don't make it, the instructors will beat you down. Meaning push-ups, getting wet and sandy, anything to up the pain and discomfort quotient, but for those of us knuckle draggers still in the mix, our attitude was, *So be it!* None of us feared the instructors anymore, and we weren't about to rush. They didn't like that one bit.

I had seen a lot of beat downs while at BUD/S, but the one we received that day will go down as one of the worst in history. We did push-ups until we couldn't pick ourselves up off the deck, then they turned us on our backs and demanded flutter kicks. Each kick was torture for me. I kept putting my legs

down because of the pain. I was showing weakness and if you show weakness, IT IS ON!

Psycho and SBG descended and took turns on me. I went from push-ups to flutter kicks to bear crawls until *they* got tired. I could feel the moving parts of my knee shifting, floating, and grabbing every time I bent it to do those bear crawls, and it was agonizing. I moved slower than normal and knew I was broken. That simple question bubbled up again. Why? What was I trying to prove? Quitting seemed the sane choice. The comfort of mediocrity sounded like sweet relief until Psycho screamed in my ear.

“Move faster, Goggins!”

Once again, an amazing feeling washed over me. I wasn’t focused on outdoing him this time. I was in the worst pain of my life, but my victory in the pool minutes before came rushing back. I’d finally proved to myself that I was a decent enough waterman to belong in the Navy SEALs. Heady stuff for a negatively buoyant kid that never took a swim lesson in his entire life. And the reason I got there was because I’d put in the work. The pool had been my kryptonite. Even though I was a far better swimmer as a SEAL candidate, I was still so stressed about water evolutions that I used to hit the pool after a day of training at least three times a week. I scaled the fifteen-foot fence just to gain after-hours access. Other than the academic aspect, nothing scared me as much about the prospects of BUD/S like the swimming drills, and by dedicating time I was able to callous over that fear and hit new levels underwater when the pressure was on.

I thought about the incredible power of a calloused mind on task, as Psycho and SBG beat me down, and that thought became a feeling that took over my body and made me move as fast as a bear around that pool. I couldn’t believe what I was doing. The intense pain was gone, and so were those nagging questions. I was putting out harder than ever, breaking through the limitations of injury and pain tolerance, and riding a second wind delivered by a calloused mind.

After the bear crawls, I went back to doing flutter kicks, and I still had no pain! As we were leaving the pool a half-hour later, SBG asked, “Goggins, what got into your head to make you Superman?” I just smiled and left the

pool. I didn't want to say anything because I didn't yet understand what I now know.

Similar to using an opponent's energy to gain an advantage, leaning on your calloused mind in the heat of battle can shift your thinking as well. Remembering what you've been through and how that has strengthened your mindset can lift you out of a negative brain loop and help you bypass those weak, one-second impulses to give in so you can power through obstacles. And when you leverage a calloused mind like I did around the pool that day and keep fighting through pain, it can help you push your limits because if you accept the pain as a natural process and refuse to give in and give up, you will engage the sympathetic nervous system which shifts your hormonal flow.

The sympathetic nervous system is your fight or flight reflex. It's bubbling just below the surface, and when you are lost, stressed out, or struggling, like I was when I was a down and out kid, that's the part of your mind that's driving the bus. We've all tasted this feeling before. Those mornings when going on a run is the last thing you want to do, but then twenty minutes into it you feel energized, that's the work of the sympathetic nervous system. What I've found is that you can tap into it on-call as long as you know how to manage your own mind.

When you indulge in negative self-talk, the gifts of a sympathetic response will remain out of reach. However, if you can manage those moments of pain that come with maximum effort, by remembering what you've been through to get to that point in your life, you will be in a better position to persevere and choose fight over flight. That will allow you to use the adrenaline that comes with a sympathetic response to go even harder.

Obstacles at work and school can also be overcome with your calloused mind. In those cases, pushing through a given flashpoint isn't likely to lead to a sympathetic response, but it will keep you motivated to push through any doubt you feel about your own abilities. No matter the task at hand, there is always opportunity for self-doubt. Whenever you decide to follow a dream or set a goal, you are just as likely to come up with all the reasons why the likelihood of success is low. Blame it on the screwed-up evolutionary wiring of the human mind. But you don't have to let your doubt

into the cockpit! You can tolerate doubt as a backseat driver, but if you put doubt in the pilot's seat, defeat is guaranteed. Remembering that you've been through difficulties before and have always survived to fight again shifts the conversation in your head. It will allow you to control and manage doubt, and keep you focused on taking each and every step necessary to achieve the task at hand.

Sounds simple, right? It isn't. Very few people even bother to try to control the way their thoughts and doubts bubble up. The vast majority of us are slaves to our minds. Most don't even make the first effort when it comes to mastering their thought process because it's a never-ending chore and impossible to get right every time. The average person thinks 2,000–3,000 thoughts per hour. That's thirty to fifty per minute! Some of those shots will slip by the goalie. It's inevitable. Especially if you coast through life.

Physical training is the perfect crucible to learn how to manage your thought process because when you're working out, your focus is more likely to be single pointed, and your response to stress and pain is immediate and measurable. Do you hammer hard and snag that personal best like you said you would, or do you crumble? That decision rarely comes down to physical ability, it's almost always a test of how well you are managing your own mind. If you push yourself through each split and use that energy to maintain a strong pace, you have a great chance of recording a faster time. Granted, some days it's easier to do that than others. And the clock, or the score, doesn't matter anyway. The reason it's important to push hardest when you want to quit the most is because it helps you callous your mind. It's the same reason why you have to do your best work when you are the least motivated. That's why I loved PT in BUD/S and why I still love it today. Physical challenges strengthen my mind so I'm ready for whatever life throws at me, and it will do the same for you.

But no matter how well you deploy it, a calloused mind can't heal broken bones. On the mile-long hike back to the BUD/S compound, the feeling of victory evaporated, and I could feel the damage I'd done. I had twenty weeks of training in front of me, dozens of evolutions ahead, and I could barely walk. While I wanted to deny the pain in my knee, I knew I was in deep trouble so I limped straight to medical.

When he saw my knee, the doc didn't say a thing. He just shook his head and sent me to get an x-ray that revealed a fractured kneecap. In BUD/S when reservists sustain injuries that take a long time to heal, they're sent home, and that's what happened to me.

I crutched back to the barracks, demoralized, and while checking out, I saw some of the guys that quit during Hell Week. When I first glimpsed their helmets lined up beneath the bell, I felt sorry for them because I knew the empty feeling of giving up, but seeing them face to face reminded me that failure is a part of life and now we all had to press on.

I hadn't quit, so I knew I'd be invited back, but I had no idea if that meant a third Hell Week or not. Or if after getting rolled twice I still had the burning desire to fight through another hurricane of pain with no guarantee of success. Given my injury record, how could I? I left the BUD/S compound with more self-awareness and more mastery over my mind than I'd ever had before, but my future was just as uncertain.

* * *

Airplanes have always made me claustrophobic, so I decided to take the train from San Diego to Chicago, which gave me three full days to think, and my mind was all messed up. On the first day I didn't know if I wanted to be a SEAL anymore. I had overcome a lot. I beat Hell Week, realized the power of a calloused mind and conquered my fear of the water. Perhaps I'd already learned enough about myself? What else did I need to prove? On day two I thought about all the other jobs I could sign up for. Maybe I should move on and become a firefighter? That's an awesome job, and it would be an opportunity to become a different sort of hero. But on day three, as the train veered into Chicago, I slipped into a bathroom the size of a phone booth and checked in with the Accountability Mirror. *Is that really how you feel? Are you sure you're ready to give up on the SEALs and become a civilian fireman?* I stared at myself for five minutes before I shook my head. I couldn't lie. I had to tell myself the truth, out loud.

"I'm afraid. I'm afraid of going through all of that suffering again. I'm afraid of day one, week one."

I was divorced by then, but my ex-wife, Pam, met me at the train station to drive me home to my mother's place in Indianapolis. Pam was still living in Brazil. We'd been in touch while I was in San Diego, and after seeing each other through the crowd on the train platform, we fell back on our habits, and later that night we fell into bed.

That whole summer, from May to November, I stayed in the Midwest, healing up then rehabbing my knee. I was still a reservist but remained undecided about going back to Navy SEAL training. I looked into the Marine Corps. I explored the application process for a handful of fire fighting units but finally picked up the phone, ready to call into the BUD/S compound. They needed my final answer.

I sat there, holding the telephone, and thought about the misery of SEAL training. You run six miles a day just to eat, not including your training runs. I visualized all the swimming and paddling, carrying heavy boats and logs on our heads, over the berm all day. I flashed onto hours of sit-ups, push-ups, flutter kicks, and the O-Course. I remembered the feeling of rolling around in the sand, of being chafed all day and night. My memories were a mind-body experience, and I felt the cold deep in my bones. A normal person would give up. They'd say, oh well, it's just not meant to be, and refuse to torture themselves one minute more.

But I wasn't wired normal.

As I dialed the number, negativity rose up like an angry shadow. I couldn't help but think that I was put on this earth to suffer. Why wouldn't my own personal demons, the fates, God, or Satan, just leave me alone? I was tired of trying to prove myself. Tired of callousing my mind. Mentally, I was worn to the nub. At the same time, being worn down is the price of being hard and I knew if I quit, those feelings and thoughts wouldn't just go away. The cost of quitting would be lifelong purgatory. I'd be trapped in the knowing that I didn't stay in the fight to the bitter end. There is no shame in getting knocked out. The shame comes when you throw in the towel, and if I was born to suffer, then I may as well take my medicine.

The training officer welcomed me back and confirmed that I was starting from day one, week one. As expected, my brown shirt would have to be

swapped out for a white one, and he had one more sliver of sunshine to share. “Just so you know, Goggins,” he said, “this will be the last time we will allow you to go through BUD/S training. If you get injured, that’s it. We will not allow you to come back again.”

“Roger that,” I said.

Class 235 would muster in just four weeks. My knee still wasn’t all the way right, but I’d better be ready because the ultimate test was about to begin.

Within seconds of hanging up the phone, Pam called and said she needed to see me. It was good timing. I was leaving town again, hopefully for good this time, and I needed to level with her. We’d been enjoying one another, but it was always a temporary thing for me. We’d been married once and we were still different people with totally different worldviews. That hadn’t changed and obviously neither had some of my insecurities, as they kept me going back to what was familiar. Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. We would never work and it was time to say so.

She got to her news first.

“I’m late,” she said, as she burst through the door, clutching a brown paper bag. “Like *late* late.” She seemed excited and nervous as she disappeared into the bathroom. I could hear that bag crinkle and the tearing open of a package as I lay on my bed staring at the ceiling. Minutes later, she opened the bathroom door, a pregnancy test in her fist and a big smile on her face. “I knew it,” she said, biting her lower lip. “Look, David, we’re pregnant!”

I stood up slow, she hugged me with everything she had, and her excitement broke my heart. It wasn’t supposed to go like this. I wasn’t ready. My body was still broken, I was $30,000 in credit card debt, and still only a reservist. I had no address of my own and no car. I was unstable, and that made me very insecure. Plus, I wasn’t even in love with this woman. That’s what I said to myself while I stared into that Accountability Mirror over her shoulder. The mirror that never lies.

I averted my eyes.

Pam went home to share the news with her parents. I walked her to the door of my mother's place, then slumped into the couch. In Coronado, I felt like I'd come to terms with my messed-up past and found some power there, and here I was sucked under once again. Now it wasn't just about me and my dreams of becoming a SEAL. I had a family to think about, which raised the stakes that much higher. If I failed this time, it wouldn't mean that I was just going back to ground zero, emotionally and financially, but I would be bringing my new family there with me. When my mother got home I told her everything, and as we talked the dam broke and my fear, sadness, and struggle came bursting out of me. I put my head in my hands and sobbed.

"Mom, my life from the time I was born until now has been a nightmare. A nightmare that keeps getting worse," I said. "The harder I try, the harder my life becomes."

"I can't argue with that, David," she said. My mom knew hell and she wasn't trying to baby me. She never had. "But I also know you well enough to know that you will find a way to get through this."

"I have to," I said as I wiped the tears from my eyes. "I don't have a choice."

She left me alone, and I sat on that couch all night. I felt like I'd been stripped of everything, but I was still breathing, which meant I had to find a way to keep going. I had to compartmentalize doubt and find the strength to believe that I was born to be more than some tired Navy SEAL reject. After Hell Week I'd felt I had become unbreakable, yet within a week I'd been zeroed out. I hadn't levelled up after all. I still wasn't anything or anyone, and if I was going to fix my broke-down life, I would have to become more!

On that sofa, I found a way.

By then I'd learned how to hold myself accountable, and I knew I could take a man's soul in the heat of battle. I had overcome many obstacles, and realized that each of those experiences had calloused my mind so thick, I could take on any challenge. All of that had made me feel like I'd dealt with my past demons, but I hadn't. I'd been ignoring them. My memories of abuse at the hands of my father, of all those people who called me nigger, didn't vaporize after a few victories. Those moments were anchored deep in

my subconscious, and as a result, my foundation was cracked. In a human being your character is your foundation, and when you build a bunch of successes and pile up even more failures on a broken foundation, the structure that is the self won't be sound. To develop an armored mind—a mindset so calloused and hard that it becomes bulletproof—you need to go to the source of all your fears and insecurities.

Most of us sweep our failures and evil secrets under the rug, but when we run into problems, that rug gets lifted up, and our darkness re-emerges, floods our soul, and influences the decisions that determine our character. My fears were never just about the water, and my anxieties toward Class 235 weren't about the pain of First Phase. They were seeping from the infected wounds I'd been walking around with my entire life, and my denial of them amounted to a denial of myself. I was my own worst enemy! It wasn't the world, or God, or the Devil that was out to get me. It was me!

I was rejecting my past and therefore rejecting myself. My foundation, my character was defined by self-rejection. All my fears came from that deep-seated uneasiness I carried with being David Goggins because of what I'd gone through. Even after I'd reached a point where I no longer cared about what others thought of me, *I* still had trouble accepting *me*.

Anyone who is of sound mind and body can sit down and think of twenty things in their life that could have gone differently. Where maybe they didn't get a fair shake and where they took the path of least resistance. If you're one of the few who acknowledge that, want to callous those wounds, and strengthen your character, it's up to you to go back through your past and make peace with yourself by facing those incidents and all of your negative influences, and accepting them as weak spots in your own character. Only when you identify and accept your weaknesses will you finally stop running from your past. Then those incidents can be used more efficiently as fuel to become better and grow stronger.

Right there on mom's couch, as the moon burned its arc in the night sky, I faced down my demons. I faced myself. I couldn't run from my dad anymore. I had to accept that he was part of me and that his lying, cheating character influenced me more than I cared to admit. Before that night, I used to tell people that my father had died rather than tell the truth about where I

came from. Even in the SEALs I trotted out that lie. I knew why. When you get beat up, you don't want to acknowledge getting your butt kicked. It doesn't make you feel very manly, so the easiest thing to do is forget about it and move on. Pretend it never happened.

Not anymore.

Going forward it became very important for me to rehash my life, because when you examine your experiences with a fine-toothed comb and see where your issues come from, you can find strength in enduring pain and abuse. By accepting Trunnis Goggins as part of me, I was free to use where I came from as fuel. I realized that each episode of child abuse that could have killed me made me tough as nails and as sharp as a Samurai's blade.

True, I had been dealt a bad hand, but that night I started thinking of it as running a 100-mile race with a fifty-pound ruck on my back. Could I still compete in that race even if everyone else was running free and easy, weighing 130 pounds? How fast would I be able to run once I'd shed that dead weight? I wasn't even thinking about ultras yet. To me the race was life itself, and the more I took inventory, the more I realized how prepared I was for the difficult events yet to come. Life had put me in the fire, taken me out, and hammered me repeatedly, and diving back into the BUD/S cauldron, feeling a third Hell Week in a calendar year, would decorate me with a PhD in pain. I was about to become the sharpest sword ever made!

* * *

I showed up to Class 235 on a mission and kept to myself throughout much of First Phase. There were 156 men in that class on day one. I still led from the front, but I wasn't about shepherding anyone through Hell Week this time. My knee was still sore and I needed to put every ounce of energy into getting myself through BUD/S. I had everything riding on the next six months, and I had no illusions about how difficult it would be to make it through.

Case in point: Shawn Dobbs.

Dobbs grew up poor in Jacksonville, Florida. He battled some of the same demons I did, and he came into class with a chip on his shoulder. Right away, I could see he was an elite, natural athlete. He was at or near the front on all the runs, he blitzed the O-Course in 8:30 after just a few reps, and he *knew* he was a stud. Then again, like the Taoists say, those that know don't speak, and those who speak, well, they don't know jack.

