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TOM CLANCY'S FIRING POINT



WRITTEN BY
MIKE MADEN

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Tom Clancy's Firing Point

Thirty-five years ago, Tom Clancy was a Maryland insurance broker with a passion for naval history. Years before, he had been an English major at Baltimore's Loyola College and had always dreamed of writing a novel. His first effort, *The Hunt for Red October*, sold briskly as a result of rave reviews, and was then catapulted on to the *New York Times* bestseller list after President Reagan pronounced it 'the perfect yarn'. From that day forward, Clancy established himself as an undisputed master at blending exceptional realism and authenticity, intricate plotting and razor-sharp suspense. He passed away in October 2013.

Mike Maden grew up working in the canneries, feed mills and slaughterhouses of California's San Joaquin Valley. A lifelong fascination with history and warfare ultimately led to a PhD in political science focused on conflict and technology in international relations. Like millions of others, he first became a Tom Clancy fan after reading *The Hunt for Red October*, and began his published fiction career in the same techno-thriller genre, starting with *Drone* and the sequels, *Blue Warrior*, *Drone Command* and *Drone Threat*. He's honored to be joining The Campus as a writer in Tom Clancy's Jack Ryan, Jr, series.

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Tom Clancy's
Firing Point

MIKE MADEN



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In valor, there is hope.

— TACITUS

Principal Characters

United States Government

Jack Ryan: President of the United States

Mary Pat Foley: Director of national intelligence

Arnold ‘Arnie’ van Damm: President Ryan’s chief of staff

Scott Adler: Secretary of state

Admiral John Talbot: Chief of naval operations

Dick Dellinger: U.S. Consulate (Barcelona, Spain), Public
Diplomacy Section

The Campus

Jack Ryan, Jr: Operations officer/senior analyst

Gavin Biery: Director of information technology

Gerry Hendley: Director of The Campus and Hendley Associates

John Clark: Director of operations

Domingo ‘Ding’ Chavez: Assistant director of operations

Dominic ‘Dom’ Caruso: Operations officer

Adara Sherman: Operations officer

Bartosz ‘Midas’ Jankowski: Operations officer

Other Characters

United States

Buck Logan: President, White Mountain Logistics + Security

Kate Parsons: Oak Ridge National Laboratory scientist

Spain

Laia Brossa: Centro Nacional de Inteligencia (CNI) agent

Gaspar Peña: CNI supervisor

Prologue

Pohang, South Korea

‘Alive, not dead.’

That was the order. Jack got it. Rijk van Delden – if that was his real name – was the only link between the Iron Syndicate and the nameless merc outfit the syndicate hired for their dirtiest hits. The merc outfit was their real target. Find van Delden, find the outfit.

Simple as that.

But van Delden had been hard as hell to find. Impossible, actually. Until a lead, finally, that led them here tonight. Their one and maybe only chance to grab him.

‘Alive, not dead’ meant keeping the big Dutchman alive so they could find and eliminate his murderous organization.

The only problem with that was van Delden was one of his outfit’s heavy hitters. The six-foot-six killer possessed serious combative and tactical skills. The giant Dutchman had put more men in the ground than a gravedigger’s shovel.

‘Don’t even think about taking this monkey on by yourself. Get eyes on him, call for backup, sit tight till the rest of us show up. Savvy?’ Clark said in their brief before The Campus team split up. All hands were on deck for this op: John Clark, Ding Chavez, Dom Caruso, Adara Sherman, Midas Jankowski, and Jack Junior.

They all headed in different directions across the steel mill’s huge complex of buildings. Too much ground to cover

for them to buddy up. They had to go it alone to find the guy. And fast.

Van Delden was in one of a dozen possible places on two hundred acres of property, and scheduled to leave within the hour, according to their source. They couldn't risk missing him here tonight. If he shook loose, he'd be back in the wind the minute he left and they'd lose the only shot they'd ever had at rolling up his crew.

Alive, not dead, was tonight's mission but it seemed like a pretty good idea for him and the rest of the team, too, Jack thought, as he made his way through the cavernous shell of the integrated steel mill. The cold night fog looming over the port outside stopped at the doorway, the air inside tinged with the acrid smells of rust, ozone, and burnt coal.

Jack Ryan, Jr, was a big, blue-eyed white guy striding confidently through the dark, hangar-size structure. He didn't look that out of place beneath his stolen white safety helmet, clipboard, and paper mask. He moved fast like he had something to do, which he did. The steelworkers were too busy flying several hundred tons of molten slag in giant ladles lumbering overhead to pay attention to him.

Jack sweated beneath his shirt. It was an industrial volcano inside the sweltering building. At least the team had Sonitus Molar Mics. Without bone conduction for reception, he wouldn't be able to hear the others calling out their sitreps on his comms. The infernal din of pounding hydraulic hammers, roaring diesel motors, grinding steel, and blaring alarms was a near sensory overload.

'I'm thirty seconds from target,' Dom whispered on his way to the plant manager's office.

'Copy that,' Clark said.

Jack took two steps at a time up the yellow steel staircase to the 'pulpit' – the automated control room for the hot-steel

processing facility, high off the floor. The grated treads led to the landing just outside the control-room door. With his back against the corrugated steel wall, he did a quick check around him. Helmeted workers below were focused on the job, not him.

From the landing, a steel-grating walkway ran parallel along the windowless steel wall of the pulpit where Jack stood. On either end of the east–west walkway was a catwalk. Both catwalks ran north, parallel with the tracks of the huge ladles moving slowly along beneath them. Each ladle brimmed with nearly two hundred tons of molten steel heading toward the vacuum degassers on the far side of the building.

