

The background of the cover features a dark blue submarine, the USS Hercules, with its conning tower and a searchlight visible. The submarine is set against a backdrop of horizontal blue stripes and a field of white stars, reminiscent of the American flag. A pennant with a white starburst and a star is attached to the mast.

**THE  
HUNT FOR  
THE USS  
HERCULES**

**DENNIS PORTER**

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# The Hunt for the USS Hercules

By

Dennis Porter



This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or to actual events or locales is entirely coincidental.

## **THE HUNT FOR THE USS HERCULES**

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## **Personal Message from Dennis Porter:**

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# Dedication

*In memory of my wife, Debbie Baldwin Porter.*

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# The Hunt for the USS Hercules

A Japanese-American Naval commander betrays his oath  
The Navy's most powerful nuclear submarine  
*The Hercules* is commandeered  
Bringing *The Hercules* to the aid of Japan  
As tensions between China and Japan soar  
The three Gorges Dam is reduced to rubble  
Nuclear missiles fly

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# **The Hunt for the USS Hercules**

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# Chapter 1

## *Manila, Philippines*

There had been another gunfire exchange between Chinese and Filipino gunboats last night. A Chinese frigate had crossed in front of a Filipino patrol boat. The patrol boat rammed the Chinese frigate. The Chinese raked the patrol boat's deck with machine gun fire. The Filipino patrol boat responded by firing a shoulder-mounted rocket into the bridge of the Chinese frigate. There were three dead Filipino sailors, and he felt sure there were dead Chinese sailors, too. The Filipino gunboat did not want to break off the engagement.

General Mendoza lit his fortieth cigarette of the day and handed the empty pack to his orderly who quickly disappeared to get another pack. He liked chain smoking, always had. Maybe he was smoking more—it was his nerves.

The problem was immediate and enormous in the last few months; there had been several gunfire exchanges between Filipino and Chinese gunboats. Now it was escalating. There were incidents happening almost every day, and it was becoming too combative. Trying to keep gunboat skirmishes from turning into a full-fledged battle was consuming all his time. He spent most nights begging editors not to report the fighting in the media, because an enraged public would demand action. He had told the President of the Philippines, "I do not want to get into a shooting war with China—we will lose."

There was no breeze off the Pacific. It was still hot, even though the sun had set. The night air was humid; his summer uniform stuck to him like his skin. General Mendoza, head of the Philippine military, stood with two senior generals from his staff, along with a Philippine business owner worth a few hundred million dollars. They stood waiting patiently, making small talk and casually scanning the horizon, from the secret military base thirty miles inland from the coast and twenty miles from the capital city of Manila. Deep in the jungle, the cement buildings they stood beside were windowless and as green as the tropical forest they were designed to blend into. Finally, they heard the thump-thump of helicopter blades, as Filipino Army choppers started arriving, bringing in their guests.

General Mendoza lit another cigarette. This meeting was clandestine and the guests were arriving as covertly as conceivably possible, which all caused the general a great deal of anxiety. This base was small and only a handful of people knew of its existence. Still, it was well guarded—both physically and electronically—there would be no electronic eavesdropping. There would be six people at the meeting, and everyone had a lot to lose.

He thought about the words in the 'For Your Eyes Only' letter, hand-delivered by Rick Azar: *"Wars have a way of starting small, but quickly escalating, and then exploding out of control. In the case of the Philippines, Japan, Taiwan, and China and the American nuclear umbrella treaty, there is an enormous risk of a nuclear exchange because of a miscalculation. A nuclear exchange would"*

*destroy all our countries; it would be nothing short of devastating. I feel we are on the verge of that now. If the Chinese economy were to turn down and the government had to appease a disillusioned population, military adventurism might seem very appealing.”*

He had arranged this meeting, but was unsure what to expect. The first helicopter brought in an American billionaire from the west coast; corporations he was involved with manufactured auto and truck parts, food packaging, and everything else cheap labor could produce with a price edge. The enterprises did in excess of thirty billion US dollars annually in sales, both in the United States and the Asian Rim countries. The last to arrive was a Chinese multi-billionaire who had his tentacles in many industries. Zang Tao was known as “The Whale” for three reasons: his size of almost four hundred pounds, his wealth in billions of dollars, and his substantial influence throughout Asia. Zang Tao had quietly slipped away during a business trip inspecting garment factories in Manila. General Mendoza watched Zang Tao get out of the helicopter. “I’m glad he was the only one in that chopper because he is a load,” he said to General Tazae.