On the night before Hell Week began he talked a lot of noise about the guys in Class 235. There were already fifty-five helmets on the Grinder, and he was sure he'd be one of a handful of graduates at the end. He mentioned the guys he *knew* would make it through Hell Week and also talked a lot of nonsense about the guys he *knew* would quit.

He had no clue that he was making the classic mistake of measuring himself against others in his class. When he beat them in an evolution or outperformed them during PT, he took a lot of pride in that. It boosted his self-confidence and his performance. In BUD/S, it's common and natural to do some of that. It's all part of the competitive nature of the alpha males who are drawn to the SEALs, but he didn't realize that during Hell Week you need a solid boat crew to survive, which means depending upon your classmates, not defeating them. While he talked and talked, I took notice. He had no idea what was in store for him and how bad sleep deprivation and being cold completely messes you up. He was about to find out. In the early hours of Hell Week, he performed well, but that same drive to defeat his classmates in evolutions and on timed runs came out on the beach.

At 5'4" and 188 pounds, Dobbs was built like a fire hydrant, but since he was short he was assigned to a boat crew of smaller guys referred to as Smurfs by the instructors. In fact, Psycho Pete made them draw a picture of Papa Smurf on the front of their boat just to toy with them. That's the kind of thing our instructors did. They looked for any way to break you, and with Dobbs it worked. He didn't like being grouped up with guys he considered smaller and weaker, and took it out on his teammates. Over the next day he would grind his own crew down before our eyes. He took up the position at the front of the boat or the log and set a blistering pace on the runs. Instead of checking in with his crew and holding something back in reserve, he went all out from the jump. I reached out to him recently and he said he remembered BUD/S like it happened last week.

“I was grinding an axe on my own people,” he said. “I was purposely beating them down, almost like if I made guys quit, it was a checkmark on my helmet.”

By Monday morning he’d done a decent job of it. Two of his guys had quit and that meant four smaller guys had to carry their boat and log by themselves. He admitted he was fighting his own demons on that beach. That his foundation was cracked.

“I was an insecure person with low self-esteem trying to grind an axe,” he said, “and my own ego, arrogance, and insecurity made my own life more difficult.”

Translation: his mind broke down in ways he’d never experienced before or since.

On Monday afternoon we did a bay swim, and when he emerged from the water, he was hurting. Watching him it was obvious he could barely walk and that his mind was teetering on the brink. We locked eyes and I saw that he was asking himself those simple questions and couldn’t find an answer. He looked a lot like I did when I was in Pararescue, searching for a way out. From then on Dobbs was one of the worst performers on the whole beach, and that only intensified his pain.

“All the people I’d categorized as lower than worms were kicking my butt,” he said. Soon his crew was down to two men, and he got moved to another boat crew with taller guys. When they lifted the boat head high, he wasn’t even able to reach it, and all of his insecurities about his size and his past started caving in on him.

“I started to believe that I didn’t belong there,” he said. “That I was genetically inferior. It was like I had superpowers, and I’d lost them. I was in a place in my mind I’d never been, and I didn’t have a road map.”

Think about where he was at that time. This man had excelled through the first few weeks of BUD/S. He’d come from nothing and was a phenomenal athlete. He had so many experiences along the way he could have leaned on. He’d calloused his mind plenty, but because his foundation was cracked,

when life got real he lost control of his mindset and became a slave to his self-doubt.

On Monday night, Dobbs reported to medical complaining about his feet. He was sure he had stress fractures, but when he took off his boots they weren't swollen or black and blue like he'd imagined. They looked perfectly healthy. I know that because I was at med check too, sitting right beside him. I saw his blank stare and knew the inevitable was near. It was the look that comes over a man's face after he surrenders his soul. I had the same look in my eyes when I quit Pararescue. What will forever bond me and Shawn Dobbs is the fact that I knew he was going to quit before he did.

The docs offered him Motrin and sent him back into the suffering. I remember watching Shawn lace his boots, wondering at what point he would finally break. That's when SBG pulled up in his truck and yelled, "This will be the coldest night that you will ever experience in your entire lives!"

I was under my boat with my crew headed toward the infamous Steel Pier when I glanced behind me and saw Shawn in the back of SBG's warm truck. He'd surrendered. Within minutes he would toll the bell three times, and place his helmet down.

In Dobbs' defense, this was one nightmare of a Hell Week. It rained all day and all night, which meant you never got warm and never got dry. Plus, somebody in command had the brilliant idea that the class shouldn't be fed and watered like kings at chow. Instead, we were supplied cold MREs for almost every meal. They thought that would test us even more. Make it more like a real-world battlefield situation. It also meant there was absolutely no relief, and without abundant calories to burn it was hard for anybody to find the energy to push through pain and exhaustion, let alone keep warm.

Yes, it was miserable, but I loved it. I thrived off of the barbaric beauty of seeing the soul of a man destroyed, only to rise again and overcome every obstacle in his path. By my third go-round, I knew what the human body could take. I knew what I could take, and I was feeding off that. At the same time, my legs didn't feel right and my knee had been barking since day one. So far, the pain was something I could handle for at least a couple more days, but the thought of injury was something that I had to block out of my

mind. I went into a dark place where there was just me and the pain and suffering. I didn't focus on my classmates or my instructors. I went full caveman. I was willing to die to make it through.

I wasn't the only one. Late on Wednesday night, with thirty-six hours to go before the end of Hell Week, tragedy hit Class 235. We were in the pool for an evolution called the caterpillar swim, in which each boat crew swam on their backs, legs locked around torsos, in a chain. We had to use our hands in concert to swim.

We mustered up at the pool. There were just twenty-six guys left and one of them was named John Skop. Mr. Skop was a specimen at 6'2" and 225 pounds, but he'd been sick from breakout and had been in and out of med check all week. While twenty-five of us stood at attention on the pool deck, swollen, chafed, and bleeding, he sat on the stairs by the pool, jackhammering in the cold. He looked like he was freezing, but waves of heat poured off his skin. His body was a radiator on full blast. I could feel him from ten feet away.

I'd had double pneumonia during my first Hell Week and knew what it looked and felt like. His alveoli, or air sacs, were filling with fluid. He couldn't clear them so he could barely breathe, which exacerbated his problem. When pneumonia goes uncontrolled, it can lead to pulmonary edema, which can be deadly, and he was halfway there.

Sure enough, during the caterpillar swim, his legs went limp and he darted to the bottom of the pool like a doll stuffed with lead. Two instructors jumped in after him and from there it was chaos. They ordered us out of the water and lined us up along the fence with our backs facing the pool as medics worked to revive Mr. Skop. We heard everything and knew his chances were slipping. Five minutes later, he still wasn't breathing, and they ordered us to the locker room. Mr. Skop was transported to the hospital and we were told to run back to the BUD/S classroom. We didn't know it yet, but Hell Week was already over. Minutes later, SBG walked in and delivered the news cold.

"Mr. Skop is dead," he said. He took stock of the room. His words had been a collective gut punch to men who were already on the knife's edge after nearly a week with no sleep and no relief. SBG didn't care. "This is the

world you live in. He's not the first and he won't be the last to die in your line of work." He looked over at Mr. Skop's roommate and said, "Mr. Moore, don't steal any of his things." Then he left the room like it was just another day.

I felt torn between grief, nausea, and relief. I was sad and sick to my stomach that Mr. Skop had died, but we were all relieved to have survived Hell Week, plus the way SBG handled it was straightforward, no nonsense, and I remember thinking if all SEALs were like him, this would definitely be the world for me. Talk about mixed emotions.

See, most civilians don't understand that you need a certain level of callousness to do the job we were being trained to do. To live in a brutal world, you have to accept cold-blooded truths. I'm not saying it's good. I'm not necessarily proud of it. But special ops is a calloused world and it demands a calloused mind.

Hell Week had ended thirty-six hours early. There was no pizza or brown shirt ceremony on the Grinder, but twenty-five men out of a possible 156 had made it. Once again, I was one of the few, and once again I was swollen like a Pillsbury doughboy and on crutches with twenty-one weeks of training still to come. My patella was intact, but both of my shins were slivered with small fractures. It gets worse. The instructors were surly because they'd been forced to call Hell Week prematurely, so they ended walk week after just forty-eight hours. By every conceivable metric, my chances of graduating were looking bleak once again. When I moved my ankle, my shins were activated and I felt searing pain, which was a monumental problem because a typical week in BUD/S demands up to sixty miles of running. Imagine doing that on two broken shins.

Most of the guys in Class 235 lived on base at Naval Special Warfare Command in Coronado. I lived about twenty miles away in a $700 a month studio apartment with a mold problem in Chula Vista, which I shared with my pregnant wife and stepdaughter. After she got pregnant, Pam and I remarried, I financed a new Honda Passport—which put me roughly $60,000 in debt—and the three of us drove out from Indiana to San Diego to restart our family. I'd just cleared Hell Week for the second time in a calendar year and she was set to deliver our baby right around graduation, but there was no

happiness in my head or my soul. How could there be? We lived in a rathole that was at the edge of affordability, and my body was broken once again. If I couldn't make it through I wouldn't even be able to afford rent, would have to start all over, and find a new line of work. I could not and would not let that happen.

The night before First Phase kicked back up in intensity, I shaved my head and stared into my reflection. For almost two years straight I'd been taking pain to the extreme and coming back for more. I'd succeeded in spurts only to be buried alive in failure. That night, the only thing that allowed me to continue pushing forward was the knowledge that everything I'd been through had helped callous my mind. The question was, how thick was the callous? How much pain could one man take? Did I have it in me to run on broken legs?

I woke up at 3:30 the next morning and drove to the base. I limped to the BUD/S cage where we kept our gear and slumped onto a bench, dropping my backpack at my feet. It was dark inside and out, and I was all alone. I could hear the rolling surf in the distance as I dug through my dive bag. Buried beneath my dive gear were two rolls of duct tape. I could only shake my head and smile in disbelief as I grabbed them, knowing how insane my plan was.

I carefully pulled a thick black tube sock over my right foot. The shin was tender to the touch and even the slightest twitch of the ankle joint registered high on the suffering scale. From there I looped the tape around my heel then up over my ankle and back down to my heel, eventually moving both down the foot and up my calf until my entire lower leg and foot were wrapped tight. That was just the first coat. Then I put another black tube sock on and taped my foot and ankle the same way. By the time I was done, I had two sock layers and two tape layers, and once my foot was laced up in the boot, my ankle and shin were protected and immobilized. Satisfied, I did up my left foot, and an hour later, it was as though both my lower legs were sunk into soft casts. It still hurt to walk, but the torture that I'd felt when my ankle moved was more tolerable. Or at least I thought so. I'd find out for sure when we started to run.

Our first training run that day was my trial by fire, and I did the best I could to run with my hip flexors. Usually we let our feet and lower legs drive the rhythm. I had to reverse that. It took intense focus to isolate each movement and generate motion and power in my legs from the hip down, and for the first thirty minutes the pain was the worst I'd ever felt in my life. The tape cut into my skin, while the pounding sent shockwaves of agony up my slivered shins.

And this was just the first run in what promised to be five months of continual pain. Was it possible to survive this, day after day? I thought about quitting. If failure was my future and I'd have to rethink my life completely, what was the point of this exercise? Why delay the inevitable? Was I messed up in the head? Each and every thought boiled down to the same old simple question: why?

"The only way to guarantee failure is to quit right now!" I was talking to myself now. Silently screaming over the din of anguish that was crushing my mind and soul. "Take the pain, or it won't just be your failure. It will be your family's failure!"

I imagined the feeling I would have if I could actually pull this off. If I could endure the pain required to complete this mission. That bought me another half mile before more pain rained down and swirled within me like a typhoon.

"People have a hard time going through BUD/S healthy, and you're going through it on broken legs! Who else would even think of this?" I asked. "Who else would be able to run even one minute on one broken leg, let alone two? Only Goggins! You are twenty minutes in the business, Goggins! You are a machine! Each step you run from now until the end will only make you harder!"

That last message cracked the code like a password. My calloused mind was my ticket forward, and at the forty-minute mark something remarkable happened. The pain receded to low tide. The tape had loosened so it wasn't cutting into my skin, and my muscles and bones were warm enough to take some pounding. The pain would come and go throughout the day, but it became much more manageable, and when the pain did show up, I told

myself it was proof of how tough I was and how much tougher I was becoming.

Day after day the same ritual played itself out. I showed up early, duct taped my feet, endured thirty minutes of extreme pain, talked myself through it, and survived. This was no fake-it-till-you-make-it nonsense. To me, the fact that I showed up every day willing to put myself through something like that *was* truly amazing. The instructors rewarded me for it too. They offered to bind my hands and feet and throw me in the pool to see if I could swim four laps. In fact, they didn't offer. They insisted. This was one part of an evolution they liked to call Drown Proofing. I preferred to call it controlled drowning!

With our hands bound behind us and feet tied behind our back, all we could do was dolphin kick, and unlike some of the experienced swimmers in our class, who looked like they'd been pulled from the Michael Phelps gene pool, my dolphin kick was that of a stationary rocking horse and provided about the same propulsion. I was continually out of breath, fighting to stay near the surface, chicken necking my head above the water to get a breath, only to sink down and kick hard, trying in vain to find momentum. I'd practiced for this. For weeks, I'd hit the pool and even experimented with wetsuit shorts to see if I could hide them under my uniform to provide some buoyancy. They made it look like I was wearing a diaper under the butt-hugging UDT shorts, and they didn't help, but all that practice did get me comfortable enough with the feeling of drowning that I was able to endure and pass that test.

We had another brutal underwater evolution in Second Phase, aka dive phase. Again, it involved treading water, which always sounds easy whenever I write it, but for this drill we were fitted with fully-charged, twin eighty-liter tanks and a sixteen-pound weight belt. We had fins, but kicking with fins increased the pain quotient and stress on my ankles and shins. I couldn't tape up for the water. I had to suck up the pain.

After that we had to swim on our backs for fifty meters without sinking. Then flip over and swim fifty meters on our stomachs, once again staying on the surface, all while being fully loaded! We weren't allowed to use any

flotation devices whatsoever, and keeping our heads up caused intense pain in our necks, shoulders, hips, and lower backs.

The noises coming out of the pool that day are something I'll never forget. Our desperate attempts to stay afloat and breathe conjured an audible mixture of terror, frustration, and exertion. We were gurgling, grunting, and gasping. I heard guttural screams and high-pitched squeals. Several guys sank to the bottom, took off their weight belts, and slipped free of their tanks, letting them crash to the floor of the pool, then jetted to the surface.

Only one man passed that evolution on the first try. We only got three chances to pass any given evolution and it took me all three to pass that one. On my last attempt I focused on long, fluid scissor kicks, again using my overworked hip flexors. I barely made it.

By the time we got to Third Phase, the land warfare training module on San Clemente Island, my legs were healed up, and I knew I'd make it through to graduation, but just because it was the last lap doesn't mean it was easy. At the main BUD/S compound on The Strand, you get lots of looky-loos coming through. Officers of all stripes stop in to watch training, which means there are people peering over the instructors' shoulders. On the island, it's just you and them. They are free to get nasty, and they show no mercy. Which is exactly why I loved the island!

One afternoon we split into teams of two and three guys to build hide sites that blend in with the vegetation. We were coming down to the end by then, and everyone was in killer shape and unafraid. Guys were getting sloppy with their attention to detail and the instructors were ticked off, so they called everyone down into a valley to give us a classic beat down.

There would be push-ups, sit-ups, flutter kicks, and eight-count bodybuilders (advanced burpees) galore. But first they told us to kneel down and dig holes with our hands, large enough to bury ourselves up to the neck for some unspecified length of time. I had a cocky grin on my face, one that said "You can't hurt me" while digging deep when one of the instructors came up with a new, creative way to torture me.

“Goggins, get up. You like this stuff too much.” I laughed and kept digging, but he was serious. “I said get up, Goggins. You’re getting way too much pleasure.”

I stood up, stepped to the side, and watched my classmates suffer for the next thirty minutes without me. From then on the instructors stopped including me in their beat downs. When the class was ordered to do push-ups, sit-ups, or get wet and sandy, they’d always exclude me. I took it as a point of pride that I’d finally broken the will of the entire BUD/S staff, but I also missed the beat downs. Because I saw them as opportunities to callous my mind. Now, they were over for me.