In the middle of the steel control-room door stood a small, face-size observation window.

‘I’m in position,’ Jack whispered.

‘Copy,’ Clark said as a siren wailed overhead.

Jack stepped over to the door’s observation window.

He scanned the room. In front of the big picture windows overlooking the mill floor, five young South Korean technicians sat at their monitors chatting excitedly, pointing at virtual gauges on their screens.

Scanning right, Jack saw Park, the oldest Korean in the room, standing in the corner, round and silver-haired beneath his safety helmet. Jack recognized Park from his file photo. He was the steel firm’s CEO and biggest shareholder, and a man in serious trouble with Japan’s largest yakuza syndicate, the Yamaguchi-gumi. Their source inside the syndicate said Park was reaching out to van Delden for protection tonight.

Jack leaned over to see who Park was talking with.

And there he was.

The giant Dutchman towered over the diminutive Korean, his long, granite face focused on Park in earnest discussion.

The Dutchman's gaze shifted briefly toward the window. His eyes locked with Jack's.

Shit.

In the blink of an eye, van Delden's big Glock 17 was in his hand. Jack ducked as the barrel sparked. The door glass shattered just above his head.

'Found him,' Jack barked in his comms as he crouched low and pressed hard against the heavy steel door. He felt more rounds thud against the metal, like someone was pounding the door with their fists.

'Sit tight,' Clark said. 'We're on our way. Five mikes, max.'

'Copy that.' More bullets crashed into the door near Jack's ear.

'Don't hurt him, Jack.'

'Copy that —'

WHUMP!

The big man slammed into the door. The steel cracked against Jack's skull and knocked him back a little. But Jack was wedged hard against it. The door only budged open an inch. He slammed it back shut with his shoulder.

Jack heard the last shards of the shattered window glass breaking above him. He glanced up just in time to see the black steel slide of the big Glock wedge through it, then angle down, thick fingers wrapped around the hilt. The Glock fired three earsplitting shots that *chinged* the grated steel floor near Jack's feet before Jack could react. Jack turned and grabbed the hot slide with his left hand and twisted it upward just as van Delden fired another shot into the steel rafters overhead.

The hot barrel burned Jack's hand as he squeezed but he caused the last shot to fail because the slide couldn't fully eject the brass.

With his left hand still gripped around the Glock, Jack pulled his SIG P229 Legion Compact SAO with his right

hand and smashed the steel butt against the Dutchman's thick wrist, breaking it with a sickening crack.

The massive paw dropped the Glock and yanked back through the shattered glass. Jack kicked the Dutchman's gun over the edge.

'Status?' Clark asked. 'Still got eyes on?'

'He ain't going nowhere —'

WHUMP!

Van Delden crashed against the door again before Jack could brace himself. The steel door blew open, tossing Jack backward, dropping him to the grated landing.

Jack raised his weapon to put a bullet in the Dutchman's knee but the man's giant steel-toed boot kicked the gun out of Jack's hand, and sent the SIG sailing over the edge, clattering onto the cement floor far below.

Jack's hand exploded in pain, as if it had been smashed with a sledgehammer. His momentary focus on his aching hand cost him dearly as the same big boot raised high and smashed down into Jack's gut, knocking the wind out of him. Jack gasped for air and clutched at his belly as the boot raised up a third time, aimed squarely at his skull. Jack rolled away at the last second, the sole of the massive boot clanging against the steel near his ear.

Jack rolled again just as the Dutchman launched a kick at his skull and missed. Van Delden lunged forward for a final, fatal steel-toed shot to Jack's temple, not seeing Jack's three-inch Kershaw spring-assisted blade until it plunged into his inner thigh.

Van Delden screamed and grabbed his leg to stanch the blood. He stumbled away past Jack before The Campus operative could strike him again, limping west along the walkway as Jack struggled to stand.

'Jack, we're close. Stay put,' Clark ordered. Jack shook the

pain out of his hand as he grabbed a couple of deep breaths, his stomach aching like he'd been gut shot.

'Jack? You copy?'

Jack glanced up just in time to see van Delden turn the corner north, heading away from the pulpit.

'Copy,' was all Jack said.

He sure as hell wasn't staying put.

He had his orders. 'Alive, not dead.'

But Jack knew there was a long, nasty road of hurt between the two, and he was happy to take the big man along for the ride.

Jack thundered along the steel grate, racing after the giant operator. Even wounded, the big man was fast as a feral cat.

Jack turned the corner, running past the giant ladle of molten steel crawling along on its track ten feet below him. Even from here, the searing heat made his skin tingle, like standing too close to a campfire on a cold night.

'Van Delden! Halt!' Jack shouted over the noise of the giant ladle motors grinding overhead.

Van Delden limped farther along, leaning heavily on the rail, one bloody, massive hand gripping his thigh. He finally stopped as Jack charged up behind him.

'Turn around, asshole,' Jack said, finally able to pull his backup gun, a striker-fired SIG P365 SAS micro-compact nine-millimeter.

The thick shoulders turned. On the dimly lit platform, the Dutchman's rugged features glowed in the seething light of the lava-like steel approaching them. The backs of Jack's legs itched with the heat through his trousers.

Jack pointed his pistol at the big man's chest.

The Dutchman grinned.

'Afraid to pull the trigger, little man?'

'Oh, hell no. But I've got my orders.'

