

INTRODUCING **JOE SHELTER** — A HERO FOR OUR TIMES

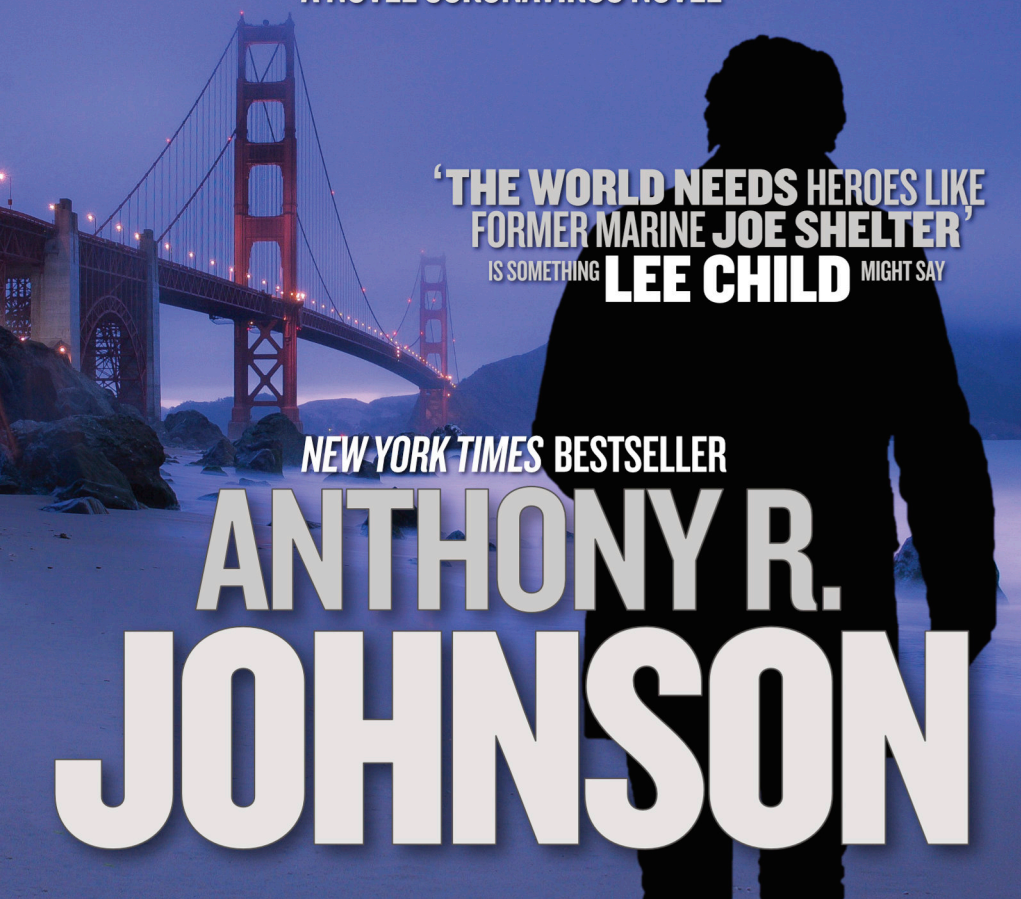
SHELTER IN PLACE

A NOVEL CORONAVIRUS NOVEL

**'THE WORLD NEEDS HEROES LIKE
FORMER MARINE JOE SHELTER'**
IS SOMETHING **LEE CHILD** MIGHT SAY

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

**ANTHONY R.
JOHNSON**



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NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

We are very proud to publish, at long last, fragments of the legendary 'Joe Shelter' manuscript which was feared lost to the ravages of time.

In early 2020, as the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, better known as COVID-19, rampaged across the globe, authors everywhere threw out their existing manuscripts and began instead to work on novels relating to the outbreak, trying to imagine what the world would be like when the virus had finished wreaking its havoc.

From our position today, most of those imaginings, and the books that resulted, seem naïve and worthless. Hindsight is a wonderful thing.