Considering that the Grinder was center stage for a lot of Navy SEAL training, it makes sense that’s where BUD/S graduation is held. Families fly in. Fathers and brothers puff their chests out; mothers, wives, and girlfriends are all done up and drop dead gorgeous. Instead of pain and misery, it was all smiles on that patch of asphalt as the graduates of Class 235 mustered up in our dress whites beneath a huge American flag billowing in the sea breeze. To our right was the infamous bell that 130 of our classmates tolled in order to quit what is arguably the most challenging training in the military. Each of us was introduced and acknowledged individually. My mother had tears of joy in her eyes when my name was called, but strangely, I didn’t feel much of anything, except sadness.

Mom and I at BUD/S graduation

On the Grinder and later at McP's—the SEAL pub of choice in downtown Coronado—my teammates beamed with pride as they gathered to take photos with their families. At the bar, music blared while everyone got drunk and partied like they'd just won something. And to be honest, that annoyed me. Because I was sorry to see BUD/S go.

When I first locked in on the SEALs, I was looking for an arena that would either destroy me completely or make me unbreakable. BUD/S provided that. It showed me what the human mind is capable of, and how to harness it to take more pain than I'd ever felt before, so I could learn to achieve things I never even knew were possible. Like running on broken legs. After graduation it would be up to me to continue to hunt impossible tasks because though it was an accomplishment to become just the thirty-sixth African American BUD/S graduate in Navy SEAL history, my quest to defy the odds had only just begun!

CHALLENGE #5

It's time to visualize! Again, the average person thinks 2,000–3,000 thoughts per hour. Rather than focusing on things you cannot change, imagine visualizing the things you can. Choose any obstacle in your way, or set a new goal, and visualize overcoming or achieving it. Before I engage in any challenging activity, I start by painting a picture of what my success looks and feels like. I'll think about it every day and that feeling propels me forward when I'm training, competing, or taking on any task I choose.

But visualization isn't simply about daydreaming of some trophy ceremony —real or metaphorical. You must also visualize the challenges that are likely to arise and determine how you will attack those problems when they do. That way you can be as prepared as possible on the journey. When I show up for a foot race now, I drive the entire course first, visualizing success but also potential challenges, which helps me control my thought process. You can't prepare for everything but if you engage in strategic visualization ahead of time, you'll be as prepared as you possibly can be.

That also means being prepared to answer the simple questions. Why are you doing this? What is driving you toward this achievement? Where does the darkness you're using as fuel come from? What has calloused your mind? You'll need to have those answers at your fingertips when you hit a wall of pain and doubt. To push through, you'll need to channel your darkness, feed off it, and lean on your calloused mind.

Remember, visualization will never compensate for work undone. You cannot visualize lies. All the strategies I employ to answer the simple questions and win the mind game are only effective because I put in work. It's a lot more than mind over matter. It takes relentless self-discipline to schedule suffering into your day, every day, but if you do, you'll find that at the other end of that suffering is a whole other life just waiting for you.

This challenge doesn't have to be physical, and victory doesn't always mean you came in first place. It can mean you've finally overcome a lifelong fear

or any other obstacle that made you surrender in the past. Whatever it is, tell the world your story about how you created your #armoredmind and where it's taken you.

CHAPTER SIX

IT'S NOT ABOUT A TROPHY

EVERYTHING ABOUT THE RACE WAS GOING BETTER THAN I COULD HAVE HOPED. There were enough clouds in the sky to blunt the heat of the sun, my rhythm was as steady as the mellow tide that sloshed against the hulls of sailboats docked in the nearby San Diego Marina, and though my legs felt heavy, that was to be expected considering my "tapering" plan the night before. Besides, they seemed to be loosening up as I rounded a bend to complete my ninth lap—my ninth mile—just an hour and change into a twenty-four-hour race.

That's when I saw John Metz, race director of the San Diego One Day, eyeballing me at the start-finish line. He was holding up his white board to inform each competitor of their time and position in the overall field. I was in fifth place, which evidently confused him. I offered a crisp nod to reassure him that I knew what I was doing, that I was right where I was supposed to be.

He saw through that.

Metz was a veteran. Always polite and soft-spoken. It didn't look like there was much that could faze him, but he was also a seasoned ultra-marathoner with three fifty-mile races in his saddlebag. He'd either reached or topped a hundred miles, seven times, and he'd achieved his personal best of 144 miles in twenty-four hours when he was fifty years old! Which is why it meant something to me that he looked concerned.

I checked my watch, synced to a heart rate monitor I wore around my chest. My pulse straddled my magic number line: 145. A few days earlier I'd run

into my old BUD/S instructor, SBG, at Naval Special Warfare Command. Most SEALs do rotations as instructors between deployments, and SBG and I worked together. When I told him about the San Diego One Day he insisted I wear a heart rate monitor to pace myself. SBG was a big geek when it came to performance and recovery, and I watched as he scratched out a few formulas, then turned to me and said, “Keep your pulse steady between 140 and 145 and you’ll be golden.” The next day he handed me a heart rate monitor as a race day gift.

If you set out to mark a course that could crack open a Navy SEAL like a walnut, chew him up, and spit him out, San Diego’s Hospitality Point would not make the cut. We’re talking about terrain so vanilla it’s downright serene. Tourists descend year-round for views of San Diego’s stunning marina, which spills into Mission Bay. The road is almost entirely smooth asphalt and perfectly flat, save a brief seven-foot incline with the pitch of a standard suburban driveway. There are manicured lawns, palm trees, and shade trees. Hospitality Point is so inviting that disabled and convalescing folks head there with their walkers for an afternoon’s rehab stroll, all the time. But the day after John Metz chalked his easy, one-mile course, it became the scene of my total destruction.

I should have known that a breakdown was coming. By the time I started running at 10 a.m. on November 12, 2005, I hadn’t run more than a mile in six months, but I looked like I was fit because I’d never stopped hitting the gym. While I was stationed in Iraq, on my second deployment with SEAL Team Five earlier that year, I’d gotten back into serious powerlifting, and my only dose of cardio was twenty minutes on the elliptical once a week. The point is, my cardiovascular fitness was an absolute joke, and still I thought it was a brilliant idea to try and run a hundred miles in twenty-four hours.

Okay, it was always a dumb idea, but I considered it doable because a hundred miles in twenty-four hours demands a pace of just under fifteen minutes a mile. If it came to it, I figured I could walk that fast. Only, I didn’t walk. When that horn sounded at the start of the race, I took off hot and zoomed to the front of the pack. Exactly the right move if your race-day goal is to blow up.

Also, I didn't exactly come in well-rested. The night before the race, I passed by the SEAL Team Five gym on my way off base after work, and peeked in like I always did, just to see who was getting after it. SBG was inside warming up, and called out.

"Goggins," he said, "let's jack some steel!" I laughed. He stared me down. "You know, Goggins," he said, stepping closer, "when the Vikings were getting ready to raid a village, and they were camped out in the woods in their tents made out of deer hides, sitting around a campfire, do you think they said, *Hey, let's have some herbal tea and call it an early night*? Or were they more like, *Forget that, we are going to drink some vodka made out of some mushrooms and get all drunked up*, so the next morning when they were all hung-over and ticked off they would be in the ideal mood to slaughter some people?"

SBG could be a funny guy when he wanted to be, and he could see me wavering, considering my options. On the one hand, that man would always be my BUD/S instructor and he was one of the few instructors who was still hard, putting out, and living the SEAL ethos every day. I'll always want to impress him. Jacking weights the night before my first 100-mile race would definitely impress that crazy son of a gun. Plus, his logic made some crazy sense to me. I needed to get my mind ready to go to war, and lifting heavy would be my way of saying, bring on all your pain and misery, I'm ready to go! But, honestly, who does that before running a hundred miles?

I shook my head in disbelief, threw my bag to the ground and started racking weights. With heavy metal blaring from the speakers, two knuckle draggers came together to put out. Most of our work focused on the legs, including long sets of squats and dead lifts at 315 pounds. In between we bench pressed 225. This was a real deal powerlifting session, and afterwards we sat on the bench next to one another and watched our quads and hamstrings quiver. It was funny…until it wasn't.

Ultra running has gone at least somewhat mainstream since then, but in 2005, most ultra races—especially the San Diego One Day—were pretty obscure, and it was all new to me. When the majority of people think of ultras they picture trail runs through remote wilderness and don't often

imagine circuit races, but there were some serious runners in the field at the San Diego One Day.

This was the American National 24-Hour Championship and athletes descended from all over the country hoping for a trophy, a place on the podium, and the modest winner-take-all cash prize of, ahem, $2,000. No, this was not a gilded event, basking in corporate sponsorship, but it was the site for a team comp between the U.S. ultra-distance national team and a team from Japan. Each side fielded teams of four men and four women who each ran for twenty-four hours. One of the top individual athletes in the field was also from Japan. Her name was Ms. Inagaki, and early on she and I kept pace.

Ms. Inagaki and me during San Diego 100

SBG turned up to cheer me on that morning with his wife and two-year-old son. They huddled up on the sidelines with my new wife, Kate, who I'd

married a few months before, a little over two years after my second divorce from Pam was finalized. When they saw me, they couldn't help but double over in laughter. Not just because SBG was still beat up from our workout the night before, and here I was trying to run a hundred miles, but because of how out of place I looked. When I spoke to SBG about it not long ago, the scene still made him laugh.

"So ultra marathoners are a little weird, right," SBG said, "and that morning it was like there were all these skinny, college professor-looking, granola-eating weirdoes, and then there is this one big black dude who looks like a linebacker from the Raiders, running around this track jacked up with no shirt on, and I'm thinking of that song we had in kindergarten…*one of these things is not like the other*. That was the song going through my head when I saw this NFL linebacker running around this stupid track with all these skinny little nerds. I mean they were some elite runners. I am not taking that away from them, but they were all super clinical about nutrition and all that, and you just put a pair of shoes on and said, let's go!"

He's not wrong. I didn't put much thought into my race plan at all. I hatched it at Walmart the night before, where I bought a fold-out lawn chair for Kate and me to use during the race and my fuel for the entire day: one box of Ritz crackers and two four-packs of Myoplex. I didn't drink much water. I didn't even consider my electrolyte or potassium levels or eat any fresh fruit. SBG brought me a pack of Hostess chocolate donuts when he showed up, and I gobbled those in a few seconds. I mean, I was winging it for real. Yet, at mile fifteen I was still in fifth place, still keeping pace with Ms. Inagaki, while Metz was getting more and more nervous. He ran up to me and tagged along.

"You should slow down, David," he said. "Pace yourself a bit more."

I shrugged. "I got this."

It's true that I felt okay in that moment, but my bravado was also a defense mechanism. I knew if I were to start planning my race at that point, the bigness of it would become too much to comprehend. It would feel like I was supposed to run the length of the sky. It would feel impossible. In my mind, strategy was the enemy of the moment, which is where I needed to

be. Translation: when it came to ultras, I was green. Metz didn't press me, but he kept a close watch.

I finished mile twenty-five at about the four-hour mark and I was still in fifth place, still running with my new Japanese friend. SBG was long gone, and Kate was my only support crew. I'd see her every mile, posted up in that lawn chair, offering a sip of Myoplex and an encouraging smile.

I'd run a marathon only once before, while I was stationed in Guam. It was unofficial, and I ran it with a fellow SEAL on a course we made up on the spot, but back then I was in excellent cardiovascular shape. Now, here I was bearing down on 26.2 miles for just the second time in my entire life, this time without training, and once I got there I realized that I'd run beyond known territory. I had twenty more hours and nearly *three more marathons* to go. Those were incomprehensible metrics, with no traditional milestone in between to focus on. I *was* running across the sky. That's when I started thinking that this could end badly.

Metz didn't stop trying to help. Each mile he'd run alongside and check on me, and me being who I am, I told him that I had everything under control and had it all figured out. Which was true. I'd figured out that John Metz knew what he was talking about.

Oh yes, the pain was becoming real. My quads throbbed, my feet were chafed and bleeding, and that simple question was once again bubbling up in my frontal lobe. *Why? Why run a hundred miles without training? Why was I doing this to myself?* Fair questions, especially since I hadn't even heard of the San Diego One Day until three days before race day, but this time my answer was different. I wasn't on Hospitality Point to deal with my own demons or to prove anything at all. I came with a purpose bigger than David Goggins. This fight was about my once and future fallen teammates, and the families they leave behind when things go wrong.

Or at least that's what I told myself at mile twenty-seven.

* * *

I had gotten the news about Operation Red Wings, a doomed operation in the remote mountains of Afghanistan, on my last day of U.S. Army Freefall school in Yuma, Arizona, in June. Operation Red Wings was a four-man reconnaissance mission tasked with gathering intelligence on a growing pro-Taliban force in a region called Sawtalo Sar. If successful, what they learned would help define strategy for a larger offensive in the coming weeks. I knew all four guys.

Danny Dietz was in BUD/S Class 231 with me. He got injured and rolled just like I did. Michael Murphy, the OIC of the mission, was with me in Class 235 before he got rolled. Matthew Axelson was in my Hooyah Class when I graduated (more on the Hooyah Class tradition in a moment), and Marcus Luttrell was one of the first people I met on my original lap through BUD/S.

Before training begins, each incoming BUD/S class throws a party, and the guys from previous classes who are still in BUD/S training are always invited. The idea is to juice as much information from brown shirts as possible, because you never know what might help get you through a crucial evolution that could make all the difference between graduation and failure. Marcus was 6’4”, 225 pounds, and he stuck out in that crowd like I did. I was a bigger guy too, back up to 210 by then, and he sought me out. In some ways we were an odd pair. He was a tougher-than-nails Texan, and I was a self-made madman from the Indiana cornfields, but he’d heard I was a good runner, and running was his main weakness.

“Goggins, do you have any tips for me?” he asked. “Because I can’t run to save my life.”

I knew Marcus was a hard man, but his humility made him real. When he graduated a few days later, we were his Hooyah Class, which meant we were the first people they were allowed to order around. They embraced that SEAL tradition and told us to go get wet and sandy. It was a SEAL’s rite of passage, and an honor to share that with him. After that I didn’t see him for a long time.

I thought I ran into him again when I was about to graduate with Class 235, but it was his twin brother, Morgan Luttrell, who was part of my Hooyah

Class, Class 237, along with Matthew Axelson. We could have ordered up some poetic justice, but after we graduated, instead of telling their class to go get wet and sandy, we put ourselves in the surf, in our dress whites!

I had something to do with that.

In the Navy SEALs, you are either deployed and operating in the field, instructing other SEALs, or in school yourself, learning or perfecting skills. We cycle through more military schools than most because we are trained to do it all, but when I went through BUD/S we didn't learn to freefall. We jumped by static lines, which deployed our chutes automatically. Back then you had to be chosen to attend U.S. Army Freefall School. After my second platoon, I was picked up for Green Team which is one of the training phases to get accepted into the Naval Special Warfare Development Group (DEVGRU), an elite unit within the SEALs. That required me to get freefall qualified. It also required that I face my fear of heights in the most confrontational way possible.

We started off in the classrooms and wind tunnels of Fort Bragg, North Carolina, which is where I reconnected with Morgan in 2005. Floating on a bed of compressed air in a fifteen-foot-high wind tunnel, we learned correct body position, how to shift left and right, and push forward and back. It takes very small movements with your palm to move and it's easy to start spinning out of control, which is never good. Not everyone could master those subtleties but those of us who could left Fort Bragg after that first week of training and headed to an airstrip in the cactus fields of Yuma to start jumping for real.

Morgan and I trained and hung out together for four weeks in the 127-degree desert heat of summer. We did dozens of jumps out of C130 transport jets from altitudes ranging from 12,500 to 19,000 feet, and there is no rush like the surge of adrenaline and paranoia that comes with plummeting to earth from high altitude at terminal velocity. Each time we jumped I couldn't help but think of Scott Gearen, the Pararescueman who survived a botched jump from high altitude and inspired me on this path when I met him as a high school student. He was a constant presence for me in that desert, and a cautionary tale. Proof that something can go horribly wrong on any given jump.

When I jumped out of an airplane for the first time from high altitude, all I felt was extreme fear, and I couldn't pry my eyes from my altimeter. I wasn't able to embrace the jump because fear had clogged my mind. All I could think about was whether or not my canopy would open. I was missing the unbelievable thrill-ride of the freefall, the beauty of the mountains painted against the horizon, and the wide-open sky. But as I became conditioned to the risk, my tolerance for that same fear increased. It was always there, but I was used to the discomfort and before long I was able to handle multiple tasks on a jump and appreciate the moment too. Seven years earlier I had been rooting around fast food kitchens and open dumpsters zapping vermin. Now I was flying!

The final task in Yuma was a midnight jump in full kit. We were weighed down with a fifty-pound rucksack, strapped with a rifle and an oxygen mask for the freefall. We were also equipped with chem lights, which were a necessity because when the back ramp of the C-130 opened up, it was pitch black.