'Tough guy, huh?' The grin disappeared as he winced in

pain, his trouser leg soaked in blood. He raised himself up to his full height – five inches taller than Jack. His broad chest was like an oak barrel, and his tree-trunk arms bulged beneath his shirtsleeves.

Jack's finger tightened on the trigger. 'I won't kill you, but if you make a move, you're gonna be pissing through a straw for the rest of your life.'

The Dutchman's eyes searched Jack up and down, calculating speed and distance to target.

'Clark, you copy?'

'I copy. You have the tango in sight?'

'I'm sitting on him. Hurry the hell up.'

'Almost there. You good?'

The air roared with the noise of the automated crane hauling the giant ladle just below them. Jack caught the glow of the white-hot steel in the corner of his eye.

'I'm good. But van Asshat is in a world of hurt.'

'Who sent you?' van Delden asked.

'Nobody you'd know.'

'What do you want with me?'

'You're the link to an outfit we're interested in.'

'Interested how? You are police?'

'Not exactly.'

'Do you know who I work for?'

'Your outfit contracted for the Iron Syndicate.'

'The syndicate is dead.'

'I know. We're the ones that rolled them up. It's your organization we're going to take apart next, thanks to you.'

'Ha! You *really* don't know anything about us, do you?'

'No. But I promise you, within the hour you'll tell me.'

Van Delden gritted his teeth, grimacing with a strange *fuck-you* smile at Jack.

'Something strike you as funny?' Jack asked.

The big Dutchman suddenly frowned, confused. He punched himself in the jaw. One, two, three times. Jack heard his teeth crack even above the noise.

‘What the hell is wrong with you?’

Van Delden’s desperate eyes darted around – searching for some kind of a weapon or another way out. The Dutchman’s bloodied fingers tightened around the steel railing.

Jack suddenly realized that the much larger man could use the railing as leverage to throw his bulk at him, even on that bad leg. If one of those meaty fists clocked his jaw, he’d be lights out.

Jack stepped back. ‘Don’t move.’

Van Delden inched closer.

‘Afraid, little man?’

Jack shook his head. ‘No one’s pointing a gun at *my* nutsack.’

The Dutchman smiled again, a sliver of sunlight in a storm cloud. But then it faded.

‘What are you willing to die for, little man?’

‘What kind of a stupid –’

In a single, vaulting leap, van Delden threw himself over the railing.

Jack lunged at the man to grab him, but he was too late.

The big Dutchman plunged feet first into the glowing ladle ten feet below. His massive frame barely rippled the blistering surface, the white-hot liquid swallowing his last, sharp cry.

Jack stood at the railing staring at the bucket of molten steel inching relentlessly forward as Clark, Dom, and Adara came racing up behind him.

‘Where the hell’s van Delden?’ Clark asked, leaning over the railing. ‘I told you we needed him alive.’

‘I know,’ Jack said, holstering his pistol. ‘But he had different plans.’

October 18

I

Aboard the container ship Jade Star

Second Officer Luis Loyola stood outside on the starboard bridge wing, vaping a sweet menthol Juulpod. He admired the blanket of stars shimmering across the black velvet sky.

His seaman's eye suddenly caught the breaking wake of what was probably a dolphin's fin racing toward the hull far down below, then watched it dip beneath the blue-black water, night feeding. He smiled. Amazing animals. And always a good luck charm.

The ship's bow surged toward a waxing moon blazing like a searchlight, illuminating the dark Pacific waters in every direction, all the way to the horizon, or so it seemed. Out here in the South Pacific, he couldn't see the lights of any nearby ships of any size; his radar had indicated the nearest fishing vessel was some 140 kilometers away. He might as well have been on the surface of Mars for the solitude he craved tonight.

The ship was sailing on a smooth sea at fifteen knots – a little more than half its rated speed – to save expensive bunker fuel. The 102,000-ton (deadweight) vessel was powered by a 93,000-horsepower, two-stroke diesel engine thrumming far belowdecks. It was burning 90 tons of fuel a day at current speed as it drove the ship's thirty-foot-diameter copper alloy, six-bladed propeller.

He cast a quick glance at the deck, stacked with red, blue, and green shipping containers. In fact, the *Jade Star* was fully

loaded with 8,465 twenty- and forty-foot shipping containers, including South Korean industrial pipe and fittings, washing machines, refrigerators, car parts, rubber tires, X-ray machines, and, strangely, seven hundred liters of human blood.

The ship was also illegally carrying three hundred tons of ethylene and other combustible chemicals, used in a variety of manufacturing applications. The legal restrictions for recommended storage and transportation precautions were ridiculous and prohibitively expensive relative to the cost of the chemicals themselves. He wasn't worried about their safety. As the ship's administrative officer, he was duty bound to be aware of such things. But if stopped and searched, he alone would be the person charged with the crime.

But all of that was of little concern at the moment. He was off the clock now, and couldn't give a damn about what they were hauling. His only concern was that his son's birthday was yesterday, and as far as he knew, his *puta* ex-wife hadn't bothered to give the boy the quadcopter drone he had sent him last week.

Loyola loved his life at sea, but he loved his six-year-old son even more. He was torn. It was the sea that had cost him his marriage, or so his wife said, blaming her whoring with every swinging dick in Lima on him not being around to satisfy her womanly desires.

¡Hija de puta!