They gathered in a well-guarded, clean, room, and sat down at a round table. Senior noncommissioned officers brought water, tea, and coffee, and then discreetly disappeared.

Next to their table was an enormous digital map, mounted on a board that was tilted at a slight angle. Spread across the top were three digital clocks displaying the time zones for each area of the map. Mounted in the center, below the clocks, was an electronic compass.

The map exhibited the Philippine Islands, the Spratley Islands, the Paracel Islands, the South China Sea, the Vietnam coast, Macau and Hong Kong, all of the Chinese Coast bordering on the East China Sea., The Korea Peninsula, and then all the way west to the Russian coast bordering on the Sea of Japan. The map was significant because it covered waterways China wanted to control with the newly expanded Chinese Navy.

Specifically, the focus was on three small islands that the Chinese were claiming were theirs. Of course, everyone knew the islands weren’t theirs, including the Chinese. The walls of the room served as display boards. There were photos of Chinese gunboats and a battleship with a helicopter platform. There were even pictures of Chinese construction vessels pouring cement on the shore of an island, strengthening its coastline of coral reefs so Chinese vehicles could be loaded ashore.

“Thank all of you for coming. No notes or recordings of any kind are being taken. When you leave, it will be like this meeting never happened. He pointed to a large green light above the door. If any electronic eavesdropping is detected inside, or up to a half-mile outside of this room, at any time during this meeting, that light will turn red. If that happens, you need to remain quiet while I find out what is going on,” General Mendoza said.

“I think all of the businessmen recognize each other. But let me do the introductions anyway. Danny Towels from America, Rick Azar, representing Philippine business interests, and lastly, Zang Tao, representing Chinese commerce. Also two members of my staff: General Bazer, who commands the Philippine’s Navy and Air Force, and General Tazae, who commands the Army.”

General Bazer stood and pointed to a large photo.

“If the Chinese military engineers continue to reinforce the island, it will make a nice landing strip for Chinese aircraft. Additionally, it is strategically positioned and it will allow deployment of large numbers of military helicopters, which will be used to support Chinese Naval vessels. They’

currently building a refueling station and aircraft hangers so they can provide air cover all the way to Australia. Additionally, it's positioned between the Philippines and American fortress at Guam."

"What they're after is control of the Philippines. At the very least a large Philippine island where they can establish a substantial force of naval vessels, fighter jets, transports, helicopters, and lots of soldiers. With the insurgency we have in the south islands, the Chinese will eventually find an island ripe for the picking. Then they will throw money and support behind some crazy rebellious group that is demanding independence," General Mendoza said.

He looked at Zang Tao. Zang Tao's hands were under his chin and his eyes stared at the map where the laser pointer's red dot rested. Zang Tao noticed the pause, looked up, and nodded his head slightly.

General Tazae said, "We already have documented proof they have been supplying money and Eastern European arms into several rebellious groups on different islands. No Chinese agents have been detected to date. But it won't be long before some locals disappear and head off to Chinese political indoctrination training camps. Later others will start going to Chinese military training camps.

"It's not difficult to understand what the Chinese are after. There are vast amounts of oil and gas deposits in the South China Sea and the East China Sea. By establishing military bases on islands throughout these waters, they are attempting to claim all that oil and gas for China. It's just greed.

"Now they are trying to determine the best way to accomplish that. This is why seventy years after the end of World War Two, the Chinese are attempting to establish military outposts away from their shores. The Chinese navy wants to dominate the South Pacific region, including the Philippines and all the way to the Australian coast."

"By having islands hundreds of miles from their coast, they can build naval bases. Thus commercial shipping will have to pass thru the South and East China Seas that are militarily controlled by the Chinese Navy. Already we have Chinese aircraft flying over the Philippines spying on us. Currently, the Chinese fishing vessels are violating our ocean fishing boundaries; the waters of the Philippines will soon be covered with commercial Chinese fishing boats until they deplete the fish," General Mendoza said.

"With refueling and resupply bases for commercial and military naval vessels, they won't have to return to Chinese ports. They will turn the waters around the Philippines into a Chinese lake," General Bazar said.

General Bazar looked around and saw his fellow generals nodding their heads in agreement. Now their eyes shifted to Zang Tao.

