

IMMINENT ***Threat***™

Thriller/International Espionage

By

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Published by Digital Marketing Services Inc.
P.O. Box 1203, Oldsmar, Florida 34677
www.digitalmarketing1.com

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ISBN: 978-0-615-44976-0

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The development of this book has been a personal journey that started from a small idea—an idea that benefited greatly from many conversations with well-respected people to whom I offer my sincerest gratitude for taking time to believe in my endeavor.

My most profound thank you goes to my wife and family for taking time to invest in a dream. To my wife, you have sacrificed time and treasure. Your continued support and encouragement has inspired me to press onward toward the goal.

I owe a very special thank you to those who provided technical information and advice: The Central Intelligence Agency, Office of Public Affairs; John F. Anderson, PhD, assistant professor of math and physics at the University of Louisiana at Monroe; Howard Dickson, CHP, American Board of Health Physics; Dave Culver, LCDR, USCG Ret., and The Office of Public Affairs, Canada's Air Force.



*For the hidden heroes working
within the Central Intelligence Agency.*

*Those lost in a sea of ordinary lives,
while living extraordinary ones.*

PREFACE

The Central Intelligence Agency, since its inception in 1947, has conjured up many ideas within the conscience of all who hear those formidable words. It has inspired fear in the hearts of our enemies, and a deep sense of pride from a grateful nation. Though many of the heroic stories of invisible heroes will forever remain untold, the Agency remains a fertile ground for fanciful stories of all kinds. This book endeavors to weave a thread through several secretive government agencies and foreign powers in an attempt to keep the reader guessing.

While the science behind this story remains safely in the realm of theoretical physics, today's theories lay the groundwork for tomorrow's technological breakthroughs—technologies that offer incredible power to anyone willing to pay the ultimate price to steal another government's most valued secrets.

This extraordinary high-stakes game of national security poses many inherent risks, and as with any theoretical technology, the possibilities of exploring these new and untested methods pose varying degrees of danger and uncertainty. The allure of power achieved through these incredible advancements, however, can on occasion echo the base levels of human nature and bring out the worst of those involved.

On the international stage where the price of being second often has consequences that tip the balance of world power, the seduction of selling one's own country can overwhelm a flawed personality. In the realm of danger and intrigue, friend and foe often take on indiscernible shades, revealing themselves only under the burning light of intense international and personal pressures.

NORTH STAR ONE

October 11, 315 Zulu / 6:15 p.m.

North Star One Oil Rig

46° North Latitude, 49° West Longitude, North Atlantic Ocean

In the harsh and isolated North Atlantic resided the deep-sea, semi-submersible oil rig, North Star One. Located two hundred and twenty miles east-southeast of St. John's, Newfoundland, the state-of-the-art rig sat in one hundred and twenty feet of water and was the first to begin full-scale pumping of the East Flank of the Terra Nova Oil Field.

Walking down one of the many corridors toward the bridge of the huge North Star One, an anxious Daniel Bowman saw Captain Robert Porter approaching from a lower deck.

"Captain," Daniel said, matching his steps with Porter's, "I've been looking for you."

"There's a lot to do today, Daniel, and entertaining your perpetual concerns over everything from thermal vent activity to the quality of the chow isn't on my list."

"Sir, I've been going over data all afternoon. There's been a significant increase in the amount of quake activity in and around the Mid-Atlantic Ridge."

"Yeah, I know you mentioned something about

some kind of instability yesterday,” Captain Porter said as he paused to look up at Daniel, who was six foot one, with broad shoulders, a chiseled chin, and cobalt-blue eyes.

“Why don’t you go get a cup of coffee and clean yourself up? You look as if you’ve been up for days.”

“Captain, I’ve received some data updates that are very troubling.” Daniel unconsciously rubbed the two-inch scar just below his left sideburn. At forty-one years of age, with a master’s in geophysics from MIT, he had already had a stellar career. ExxonMobil and ConocoPhillips had helped him cut his teeth early on, and he had quickly moved through the ranks of both companies, soon becoming a well-regarded industry expert in deep-sea research and exploration. Now he worked for the Texas-based North American Deep Sea Research Organization, and had been tapped by Cummins-McGuire Oil Exploration Corporation to be point man for North Star One’s startup phase.

“Look, Daniel,” Porter sighed, “The ridge is seven thousand miles long. I think the chances of having geological instabilities along that line are pretty good. It’s nothing to be concerned about. We just happen to be in the area where the earth’s having a bad day. You get nervous every time we launch a rig, and you’re getting worse. Besides, how many times have you told me that geology isn’t a smooth system, and unpredictable events happen all the time?”

“I know, but this is different,” Daniel said.

“All I know is that I have less than thirty-six hours to anchor this rig before the first nor’easter closes in on us with sixty- to seventy-knot gales. If anything changes, let me know.”

As the captain began to walk past toward the bridge,

Daniel put his hand out to stop him. “Captain, you don’t understand. I know seismic activity is a common occurrence. It’s just that there is something odd about the data. The quakes have been moving down the ridge in a steady succession from the polar region for the past week. I did some checking at the office, and seismic activity is going off the scale from here to Singapore. Most have been minor, but some have been relatively strong. The larger quakes have shown up deep in the sea bed in both the Pacific and Atlantic.”