We couldn't see anything, but still we leapt into that moonless sky, eight of us in a line, one after another. We were supposed to form an arrow, and as I maneuvered through the real-world wind tunnel to take my place in the grand design, all I could see were swerving lights streaking like comets in an inkwell sky. My goggles fogged up as the wind ripped through me. We fell for a full minute, and when we deployed our chutes at around 4,000 feet, the overpowering sound went from full tornado to eerie silence. It was so quiet I could hear my heart beat through my chest. It was bliss, and when we all landed safely, we were freefall qualified! We had no idea that at that moment, in the mountains of Afghanistan, Marcus and his team were locked into an all-out battle for their lives, at the center of what would become the worst incident in SEAL history.

One of the best things about Yuma is that you have horrible cell service. I'm not big on texting or talking on the phone so this gave me four weeks of peace. When you graduate any military school, the last thing you do is clean all the areas your class used until it's like you were never there. My cleaning detail was in charge of the bathrooms, which happened to be one of the only places in Yuma that has cell service, and as soon as I walked in I

could hear my phone blow up. Text messages about Operation Red Wings going bad flooded in, and as I read them my soul broke. Morgan hadn't heard anything about it yet, so I walked outside, found him, and told him the news. I had to. Marcus and his crew were all MIA and presumed KIA. He nodded, considered it for a second, and said, "My brother's not dead."

Morgan is seven minutes older than Marcus. They were inseparable as kids, and the first time they'd ever been apart for longer than a day was when Marcus joined the Navy. Morgan opted for college before joining up, and during Marcus's Hell Week, he tried to stay up the whole time in solidarity. He wanted and needed to share that feeling, but there is no such thing as a Hell Week simulation. You have to go through it to know it, and those that survive are forever changed. In fact, the period after Marcus survived Hell Week and before Morgan became a SEAL himself was the only time there was any emotional distance between the brothers, which speaks to the power of those 130 hours and their emotional toll. Once Morgan went through it for real, everything was right again. They each have half a Trident tattooed on their back. The picture is only complete when they stand side by side.

Morgan took off immediately to drive to San Diego and figure out what in the world was going on. He still hadn't heard anything about the operation directly, but once he reached civilization and his service hit, a tide of messages flooded his phone too. He floored his rental car to 120 mph and zoomed directly to the base in Coronado.

Morgan knew all the guys in his brother's unit well. Axelson was his classmate in BUD/S, and as facts trickled in it was obvious to most that his brother wouldn't be found alive. I thought he was gone too, but you know what they say about twins.

"I knew my brother was out there, alive," Morgan told me when we connected again in April 2018. "I said that the whole time."

I'd called Morgan to talk about old times and asked him about the hardest week in his life. From San Diego, he flew out to his family's ranch in Huntsville, Texas, where they were getting updates twice a day. Dozens of fellow SEALs turned up to show support, Morgan said, and for five long

days, he and his family cried themselves to sleep at night. To them it was torture knowing that Marcus might be alive and alone in hostile territory. When officials from the Pentagon arrived, Morgan made himself clear as cut glass, “[Marcus] may be in a bad way, but he’s *alive* and either you go out there and find him, or I will!”

Operation Red Wings went horribly wrong because there were many more pro-Taliban hajjis active in those mountains than had been expected, and once Marcus and his team were discovered by villagers there, it was four guys against a well-armed militia of somewhere between 30–200 men (reports on the size of the pro-Taliban force vary). Our guys took RPG and machine gun fire, and fought hard. Four SEALs can put on quite a show. Each one of us can usually do as much damage as five regular troops, and they made their presence felt.

The battle played out along a ridgeline above 9,000 feet in elevation, where they had communication troubles. When they finally broke through and the situation was made plain to their commanding officer back at special operations headquarters, a quick reaction force of Navy SEALs, marines, and aviators from 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment was assembled, but they were delayed for hours because of lack of transport capacity. One thing about the SEAL Teams is we don’t have our own transport. In Afghanistan we hitch rides with the Army, and that delayed relief.

They eventually loaded up into two Chinook transport choppers and four attack helicopters (two Black Hawks and two Apaches) and took off for Sawtalo Sar. The Chinooks took the lead, and as they closed in on the ridge, they were hit by small arms fire. Despite the onslaught, the first Chinook hovered, attempting to unload eight Navy SEALs on a mountain top, but they made a fat target, lingered too long, and were hit with a rocket propelled grenade. The bird spun, crashed into the mountain, and exploded. Everyone aboard was killed. The remaining choppers bailed out, and by the time they could return with ground assets, everyone who was left behind, including Marcus’s three teammates on Operation Red Wings, was found dead. Everyone, that is, except for Marcus.

Marcus was hit multiple times by enemy fire and went missing for five days. He was saved by Afghan villagers who nursed and sheltered him, and was finally found alive by U.S. troops on July 3, 2005, when he became the lone survivor of a mission that took the lives of nineteen special operations warriors, including eleven Navy SEALs.

No doubt, you've heard this story before. Marcus wrote a bestselling book about it, *Lone Survivor*, which became a hit movie starring Mark Wahlberg. But in 2005, that was all years away, and in the aftermath of the worst battlefield loss ever to hit the SEALs, I was looking for a way to contribute to the families of the men who were killed. It's not like bills stop rolling in after a tragedy like that. There were wives and kids out there with basic needs to fulfill, and eventually they'd need their college educations covered too. I wanted to help in any way I could.

A few weeks before all of this, I'd spent an evening Googling around for the world's toughest foot races and landed on a race called Badwater 135. I'd never even heard of ultra marathons before, and Badwater was an ultra marathoner's ultra marathon. It started below sea level in Death Valley and finished at the end of the road at Mount Whitney Portal, a trailhead located at 8,374 feet. Oh, and the race takes place in late July, when Death Valley isn't just the lowest place on Earth. It's also the hottest.

Seeing images from that race materialize on my monitor terrified and thrilled me. The terrain looked all kinds of harsh, and the expressions on tortured runners' faces reminded me of the kind of thing I saw in Hell Week. Until then, I'd always considered the marathon to be the pinnacle of endurance racing, and now I was seeing there were several levels beyond it. I filed the information away and figured I'd come back to it someday.

Then Operation Red Wings happened, and I vowed to run Badwater 135 to raise money for the Special Operations Warrior Foundation, a non-profit founded as a battlefield promise in 1980, when eight special operations warriors died in a helicopter crash during the famous hostage rescue operation in Iran and left seventeen children behind. The surviving servicemen promised to make sure each one of those kids had the money to go to college. Their work continues. Within thirty days of a fatality, like

those that occurred during Operation Red Wings, the foundation's hardworking staff reach out to surviving family members.

"We are the interfering aunt," said Executive Director, Edie Rosenthal. "We become a part of our students' lives."

They pay for preschool and private tutoring during grade school. They arrange college visits and host peer support groups. They help with applications, buy books, laptop computers, and printers, and cover tuition at whichever school one of their students manages to gain acceptance, not to mention room and board. They also send students to vocational schools. It's all up to the kids. As I write this, the foundation has 1,280 kids in their program.

They are an amazing organization, and with them in mind, I called Chris Kostman, Race Director of Badwater 135, at 7 a.m. in mid-November, 2005. I tried to introduce myself, but he cut me off, sharp. "Do you know what time it is?!" he snapped.

I took the phone away from my ear and stared at it for a second. In those days, by 7 a.m. on a typical weekday I'd have already rocked a two-hour gym workout and was ready for a day's work. This dude was half asleep. "Roger that," I said. "I'll call you back at 0900."

My second call didn't go much better, but at least he knew who I was. SBG and I had already discussed Badwater and he'd emailed Kostman a letter of recommendation. SBG has raced triathlons, captained a team through the Eco-Challenge, and watched several Olympic qualifiers attempt BUD/S. In his email to Kostman, he wrote that I was the "best endurance athlete with the greatest mental toughness" he'd ever seen. To put me, a kid who came from nothing, at the top of his list meant the world to me and still does.

It didn't mean squat to Chris Kostman. He was the definition of unimpressed. The kind of unimpressed that can only come from real-world experience. When he was twenty years old he'd competed in the Race Across America bicycle race, and before taking over as Badwater race director, he'd run three 100-mile races in winter in Alaska and completed a triple Ironman triathlon, which ends with a seventy-eight-mile run. Along

the way, he'd seen dozens of supposedly great athletes crumble beneath the anvil of ultra.

Weekend warriors sign up for and complete marathons after a few months' training all the time, but the gap between marathon running and becoming an ultra athlete is much wider, and Badwater was the absolute apex of the ultra universe. In 2005, there were approximately twenty-two 100-mile races held in the United States, and none had the combination of the elevation gain and unforgiving heat that Badwater 135 brought to the table. Just to put on the race, Kostman had to wrangle permissions and assistance from five government agencies, including the National Forest Service, the National Park Service, and the California Highway Patrol, and he knew that if he allowed some greenhorn into the most difficult race ever conceived, in the middle of summer, that guy might die, and his race would vaporize overnight. No, if he was going to let me compete in Badwater, I was going to have to earn it. Because earning my way in would provide him at least some comfort that I probably wouldn't collapse into a steaming pile of roadkill somewhere between Death Valley and Mount Whitney.

In his email, SBG attempted to make a case that because I was busy working as a SEAL, the prerequisites required to compete at Badwater—the completion of at least one 100-mile race or one twenty-four-hour race, while covering at least one hundred miles—should be waived. If I was allowed in, SBG guaranteed him that I'd finish in the top ten. Kostman wasn't having any of it. He'd had accomplished athletes beg him to waive his standards over the years, including a champion marathoner and a champion sumo wrestler (no joke!), and he'd never budged.

"One thing about me is, I'm the same with everyone," Kostman said when I called him back. "We have certain standards for getting into our race, and that's the way it is. But hey, there's this twenty-four-hour race in San Diego coming up this weekend," he continued, his voice dripping with sarcasm. "Go run one hundred miles and get back to me."

Chris Kostman had made me. I was as unprepared as he suspected. The fact that I wanted to run Badwater was no lie, and I planned to train for it, but to even have a chance to do that I'd have to run one hundred miles at the drop of a hat. If I chose not to, after all that Navy SEAL bluster, what would that

prove? That I was just another pretender ringing his bell way too early on a Wednesday morning. Which is how and why I wound up running the San Diego One Day with three days' notice.

* * *

After surpassing the fifty-mile mark, I could no longer keep up with Ms. Inagaki, who bounded ahead like a rabbit. I soldiered on in a fugue state. Pain washed through me in waves. My thighs felt like they were loaded with lead. The heavier they got the more twisted my stride became. I torqued my hips to keep my legs moving and fought gravity to lift my feet a mere millimeter from the earth. Ah, yes, my feet. My bones were becoming more brittle by the second, and my toes had banged the tips of my shoes for nearly ten hours. Still, I ran. Not fast. Not with much style. But I kept going.

My shins were the next domino to fall. Each subtle rotation of the ankle joint felt like shock therapy—like venom flowing through the marrow of my tibia. It brought back memories of my duct tape days from Class 235, but I didn't bring any tape with me this time. Besides, if I stopped for even a few seconds, starting up again would be near impossible.

A few miles later, my lungs seized, and my chest rattled as I hocked up knots of brown mucus. It got cold. I became short of breath. Fog gathered around the halogen street lights, ringing the lamps with electric rainbows, which lent the whole event an otherworldly feel. Or maybe it was just me in that other world. One in which pain was the mother tongue, a language synced to memory.

With every lung-scraping cough I flashed to my first BUD/S class. I was back on the log, staggering ahead, my lungs bleeding. I could feel and see it happening all over again. Was I asleep? Was I dreaming? I opened my eyes wide, pulled my ears and slapped my face to wake up. I felt my lips and chin for fresh blood, and found a translucent slick of saliva, sweat, and mucus dribbling from my nose. SBG's nerds were all around me now, running in circles, pointing, mocking *the only;* the only black man in the

mix. Or were they? I took another look. Everyone who passed me was focused. Each in their own pain zone. They didn't even see me.

I was losing touch with reality in small doses, because my mind was folding over on itself, loading tremendous physical pain with dark emotional garbage it had dredged up from the depths of my soul. Translation: I was suffering on an unholy level reserved for idiots who thought the laws of physics and physiology did not apply to them. Cocky guys like me who felt like they could push the limits safely because they'd done a couple of Hell Weeks.

Right, well, I hadn't done *this*. I hadn't run one hundred miles with zero training. Had anybody in the history of mankind even attempted something so foolish? Could *this* even be done at all? Iterations of that one simple question slid by like a digital ticker on my brain screen. Bloody thought bubbles floated from my skin and soul.

Why? Why? Why are you still doing this to yourself?!

I hit the incline at mile sixty-nine—that seven-foot ramp, the pitch of a shallow driveway—which would make any seasoned trail runner laugh out loud. It buckled my knees and sent me reeling backward like a delivery truck in neutral. I staggered, reached for the ground with the tips of my fingers, and nearly capsized. It took ten seconds to cover the distance. Each one dragged out like an elastic thread, sending shockwaves of pain from my toes to the space behind my eyeballs. I hacked and coughed, my gut twisted. Collapse was imminent. Collapse is what I deserved.

At the seventy-mile mark I couldn't take another step forward. Kate had set up our lawn chair on the grass near the start/finish line and when I teetered toward her I saw her in triplicate, six hands groping toward me, guiding me into that folding chair. I was dizzy and dehydrated, starved of potassium and sodium.

Kate was a nurse; I had EMT training, and went through my own mental checklist. I knew my blood pressure was probably dangerously low. She removed my shoes. My foot pain was no Shawn Dobbs illusion. My white tube socks were caked in blood from cracked toenails and broken blisters. I

asked Kate to grab some Motrin and anything she thought might be helpful from John Metz. And when she was gone, my body continued to decline. My stomach rumbled and when I looked down I saw bloody urine leak down my leg. Liquefied diarrhea rose in the space between my butt and a lawn chair that would never be quite the same again. Worse, I had to hide it because I knew if Kate saw how bad off I really was she would beg me to pull out of the race.

I'd run seventy miles in twelve hours with no training, and this was my reward. To my left on the lawn was another four-pack of Myoplex. Only a muscle head like me would choose that thick protein drink as my hydrating agent of choice. Next to it was half a box of Ritz crackers, the other half now congealing and churning in my stomach and intestinal tract like an orange blob.

I sat there with my head in my hands for twenty minutes. Runners shuffled, glided, or staggered past me, as I felt time tick down on my hastily imagined, ill-conceived dream. Kate returned, knelt down, and helped me lace back up. She didn't know the extent of my breakdown and hadn't quit on me yet. That was something, at least, and in her hands were a welcome reprieve from more Myoplex and more Ritz crackers. She handed me Motrin, then some cookies and two peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, which I washed down with Gatorade. Then she helped me stand.

The world wobbled on its axis. Again she split into two, then three, but she held me there as my world stabilized and I took a single, solitary step. Cue the ungodly pain. I didn't know it yet, but my feet were slivered with stress fractures. The toll of hubris is heavy on the ultra circuit, and my bill had come due. I took another step. And another. I winced. My eyes watered. Another step. She let go. I walked on.

Slowly.

Way too slow.

When I stopped at the seventy-mile mark, I was well ahead of the pace I needed to run one hundred miles in twenty-four hours, but now I was walking at a twenty-minute-a-mile clip, which was as fast as I could

possibly move. Ms. Inagaki breezed by me and glanced over. There was pain in her eyes too, but she still looked the part of an athlete. I was a zombie, giving away all the precious time I stored up, watching my margin for error burn to ash. *Why?* Again the same boring question. *Why?* Four hours later, at nearly 2 a.m., I hit the eighty-one-mile mark and Kate broke some news.

“I don’t believe you’re gonna make the time at this pace,” she said, walking with me, encouraging me to drink more Myoplex. She didn’t cushion the blow. She was matter-of-fact about it. I stared over at her, mucus and Myoplex dripping down my chin, all the life drained from my eyes. For four hours, each agonizing step had demanded maximum focus and effort, but it wasn’t enough and unless I could find more, my philanthropic dream was dead. I choked and coughed. Took another sip.

“Roger that,” I said softly. I knew that she was right. My pace continued to slow and was only getting worse.

That’s when I finally realized that this fight wasn’t about Operation Red Wings or the families of the fallen. It was to a point, but none of that would help me run nineteen more miles before 10 a.m. No, this run, Badwater, my entire desire to push myself to the brink of destruction, was about me. It was about how much I was willing to suffer, how much more I could take, and how much I had to give. If I was gonna make it, this would have to get personal.