Zang Tao spoke, "What you have just described is something I was not aware of, but I suspected it was happening. Although I am a business member of the Politburo, a lot of information is not given to us. But I can say in general that members of the Politburo are not in favor of military adventurism. They believe in territorial integrity and that boundaries should remain as they are. There are five members of the standing committee of the Politburo; they are not as influential as Prime Minister Li, but the council taken as a whole is more powerful than the Prime Minister.

"As one of the twenty-five Politburo members, I only have a modest amount of influence. I feel Prime Minister Li is overstepping his boundaries, but he continues to get away with it—now Li

becoming bolder. Prime Minister Li should not be making significant foreign policy decisions without consulting with the Politburo—but he does. What are his boundaries? I don't know. If the Politburo felt he acted imprudently—then he would be in an awkward position. If he loses their support—he will eventually have to step down.”

“Zang Tao, are you saying Prime Minister Li is acting on his own?”

“Yes, in conjunction with heads of different ministries. I'm sure he discusses the incursions into the Philippines with his naval commanders and intelligence services. He can authorize a lot of actions but always risks undermining his office. This is especially true if he makes a risky decision that imperils China. Even more so, if he did this without the explicit authorization of the standing committee. The Politburo and the standing committee are generally very conservative.”

“What are Li's intentions in the Philippines?” General Mendoza said.

“Earlier when you spoke of a military presence on some substantial island in the Philippines—I believe that is Li's intention.”

“Why the Philippines?” General Bazar said.

“No real good reason; in his mind, protecting commercial shipping lanes. Perhaps the biggest reason is, Li equates a strong military that can dominate the South Pacific as China's birthright. China is the world's most populous country, our economy will soon be the largest in the world, and our military is strong. Li wants recognition; Li wants China to have its place in the sun, perhaps his own place in the sun. It is really just old thinking, nothing strategic about it.” Zang Tao said.

“How can this be avoided?” General Mazda said.

“Many people in the Politburo think we are pursuing the wrong course. I sincerely believe we are treading a path of self-destruction; a path China has traveled many times in the past.”

“Why is that, Zang Tao?” Danny Towels said.

“We have always had bad relations with Taiwan. But recently we have alienated Vietnam, Thailand, Philippines, Japan, Malaysian, and South Korea. In short, we are forcing countries into a group that could bond against us. If Japan armed itself with nuclear weapons and signed mutual military support treaties with the Philippines, Vietnam, South Korea, and Taiwan, that would be fortifiable opposition. Plus you have the American fortress at Guam. Perhaps then the Politburo would become involved and establish a policy that would govern the relationships with those countries.”

Zang Tao looked at the American, Danny Towers.

“Danny, why does America keep involving itself in the South Pacific?”

“It's a huge mistake, perhaps a little justified after the Second World War. We had to govern Japan until they had a democracy, but after that we should have withdrawn. Truthfully, we were involved in two very expensive wars, neither of which made any sense and were a total waste of manpower and money. As a result, we are deeply in debt, and the interest we pay alone is unsustainable; there is no justification for remaining in the South Pacific. I'm in favor of withdrawing now,” Danny said.

Zang Tao nodded his head in agreement. Then he clapped his hands loudly, and the room grew silent.

“Gentleman I am the one who urged Rick Azar to have General Mendoza arrange this meeting. I have specifically requested each of you because each of us will have explicit duties to perform. Duties

that only you have the position and stature to execute.”

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He paused and leaned forward in his chair.

“Let me explain further. I want to stop China’s military adventurism before we get caught up in war. Wars have a way of starting small, but quickly escalating and then exploding out of control. In the case of the Philippines, Japan, Taiwan, and China; and the American nuclear umbrella treaty, there is an enormous risk of a nuclear exchange—because of a miscalculation. A nuclear exchange would destroy all our countries; it would be nothing short of devastating. I feel we are on the verge of that now. If the Chinese economy were to turn down and we had to confront an economic depression—coupled with high unemployment and a disillusioned population—military adventurism would seem very appealing.”

*General Mendoza thought—now I know whom the letter came from.*

Zang Tao paused and placed both of his large hands together on the table, then carefully chose his words.

“Prime Minister Li believes China will destroy whomever we confront, quickly, with conventional forces. He forgets that the Chinese military would have to invade over hostile oceans and open waterways that China doesn’t control. I don’t know what his rationale is, but he’s convinced China would win these wars. I view this, as many others of the Politburo do, as very alarming. Any conflict is unproductive, but a war over three little islands with Japan and a couple in the Philippines is truly senseless.”