He took a long drag on his Juul, then watched the breeze sweep the vapor cloud away into the darkness. If he didn't quit the sea, he might lose his son altogether. Besides, he hadn't had a pay raise in three years, let alone a promotion, and neither was on the horizon. He had thought about quitting many times, but as shitty as the non-union wages were, they were still better than anything else he could manage

from a desk job back home in Peru. At least this way he could save up money for his son's future, even if he missed his son growing up.

He felt a dark despair falling back over him again and thought about the bottle of Golden Blue Korean whiskey he had stowed away in his cabin. His drinking had gotten worse this trip, and it was probably time to back off. His last fitness report by that *maricón* captain had warned him about his drinking but that asshole didn't understand the pain he was feeling.

Loyola took another deep breath of salt air, and forced his mind to forget his troubles. For all of the pain of being a sailor, there was nothing like standing out on the bridge on a night like this. He'd sailed around the world a dozen times, and seen things on land and at sea that no civilian would ever see. Not bad for a street kid who used to hustle cigarettes and lottery tickets in the filthy Lima slums.

Loyola took another long, thoughtful pull. Yes, perhaps he would try to find some kind of job at the port, nearer the boy. Maybe even teach him how to play *fútbol*, as his father had taught him. And with the money he'd already saved up, perhaps a house out in the country where the boy –

A thundering blast deep beneath the vessel threw Loyola to the deck, slamming his skull against the steel bulkhead. Stunned, Loyola crawled to his knees as the breaking hull tore apart with a scream of shattering metal. He was tossed against the rails of the bridge wing, cracking his ribs, but his desperate hands wrapped around the nearest post to keep from falling several stories into the ocean. The air filled with the wail of alarms and klaxons.

He tried to blink away the blood pouring into his eyes from the wound in his broken scalp. He watched in horror as the bow and six hundred feet of ship behind it broke away

and plunged headlong into the sea. The rear section where he lay surged ahead, still under power, and crashed into the upended hull in front. Steel containers spilled out of their holds and into the water, and a dozen screaming crewmen along with them.

Secondary explosions ignited the incendiary chemicals, enveloping the shuddering wreckage in unquenchable fire. Within minutes the entire ship and its cargo were lost, sent plunging into the depths of the warm Pacific.

There were no survivors.

October 24

Barcelona, Spain

Jack stood at the bar of L'avi, his favorite restaurant in Barcelona. It was located in the El Born district of the old city, called the Ciutat Vella in Català, the language of Catalonia, the semi-autonomous region of Spain. It was also a locals' favorite, which was saying something, because *catalanes* really knew how to eat and drink, and did so quite often, late into the night.

Jack took another sip of sweet, red Spanish *vermut*. Van Delden's suicide was a distant memory, thanks to his time in Spain. It had been a week since Jack woke up in a cold sweat in the middle of the night reliving it. Now numbed to the horror of the Dutchman's excruciating death, Jack still couldn't help but wonder what kind of organization inspired that kind of fearsome loyalty.

Jack had loved his time in Madrid but he was utterly captivated by Barcelona. He could see himself living in this city, despite recent events. Spontaneous mass protests of hundreds of thousands of people had shut Barcelona down several times in the days before he arrived but lately all was quiet. Jack sensed there was still something in the air.

Most protesters favored Catalanian independence from Madrid, but not all. Independence wasn't the only issue. The rage that had driven freedom-loving people into the streets was the recent sentencing of Catalanian independence politicians to long prison terms by Madrid. Spain still lived under

the long shadow of Franco's Fascist dictatorship. Though Spain was now a democratic republic, heavily armed riot police battling barricades of unarmed Catalanian civilians elicited hard memories from the earlier times. It was an emotional response, not a rational one, Jack thought, but modern politics was only about emotions in the Western world these days, including here.

The protests changed nothing. Madrid still held all the cards because it held the monopoly of force. Barcelona was a city on the edge of another eruption, which made it all the more interesting as a place to be.

At six-one, Jack's broad-shouldered frame towered over most of the locals who crowded the place at lunchtime, which throughout Spain lasted until at least three o'clock. The energy level in here was somewhere between a late-night disco and a rock concert.

Jack could hardly hear himself think above the din of excited diners jabbering away in a half-dozen languages, particularly Català – its own unique mix of Spanish, Italian, and French. Català was one of the many things that made Catalonia separate and distinct, which was why Franco had outlawed the language during his regime.

Jack had little more of the language than *si us plau* or *gràcies* in his vocabulary, but even using those few words was enough to elicit a smile from appreciative locals, particularly those favoring independence from Madrid. If all else failed, Jack knew the words for the tapas he loved best – especially *bombas* and *pa amb tomàquet*. In a worst-case scenario, a finger jabbed onto a menu item along with a smile would always do the trick.

Today was Jack's last day in Spain. Despite the highly social atmosphere, he was by himself. The life he lived as a covert operative wasn't amenable to long-term relationships, at least, not for him.

He'd seen the pretty blonde at the other end of the bar when he first came in, and saw her check him out. She wore no wedding ring and appeared to be by herself. She had a Bluetooth stuck in her ear and engaged in a very occasional conversation with someone on the other end of the call. Between shots of bubbly cava and bites of crispy *croquetas de jamón*, she tossed subtle, sidelong glances at him in the mirror that stood behind the counter.

Even if she was interested in him, he was already packed for his American Airlines flight back home tomorrow. He only traveled with a laptop and a buffalo leather satchel crammed with a few days' worth of clothes. He preferred washing his things to throwing them out and buying new ones, unlike a famous fictional character he admired.