But as the orders to self-isolate and quarantine gathered pace, one author, the enigmatic and publicity-shy Anthony R. Johnson (a pseudonym, of course, but one we continue to honor) dared to address not the aftermath of the crisis, but the crisis itself. He created a new breed of hero for those troubled times, a type of character never seen before. Rugged, blue-eyed former Marine Joe Shelter was ready to fight the forces of greed and injustice all too readily on display. Writing at a furious pace, Johnson shared his progress on social media, where his legions of fans were in awe at his prowess and sheer prolificity. Within one week, *Shelter in Place* — taking its title from a now-obscure contemporary government phrase — was finished.

Then disaster struck, when Johnson contracted the coronavirus himself. Scholars continue to argue over the method of transmission, and the only thing of which we can be sure is that we will never be sure. The most popular theory holds that he caught it from his elderly mailman, who continued to deliver the hundreds of royalty checks Johnson received daily, despite himself being asymptotically infected.

(Although many of the terms in that theory are unfamiliar and archaic, we trust its now-widespread discussion in society means we need not explain 'checks', 'mailmen', or 'royalties'.)

Part of the reason nobody knows how Johnson was infected, of course, is because his house caught fire just two days later, taking with it his entire archive, and every extant copy of *Shelter in Place*. If not for the Great Cloudburst later that year, perhaps we might yet have retrieved a full copy from an online backup. Instead, all we are left with are the photographs Johnson himself shared on social media, to excite his fans, published here for the first time after an extensive and costly digital forensic excavation.

They're not much, but they're what we have — and these days, as in all things, that must be enough.

Hiram J. Hackenbacker IV
New New York, NNY

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Chapter One: Bitcoin Won't Save You Now

Joe Shelter stared at the shelves. Toilet paper. Piled up on the shelves, stacked in wheeled cages, spilling from pallets further down in the gloom. So this is what the tech wunderkind was hiding behind those ten military-grade locks the former Marine had picked to get in here. A smirk cracked his granite jaw. Maybe try eleven next time.

'Who the hell are you? Get out of my house!'

Shelter said nothing. He'd heard Craig Buchencraig's footsteps the moment he began descending the stairs. The CEO was no threat. Shelter's thoughts were more focused on how he was going to relieve Buchencraig of this insane stockpile and redistribute it to the self-isolating families who needed it.

Shelter was no communist. Buchencraig could keep his billions. But this was just shitty behavior.

Another smirk.

The cold metallic click of a Glock hammer behind him. Shelter turned slowly, curling his ham-sized fists. He was betting this kid had never shot a single round outside the practice range. ... A feban crag for four days, never ignored the fiery cramp in every ... 25 ounces of speeding

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Chapter Two: Hell in a Handcart

'Bro's got all the soap,' said the one in the blue ballcap. Joe Shelter counted five total, young and healthy. Or looked it, anyway.

'Hand over the cart or maybe we cough on you,' said Ballcap's right-hand-punk. Shelter's meaty hands tightened on the shopping cart, piled up with boxes of soap bars. He'd just finished delivering one to a condo in communal self-isolation, and dozens more families in Oakland still needed this stuff. This was the civic duty he'd chosen, and if Shelter had to go through twenty roaming gangs like these kids to carry it out, he was fine with that. The former Marine narrowed his frost-blue eyes. 'You don't look ill to me.'

Right-hand-punk laughed. 'Maybe we *asymptomatic*, bro. Spreading all over the Bay.'

Shelter took a half-step backward, to let them think he was afraid. They didn't know he'd spent eighteen days sweating on the floor of a Seoul basement, locked in battle with the novel coronavirus, C-19 as he called it, before emerging clean and ready to return home. The only thing he planned on catching today was some shut-eye. But not yet. First he had to teach these punks a lesson in community values. The hard steel of an Ontario 6504 bayonet pressed at the small of his back, tucked under his tactical vest.

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Chapter Three: Testing Justice

The doc didn't look so good. Joe Shelter placed a hand on the older man's skin. The wide expanse of his fingers covered the doc's entire forehead. It was warm, but what else did he expect in San Francisco at two o'clock? Wait till the fog rolled in, then see what kind of temp the doc was running.