I stared down at my legs. I could still see a trail of dried pee and blood stuck to my inner thigh and thought to myself, who in this entire screwed-up world would still be in this fight? *Only you, Goggins! You haven’t trained, you don’t know squat about hydration and performance—all you know is you refuse to quit.*

Why?

It’s funny, humans tend to hatch our most challenging goals and dreams, the ones that demand our greatest effort yet promise absolutely nothing, when we are tucked into our comfort zones. I was at work when Kostman laid out his challenge for me. I’d just had a warm shower. I was fed and watered. I

was comfortable. And looking back, every single time I've been inspired to do something difficult, I was in a soft environment, because it all sounds doable when you're chilling on your couch, with a glass of lemonade or a chocolate shake in your hand. When we're comfortable we can't answer those simple questions that are bound to arise in the heat of battle because we don't even realize they're coming.

But those answers are very important when you are no longer in your air-conditioned room or under your fluffy blanket. When your body is broken and beaten, when you're confronted with agonizing pain and staring into the unknown, your mind will spin, and that's when those questions become toxic. If you aren't prepared in advance, if you allow your mind to remain undisciplined in an environment of intense suffering (it won't feel like it, but it is very much a choice you are making), the only answer you are likely to find is the one that will make it stop as fast as possible.

I don't know.

Hell Week changed everything for me. It allowed me to have the mindset to sign up for that twenty-four-hour race with less than a week's notice because during Hell Week you live all the emotions of life, all the highs and lows, in six days. In 130 hours, you earn decades of wisdom. That's why there was a schism between the twins after Marcus went through BUD/S. He'd gained the kind of self-knowledge that can only come from being broken down to nothing and finding more within. Morgan couldn't speak that language until he endured it for himself.

After surviving two Hell Weeks and participating in three, I was a native speaker. Hell Week was home. It was the fairest place I've ever been in this world. There were no timed evolutions. There was nothing graded, and there were no trophies. It was an all-out war of me against me, and that's exactly where I found myself again when I was reduced to my absolute lowest on Hospitality Point.

Why?! Why are you still doing this to yourself, Goggins?!

"Because you are one hard man," I screamed.

The voices in my head were so penetrating, I had to bite back out loud. I was onto something. I felt an energy build immediately, as I realized that still being in the fight was a miracle in itself. Except it wasn't a miracle. God didn't come down and bless me. *I did this!* I kept going when I should have quit five hours ago. *I am the reason I still have a chance*. And I remembered something else too. This wasn't the first time I'd taken on a seemingly impossible task. I picked up my pace. I was still walking, but I wasn't sleepwalking anymore. I had life! I kept digging into my past, into my own imaginary Cookie Jar.

I remembered as a kid, no matter how difficult our life was, my mother always figured out a way to stock our cookie jar. She'd buy wafers and Oreos, Pepperidge Farm Milanos and Chips Ahoy!, and whenever she showed up with a new batch of cookies, she dumped them into one jar. With her permission we'd get to pick one or two out at a time. It was like a mini treasure hunt. I remember the joy of dropping my fist into that jar, wondering what I'd find, and before I crammed the cookie in my mouth I always took the time to admire it first, especially when we were broke in Brazil. I'd turn it around in my hand and say my own little prayer of thanks. The feeling of being that kid, locked in a moment of gratitude for a simple gift like a cookie, came back to me. I felt it viscerally, and I used that concept to stuff a new kind of Cookie Jar. Inside it were all my past victories.

Like the time when I had to study three times as hard as anybody else during my senior year in high school just to graduate. That was a cookie. Or when I passed the ASVAB test as a senior and then again to get into BUD/S. Two more cookies. I remembered dropping over a hundred pounds in under three months, conquering my fear of water, graduating BUD/S at the top of my class, and being named Enlisted Honor Man in Army Ranger School (more on that soon). All those were cookies loaded with chocolate chunks.

These weren't mere flashbacks. I wasn't just floating through my memory files, I actually tapped into the emotional state I felt during those victories, and in so doing accessed my sympathetic nervous system once again. My adrenaline took over, the pain started to fade just enough, and my pace picked up. I began swinging my arms and lengthening my stride. My

fractured feet were still a bloody mess, full of blisters, the toenails peeling off almost every toe, but I kept pounding, and soon it was me who was slaloming runners with pained expressions as I raced the clock.

From then on, the Cookie Jar became a concept I've employed whenever I need a reminder of who I am and what I'm capable of. We all have a cookie jar inside us, because life, being what it is, has always tested us. Even if you're feeling low and beat down by life right now, I guarantee you can think of a time or two when you overcame odds and tasted success. It doesn't have to be a big victory either. It can be something small.

I know we all want the whole victory today, but when I was teaching myself to read I would be happy when I could understand every word in a single paragraph. I knew I still had a long way to go to move from a third-grade reading level to that of a senior in high school, but even a small win like that was enough to keep me interested in learning and finding more within myself. You don't drop one hundred pounds in less than three months without losing five pounds in a week first. Those first five pounds I lost were a small accomplishment, and it doesn't sound like a lot, but at the time it was proof that I could lose weight and that my goal, however improbable, was not impossible!

The engine in a rocket ship does not fire without a small spark first. We all need small sparks, small accomplishments in our lives to fuel the big ones. Think of your small accomplishments as kindling. When you want a bonfire, you don't start by lighting a big log. You collect some witch's hair—a small pile of hay or some dry, dead grass. You light that, and then add small sticks and bigger sticks before you feed your tree stump into the blaze. Because it's the small sparks, which start small fires, that eventually build enough heat to burn the whole forest down.

If you don't have any big accomplishments to draw on yet, so be it. Your small victories are your cookies to savor, and make sure you do savor them. Yeah, I was hard on myself when I looked in the Accountability Mirror, but I also praised myself whenever I could claim a small victory, because we all need that, and very few of us take the time to celebrate our successes. Sure, in the moment, we might enjoy them, but do we ever look back on them and feel that win again and again? Maybe that sounds narcissistic to you. But

I’m not talking about droning on about the glory days here. I’m not suggesting you bore your friends with all your stories about what a hero you *used to be*. Nobody wants to hear that. I’m talking about utilizing past successes to fuel you to new and bigger ones. Because in the heat of battle, when life gets real, we need to draw inspiration to push through our own exhaustion, depression, pain, and misery. We need to spark a bunch of small fires to become the inferno.

But digging into the Cookie Jar when things are going south takes focus and determination because at first the brain doesn’t want to go there. It wants to remind you that you’re suffering and that your goal is impossible. It wants to stop you so it can stop the pain. That night in San Diego was the most difficult night of my life, physically. I’d never felt so broken, and there were no souls to take. I wasn’t competing for a trophy. There was no one standing in my way. All I had to draw on to keep myself going was me.

The Cookie Jar became my energy bank. Whenever the pain got to be too much, I dug into it and took a bite. The pain was never gone, but I only felt it in waves because my brain was otherwise occupied, which allowed me to drown out the simple questions and shrink time. Each lap became a victory lap, celebrating a different cookie, another small fire. Mile eighty-one became eighty-two, and an hour and a half later, I was in the nineties. I’d run ninety miles with no training! Who does that? An hour later I was at ninety-five, and after nearly nineteen hours of running almost non-stop, I’d done it! I’d hit one hundred miles! Or had I? I couldn’t remember, so I ran one more lap just to make sure.

After running 101 miles, my race finally over, I staggered to my lawn chair and Kate placed a camouflaged poncho liner over my body as I shivered in the fog. Steam poured off me. My vision was blurred. I remember feeling something warm on my leg, looked down and saw I was peeing blood again. I knew what was coming next, but the port-a-potties were about forty feet away, which may as well have been forty miles, or 4,000. I tried to get up but I was way too dizzy and collapsed back into that chair, an immovable object. It was much worse this time. My entire backside and lower back were smeared with warm feces.

Kate knew what an emergency looked like. She sprinted to our Toyota Camry and backed the car up on the grassy knoll beside me. My legs were stiff as fossils frozen in stone, and I leaned on her to slide into the backseat. She was frantic behind the wheel and wanted to take me directly to the ER, but I wanted to go home.

We lived on the second deck of an apartment complex in Chula Vista, and I leaned on her back with my arms around her neck as she led me up that staircase. She balanced me up against the stucco as she opened the door to our apartment. I took a few steps inside before blacking out.

I came to, on the kitchen floor, a few minutes later. My back was still smeared with crap, my thighs caked in blood and urine. My feet were blistered up and bleeding in twelve places. Seven of my ten toenails were dangling loose, connected only by tabs of dead skin. We had a combination tub and shower and she got the shower going before helping me crawl toward the bathroom and climb into the tub. I remember lying there, naked, with the shower pouring down upon me. I shivered, felt and looked like death, and then I started peeing again. But instead of blood or urine, what came out of me looked like thick brown bile.

Petrified, Kate stepped into the hall to dial my mom. She'd been to the race with a friend of hers who happened to be a doctor. When he heard my symptoms, the doctor suggested that I might be in kidney failure and that I needed to go to the ER immediately. Kate hung up, stormed into the bathroom, and found me lying on my left side, in the fetal position.

"We need to get you to the ER now, David!"

She kept talking, shouting, crying, trying to reach me through the haze, and I heard most of what she said, but I knew if we went to the hospital they'd give me pain killers and I didn't want to mask this pain. I'd just accomplished the most amazing feat in my entire life. It was harder than Hell Week, more significant to me than becoming a SEAL, and more challenging than my deployment to Iraq because this time I had done something I'm not sure anyone had ever done before. I ran 101 miles with zero preparation.

I knew then that I'd been selling myself short. That there was a whole new level of performance out there to tap into. That the human body can withstand and accomplish a lot more than most of us think possible, and that it all begins and ends in the mind. This wasn't a theory. It wasn't something I'd read in a book. I'd experienced it firsthand on Hospitality Point.

This last part. This pain and suffering. This was my trophy ceremony. I'd earned this. This was confirmation that I'd mastered my own mind—at least for a little while—and that what I'd just accomplished was something special. As I lay there, curled up in the tub, shivering in the fetal position, relishing the pain, I thought of something else too. If I could run 101 miles with zero training, imagine what I could do with a little preparation.

CHALLENGE #6

Take inventory of your Cookie Jar. Crack your journal open again. Write it all out. Remember, this is not some breezy stroll through your personal trophy room. Don't just write down your achievement hit list. Include life obstacles you've overcome as well, like quitting smoking or overcoming depression or a stutter. Add in those minor tasks you failed earlier in life, but tried again a second or third time and ultimately succeeded at. Feel what it was like to overcome those struggles, those opponents, and win. Then get to work.

Set ambitious goals before each workout and let those past victories carry you to new personal bests. If it's a run or bike ride, include some time to do interval work and challenge yourself to beat your best mile split. Or simply maintain a maximum heart rate for a full minute, then two minutes. If you're at home, focus on pull-ups or push-ups. Do as many as possible in two minutes. Then try to beat your best. When the pain hits and tries to stop you short of your goal, dunk your fist in, pull out a cookie, and let it fuel you!

If you're more focused on intellectual growth, train yourself to study harder and longer than ever before, or read a record number of books in a given month. Your Cookie Jar can help there too. Because if you perform this challenge correctly and truly challenge yourself, you'll come to a point in any exercise where pain, boredom, or self-doubt kicks in, and you'll need to push back to get through it. The Cookie Jar is your shortcut to taking control of your own thought process. Use it that way! The point here isn't to make yourself feel like a hero for the fun of it. It's not a hooray-for-me session. It's to remember what a warrior you are so you can use that energy to succeed again in the heat of battle!

Post your memories and the new successes they fueled on social media, and include the hashtags: #canthurtme #cookiejar.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE MOST POWERFUL WEAPON

TWENTY-SEVEN HOURS AFTER SAVORING INTENSE, GRATIFYING PAIN AND BASKING IN the afterglow of my greatest achievement so far, I was back at my desk on a Monday morning. SBG was my commanding officer, and I had his permission, and every known excuse, to take a few days off. Instead, swollen, sore, and miserable, I pulled myself out of bed, hobbled into work, and later that morning called Chris Kostman.

I'd been looking forward to this. I imagined the sweet note of surprise in his voice, after hearing that I'd taken his challenge and run 101 miles in less than twenty-four hours. Perhaps there'd even be some overdue respect as he made my entry to Badwater official. Instead, my call went to voicemail. I left him a polite message he never returned, and two days later I dropped him an email.

> Sir, how are you doing? I ran the one hundred miles needed to qualify in 18 hours and 56 minutes…I would like to know now what I need to do to get into Badwater…so we can begin raising money for the [Special Operations Warrior] foundation. Thanks again…

His reply came in the next day, and it threw me way off.

> Congrats on your hundred-mile finish. But did you actually stop then? The point of a twenty-four-hour event is to run for twenty-four hours…

> Anyway…stay tuned for the announcement that you can apply…The race will be July 24–26.
>
> Best regards,
>
> Chris Kostman

I couldn't help but take his response personally. On a Wednesday he suggested I run one hundred miles in twenty-four hours that Saturday. I got it done in less time than he required, and he still wasn't impressed? Kostman was a veteran of ultra races, so he knew that strewn behind me were a dozen performance barriers and pain thresholds I'd shattered. Obviously, none of that meant much to him.

I cooled off for a week before I wrote him back, and in the meantime looked into other races to bolster my resume. There were very few available that late in the year. I found a fifty-miler on Catalina, but only triple digits would impress a guy like Kostman. Plus, it had been a full week since the San Diego One Day and my body was still monumentally destroyed. I hadn't run three feet since finishing mile 101. My frustration flashed with the cursor as I crafted my rebuttal.

> Thanks for emailing me back. I see that you enjoy talking about as much as I do. The only reason why I'm still bugging you is because this race and the cause behind it is important…If you have any other qualifying races that you think I should do, please let me know…Thanks for letting me know I'm supposed to run the full twenty-four hours. Next time I'll be sure to do that.

It took him another full week to respond, and he didn't offer a heck of a lot more hope, but at least he salted it with sarcasm.

> Hi David,
>
> If you can do some more ultras between now and Jan 3–24, the application period, great. If not,

submit the best possible application during the Jan 3–24 window and cross your fingers.

Thanks for your enthusiasm,

Chris

At this point I was starting to like Chris Kostman a lot better than my chances of getting into Badwater. What I didn't know, because he never mentioned it, is that Kostman was one of five people on the Badwater admissions committee, which reviews upwards of 1,000 applications a year. Each judge scores every application, and based on their cumulative scores, the top ninety applicants get in on merit. From the sounds of it, my resume was thin and wouldn't crack the top ninety. On the other hand, Kostman held ten wild cards in his back pocket. He could have already guaranteed me a spot, but for some reason he kept pushing me. Once again I'd have to prove myself beyond a minimum standard to get a fair shake. To become a SEAL, I had to deal with three Hell Weeks, and now, if I really wanted to run Badwater and raise money for families in need, I was going to have to find a way to make my application bulletproof.

Based on a link he sent along with his reply, I found one more ultra race scheduled before the Badwater application was due. It was called the Hurt 100, and the name did not lie. One of the toughest 100-mile trail races in the world, it was set in a triple canopy rainforest on the island of Oahu. To cross the finish line, I'd have to run up and down 24,500 vertical feet. That's some Himalayan craziness. I stared at the race profile. It was all sharp spikes and deep dives. It looked like an arrhythmic EKG. I couldn't do this race cold. There's no way I could finish it without at least some training, but by early December I was still in so much agony that walking up the stairs to my apartment was pure torture.

The following weekend I zoomed up Interstate 15 to Vegas for the Las Vegas Marathon. It wasn't spur of the moment. Months before I'd ever heard the words "San Diego One Day," Kate, my mom, and I had circled December 5th on our calendars. It was 2005, the first year that the Las Vegas Marathon started on the Strip, and we wanted to be part of that! Except I never trained for it, then the San Diego One Day happened, and by the time we got to

Vegas I had no illusions about my fitness level. I tried to run the morning before we left, but I still had stress fractures in my feet, my medial tendons were wobbly, and even while wrapped with a special bandage I'd found that could stabilize my ankles, I couldn't last longer than a quarter mile. So I didn't plan on running as we rocked up to the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino on race day.

It was a beautiful morning. Music was pumping, there were thousands of smiling faces in the street, the clean desert air had a chill to it, and the sun was shining. Running conditions don't get much better, and Kate was ready to go. Her goal was to break five hours, and for once, I was satisfied being a cheerleader. My mom had always planned on walking it, and I figured I'd stroll with her for as long as I could, then hail a cab to the finish line and cheer my ladies to the tape.