The only thing he needed to remember to grab in the morning was his dog-eared copy of George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*, which was the reason for his stop in Barcelona. He'd first read the book in college and its last, prophetic pages had haunted him for years. When Gerry Hendley told him to take a few weeks off after his last mission with The Campus in South Korea, he decided to revisit the idea of Spain, and in particular, the Spanish Civil War. He loved being an off-the-books operator for The Campus – the 'black side' operations of the financial firm Hendley Associates, carrying out missions for the American government that otherwise couldn't be handled through normal channels.

But lately, Jack had been considering the words of an old Jesuit professor he'd bumped into in London a few years back. His subconscious was nibbling on the edges of an idea to go back to school and get his doctorate in history, just like his dad.

Maybe.

Nothing on this trip persuaded him to quit The Campus.

The work was too important and too damned exciting. But he also had to admit he had been utterly captivated by his time in Spain and experiencing it through a historian's eyes, rather than through the green glow of night-vision optics while chasing tangos. It was one thing to read about a great historical city like Barcelona but something else altogether to stand inside a nine-hundred-year-old church with the bones of Crusader knights entombed beneath the stones at your feet.

He plopped the last of the glistening *pimientos de Padrón* into his mouth. The small green peppers fried in olive oil and dusted with sea salt practically melted on his tongue. He seriously considered ordering another *vermut* but decided to just finish the one he had and pay the bill. The clock was ticking and he had a timed entrance ticket to the Picasso Museum, which was just up the narrow, medieval street of Carrer de Montcada. It was the last item on his list before leaving tomorrow.

He raised a finger to the passing server who set his check on the bar in front of him. Jack counted out the bills he needed to cover the tab along with a generous tip. He noticed he still had a few euros left in his wallet and decided to toss those into the tray as well. He didn't need euros in Virginia and the young server was working her ass off. God bless her.

Adéu, Barcelona.

His bill paid, Jack polished off the last swallow of his drink when he happened to catch a glimpse of a striking young African American woman as she edged her way into the restaurant, clearly looking for someone.

Renée Moore?

Jack couldn't believe it was her, after all these years.

They'd had a few senior finance classes together at Georgetown and, as often happened when two smart, attractive people spent a lot of time together, fell into an intense but brief relationship. Renée Moore was the most career-minded woman he'd ever met, and that was saying something coming from a household of highly accomplished Ryan women. But her mind was set on conquering Wall Street. She was perfectly gentle but crystal clear when she broke up with him: She wasn't looking to get married. Ever.

Jack hadn't seen Renée since they'd both graduated seven years ago. He had often wondered if she could have been the one who got away because she had so many of the qualities he most admired in women. But then again, her top priority was earning a Wall Street fortune. His wasn't. Jack believed in living for things worth dying for, and money wasn't one of them.

He'd actually thought of reaching out to her a couple of years ago for a Costa Rican banking project he was tackling as a 'white side' analyst at Hendley Associates. Moore had a first-rate mind and an incredible work ethic. She would have been perfect for the gig. He'd even thought he might be able

to convince her that things like duty, honor, and country were just as significant as making a billion dollars by the time she was thirty. But every time he thought about picking up the phone, he didn't. Most people's loyalties were only to their own ambitions. That didn't necessarily make them bad people. But if his dad taught Jack anything, it was that the only life worth living was a life of service to others.

And like the Man said, you can't serve two masters.

Above the din of happy diners, Jack shouted her name. She began searching the crowd until she spotted him, which wasn't hard, given his height. A luminous smile lit her up for a moment, then it turned to confusion as she made her way over to him, squeezing her five-foot-six frame next to him at the crowded bar. She reached up and gave him a hug.

'Reneé, I can't believe it. What brings you to Barcelona? To this place?' Smile lines creased around Jack's blue eyes.

'For a second there, I thought maybe it was you, but —'

He could barely hear her above the noise. He raised his voice. 'Can I get you something to drink? The tapas here are unbelievable.'

'No, thanks.' She glanced around the room, clearly searching for someone, occasionally standing up on her tiptoes.

'Can't find who you're looking for?'

She turned back to Jack. 'Sorry, I'm being rude. How have you been? You look great — put on a few pounds of muscle since I last saw you.'

'Yeah, hitting the weight room every now and then,' Jack said.

She touched his face, a familiar gesture. 'The beard's new. I like it.'

'Tell that to my mom.'

He wanted to tell her how gorgeous she looked, too — better

than he remembered. But he knew that wasn't going to go anywhere, and he wasn't looking to seduce her. He was just genuinely glad to see her.

The pretty girl with the Bluetooth at the end of the bar seemed happy to see her, too. She kept glancing back and forth between her second cava and Moore.

'What are you up to these days?' Moore kept scanning the room and checking the door.

'Hendley Associates. A small, private-equity firm in Alexandria. You?'

'I'm a VP with a tech startup in California called CrowdScope.'

'Tech? I thought you'd be in finance.'

'I am, just the other side of it. It's a fintech firm.'

'Sounds exciting. What happened to Wall Street?'

'Been there, done that.'

Jack's Apple Watch beeped. 'Oh, man. I gotta run.'

'Hot date?'

'No. Just the museum. I've got a timed entry. Any chance we could grab a drink later? Or maybe dinner?'

She turned back around and smiled at him. 'Yeah, Jack. I'd really like that.' She reached into her purse and pulled out her business card. 'Call me around seven. We'll find a place to meet. Okay?'

'Perfect.' He glanced at the address and phone number, then pocketed it.

'How long are you in town for?'