'Shouldn't you be wearing a mask, doc?' Shelter asked. He didn't need one himself. He'd kicked C-19's ass in Asia before returning home.

Dr Manganese swallowed and shook his head. 'Without a proper medical seal, masks don't work and only deliver a false sense of security. If I begin to show symptoms, maybe then...' He trailed off, not wanting to think about what that might mean.

'If it comes to that I'll do the damn tests myself,' said Shelter. The former Marine's firm jaw locked and he resumed scanning the street for danger. Or worse, the law. Coronavirus tests were supposed to be controlled and distributed by the Governor's office, but to hell with that. There were thousands of potential carriers in the Bay, families and at-risk people who couldn't wait till tomorrow, or next month. Shepherding a doctor around the city to conduct prelim base tests might be illegal, but there was law, and then there was justice. Shelter knew the difference.

Movement down the block caught his eye. He pressed Dr Manganese back behind an overflowing dumpster. Metal glinted in the afternoon sun. Shelter slowly drew his own sidearm, the same Berretta M9 semiautomatic that had seen him through more tours of Afghanistan than

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Chapter Four: You Got the Touch

Shouts and screams from around the corner. Joe Shelter remained still in the shadows. His Marine-trained senses picked out snatches of drunken calls. He knew what he expected to see when he finally turned that corner. Didn't want to do it. Had no choice.

He took a deep breath (thankful for his own immunity, paid for with weeks of his own sweat in an old Navy buddy's basement in Seoul) and emerged from the darkness like a man from the shadows.

Forty, maybe fifty kids. No music. All fully clothed. *Touching* each other. Defiant as only teenagers could be.

Idiots!

Shelter didn't hesitate. He walked into the crowd and let the amateur rebels bounce off him. Any that didn't move, he shoved aside. He scanned left, right, his prodigious height giving him a clear view. The party started to realize he was there. Happy shouts turned unhappy real quick.

There: four feet away, eight o'clock, blonde hair in a ponytail. She saw him, and the look in his steel-blue eyes. Realized he was here for her. Before she could run his muscular hand shot out like a striking cobra, closing around her arm like a vise.

'Kyyliesha. Your parents are real worried about you.' The girl tried to pull away. She might as well have tried to haul a truck. 'And with good reason, turns out.'

'Don't you get it? It's all a hoax!' she shouted. 'The government is trying to suppress our freedom!'

Shelter was no fan of the government. Didn't normally give it much thought. But this situation was different, and he'd seen for himself how serious things could get. Seoul was the closest thing he'd seen to a warzone since his last warzone. Even the doctors were getting sick.

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Chapter Five: Night Law

Even at two a.m. in the morning, Joe Shelter couldn't remember the streets of San Francisco ever being this quiet. Quiet enough for his excellent hearing to hear a car approach, then stop. Shelter pressed himself back into the shadows of the doorway. Racked the breech of his Berretta M9.

Footsteps, coming closer. The former Marine judged by sound alone, judgement won from hard experience. Wait, wait — *now!* He stepped out, sidearm raised, and stared into a matching, but smaller, gun barrel. Behind the gun barrel was the face of a female cop.

(Shelter had nothing against women in the police force. But they still only made up fifteen per cent of all SFPD officers, although that was higher than the national average of twelve per cent, for which the City should be commended.)

She was a head shorter than him, but with a hard set to her jaw and an alertness in her bright eyes. She wielded a SIG Sauer P229, the smaller model to fit her slender woman's hands. *Officer Martinuertas*, he read on her name badge with his remarkable peripheral vision before she backed up to a safe six feet of social distance.

'You're out after curfew, mister,' she said, looking up at the much taller man.

Shelter said nothing. His ice-blue eyes refused to blink. She was just doing her job, but he wasn't in the business of backing down.

She frowned, crinkling the space between her eyebrows, but in an attractive way. 'Can you understand me? Is there something wrong with your eyes?'