The three of us toed up with the masses as the clock struck 7 a.m., and someone got on the mic to begin the official count down. "Ten…nine…eight…" When he hit one, a horn sounded, and like Pavlov's dog something clicked inside me. I still don't know what it was. Perhaps I underestimated my competitive spirit. Maybe it was because I knew Navy SEALs were supposed to be the toughest warriors in the world. We were supposed to run on broken legs and fractured feet. Or so went the legend I'd bought into long ago. Whatever it was, something triggered and the last thing I remember seeing as the horn echoed down the street was shock and real concern on the faces of Kate and my mother as I charged down the boulevard and out of sight.

The pain was serious for the first quarter mile, but after that adrenaline took over, I hit the first mile marker at 7:10 and kept running like the asphalt was melting behind me. Ten kilometers into the race, my time was around forty-three minutes. That's solid, but I wasn't focused on the clock because considering how I'd felt the day before, I was still in total disbelief that I'd actually run 6.2 miles! My body was broken. How was this happening? Most people in my condition would have both feet in soft casts, and here I was running a marathon!

I got to mile thirteen, the halfway point, and saw the official clock. It read, "1:35:55." I did the math and realized that I was in the hunt to qualify for the

Boston marathon, but was right on the cusp. In order to qualify in my age group, I had to finish in under 3:10:59. I laughed in disbelief and slammed a paper cup of Gatorade. In less than two hours the game had flipped, and I might never get this chance again. I'd seen so much death by then—in my personal life and on the battlefield—that I knew tomorrow was not guaranteed.

It wasn't easy. I'd surfed an adrenaline wave for the first thirteen miles, but I felt every inch of the second half, and at mile eighteen, I hit a wall. That's a common theme in marathon running, because mile eighteen is usually when a runner's glycogen levels run low, and I was bonking, my lungs heaving. My legs felt like I was running in deep Saharan sand. I needed to stop and take a break, but I refused, and two hard miles later I felt rejuvenated. I reached the next clock at mile twenty-two. I was still in the hunt for Boston, though I'd fallen thirty seconds off the pace, and to qualify, the final four miles would have to be my very best.

I dug deep, kicked my thighs up high, and lengthened my stride. I was a man possessed as I turned the final corner and charged toward the finish line at the Mandalay Bay. Thousands of people had assembled on the sidewalk, cheering. It was all a beautiful blur to me as I sprinted home.

I ran my last two miles at a sub-seven-minute pace, finished the race in just over 3:08, and qualified for Boston. Somewhere on the streets of Las Vegas, my wife and mother would deal with their own struggles and overcome them to finish too, and as I sat on a patch of grass, waiting for them, I contemplated another simple question I couldn't shake. It was a new one, and wasn't fear-based, pain-spiked, or self-limiting. This one felt open.

What am I capable of?

SEAL training had pushed me to the brink several times, but whenever it beat me down I popped up to take another pounding. That experience made me hard, but it also left me wanting more of the same, and day-to-day Navy SEAL life just wasn't like that. Then came the San Diego One Day, and now this. I'd finished a marathon at an elite pace (for a weekend warrior) when I had no business even walking a mile. Both were incredible physical feats that didn't seem possible. But they'd happened.

What am I capable of?

I couldn't answer that question, but as I looked around the finish line that day and considered what I'd accomplished, it became clear that we are all leaving a lot of money on the table without realizing it. We habitually settle for less than our best; at work, in school, in our relationships, and on the playing field or race course. We settle as individuals, and we teach our children to settle for less than their best, and all of that ripples out, merges, and multiplies within our communities and society as a whole. We're not talking some bad weekend in Vegas, no more cash at the ATM kind of loss either. In that moment, the cost of missing out on so much excellence in this eternally screwed-up world felt incalculable to me, and it still does. I haven't stopped thinking about it since.

* * *

Physically, I bounced back from Vegas within a few days. Meaning I was back to my new normal: dealing with the same serious yet tolerable pain I'd come home to after the San Diego One Day. The aches were still there by the following Saturday, but I was done convalescing. I needed to start training or I'd burn out on the trail during the Hurt 100, and there would be no Badwater. I'd been reading up on how to prepare for ultras and knew it was vital to get in some hundred-mile weeks. I only had about a month to build my strength and endurance before race day on January 14th.

My feet and shins weren't even close to right, so I came up with a new method to stabilize both the bones in my feet and my tendons. I bought high performance inserts, cut them down to fit flush with the soles of my feet, and taped my ankles, heels, and lower shins with compression tape. I also slid a small heel wedge into my shoes to correct my running posture and ease pressure. After what I'd endured, it took a lot of props to get me running (nearly) pain free.

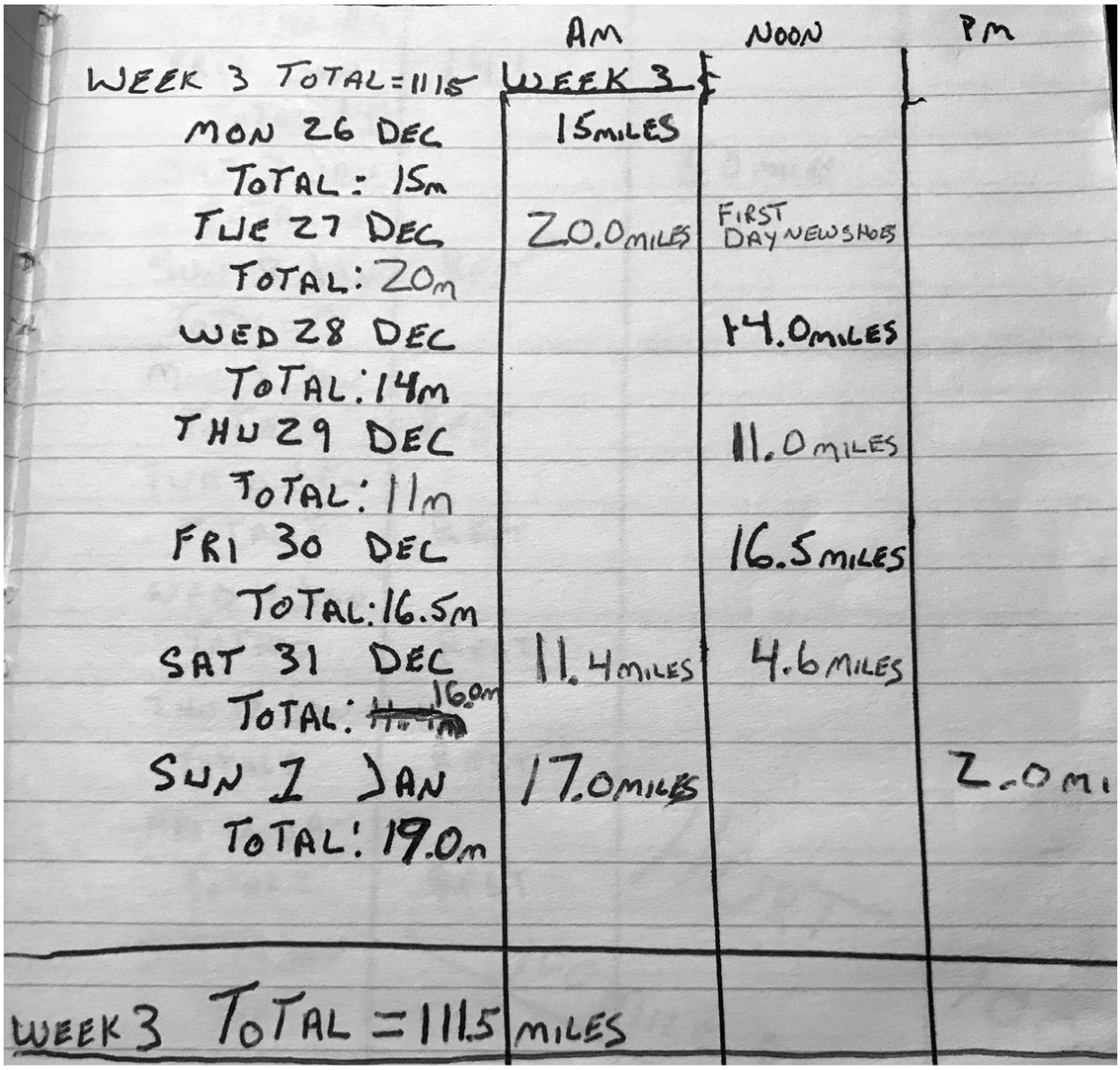
Getting hundred-mile weeks in while holding down a steady job isn't easy, but that was no excuse. My sixteen-mile commute to work from Chula Vista to Coronado became my go-to run. Chula Vista had a split personality when I lived there. There was the nicer, newer, middle class section, where we lived, which was surrounded by a concrete jungle of gritty, dangerous

streets. That’s the part I ran through at dawn, beneath freeway overpasses, and alongside Home Depot shipping bays. This was not your tourist brochure’s version of sunny San Diego.

I sniffed car exhaust and rotting garbage, spotted skittering rats, and dodged sleepless homeless camps before reaching Imperial Beach, where I picked up the seven-mile Silver Strand bike path. It banked south past Coronado’s landmark hotel, the turn of the century Hotel del Coronado, and a crop of luxury condo towers which overlooked the same wide strip of sand shared by Naval Special Warfare Command, where I spent the day jumping out of airplanes and shooting guns. I was living the Navy SEAL legend, trying to keep it real!

I ran that sixteen-mile stretch at least three times a week. Some days I ran home too, and on Fridays I added a ruck run. Inside the radio pouch of my standard issue ruck sack, I slid two twenty-five-pound weights and ran fully loaded for as many as twenty miles to build quad strength. I loved waking up at 5 a.m. and starting work with three hours of cardio already in the bank while most of my teammates hadn’t even finished their coffee. It gave me a mental edge, a better sense of self-awareness, and a ton of self-confidence, which made me a better SEAL instructor. That’s what getting up at the crack of dawn and putting out will do for you. It makes you better in all facets of your life.

During my first real deal week of training, I ran seventy-seven miles. The following week, I ran 109 miles, including a twelve-mile run on Christmas Day. The next week I pushed it to 111.5, including a nineteen-mile run on New Year’s Day, and the following week I backed off to taper my legs, but still got 56.5 miles in. All of those were road miles, but what I had coming up was a trail run, and I had never run on a trail before. I’d bushwhacked a bunch, but I hadn’t run distance on single track with a clock running. The Hurt 100 was a twenty-mile circuit course, and I’d heard that only a slim slice of those who start the race finish all five laps. This was my last chance to pad my Badwater resume. I had a lot riding on a successful outcome, and there was so much about the race, and about ultra running, that I still didn’t know.



	AM	NOON	PM
WEEK 3 TOTAL=111.5	WEEK 3		
MON 26 DEC	15 MILES		
TOTAL: 15m			
TUE 27 DEC	20.0 MILES	FIRST DAY NEW SHOES	
TOTAL: 20m			
WED 28 DEC		14.0 MILES	
TOTAL: 14m			
THU 29 DEC		11.0 MILES	
TOTAL: 11m			
FRI 30 DEC		16.5 MILES	
TOTAL: 16.5m			
SAT 31 DEC	11.4 MILES	4.6 MILES	
TOTAL: ~~11m~~ 16.0m			
SUN 1 JAN	17.0 MILES		2.0 mi
TOTAL: 19.0m			
WEEK 3 TOTAL = 111.5	MILES		

Hurt 100 Week 3 training log

I flew into Honolulu a few days early and checked into the Halekoa, a military hotel where active duty and veterans stay with their families when they come through town. I'd studied the maps and knew the basics when it came to the terrain, but I hadn't seen it up close, so I drove over to the Hawaii Nature Center the day before the race and stared into the velvety, jade mountains. All I could see was a steep cut of red earth disappearing into the dense green. I walked up the trail for a half mile, but there was only so far I could hike. I was tapering, and the first mile was straight uphill. Everything beyond that would have to remain a mystery for a little longer.

There were just three aid stations on the twenty-mile course, and most athletes were self-reliant and dialed in their own nutritional regimen. I was still a neophyte, and had no clue what I needed when it came to fuel. I met a woman at the hotel at 5:30 a.m. on race day morning as we were about to leave. She knew I was a rookie and asked what I'd brought with me to keep myself going. I showed her my meager stash of flavored energy gels, and my CamelBak.

"You didn't bring salt pills?" she asked, shocked. I shrugged. I didn't have a clue what a salt pill was. She poured a hundred of them into my palm. "Take two of these, every hour. They'll keep you from cramping."

"Roger that." She smiled and shook her head like she could see my doomed future.

I had a strong start and felt great, but not long after the race began I knew I was facing a monster course. I'm not talking about the grade and elevation variance. I expected that. It was all the rocks and roots that took me by surprise. I was lucky that it hadn't rained in a couple of days because all I had to wear were my standard running shoes, which had precious little tread. Then my CamelBak broke at mile six.

I shook it off and kept hammering, but without a water source, I'd have to rely on the aid stations to hydrate, and they were spaced miles apart. I didn't even have my support crew (of one) yet. Kate was chilling on the beach and didn't plan on showing up until later in the race, which was my own fault. I enticed her to come along by promising a vacation, and early that morning I insisted she enjoy Hawaii and leave the suffering to me. With or without a CamelBak, my mindset was to make it from aid station to aid station and see what happens.

Before the race started I heard people talking about Karl Meltzer. I'd seen him stretching out and warming up. His nickname was the Speedgoat, and he was trying to become the first person ever to complete the race in less than twenty-four hours. For the rest of us there was a thirty-six hour time limit. My first lap took four and a half hours, and I felt okay afterwards, which was to be expected considering all the long days I'd done in preparation, but I was also concerned because each lap demanded an ascent and descent of

around 5,000 vertical feet, and the amount of focus it took to pay attention to every step so I didn't turn an ankle amped up my mental fatigue. Each time my medial tendon twinged it felt like a raw nerve exposed to the wind, and I knew one stumble could fold my wobbly ankle and end my race. I felt that pressure every single moment, and as a result, I burned more calories than expected. Which was a problem because I had very little fuel, and without a water source, I couldn't hydrate effectively.

Between laps, I guzzled water, and with my belly sloshing started my second loop, with a slow jog up that one-mile-long, 800-foot climb into the mountains (basically straight uphill). That's when it started to rain. Our red earth trail became mud within minutes. The soles of my shoes were coated with it and slick as skis. I sloshed through shin deep puddles, skidded down descents, and slipped on ascents. It was a full-body sport. But at least there was water. Whenever I was dry I tipped my head back, opened wide, and tasted the rain, which filtered through a triple canopy jungle that smelled of leaf rot and dung. The feral funk invaded my nostrils, and all I could think of was the fact that I had to run four more laps!

At mile thirty, my body reported some positive news. Or maybe it was the physical manifestation of a backhanded compliment? The tendon pain in my ankles had vanished…because my feet had swollen enough to stabilize those tendons. Was this a good thing long-term? Probably not, but you take what you can get on the ultra circuit, where you have to roll with whatever gets you from mile to mile. Meanwhile, my quads and calves ached like they'd been thumped with a sledgehammer. Yeah, I had done a lot of running, but most of it—including my ruck runs—on pancake flat terrain in San Diego, not on slick jungle trails.

Kate was waiting for me by the time I completed my second lap, and after spending a relaxing morning on Waikiki beach, she watched in horror as I materialized from the mist like a zombie from *The Walking Dead*. I sat and guzzled as much water as I could. By then, word had gotten out that it was my first trail race.

Have you ever had a very public failure, or were in the midst of a very bad day/week/month/year, yet people around you felt obliged to comment on the source of your humiliation? Maybe they reminded you of all the ways you

could have ensured a very different outcome? Now imagine consuming that negativity, but having to run sixty more miles in the sweaty, jungle rain on top of it. Does that sound like fun? Yeah, I was the talk of the race. Well, me and Karl Meltzer. Nobody could believe he was gunning for a sub-twenty-four-hour experience, and it was equally baffling that I showed up to one of the most treacherous trail races on the planet, undersupplied and unprepared, with no trail races under my belt. By the time I began my third loop there were only forty athletes, out of nearly a hundred, left in the race, and I started running with a guy named Luis Escobar. For the tenth time I heard the following words:

"So it's your first trail race?" he asked. I nodded. "You really picked the wrong…"

"I know," I said.

"It's just such a technical…"

"Right. I'm an idiot. I've heard that a lot today."

"That's okay," he said, "we're all a bunch of idiots out here, man." He handed me a water bottle. He was carrying three of them. "Take this. I heard about your CamelBak."

This being my second race, I was starting to understand the rhythm of ultra. It's a constant dance between competition and camaraderie, which reminded me of BUD/S. Luis and I were both racing the clock and each other, but we wanted one another to make it. We were in it alone, together, and he was right. We were a couple of idiots.