Zang Tao stopped talking and looked at General Mendoza.

*General Mendoza looked at Zang Tao with a lump in his throat and thought, he is risking everything. This big man, with enormous wealth and the world in his hands, Zang Tao, is putting all that in jeopardy. This clandestine meeting and the words he has spoken are treasonous to Chinese ears, and for a member of the Politburo, it was incomprehensible.*

*Zang Tao, four hundred pounds or not—they would hang him. Confiscate his wealth, execute every member of his family, and send every relative to prison for political indoctrination, and they would never see the light of day again. They would destroy everything; every mention of his name would be stricken from the records—that is the Chinese way.*

Zang Tao was staring at him. “Yes, General Mendoza, I’m going all in.”

*General Mendoza thought—it’s like he can read my mind.*

“What is your plan, Zang Tao?” General Mendoza said.

“Listen closely because it is complicated and involves a lot of risks. But it can work if we execute it. Most importantly, it will prevent a political miscalculation that would lead to an enormous nuclear exchange between China and the United States. A miscalculation that would destroy our countries, our way of life, our families, and lead the world into chaos.”

Then Zang Tao outlined his plan.

---

## Chapter 2

*Manila, Philippines*

*Two months later*

General Mendoza sat in a clean room, inside a safe house in Manila, for his meeting with Filipino businessman Rick.

“Our intelligence service was able to purchase a Russian suitcase nuke; they had heard rumors for years that they were available on the black market.

“The service now has what we needed. It cost us a few million Euro’s, but we got it. It was clandestinely purchased in Kazakhstan from a government official and a couple of high-ranking military officers. The bomb cannot be traced back to us, and that’s of paramount importance.”

“How much devastation will this suitcase nuke cause?” Rick asked.

“It’s about four kilotons. That is equivalent to approximately one-fourth the size of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. The suitcase nukes are tactical weapons designed to destroy a large airport facility, a port facility, an Air Force base, a Naval installation, or a military base. They could take out the heart of a large city, like the financial center. They weigh just over two hundred pounds and the packaging is about three and a half feet in length and two and a half feet in width.

“The good thing about suitcase nukes is that they can’t sustain a detonation beyond three to five kilotons. There’s just not enough material in the case to support a larger explosion; the need to keep them portable restricts the amount of the material that can be used. So the fission is reached quickly and then there is no more material to sustain the fission.”

“Why did the Russians develop a suitcase nuke?”

“Russia heard rumors that the U.S. was experimenting with miniaturizing nuclear weapons. The Russians started experimenting with suitcase nukes during the late 1950s. The Russian General in charge of the miniaturizing of nuclear weapons chose to develop a suitcase nuke, but they never got the size reduced beyond a steamer trunk.

“Then the cold war got heated. The Russians had over two hundred suitcase nukes available. They distributed about two-thirds of the units to overseas Soviet agents. There were many suitcase nukes sent out of the Soviet Union to about fifteen countries; most of the countries were in Europe, but Japan and Korea were included. They hid the suitcase nukes inside those countries; that way they were in position to be used if they were needed.”

“Is this suitcase nuke ready to be deployed?”

“Yes; it will be completed today. We had to modernize their battery backup system. We replaced the old cell battery pack with a modern nickel-coated battery almost like in a camera. The battery backup in the steamer trunk bomb is used only to keep track of time and run the countdown to detonation. It only needs a modest amount of electrical input, but must provide that direct electric

current for a very long time. The timing mechanism has been replaced with a modern triggering and timing system of Japanese manufacturer.”

“We no longer have communications between ourselves and Zang Tao. We must comply with his instructions. He is closest to the mighty of China. I’m sure everyone’s communications are scrutinized, perhaps not even so discreetly,” Mendoza said.

“Is the target still the same?”

“Yes. I prefer a different target, but Zang Tao inspires me; he seems so capable and so confident.”

“So the target is The Three Gorges Dam?”

“Yes. I’ve thought about it a lot and in the end I have to agree with Zang Tao. It is a target that will embarrass the Chinese government and Prime Minister Li but is not a threat to the security of China. The Three Gorges Dam is a perfect economic target that will cripple the Chinese economy for ten to fifteen years. It produces fifteen percent of their electric power.