Jack shrugged. 'Leaving tomorrow.'

'Too bad.' Her smile faded. 'I've missed you, Jack. I'm so glad we bumped into each other. What a crazy coincidence.'

Jack ignored the screeching voice of the catechism nun in his head telling him that there was no such thing as coincidences.

‘Try the *vermut* here. And the *tortilla*. It’s fantastic – hell, everything is. Well, gotta run. I’ll call you later.’

‘Make sure you do.’ She threw another hug around his neck and kissed his bearded cheek. ‘*Adéu.*’

‘*Adéu.*’

Jack gently pushed his way through the crowd of people, heading for the exit. He cast another glance at Moore at the bar, still searching for someone, and the Bluetooth blonde, still watching her. As he stepped through the doorway, a short, heavyset man about his age with shoulder-length hair and thick, Warby Parker tortoiseshell glasses bumped into him.

‘Sorry, man,’ he said to Jack as he passed.

‘*No hay problema, slick,*’ Jack muttered, thinking nothing of it.

Finally breaking through to the narrow street, Jack checked his watch. His online ticket would get him into the museum in five minutes, which was perfect timing.

A glance in the window of a small jewelry store across the narrow street gave Jack the nearest shot for quick surveillance detection. The only person who caught Jack’s eye in the glass was a guy about his size and age, with short-cropped blond hair, a long, crooked nose, square face, and deep-set hazel eyes. He also had a Bluetooth in his ear.

It was a lot of data to acquire in a short glance, but that was how Jack had been trained by John Clark, The Campus’s director of operations.

Like Jack, the man was catching a glimpse of him as well in the same glass, or so it seemed. They held each other’s gaze for less than the blink of an eye before the man turned casually away and headed south in the opposite direction. He was just another tourist on the phone, Jack supposed, but his mind registered the man’s strong, athletic gait as he turned a corner onto Passeig del Born.

Jack turned north and headed for the museum.
Three steps later, he was dead.

Or so he thought.

The concussive force from the blast inside L'avi had nowhere to go but out the front door and into the narrow street between the heavy stone walls in a rushing tidal wave of pressure. Shop windows shattered for a dozen yards in each direction.

The sound of the explosion was like a shotgun blast in Jack's unprotected ears. The pressure from the detonation behind Jack was heavy enough to knock him forward, slamming his head into a wall, but he managed to stay on his feet.

He turned, dazed, and staggered back toward the direction of the explosion. Broken bodies lay in the narrow street in front. He didn't stop to help them. They were dead.

Blood and shredded flesh spattered the wrecked doorway as he picked his way through the debris and into the restaurant. The ringing in his ears muted the anguished cries and moans of the few survivors. Jack's limited emergency medical training under the watchful eye of Adara Sherman kicked in, but without a medical kit there wouldn't be much he could do. He stepped around the wounded and the dead, pushing past overturned chairs and tables, desperately searching for Moore. His eyes finally fell on her crumpled form, one arm twisted unnaturally against the hinge of her elbow, her blouse torn away by the blast.

Jack fell down at her side, broken plates and glasses crunching beneath his weight. Her swollen face oozed blood from her nose, mouth, and ears. He laid a hand on her neck to check for a pulse, certain she was dead, but her bloodshot eyes suddenly startled awake. Jack nearly shouted for joy that she was still alive. Her swollen lips began to whisper.

‘Babe, it’s me, Jack. Lie still. An ambulance will be here soon.’

Moore’s dimming eyes pleaded with Jack. She tugged on his shirtsleeve with the bloody fingers of her one unbroken hand. He leaned in close, his ear next to her mouth. He saw her eyes fluttering, and the whites suddenly showing. But with her last, ragged breath she managed to whisper a single word:

‘Sammler.’

South Pacific
On board the Russian Federation Navy submarine Glazov

Captain First Rank Nikolay Grinko read the notice a third time and swore.

It wasn't a complicated instruction. Far from it. The extremely low frequency transmission (ELF) from the ZEVS transmitter near Murmansk was only capable of sending out minimal communications.

The ELF data rate was so low that submarine comms were limited to receiving messages only from Murmansk, and those were little more than 'bell ringer' notices. The microscopic data rate had always seemed ironic to Grinko. The ZEVS transmitter was the most powerful in Europe. It required up to 14 megawatts of electricity fired through two sixty-kilometer-long antennas in order to generate an 82 Hz signal with a massive wavelength of 3,686 kilometers. Only China's ELF transmitter – five times the size of New York City – was larger and more powerful.

The low data-transmission rate was the trade-off for the ZEVS's capacity to send a signal through several hundred feet of polar ice or ocean water almost anywhere on the planet. The *Glazov* was currently submerged at 137 meters below the surface of the Pacific, deep enough to avoid any surface sonar detection from air or ships. A submarine like his only survived by remaining undetected. ELF was designed to help him remain so.

Unless, of course, the bell ringer message was telling him to surface and receive new instructions from a high-density satellite communication, which it was.

Grinko swore again.

‘No mistake?’

‘No, sir.’

Grinko searched the man’s eyes for any sign of doubt. There was none. He wasn’t surprised.

The senior enlisted man standing in front of him was utterly reliable, as were the rest of his crew. The information systems technician – Grinko still called them radiomen – didn’t write the new orders; he only delivered them.

‘Thank you. Dismissed.’