Darkness descended and left us with a pitch-black jungle night. Running side by side, the glow of our headlamps merged and shed a wider light, but once we separated all I could see was a yellow ball bouncing on the trail ahead of me. Countless trip wires—shin-high logs, slick roots, lichen-wrapped rocks—remained out of sight. I slipped, stumbled, fell, and cursed. Jungle noises were everywhere. It wasn't just the insect world that had my attention. In Hawaii, on all the islands, bow hunting for wild pig in the mountains is a major pastime, and master hunters often leave their pit bulls chained up in

the jungle to develop a nose for swine. I heard every one of those hungry bulls snapping and growling, and I heard some pigs squealing too. I smelled their fear and rage, their pee, their dung, their sour breath.

With each nearby bark or yelp, my heart skipped and I jumped on terrain so slick that injury was a real possibility. One wrong step could roll me out of the race and out of contention for Badwater. I could picture Kostman hearing the news and nodding like he figured that would happen all along. I know him pretty well now, and he was never out to get me, but that's how my mind worked back then. And in the steep, dark mountains of Oahu, my exhaustion magnified my stress. I felt close to my absolute limit, but still had more than forty miles to go!

On the backside of the course, after a long technical descent into the dark, dank forest I saw another headlamp circling ahead of me in a cutout on the trail. The runner was moving in curlicues and when I caught up to him I could see it was a Hungarian runner I'd met in San Diego named Akos Konya. He was one of the best runners in the field on Hospitality Point, where he covered 134 miles in twenty-four hours. I liked Akos and had mad respect for him. I stopped and watched him move in conjoining circles, covering the same terrain over and over again. Was he looking for something? Was he hallucinating?

"Akos," I asked, "you okay, man? Do you need some help?"

"David, no! I…no, I'm fine," he said. His eyes were full-moon flying saucers. He was in delirium, but I was barely hanging on myself and wasn't sure what I could do for him other than tell staff at the next aid station he was wandering in a daze. Like I said, there's camaraderie and there's competition on the ultra circuit, and since he wasn't in obvious pain and refused my help, I had to go into barbarian mode. With two full laps to go, I had no choice but to keep moving.

I staggered back to the start line and slumped into my chair, dazed. It was dark as space, the temperature was dropping, and rain was still pouring down. I was at the very edge of my capability, and wasn't sure that I could take one more step. I felt like I'd drained 99 percent from my tank, at least.

My gas light was on, my engine shuddering, yet I knew I had to find more if I was going to finish this race and get myself into Badwater.

But how do you push yourself when pain is all you feel with every step? When agony is the feedback loop that permeates each cell in your body, begging you to stop? That's tricky because the threshold for suffering is different for everybody. What's universal is the impulse to succumb. To feel like you've given everything you can, and that you are justified in leaving a job undone.

By now, I'm sure you can tell that it doesn't take much for me to become obsessed. Some criticize my level of passion, but I'm not down with the prevailing mentalities that tend to dominate American society these days; the ones that tell us to go with the flow or invite us to learn how to get more with less effort. Shortcuts don't equal permanent results. The reason I embrace my own obsessions and demand and desire more of myself is because I've learned that it's only when I push beyond pain and suffering, past my perceived limitations, that I'm capable of accomplishing more, physically and mentally—in endurance races but also in life as a whole.

And I believe the same is true for you.

The human body is like a stock car. We may look different on the outside, but under the hood we all have huge reservoirs of potential and a governor impeding us from reaching our maximum velocity. In a car, the governor limits the flow of fuel and air so it doesn't burn too hot, which places a ceiling on performance. It's a hardware issue; the governor can easily be removed, and if you disable yours, watch your car rocket beyond 130 mph.

It's a subtler process in the human animal.

Our governor is buried deep in our minds, intertwined with our very identity. It knows what and who we love and hate; it's read our whole life story and forms the way we see ourselves and how we'd like to be seen. It's the software that delivers personalized feedback—in the form of pain and exhaustion, but also fear and insecurity, and it uses all of that to encourage us to stop before we risk it all. But, here's the thing, it doesn't have absolute

control. Unlike the governor in an engine, ours can't stop us unless we buy into it and agree to quit.

Sadly, most of us give up when we've only given around 40 percent of our maximum effort. Even when we feel like we've reached our absolute limit, we still have 60 percent more to give! That's the governor in action! Once you know that to be true, it's simply a matter of stretching your pain tolerance, letting go of your identity and all your self-limiting stories, so you can get to 60 percent, then 80 percent and beyond without giving up. I call this The 40% Rule, and the reason it's so powerful is that if you follow it, you will unlock your mind to new levels of performance and excellence in sports and in life, and your rewards will run far deeper than mere material success.

The 40% Rule can be applied to everything we do. Because in life almost nothing will turn out exactly as we hope. There are always challenges, and whether we are at work or school, or feeling tested within our most intimate or important relationships, we will all be tempted to walk away from commitments, give up on our goals and dreams, and sell our own happiness short at some point. Because we will feel empty, like we have no more to give, when we haven't tapped even half of the treasure buried deep in our minds, hearts, and souls.

I know how it feels to be approaching an energetic dead end. I've been there too many times to count. I understand the temptation to sell short, but I also know that impulse is driven by your mind's desire for comfort, and it's not telling you the truth. It's your identity trying to find sanctuary, not help you grow. It's looking for status quo, not reaching for greatness or seeking wholeness. But the software update that you need to shut your governor down is no supersonic download. It takes twenty years to gain twenty years of experience, and the only way to move beyond your 40 percent is to callous your mind, day after day. Which means you'll have to chase pain like it's your job!

Imagine you're a boxer, and on your first day in the ring you take one on your chin. It's gonna hurt like crazy, but at year ten of being a boxer, you won't be stopped by one punch. You'll be able to absorb twelve rounds of getting beat down and come back the very next day and fight again. It's not

that the punch has lost power. Your opponents will be even stronger. The change has happened within your brain. You've calloused your mind. Over a period of time, your tolerance for mental and physical suffering will have expanded because your software will have learned that you can take a whole lot more than one punch, and if you stay with any task that is trying to beat you down, you will reap rewards.

Not a fighter? Say you like to run but have a broken pinky toe. I'll bet if you continue running on it, pretty soon you'll be able to run on broken legs. Sounds impossible, right? I know it's true, because I've run on broken legs, and that knowledge helped me endure all manner of agonies on the ultra circuit, which has revealed a clear spring of self confidence that I drink from whenever my tank is dry.

But nobody taps their reserve 60 percent right away or all at once. The first step is to remember that your initial blast of pain and fatigue is your governor talking. Once you do that, you are in control of the dialogue in your mind, and you can remind yourself that you are not as drained as you think. That you haven't given it your all. Not even close. Buying into that will keep you in the fight, and that's worth an extra 5 percent. Of course, that's easier read than done.

It wasn't easy to begin the fourth lap of the Hurt 100 because I knew how much it would hurt, and when you are feeling dead and buried, dehydrated, wrung out, and torn up at 40 percent, finding that extra 60 percent feels impossible. I didn't want my suffering to continue. Nobody does! That's why the line "fatigue makes cowards of us all" is so true.

Mind you, I didn't know anything about The 40% Rule that day. The Hurt 100 is when I first started to contemplate it, but I had hit the wall many times before, and I had learned to stay present and open-minded enough to recalibrate my goals even at my lowest. I knew that staying in the fight is always the hardest, and most rewarding, first step.

Of course, it's easy to be open-minded when you leave yoga class and are taking a stroll by the beach, but when you're suffering, keeping an open mind is hard work. The same is true if you are facing a daunting challenge on the job or at school. Maybe you are tackling a hundred-question test and

know that you've bricked the first fifty. At that point, it's extremely difficult to maintain the necessary discipline to force yourself to keep taking the test seriously. It's also imperative that you find it because in every failure there is something to be gained, even if it's only practice for the next test you'll have to take. Because that next test is coming. That's a guarantee.

I didn't start my fourth lap with any sort of conviction. I was in wait-and-see mode, and halfway up that first climb I became so dizzy I had to sit under a tree for a while. Two runners passed me, one at a time. They checked in but I waved them on. Told them I was just fine.

Yeah, I was doing great. I was a regular Akos Konya.

From my vantage point I could see the crest of the hill above and encouraged myself to walk at least that far. If I still wanted to quit after that, I told myself that I would be willing to sign off, and that there is no shame in not finishing the Hurt 100. I said that to myself again and again because that's how our governor works. It massages your ego even as it stops you short of your goals. But once I got to the top of the climb, the higher ground gave me a new perspective and I saw another place off in the distance and decided to cover that small stretch of mud, rock, and root too—you know, before quitting for good.

Once I got there I was staring down a long descent and even though the footing was troubling, it still looked much easier than going uphill. Without realizing it, I'd gotten to a point where I was able to strategize. On the first climb, I was so dizzy and weak I was swept into a moment of sheer agony, which clogged my brain. There was no room for strategy. I just wanted to quit, but by moving a little bit further I'd reset my brain. I'd calmed down and realized I could chunk the race down to size, and staying in the game like that gave me hope, and hope is addictive.

I chunked the race out that way, collecting 5 percent chips, unlocking more energy, then burning it up as time bled into the wee hours. I became so tired I almost fell asleep on my feet, and that's dangerous on a trail with so many switchbacks and drop offs. Any runner could have easily sleepwalked into oblivion. The one thing keeping me awake was the awful trail condition. I fell on my butt dozens of times. My street shoes were out of their element. It

felt like I was running on ice, and the inevitable fall was always jarring, but at least it woke me up.

By running a little while, then walking a stretch, I was able to forge ahead to mile seventy-seven, the toughest descent of them all, which is when I saw Karl Meltzer, the Speedgoat, crest the hill behind me. He wore a lamp on his head and another on his wrist, and a hip pack with two big water bottles. Silhouetted in pink dawn light he charged down slope, navigating a section that had me stumbling and groping for tree branches to stay upright. He was about to lap me, three miles from the finish line, on pace for a course record, twenty-two hours and sixteen minutes, but what I remember most is how graceful he looked running at an incredible 6:30 per mile pace. He was levitating over the mud, riding a whole different Zen. His feet barely touched the ground, and it was a beautiful sight. The Speedgoat was the living, breathing answer to the question that colonized my mind after the Las Vegas marathon.

What am I capable of?

Watching that bad man glide across the most challenging terrain made me realize that there is a whole other level of athlete out there in the world, and that some of that was inside me too. In fact, it's in all of us. I'm not saying that genetics don't play a role in athletic performance, or that everyone has an undiscovered ability to run a four-minute mile, dunk like LeBron James, shoot like Steph Curry, or run the Hurt 100 in twenty-two hours. We don't all have the same floor or ceiling, but we each have a lot more in us than we know, and when it comes to endurance sports like ultra running, everyone can achieve feats they once thought impossible. In order to do that we must change our minds, be willing to scrap our identity, and make the extra effort to always find more in order to become more.

We must remove our governor.

That day on the Hurt 100 circuit, after seeing Meltzer run like a superhero, I finished my fourth lap in all kinds of pain and took time to watch him celebrate, surrounded by his team. He'd just achieved something nobody had ever done before and here I was with another full lap to go. My legs were rubber, my feet swollen. I did not want to go on, but I also knew that was my

pain talking. My true potential was still undetermined. Looking back, I'd say I'd given 60 percent, which meant my tank was just shy of half-full.

I'd like to sit here and tell you I went all-out and destroyed lap five, but I was still a mere tourist on Planet Ultra. I wasn't the master of my mind. I was in the laboratory, still in discovery mode, and I walked every single step of my fifth and final lap. It took me eight hours, but the rain had stopped, the tropical glow of the warm Hawaiian sun felt phenomenal, and I got the job done. I finished Hurt 100 in thirty-three hours and twenty-three minutes, just shy of the thirty-six-hour cut off, good enough for ninth place. Only twenty-three athletes finished the entire race, and I was one of them.

I was so thrashed afterward, two people carried me to the car, and Kate had to spin me up to my room in a wheelchair. When we got there, we had more work to do. I wanted to get my Badwater application done ASAP, so without so much as a cat nap, we polished that up.

Within a matter of days, Kostman emailed me to let me know that I had been accepted into Badwater. It was a great feeling. It also meant that for the next six months I had two full-time jobs. I was a Navy SEAL in full preparation mode for Badwater. This time I would get strategic and specific because I knew that in order to unleash my best performance—if I wanted to blow past 40 percent, drain my tank, and tap my full potential—I had to first give myself an opportunity.

I didn't research or prepare for the Hurt 100 well enough. I hadn't anticipated the rough terrain, I had no support crew for the first part of the race, and I had no back-up water source. I didn't bring two headlamps, which would have helped during the long, bleak night, and though I sure felt like I had given everything I had, I never even had a chance to access my true 100 percent.

Badwater was going to be different. I researched day and night. I studied the course, noted temperature and elevation variances, and charted them out. I wasn't just interested in the air temperature. I drilled down deeper so I knew how hot the pavement would be on the hottest Death Valley day ever. I Googled videos of the race and watched them for hours. I read blogs from

runners who completed it, noted their pitfalls and training techniques. I drove north to Death Valley and explored the entire course.

Seeing the terrain up close revealed its brutality. The first forty-two miles were dead flat—a run through God's blast furnace cranked up high. That would be my best opportunity to make great time, but to survive it, I'd need two crew vehicles to leap frog one another and set up cooling stations every third of a mile. The thought of it thrilled me, but then again, I wasn't living it yet. I was listening to music, windows down on a spring day in a blooming desert. I was comfortable! It was all still a fantasy!

I marked off the best spots to set up my cooling stations. I noted wherever the shoulder was wide, and where stopping would have to be avoided. I also took note of gas stations and other places to fill up on water and buy ice. There weren't many of them, but they were all mapped. After running the desert gauntlet I'd earn some relief from the heat and pay for it with altitude. The next stage of the race was an eighteen-mile climb to Towne Pass at 4,800 feet. The sun would be setting by then and after driving that section, I pulled over, closed my eyes, and visualized it all.

Research is one part of preparation; visualization is another. Following that Towne Pass climb, I would face a bone-crushing, nine-mile descent. I could see it unfurl from the top of the pass. One thing I learned from the Hurt 100 is that running downhill messes you up bad, and this time I'd be doing it on asphalt. I closed my eyes, opened my mind, and tried to feel the pain in my quads and calves, knees and shins. I knew my quads would bear the brunt of that descent, so I made a note to add muscle. My thighs would need to be plated in steel.

The eighteen-mile climb up Darwin Pass from mile seventy-two would be a nightmare. I'd have to run-walk that section, but the sun would be down, I'd welcome the chill in Lone Pine, and from there I could make up some time because that's where the road flattened out again before the final thirteen-mile climb up Whitney Portal Road, to the finish line at 8,374 feet.

Then again, it's easy to write "make up time" in your notepad, and another to execute it when you get there in real life, but at least I had notes. Together with my annotated maps, they made up my Badwater file, which I studied

like I was preparing for another ASVAB test. I sat at my kitchen table, read and re-read them, and visualized each mile the best I could, but I also knew that my body still hadn't recovered from Hawaii, which hampered the other, even more important aspect of my Badwater prep: physical training.

I was in dire need of PT, but my tendons still hurt so bad I couldn't run for months. Pages were flying off the calendar. I needed to get harder and become the strongest runner possible, and the fact that I couldn't train like I'd hoped sapped my confidence. Plus, word had gotten out at work about what I was getting myself into, and while I had some support from fellow SEALs, I got my share of negativity too, especially when they found out I still couldn't run. But that was nothing new. Who hasn't dreamed up a possibility for themselves only to have friends, colleagues, or family ridicule it? Most of us are extremely motivated to do anything to pursue our dreams until those around us remind us of the danger, the downside, our own limitations, and all the people before us that didn't make it. Sometimes the advice comes from a well-intentioned place. They really believe they are doing it for our own good but if you let them, these same people will talk you out of your dreams, and your governor will help them do it.

That's one reason I invented the Cookie Jar. We must create a system that constantly reminds us who we are when we are at our best, because life is not going to pick us up when we fall. There will be forks in the road, knives in your back, mountains to climb, and we are only capable of living up to the image we create for ourselves.

Prepare yourself!

We know life can be hard, and yet we feel sorry for ourselves when it isn't fair. From this point forward, accept the following as Goggins's laws of nature:

- You will be made fun of.
- You will feel insecure.
- You may not be the best all the time.
- You may be the only black, white, Asian, Latino, female, male, gay, lesbian or [fill in your identity here] in a given situation.
- There will be times when you feel alone.

Get over it!