“Remember, it is important that this suitcase nuke is included as part of your usual shipment tomorrow, and it must not be x-rayed here. The freighter it travels on must pick up loads from at least eight ports. It’s critical that the cargo be computer imaged in the Chinese port of entry.” Mendoza said.

“I will make sure it is. In China, almost all industrial cargo has a computer image taken upon arrival as soon as it is unloaded. Everything passes, because you are forced to pay a bribe; that’s how it is done in China. I don’t think anyone looks at the computer image—may as well not even take them.”

“Rick, who are you working with?”

“I will oversee the entire operation; I’m going to be hands-on all the way, until a day before the detonation. There is an old friend I grew up with and have known since the age of nine. A few years ago a small business he owned collapsed and wiped out his modest wealth. I began employing him more than a year ago; unfortunately, three months ago he was diagnosed with terminal cancer.”

“Please go on,” Mendoza said.

“His views parallel my opinions on the threat that China signifies to the Philippines. He has two boys and a girl that are married, a son in trade school, and a daughter who is trying to get into nursing school. It’s very expensive; the two in school live at home. His finances are such that he has taken a second mortgage on his home and things are very tight. His wife Milga has never worked outside the home.”

“There is more?” General Mendoza said.

“A few days ago, I told him I was involved in a plot to cripple China’s economy. This scheme was designed to buy desperately needed time for the Philippines to militarily enhance its capability to repulse Chinese aggression—that the mission I was involved with was a suicidal operation. His response was ‘I’m a patriot. If I can make my death count, especially if I can do something for the Philippines, I will. Hopefully, this can leave my family in better financial condition.’”

“How much do you trust this man?” General Mendoza said.

“With my life, and he would do it without any financial reward. He wants to leave this world knowing he has taken care of his family. You can’t blame a man for that. Can you help me with this?”



finances?”

“More than help, and without being obvious. There is money available in our intelligence fund. His mortgage will be paid off. His daughter will attend a nursing school with all expenses paid, his son in trade school will get a job working in his tradecraft with a reliable corporation. His wife will receive a substantial sum from a post-dated life insurance policy and an attached annuity. How about that?” General Mendoza said.

“His name is Doda. Written on this note is his name, address and cell phone number. I will follow up with all the other information you will need, and will hand deliver it to you within a few days,” Rick said.

“This is the perfect candidate for this job. Nothing to lose, everything to gain, and he is not associated with the Filipino military or government. Effective tomorrow, all his communications will be monitored, and he will be under twenty-four-hour surveillance. If there are any problems, you will be notified immediately.”

“You won’t see me again before you depart. Tomorrow at nine in the morning you will meet with the army engineer who is overseeing the mechanics of this project. He will review everything with you in detail,” General Mendoza said.

“Sometimes in China things can get confused if a problem arises that will hinder the plan. I will be in contact,” Rick said.

“Your communications, even in China, will be monitored. If there is a problem, say the word ‘homecoming’ to the party you’re talking with. We will respond within twenty-four hours.”

“It’s interesting that our great-grandfathers fought together against the Spanish and later the Americans in the early 1901 war for independence. Here we are today plotting against another foreign threat,” Rick said.

“Lots of countries have sought control over the Philippines. I think China has always wanted to establish themselves in the Philippines, but until recently lacked the resources to achieve that goal. Now they have dusted off some ancient sea map and claim all the Spratly and Paracel islands as ancient Chinese possessions.”

“If China weren’t so close; it’s less than eight hundred sea miles to their large Naval base on Hainan Island. If it weren’t for that, I wouldn’t give them a second thought,” Rick said.

“Same here, but the Chinese are coming, somehow.”

“We kicked out the Spanish and got rid of the Yankees and we like our independence,” Rick said.

“Independence has been good for our families. We have prospered, and most of my family and relatives have done well. I have three sons serving as military officers and one son serving as a government administrator in Manila. Our family has been in government service since our independence.” General Mendoza said.

“Both my daughters are employed in the family business of import-export and trading all over the world. It’s been a great business; the Philippines has been good to my family and me.

It is strange that our families never intermarried.” Rick said.

“Not yet, anyway, but there is always hope.”

They stood and shook hands. Rick walked out the door away from the safe house. General Mendoza lit the last cigarette in the pack; the pack had lasted almost till noon. He walked to the

window and watched Rick walk away. It crossed his mind perhaps his great-great-grandfather had  
~~watched Rick's great-great-grandfather walking away from their meetings in the jungle, more than~~  
hundred years ago.