The man quietly closed Grinko’s cabin door. Grinko couldn’t believe it. What was the point of changing position? The first test of the latest version VA-111 Shkval 3 (‘Squall’) supercavitating torpedo had gone perfectly and, equally important, undetected by the opposition. It had taken all of his crew’s best efforts to avoid them to arrive on station.

Propelled by a solid-fuel rocket motor and a terminal guidance system, the new Shkval 3 had achieved underwater speeds approaching three hundred miles per hour and struck its target with a range in excess of twelve miles.

Keeping the weapon secret meant the Americans couldn’t develop defenses against it. Why risk being found now by moving? For what purpose?

Grinko rubbed his clean-shaven face, resigned to his fate. Submarine captains in the Pacific Fleet carried out orders from Vladivostok HQ, not the other way around. So be it. He picked up his phone and called his XO, issuing the order to redeploy to the new coordinates.

Grinko’s resignation turned to confidence. He was

captain of one of his nation's most advanced submarines, carrying some of its most potent weapons. Vladivostok was handing him another opportunity to demonstrate to the arrogant Americans that their dominance at sea was at an end.

Barcelona, Spain

Who the hell was Sammler?

‘Sammler’ was the last thing she ever said, and last words mattered the most, Jack told himself as he gently closed Moore’s eyes. His hand hovered over her breathless mouth. He touched her lips.

A last good-bye.

Still wet with her blood and his skull pounding with a near-migraine headache, Jack glanced over at a middle-aged woman lying against the bar, whimpering in Spanish. Her eyes were shut against the blood oozing onto her face from a scalp wound and the stabbing pain of her injured left hand. Sirens screamed in the distance.

Jack dashed over to her side. He snatched up a handful of paper napkins from the floor and pressed them hard against her scalp wound. He took her one good hand and switched it for his.

‘*Su mano, empujar aquí,*’ he said. ‘No, not *empujar*. Sorry. I don’t know the word. Just . . . press hard.’

But the woman understood Jack’s middle-school Spanish well enough. She pressed her good hand hard against the makeshift bandage as Jack took her other hand and inspected it briefly before pulling out a large shard of glass from her palm. It bled, too, but not as badly as the scalp. Jack pulled another stack of napkins from a dispenser lying next to him, compressed it into her palm, and folded her hand into a fist.

‘Hold this, tight, okay?’ Jack said, as he turned around to see who else he could help, his clothes even bloodier now than they were a moment ago.

On the floor just a few feet away he saw Moore’s purse. A few cautious pedestrians crept into the wreckage of the restaurant, faces white with terror but eager to help. Ambulance sirens screamed just beyond the door.

As tires screeched to a halt outside, Jack reached down and picked up Moore’s purse, its contents scattered on the floor. He dug through the nearly empty purse looking for her smartphone, thinking that whoever this Sammler was, maybe he’d called her earlier or she had his contact information stored on her phone.

Spanish EMTs charged through the doors with medical gear in hand, followed by four local police, their uniforms marked GUÀRDIA URBANA.

One of the cops, bearded and burly, saw Jack standing in the middle of the carnage, rifling through Moore’s purse like a looter, and began shouting at him in Català.

Still dazed by the blast and numbed with grief, and with his ears ringing and a headache crushing his skull, Jack couldn’t make out a single word of what the cop was saying, but it wasn’t hard for him to figure out the guy was pissed.

More sirens blared outside and more tires screeched to a halt as even more police and EMTs arrived, charging through the broken doors.

Jack pointed at Moore’s corpse. ‘She’s my friend. I’m just looking for —’

But the big cop pulled his baton and charged at Jack, his eyes raging.

Jack dropped the purse but something in him snapped. His friend was dead and he’d nearly been killed. *And now this*

asshole is calling me a thief. Jack squared up to take the guy down as the cop raised his baton.

‘*Parì!*’ – Stop! a woman’s voice called from behind.

The big bearded cop froze in mid-swing. He and Jack turned around to see a woman about his age in jeans and a leather jacket flashing a badge. Her shoulder-length hair was neat but not fashionable, and her small frame was trim like an athlete’s. Despite his headache, Jack saw the pistol in a shoulder rig beneath her coat. She barked another order at the cop towering over her. He argued with her, pointing his baton at Jack.

She turned toward Jack. ‘He says you’re a looter. Is that true?’

‘No. I was looking for the phone of my friend . . .’ Jack’s voice trailed off, his legs wobbly. He pointed at Moore’s corpse. Unexpectedly, tears welled in his eyes.

The woman with the badge softened, but only slightly. She took Jack by the elbow.

‘Let’s go outside and get you checked out.’

Jack sat on the stone stairs of the back entrance to the big Gothic church, Santa Maria del Mar. He was just a hundred yards from the restaurant, facing a *placeta* – a small plaza. A uniformed EMT examined Jack’s eyes with a penlight under the watchful gaze of the woman with the badge. A police helicopter’s rotors hammered low overhead.

Hundreds of spectators had gathered in the area but had been pushed back behind yellow police tape and barricades. A local TV journalist stood among them, interviewing people claiming to be witnesses to the tragedy.

The plaza was filled with several ambulances and police vehicles, forming a staging area for medical treatment and a preliminary investigation of the blast. Jack saw police cars

and vans marked from several departments – Mossos d'Esquadra, Guardia Civil, Policía Nacional – blue lights still flashing on most of them.

The EMT gave Jack one last cautious glance as he pocketed his penlight. 'No headache?'

'No. I'm fine,' Jack said, lying.

The EMT's eyes narrowed with disbelief. '*Estàs segur?* You are sure?' He scratched his thin beard tinged with gray.