Our minds are strong, they are our most powerful weapon, but we have stopped using them. We have access to so many more resources today than ever before and yet we are so much less capable than those who came before us. If you want to be one of the few to defy those trends in our ever-softening society, you will have to be willing to go to war with yourself and create a whole new identity, which requires an open mind. It's funny, being open-minded is often tagged as new age or soft when in reality being open-minded enough to find a way is old school. It's what knuckle draggers do. And that's exactly what I did.

I borrowed my friend Stokes's bike (he also graduated in Class 235), and instead of running to work, I rode there and back every day. There was an elliptical trainer in the brand-new SEAL Team Five gym, and I hit it once and sometimes twice a day, with five layers of clothes on! The heat in Death Valley scared me to death, so I simulated it. I suited up in three or four pairs of sweatpants, a few pull-over sweatshirts, a hoodie, and a fleece hat, all sealed up in a Gore-Tex shell. After two minutes on the elliptical my heart rate was at 170, and I stayed at it for two hours at a time. Before or after that I'd hop on the rowing machine and bang out 30,000 meters—which is nearly twenty miles. I never did anything for ten or twenty minutes. My entire mindset was ultra. It had to be. Afterward I could be seen wringing my clothes out, like I'd just soaked them in a river. Most of the guys thought I was whacked out, but my old BUD/S instructor, SBG, loved it.

That spring I was tasked as a land warfare instructor for SEALs at our base in Niland, California; a sorry scrap of Southern California desert, its trailer parks rampant with unemployed meth heads. Drugged-out drifters, who filtered through the disintegrating settlements on the Salton Sea, an inland body of water sixty miles from the Mexico border, were our only neighbors. Whenever I passed them on the street while out on a ten-mile ruck, they'd stare like I was an alien that had materialized into the real world from one of their speed-addled vision quests. Then again, I was dressed in three layers of clothes and a Gore-Tex jacket in peak hundred-degree heat. I did look like some evil messenger from the way-out beyond! By then my injuries had become manageable and I ran ten miles at a time, then hiked the hills around Niland for hours, weighed down with a fifty-pound ruck.

The Team guys I was training considered me an alien being too, and a few of them were more frightened of me than the meth heads. They thought something had happened to me on the battlefield out in that other desert where war wasn't a game. What they didn't know was the battlefield for me was my own mind.

I drove back out to Death Valley to train and did a ten-mile run in a sauna suit. I had the hardest race in the world ahead of me, and I'd run a hundred miles twice. I knew how that felt, and the prospect of having to take on an additional thirty-five miles petrified me. Sure, I talked a good game, projected all kinds of confidence, and raised tens of thousands of dollars, but part of me didn't know if I had what it took to finish the race, so I had to invent barbaric PT to give myself a chance.

It takes a lot of will to push yourself when you are all alone. I hated getting up in the morning knowing what the day held for me. It was very lonely, but I knew that on the Badwater course I'd reach a point where the pain would become unbearable and feel insurmountable. Maybe it would be at mile fifty or sixty, maybe later, but there would be a time when I'd want to quit, and I had to be able to slay the one-second decisions in order to stay in the game and access my untapped 60 percent.

During all the lonely hours of heat training, I'd started to dissect the quitting mind and realized that if I was going to perform close to my absolute potential and make the Warrior Foundation proud, I'd have to do more than answer the simple questions as they came up. I'd have to stifle the quitting mind before it gained any traction at all. Before I ever asked myself, "*Why?*" I'd need my Cookie Jar on recall to convince me that despite what my body was saying, I was immune to suffering.

Because nobody quits an ultra race or Hell Week in a split second. People make the decision to quit hours before they ring that bell, so I needed to be present enough to recognize when my body and mind were starting to fail in order to short circuit the impulse to look for a way out long before I tumbled into that fatal funnel. Ignoring pain or blocking out the truth like I did at the San Diego One Day would not work this time, and if you are on the hunt for your 100 percent you should catalog your weaknesses and vulnerabilities. Don't ignore them. Be prepared for them, because in any endurance event, in

any high-stress environment, your weaknesses will surface like bad karma, build in volume, and overwhelm you. Unless you get ahead of them first.

This is an exercise in recognition and visualization. You must recognize what you are about to do, highlight what you do not like about it, and spend time visualizing each and every obstacle you can. I was afraid of the heat, so in the run-up to Badwater, I imagined new and more medieval self-torture rituals disguised as training sessions (or maybe it was the other way around). I told myself I was immune to suffering, but that didn't mean I was immune to pain. I hurt like everybody else, but I was committed to working my way around and through it so it would not derail me. By the time I toed up to the line at Badwater at 6 a.m. on July 22, 2006, I'd moved my governor to 80 percent. I'd doubled my ceiling in six months, and you know what that guaranteed me?

Jack squat.

Badwater has a staggered start. Rookies started at 6 a.m., veteran runners had an 8 a.m. start, and the true contenders wouldn't take off until 10 a.m., which put them in Death Valley for peak heat. Chris Kostman truly has a unique sense of humor. But he didn't know he'd given one athlete a serious tactical advantage. Not me. I'm talking about Akos Konya.

Akos and I met up the night before at the Furnace Creek Inn, where all the athletes stayed. He was a first-timer too, and he looked a lot better since the last time we saw one another. Despite his issues at the Hurt 100 (he finished by the way, in 35 hours and 17 minutes), I knew Akos was a stud, and since we were both in the first group I let him pace me through the desert. Bad call!

For the first seventeen miles we were side by side, and we looked like an odd couple. Akos is a 5'7", 122-pound Hungarian. I was the biggest man in the field at 6'1", 195 pounds, and *the only* black guy too. Akos was sponsored and dressed in a colorful, branded getup. I wore a torn grey tank top, black running shorts, and streamlined Oakley sunglasses. My feet and ankles were wrapped in compression tape and stuffed into broken-in but still springy running shoes. I didn't wear Navy SEAL gear or Warrior Foundation

garb. I preferred to go incognito. I was the shadow figure filtering into a new world of pain.

During my first Badwater

Although Akos set a fast pace, the heat didn't bother me, partly because it was early and because I'd heat trained so well. We were the two best runners in the 6 a.m. group by far, and when we passed the Furnace Creek Inn at 8:40 a.m., some of the runners from the 10 a.m. group were outside, including Scott Jurek, the defending champion, Badwater record-holder, and an ultra legend. He must have known we were making great time, but I'm not sure he realized that he'd just glimpsed his stiffest competition.

Not long after, Akos put some space between us, and at mile twenty-six, I started to realize that, once again, I went out way too fast. I was dizzy and lightheaded, and I was dealing with GI issues. Translation: I had to take a dump on the side of the road. All of which stemmed from the fact that I was severely dehydrated. My mind spun with dire prognosis after dire prognosis. Excuses to quit piled up one after another. I didn't listen. I responded by taking care of my dehydration issue and pounding more water than I wanted.

I went through the Stovepipe Wells checkpoint at mile forty-two at 1:31 p.m., a full hour after Akos. I'd been on the race course for over seven and a half hours and was almost exclusively walking by then. I was proud just to have made it through Death Valley on my feet. I took a break, went to a proper bathroom, and changed my clothes. My feet had swollen more than I'd expected, and my right big toe had been chafing the side of the shoe for hours, so stopping felt like sweet relief. I felt the bloom of a blood blister on the side of my left foot, but I knew better than to take off my shoes. Most

athletes size up their shoes to run Badwater, and even then, they cut out the big toe side panel to create space for swelling and to minimize chafing. I did not, and I had ninety more miles ahead of me.

I hiked the entire eighteen-mile climb to Towne Pass at 4,850 feet. As predicted, the sun dropped as I crested the pass, the air cooled, and I pulled on another layer. In the military we always say we don't rise to the level of our expectations, we fall to the level of our training, and as I hiked up the winding highway with my blister barking, I fell into the same rhythm I'd find on my long rucks in the desert around Niland. I wasn't running, but I kept a strong pace and covered a lot of ground.

I stuck to my script, ran the entire nine-mile descent, and my quads paid the price. So did my left foot. My blister was growing by the minute. I could feel it verging on hot-air-balloon status. If only it would burst through my shoe like an old cartoon, and continue to expand until it carried me into the clouds and dropped me onto the peak of Mount Whitney itself.

No such luck. I kept walking, and aside from my crew, which included, among others, my wife (Kate was crew chief) and mother, I didn't see anybody else. I was on an eternal ruck, marching beneath a black dome sky glittering with starlight. I'd been walking for so long I expected a swarm of runners to materialize at any moment, then leave me in their wake. But nobody showed. The only evidence of life on planet pain was the rhythm of my own hot breath, the burn of my cartoon blister, and the high beams and red taillights of road trippers blazing trails through the California night. That is, until the sun was ready to rise and a swarm finally did arrive at mile 110.

I was exhausted and dehydrated by then, glazed in sweat, dirt, and salt, when horseflies began to dive bomb me one at a time. Two became four which became ten and fifteen. They beat their wings against my skin, bit my thighs, and crawled into my ears. This scene was biblical, and it was my very last test. My crew took turns swatting flies off my skin with a towel. I was in personal best territory already. I'd covered more than 110 miles on foot, and with "only" twenty-five miles to go there was no way these devil flies would stop me. Would they? I kept marching, and my crew kept swatting flies, for the next eight miles!

Since watching Akos run away from me after mile seventeen, I hadn't seen another Badwater runner until mile 122 when Kate pulled up alongside me.

"Scott Jurek is two miles behind you," she said.

We were more than twenty-six hours into the race, and Akos had already finished, but the fact that Jurek was just now catching me meant my time must have been pretty darn good. I hadn't run much, but all those Niland rucks made my hiking stride swift and strong. I was able to power hike fifteen-minute miles, and got my nutrition on the move to save time. After it was all over, when I examined the splits and finishing times of all the competitors, I realized my biggest fear, the heat, had actually helped me. It was the great equalizer. It made fast runners slow.

With Jurek on the hunt, I was inspired to give it everything I had as I turned onto Whitney Portal Road and started the final thirteen-mile climb. I flashed onto my pre-race strategy to walk the slopes and run the flats as the road switched back like a snake slithering into the clouds. Jurek wasn't pursuing me, but he was on the chase. Akos had finished in twenty-five hours and fifty-eight minutes and Jurek hadn't been at his best that day. The clock was winding down on his effort to repeat as Badwater champion, but he had the tactical advantage of knowing Akos's time in advance. He also knew his splits. Akos hadn't had that luxury, and somewhere on the highway he'd stopped for a thirty-minute nap.

Jurek wasn't alone. He had a pacer, a formidable runner in his own right named Dusty Olson who nipped at his heels. Word was Olson ran at least seventy miles of the race himself. I heard them approach from behind, and whenever the road switched back I could see them below me. Finally, at mile 128, on the steepest part of the steepest road in this entire brutal race, they were right behind me. I stopped running, got out of the way, and cheered them on.

Jurek was the fastest ultra runner in history at that point, but his pace wasn't electric that late in the game. It was consistent. He chopped down the mighty mountain with each deliberate step. He wore black running shorts, a blue sleeveless shirt, and a white baseball cap. Behind him, Olson had his long,

shoulder length hair corralled with a bandana, otherwise their uniform was identical. Jurek was the mule and Olson was riding him.

“Come on, Jurker! Come on, Jurker! This is your race,” Olson said as they passed me up. “No one is better than you! No one!” Olson kept talking as they ran ahead, reminding Jurek that he had more to give. Jurek obliged and kept charging up the mountain. He left it all out on that unforgiving asphalt. It was amazing to watch.

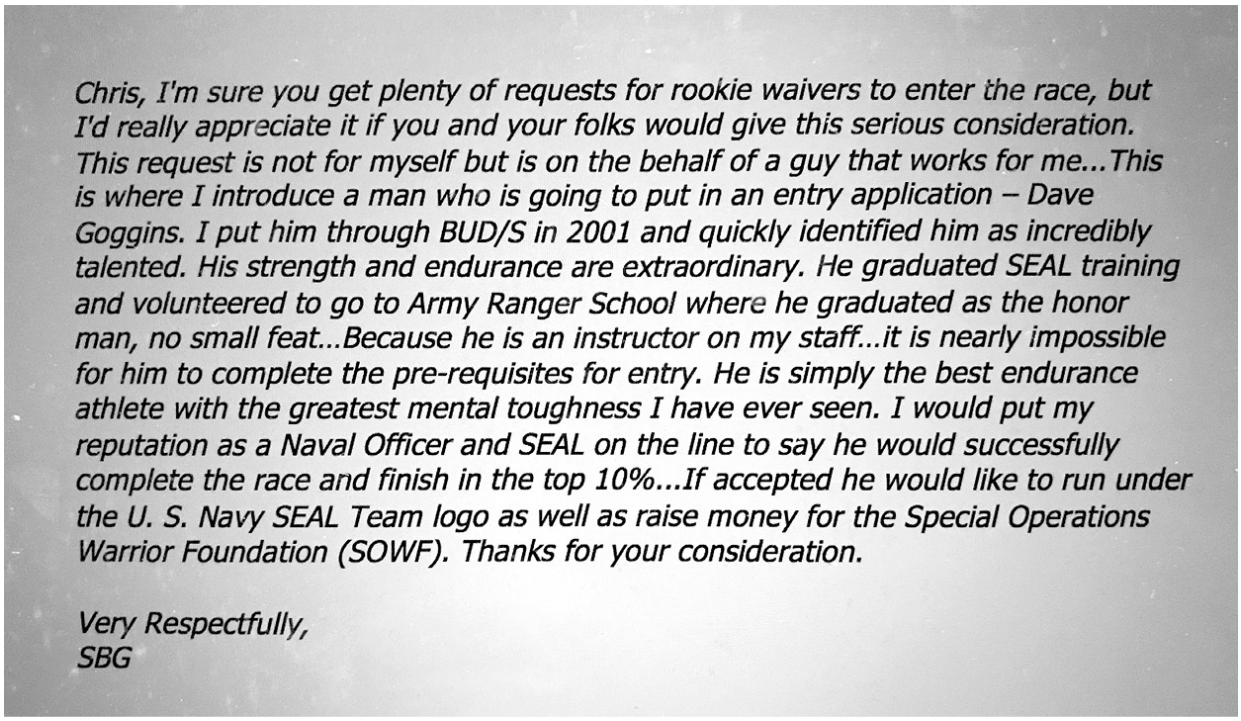
Jurek wound up winning the 2006 edition of Badwater when he finished in twenty-five hours and forty-one minutes, seventeen minutes faster than Akos, who must have regretted his power nap, but that wasn’t my concern. I had a race of my own to finish.

Whitney Portal Road winds up a parched, exposed rock escarpment for ten miles, before finding shade in gathering stands of cedar and pine. Energized by Jurek and his crew, I ran most of the last seven miles. I used my hips to push my legs forward and every single step was agony, but after thirty hours, eighteen minutes, and fifty-four seconds of running, hiking, sweating, and suffering, I snapped the tape to the cheers of a small crowd. I’d wanted to quit thirty times. I had to mentally inch my way through 135 miles, but ninety runners competed that day, and I came in fifth place.

Akos and I after my second Badwater in 2007—I placed third and Akos came in second again

I plodded over to a grassy slope in the woods and lay back on a bed of pine needles as Kate unlaced my shoes. That blister had fully colonized my left foot. It was so big it looked like a sixth toe, the color and texture of cherry bubble gum. I marveled at it while she removed the compression tape from my feet. Then I staggered to the stage to accept my medal from Kostman. I'd just finished one of the hardest races on planet earth. I'd visualized that moment ten times at least and thought I'd be elated, but I wasn't.

Blistered toe after Badwater



SBG's email to Kostman. He was right: I did finish in the top 10 percent!

He handed me my medal, shook my hand, and interviewed me for the crowd, but I was only half there. While he spoke, I flashed to the final climb and a pass above 8,000 feet, where the view was unreal. I could see all the way to Death Valley. Near the end of another horrible journey, I got to see where I came from. It was the perfect metaphor for my twisted life. Once again I was broken, destroyed twenty different ways, but I'd passed another evolution, another crucible, and my reward was a lot more than a medal and a few minutes with Kostman's microphone.

It was a whole new bar.

I closed my eyes and saw Jurek and Olson, Akos and Karl Meltzer. All of them had something I didn't. They understood how to drain every last drop and put themselves in a position to win the world's most difficult races, and it was time to seek out that feeling for myself. I'd prepared like a madman. I knew myself and the terrain. I stayed ahead of the quitting mind, answered the simple questions, and stayed in the race, but there was more to be done. There was still somewhere higher for me to rise. A cool breeze rustled the trees, dried the sweat from my skin, and soothed my aching bones. It

whispered in my ear and shared a secret which echoed in my brain like a drumbeat that wouldn’t stop.

There is no finish line, Goggins. There is no finish line.