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## Chapter 3

The following morning, Rick went to the address he was given. It was located in downtown Manila. The building was a white and green painted, two-story cement office building with a glass double-door entrance. The advertisement mounted on the inside of the door indicated they rented business offices by the day.

He arrived a half hour early and bought coffee from a street vendor, then sat in the chair next to the vendor's stand. There are almost two million residents in Manila, and perhaps a hundred thousand street people who live in boxes, shacks, building entrances, and on the streets. He watched some of the street people searching the trash bins, moving along the streets scanning the pavement, the gutters, and the alleys, looking for anything of value.

Slowly the streets filled up with a colorful multitude of people walking everywhere—businessmen, vendors carrying cases with straps around their necks, early morning shoppers, and lots of secretaries dressed in bright clothes, with necklaces, earrings, and high heels. They were attractive and seemed business-like, but nevertheless were interesting to look at. The traffic kept his eyes moving, but it was the women who drew his attention. The coffee vendor noticed him looking at the ladies, too.

“I should have charged you more for the coffee, and double for the stool.”

“You're right; this is the best seat downtown.” He tipped him forty pesos.

The receptionist was expecting him and took him to a room with a large, square table and several chairs. He only had to wait a few minutes. Then a man in a plain suit entered the office. He nodded to Rick, then sat down across from him, and opened a briefcase, removing some papers with diagrams on them.

*The man looked, acted, and had the bearing of a military officer. He should have just stayed in uniform; he would be more comfortable, Rick thought.*

“We are not permitted to exchange names and there are no records of this meeting, nor will there ever be.

“I will give you all the technical information you need to know about the Three Gorges Dam. I will provide the most efficient method of detonation of the suitcase nuke, so the dam is entirely destroyed.”

“Do you have information I can take with me?”

“Absolutely not, and no notes are to be taken! You don't want to have a diagram of the Three Gorges Dam in your possession in the event you are detained—that would be a death sentence.

“Please commit this information to memory. It won't be that difficult; that's why I made these diagrams. It simplifies the information you need to know. If you have any questions as I'm talking, interrupt me, and I will address your question. It will help you to grasp the diagram if you follow me.”

finger as I move it along the lines of the drawing.”

Rick leaned in closer and started making a mental image of the dam. His eyes following the engineer’s finger as it moved slowly along the sketch lines of the massive dam.

“About the mechanics of the detonation: the water near the dam’s retaining wall is approximately 540 feet deep, and the dam is approximately 7,200 feet in length. The spillway is in the center of the dam and about 1,500 feet in length; the center of the spillway is the best place for the device to detonate. There is considerable water turbulence, but the nuke is sufficiently dense to experience minimum hindrance as it makes its descent.”

Rick placed a finger on the dam’s spillway. “Why here?”

“It’s the center of the retaining wall. There is sufficient explosive force to remove the entire dam—everything. No part of the structure will remain, and this means they will have to rebuild from scratch.”

“Okay, I get it.”

“The blue remote control button can be activated from a distance of a mile as long as there is a direct line of sight between the steamer trunk and the front sight of the remote. The blue button, after a ninety-second delay, will internally activate the detonation mechanism. Once the detonation is activated, it cannot be stopped.”

“Is a mile the maximum distance?”

“Absolutely, the closer, the better.”

“Can you survive this nuke detonation from a mile away?”

“No.”

The engineer and Rick looked at each other; nothing was said, but Rick got the message.

“You can depress the red button on the control; it’s next to the blue button. This will immediately activate the firing mechanism. There will be an immediate, small explosion and the outer casing of the steamer trunk will separate, the trapped air will escape and the suitcase nuke will lose its buoyancy. The front of the steamer trunk will start to descend first.”

Rick interrupted, “How much noise from the explosion that causes the steamer trunk to start its descent?”

The engineer scratched his chin. “Because it is over water, it will sound like an oversized firecracker, followed by a muffling sound as the air escapes from the steamer trunk.

“There are exactly three-minute forty-eight seconds from the time the red button is depressed until detonation. The nuke should be approximately eleven feet from the dam’s bottom when it detonates.”

“How certain are you?”

“What I described is the best scenario and will deliver the most potent blast. But as long as the nuke is one-hundred-fifty feet below the surface and within a thousand feet of the dam’s retaining wall, it will destroy the dam.”

“What about radiation?” Rick asked.