'Yeah, really. Thanks.'

'I think it is best you go to hospital. Get X-rays, at least.'

'No, I'm good.'

'You know, it cost you no money for medicine here.'

'It's not that. I just don't want to go. I'm fine.'

'Then it is necessary for you to see a doctor when you get back to the States, *vale?*'

'I will. I promise.'

The EMT looked over at the woman and shrugged his reluctant approval, then dashed off with his medical kit to another victim.

'My name is Laia Brossa. I work for the Centro Nacional de Inteligencia – CNI, for short. That's our version of the FBI and CIA, how you say, rolled into one. Who are you?'

Still seated on the steps, Jack stuck out his hand. She took it. 'My name is Jack Ryan. *Mucho gusto*' – Nice to meet you.

'*Igualmente.*' Brossa pulled out her smartphone. 'Do you mind if I record our conversation? It's easier than taking notes.'

'Not at all.'

'And you said your friend Renée Moore was killed inside?'

Jack lowered his head and nodded.

'Yes.'

She patted his shoulder. 'I'm very sorry for your loss.'

Jack raised his head. 'Yeah. Me, too.'

'She was an American as well?'

'Yes.'

'And how is it you survived the blast, Mr Ryan?'

'I was outside. I had just left to go to the Picasso Museum. If I'd waited another thirty seconds, I'd probably be dead, too.'

'You are very lucky. And what brings you to Spain?'

'I'm sorry, I don't know why you're asking me all of these questions.'

'Because it is my job.'

'Your job is to find out who killed my friend, and all of those other people.'

'We already know. It was a terror group called Brigada Catalan. They claimed responsibility just a few minutes ago on the Internet, while you were getting checked out.'

'I read about them in the news. They haven't done anything like this before. Just a lot of talk, right?'

Brossa shrugged. 'Every terrorist who kills talks a lot before they start killing, yes?'

'Yeah, I guess so.' Jack glanced up at the flags hanging from several of the private terraces around the square. Most had patriotic gold flags with four red stripes – the official flag of Catalonia – but a few had the addition of a Cuban white star on a blue triangle – the flag of the independence movement. In the last few days, Jack had hardly seen any Spanish national flags here in Barcelona. In Madrid, just the opposite.

'But these Brigada Catalan people, they haven't been violent, not like this. It's a political movement, not a terrorist one, if I'm not mistaken,' Jack said.

'Until today,' Brossa said, surveying the flags. She muttered something in Català to herself. She turned back to Jack. 'You are well read on Catalanian politics for an American. Quite unusual.'

‘We’re not all idiots,’ Jack said, instantly regretting the comment. Most Americans weren’t idiots. They just didn’t pay attention to other countries because their own country was so huge and had plenty of its own problems. And not every American double-majored in history and finance at an elite university like Georgetown.

‘I apologize if I offended you,’ Brossa said.

‘Not at all. I’m sorry for my bad manners. Almost getting killed has put me in a lousy mood. The only reason I’m up to speed on Brigada Catalan is because I happened to read an article about them in *El País* yesterday. In English. So, yeah, maybe I’m just another American idiot, too.’

‘Somehow, I doubt that. So tell me, what brought you to Spain? Ms Moore? She was your woman?’

‘No, nothing like that. Just friends. We hadn’t seen each other in years. It was a pure coincidence that she walked into the restaurant.’

‘My father says there is no such thing as coincidence,’ Brossa said.

Jack smiled, despite the headache.

‘Something funny, Mr Ryan?’

‘Not really.’

‘And the reason you are in Spain?’

The real reason he was in Spain was for R & R from missions he’d run for The Campus in Poland and Indonesia in the past several months, and to clear his mind from the death of his friend Liliana, and van Delden’s suicide. But Brossa wasn’t cleared to be read in on any of that.

‘I studied a little history in college, and read Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia* – do you know it?’

‘Of course.’

‘We didn’t cover the Spanish Civil War in depth in class. I wanted to fill in the gaps by seeing it for myself.’

Brossa eyed Jack up and down, trying to decide if he was bullshitting her or not.

‘And did you find what you were looking for, Mr Ryan?’

‘I came to find out more about the war, but I wound up falling in love with Spain. It’s a fantastic country.’

‘Where have you been in Spain?’

Chasing a couple of arms-smuggling shitbirds in Seville with The Campus last time I was here, Jack reminded himself.

‘It’s been a short trip, unfortunately. Just Madrid, and then here.’

‘You must come back, then, and see the rest. Galicia, Andalusia, the Basque region – Spain is not just one country, but a collection of many smaller ones.’

‘Already on my bucket list, believe me.’

‘So, Mr Ryan –’

‘Please, call me Jack.’

‘Vale, Jack. Can you tell me what you last saw or heard before the explosion? Any protesters outside? Anyone suspicious?’

‘The place was packed for lunch. Everyone seemed to be having a good time. I’d say half locals, half tourists, maybe? I heard German, French, Norwegian, but mostly Català.’

‘You are very observant.’

‘Just a curious tourist.’

‘Lavi is very popular. One of the best in the city. I eat there often myself. No shouts of *Visca Catalunya!* before the blast? Or anything else that would indicate a motive for the attack?’

‘No, nothing like that. People were just eating and drinking and having a good time when I left, then suddenly – well, you know the rest.’

‘And your friend? What does she do? Why was she in Barcelona?’ She pronounced the word *Barcelona* like an American – the *c* sounding like an *s*, unlike the Castilian