Martinuertas obviously wasn't thinking straight. It was understandable. The incredible stress she was under would be too much for most people to take. People who hadn't spent time in the deserts of Afghanistan, living in foxholes for days, or who hadn't spent time in the rifle for comm

PUBLISHER'S NOTE:

Johnson wrote Chapter Five, introducing the short-but-shapely female policewoman Officer Martinuertas, the day before a 'week-end' — an old-fashioned public holiday that lasted for two whole days. Most people, whether religious or not, observed this holiday and did little to no work. Johnson, by contrast, appears to have written the bulk of Shelter in Place during this time, as the next extract he shared following the week-end was from Chapter Forty-Four, believed to be the penultimate chapter.

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Chapter Forty-Four: Blood in the Water

'They're gaining! And the doc won't last much longer!'

Joe Shelter turned from the ocean spray to glance back over his shoulder. Selena was right. Dr Manganese was in a bad way, bleeding out onto the deck of the Sunseeker Predator 55 they'd stolen.

Shelter had immediately recognized it as the fastest yacht in the marina. The former Marine hadn't piloted a 55 before, but he knew his way around the water. A quick hotwire and the boat was theirs. Just in time, as two squads of corrupt SFPD — Selena's former colleagues, when she'd still been Officer Matinuartas — opened fire at them from the shore. One got lucky, hitting the doc with a through-and-through that smacked his kidneys around. Then the crooked cops commandeered a yacht themselves and the chase was on.

Dr Manganese's wound was the kind that a man like Shelter would shrug off with gritted teeth and willpower, but the doc wasn't that kind of a man.

'You've gotta stop that bleeding!' he shouted above the deep roar of the engines, pushing the throttle beyond the redline to outrun the cops. They'd need the doc's expertise when they reached Governor Vegano's private island. The cowardly politician was holding more than a dozen top scientists captive there. Twenty men and women (mostly men, though) that Vegano was hoarding, like those idiots with their toilet paper, to create a personal Covid-19 vaccine for himself. Shelter couldn't let that stand.

'Good idea!' Selena replied and tore strips from her blood-soaked shirt. Her toned smooth skin glistened wet, sprayed with water from the boat's shower. Manganese's head

to argue. ...attered at them to get on the boat. They obeyed, knowing
Joe Shelter stopped to look back at Governor Vegano's burning mansion house, badly on
fire. The former Marine narrowed his cool-blue eyes. 'Pity we couldn't save the doc,' he sighed.
But Dr Manganese's sacrifice had allowed them to escape the bears, and he wouldn't forget that.

'Shelter!' The cry came from behind him. A man's voice. Desperate.
He turned to see Governor Vegano, bleeding and holding Selena at gunpoint with a tiny
pistol. Somehow the corrupt politician had escaped the inferno in his mansion, made it to the
beach before them, and hidden on the stolen Sunseeker Predator 55 yacht to ambush them.

Immediately, before Shelter had even formed the conscious thought, his Berretta M9 was in
his muscular hands and aimed directly at the Governor's head, killshot guaranteed. If only Selena
hadn't been blocking his line of sight.

'It's over, Vegano,' said Shelter. 'We're taking that boat, and these scientists, and sailing
them to the CDC in Washington. Sure, they're going to create a Covid-19 vaccine. But they'll do
it for the world. For ordinary people, not just rich bastards who want to keep it for themselves.
Like you, I mean.'

'They're mine!' Vegano growled, or would have if his voice had been deep enough. 'They
work for me!'

'Not any more. Sorry to let you *down*.' Shelter's blue eyes glanced meaningfully at Selena.
The ex-cop got the message and slammed her elbow back into Vegano's gut before hitting the
floor.

Taken by surprise, the cowardly politician just had time to gasp, 'No...!' before Shelter
squeezed the trigger, his Marine training taking over to double-tap Vegano, twice in the head.
The Governor's body crumpled to the ground like a dead corpse.

Selena picked herself up off the ground and ran to Shelter, pressing her small but shapely
body against his wide chest. 'I thought he might get away with it after all,' she said, smiling up at
him. 'But you put him in his place.'

Shelter said nothing.

THE END

DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY
AND GENIUS OF ANTHONY R. JOHNSON
19?? - 2020