“This is a dirty bomb; radiation will be everywhere, but the size of a suitcase nuke will limit the contaminated area. The radiation will linger for several years, eventually losing its potency over time.”

“Is the bomb completely waterproofed?”

“Yes, the unit is completely waterproofed. After it leaves the suitcase on its descent to the bottom, it is waterproofed to a depth of seven hundred feet.”

“Do you have any other questions?”

“No.”

“Your friend asked me to give this to you.”

He reached into his briefcase and pulled out a plastic bag with two capsules in it.

“These two capsules are filled with cyanide. Each capsule contains three times the amount of cyanide needed to terminate your life. If you placed this capsule in your mouth, it would not dissolve from saliva. You could keep it in your mouth all day. If you swallowed the capsule it would pass through your system and you could retrieve it from fecal matter and reuse it. The capsule must be crushed between your teeth. Then even a small portion of the cyanide from the capsule will be sufficient to end your life. Once the cyanide enters your system, it takes ten seconds to kill you.”

“Have you tried that?” Rick asked.

“Tried what?”

“Swallowing a cyanide capsule and letting it pass through your system.”

“No, but it has happened—it is not recommended.”

The engineer looked at Rick and said, “Good luck. This meeting is over.”

He stood up, placed the diagrams back in the briefcase and moved towards the entrance. He did not look back as Rick’s eyes followed him out the door.

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## Chapter 4

*A month later*  
*Shanghai, China*

Rick and Doda sat in the Chinese version of the Range Rover and watched the huge ocean freighter being unloaded. The docks were frenzied with activity; it was unbelievably busy and it made you wonder how it could even be managed. But Rick knew every box had a destination, designated time to be there, and tons of paperwork.

Sometime today, his containers would be unloaded, the industrial goods inspected and x-rayed. Then the x-rays were to be stored in computer archives. Supposedly, the x-rays would be scanned and then stored in files. If the goods passed inspection, then internal Chinese shipping papers would be generated. These documents permitted the shipment to be transported within China.

It sounded official, but it was all corrupt. To get his goods inspected in a timely fashion, he gave the shipping clerk a gratuity that allegedly moved his goods to the front of the line. It didn't. What that actually meant was that your cargo would not be set aside or misplaced, or even lost. Lost meant that sometimes it would turn up, but mostly that depended on the type of goods involved. If they had ready black market value, like clothing or electronics consumer goods, you could kiss them off.

If they were industrial products without an immediately available black market value, and couldn't be sold after a little time and numerous sales calls by the port thieves; then the goods would be mysteriously found and you were charged a storage fee.

Some of Rick's Chinese customers told him they had received sales calls from people in Shanghai, offering to sell his goods but at a cheaper price, and they were the same parts that they had on order from his factory. Once his company in Philippines received a call from Shanghai. The harbor thieves were trying to sell back to them the products they had just shipped to China, and at a cheaper price than the factory could manufacture them.

"If my shipment was lost, then how can you charge me a storage fee?" he once asked, out of curiosity.

"It had to be on our docks, or we wouldn't have found it—so there is a storage fee that was applied."

Sometimes doing business in China was insulting.

Rick could see the freighter his cargo had arrived on, but it was still being unloaded. Maybe his product was off, maybe it wasn't, but he didn't want to appear too anxious.

"Doda, let's get something to eat. There is a tasty rice-chicken booth at the black market. We can walk the aisles while we eat."

"Maybe we can buy some of our goods back?" Doda said.

The black market was close to eighteen blocks from the port docks and about six blocks inland.

from the shipping docks, towards the city center. It was convenient for the harbor thieves because they didn't have far to transport their stolen goods.

It was the largest of the black markets in Shanghai, and Rick made a point to visit here whenever he was in China, which was at least three times a year. They chose fried rice and pan-fried shrimp, and cartons, that somehow tasted better than the same food in restaurants, and the price was less than an American dollar.

He found the vendor he had been looking for. He was an old man who employed a few young men. He worked the booth while the boys arranged the products. If these thieves had a specialty, it appeared to be industrial tools and pumps. He casually looked at some of the precision German automobile tools. Rick wanted to laugh; this meant that a shipment from Germany of expensive automotive tools had gotten lost in transit, which meant stolen off the dock. A sign read, "Inexpensive German automotive tools; no reasonable offers refused." They also carried industrial oil transfer pumps, industrial water pumps, dry pumps for moving grain, and centrifugal transfer pumps.

"They certainly like stealing pumps," Doda said.

"Indeed they do. This is where I purchased one of my pumps back from the shipment that was taken nineteen months ago. This is the vendor I've been looking for. Let's walk back to the Range Rover where we can talk."

In the vehicle, Rick explained what he wanted to do.

"The plan I had devised to get the pumps after they had left the Shanghai harbor was to ship them in the bulk container to our distributor in Huwan, near the three Gorges dam. Unfortunately, that leaves a paper trail.

"If we can get a couple of pumps stolen out of the shipping container at the dock, there will be no x-ray of the pumps coming into China. Then two pumps disappear without a paper trail because the port thieves have stolen them and sold them to a pump vendor at the black market. We arrange to buy the stolen pumps from the seller on the black market." Rick said.

"Then we have the suitcase nuke without a paper trail," Doda said.

"How do you know they will sell the stolen pumps to this vendor?"

"Because you're going to ask that old man at the vendor's booth for a centrifugal pump with some particular specifications, and you need two of them."

"I can order them?" Doda said.

"Not exactly. Tell him you will be in Shanghai for about five days. You will check back with him, in a few days."

"Should I give him a contact number?"

"No, nothing that can lead to us. But tell him that the pumps cost about nine thousand US dollars apiece. That you would like to buy them cheaper than that; for about five thousand US dollars cash."

"That will get his attention," Doda said.

"Doda, write this down to give to that old man. 'Centrifugal Horizontal Pump with variable speed, RPM range 2,500–4,800, self-lubricating, and aluminum construction only.' Need two pumps." Rick said.

"This afternoon when you go to give it to the vendor, first wipe your prints off the note. Then purchase some rice and chicken, then smear some chicken fat on your fingers. That way you

fingerprints will be smudged in case the authorities ever get their hands on this note.” Rick said.

The market stayed open until evening, but the customers thinned out after five p.m. Doda walked to the pump vendor’s booth while there was still lots of pedestrian traffic moving up and down the aisles. Peering around a booth halfway down the aisle, Rick watched. Doda was talking to the old man while eating chicken and a rice ball. A few minutes later, Doda switched the chicken leg to his other hand then reached into his pocket and retrieved the note with his chicken-fat-covered fingers.

He met Doda outside the market.

“Good job. They won’t get any fingerprints off that paper, just chicken grease. What did the old man say?”

“He just nodded his head until I told him that I would pay five thousand US dollars cash for each pump. Then his eyes got big and he became very attentive.”

“He asked if I was interested in used pumps. I told him only new pumps. He was sure he could do something. Did I have a number that he could contact me at? I told him that I would contact him in two days’ time, and I would be in Shanghai for five days.” Doda said.

“Good, this end is set up.”

They went back to the Gucan Park Hotel on Hutai road, just a few miles from the shipping docks. The parking lot was poorly lit, which he liked. He checked his cell phone. There was a call from the shipping clerk. He left a message: “Your shipment has arrived.”

He didn’t return the call from the shipping clerk. If he responded promptly and indicated he would pay a gratuity, then his shipment would be handled quickly. This time he didn’t want prompt service.

They drove to the Din Ta Fung restaurant for dinner, because it was near the Jade Buddha temple. After eating, they went to the Jade Buddha and chanted. Later they walked along the banks of the Huangpu River. It was a typical June night in Shanghai. The Plum rain season had begun and the temperature dropped from ninety degrees in the afternoon to around eighty at night. The high humidity made your clothes cling to your body like a second skin, and even walking left you sweating and uncomfortable.

The next morning he had a call again from the shipping clerk. Again he didn’t respond.

Instead, they took a Shanghai harbor cruise and saw ships from all over the world anchored in the harbor and the Huangpu River. The wharfs and ports operated at a frenzied pace, loading and unloading. It is a sight to behold. The river divides Shanghai into east and west. The west is the old cultural and residential center of Shanghai, and the east bank is the new financial and commercial center of the city.

They ate dinner downtown, chanted at the Jade Buddha Temple, then walked along the banks of the Huangpu River. They walked across the Nanpu suspension bridge that spanned the quarter mile over the river.

The next morning, Rick called the shipping clerk.

“Sorry, just got notified that you called. Is my shipment ready for processing?”

“I’ll have to check and call you back. When you don’t return my calls promptly sometimes that causes things to get misplaced. It could have even gotten lost. I will check on your shipment and call you this afternoon.”



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