Daniel pulled Porter into a side office and threw open a marine map of the world, pointing to the Arctic region. “We’ve never measured a period of such global geological instability in such a short time. I’m not sure what to make of it, but it seems quake activity is consistently spiking in the Arctic and radiating outward. The thing I can’t make sense of is that it seems to be happening in systematic intervals. Captain, once we anchor the rig, I think we should hold off final connections for a few days to see if things settle down. We don’t want to get rocked with a substantial quake this early on. Cummins has invested seven hundred and fifty million into the North Star project, they aren’t going to be happy with additional costs and time delays for broken fittings.”

“Listen, I appreciate your concern, but there’s a thousand square miles of nothing around us, and you’re telling me that I’m so unlucky I not only have a nor’easter bearing down on me, but we may also get hit by a quake? Can you tell me how big this earthquake of yours is going to be or where it’s going to hit?” Porter raised an eyebrow and added, “You know, Bowman, I’m beginning to think *you’re* the bad luck.”

“I can’t tell you how big it’s going to be, Captain, but this is strange enough to be a serious cause for concern.”

“Look, you know a quake isn’t going to affect us

up here, so I'll take my chances and replace the fittings if something happens. The last time we launched a rig, you were worked up about Greenpeace activists sabotaging us because a herd of migrating humpbacks was passing within twenty miles. Nothing is going to happen. Just relax. It's all just an odd coincidence. Why don't you go get some sleep before you spook the crew?"

"Captain Porter, I think this is serious. You're not understanding what I'm trying to tell you."

"I understand exactly what you're saying and your concerns have been duly noted. Now, listen to me. I've been doing this a long time, and your 'geological' problem isn't going to keep me from getting this rig online before the storm moves in. Do we understand one another? Cummins is paying both of us a lot of money, and I'm not going to let them down because the Atlantic isn't acting the way you would like it to. Listen, I give you a lot of leeway around here because your father and I have been friends since before you were born, but don't push it."

Porter ended the brief conversation, moving around Daniel to get to the North Star One's bridge. Daniel grabbed his maps and papers and followed him down the long corridor toward the active bridge where crewmen bustled about, giving vague attention to the conversations ringing over the speakers between a North Star One radioman and tugs that were fighting the increasing seas. The North Star crew made final systems checks before bringing the rig into position. The chaotic atmosphere buzzed with activity. Voices over intercoms repeated technical information, global positioning coordinates, equipment statuses, and the endless checks and re-checks. Radios continued to crackle with abrupt transmissions from tugs to bridge.

“*Atlantic Sun*, you’re clear to position anchor number seven,” the rig’s radioman said.

“Roger that, North Star One. We’re proceeding with anchor drop seven.”

Daniel watched as frigid waves began to spill over the high-performance tugs’ lower decks; tugs that carried enormous, four-ton anchors to secure the towering rig to the sea floor.

“Is everything moving on schedule to beat the storm?” Porter asked the chief engineer on the bridge of North Star One.

“Yes, sir.”

“What’s the weather doing?” the captain again asked.

“Sir, winds are moderate but expected to increase by midnight, squalls are moving in, and seas are fifteen to twenty feet. We’re expecting a significant increase in the overnight hours.”

Porter turned toward Daniel. “You can tell Cummins we’re going to make it. If I’ve got to break these men to do it, we’re going to make it.”

From across the bridge a radio dispatcher informed the captain that an urgent incoming call was being patched through on an emergency frequency from the Navy cruiser *Normandy*.

Captain Porter replied, “Patch it through the intercom.”

“One moment, sir.” The crewman spoke into a headset, and then turned back to the captain. “I’m sorry, the *Normandy* says she has to be patched through on a hard line.”

The captain picked up a nearby receiver. "Porter here." He listened for a moment, a frown forming on his forehead. "I understand, but Bowman has been assigned to me by our offices. I need him for this operation. He's a vital part of the team to get this rig properly seated before the storm hits. Uh-huh. Uh-huh."

Daniel's attention was divided between the captain and the tugs that fought the increasing swells outside the bridge window. "Here," Porter said suddenly, thrusting the handset at Daniel and turning away.

Startled, Daniel took the phone. "Hello?"

"Is this Daniel Bowman?" the *Normandy's* Captain Whitaker barked.

"Yes it is," he replied, as he tried to make sense of the curious nature of the phone call.

"I've been instructed to have you transported to the mainland ASAP. Langley says Shadow Walker personally requested your help. There's a Navy Seahawk inbound. I expect you to be on it."

"Excuse me? Is this some kind of joke?"

"The Navy doesn't joke, son. If you're not on that bird, there'll be hell to pay. Do you understand?" Whitaker responded just before the transmission abruptly disconnected.

Daniel slowly handed the phone back to Porter. The captain looked at him. "That Whitaker is a real hard nose. Give a man a Navy ship and he thinks he's God. Get your bags packed, it looks as if your work here is done." He grabbed Daniel by the arm from his captain's chair. "I don't know what's going on here," he whispered, "but I know the people

in Langley, and you better watch yourself. The Agency plays hardball, and it must be damn serious for them to have the Navy pick you up in this weather. Screwing up can put you in a kill zone before you even knew you were in the crosshairs. Just ask your father.”

“Captain, he mentioned something about ‘Shadow Walker—’”

“Yeah, I know. Get moving. The weather is deteriorating rapidly. You’d better tighten your seat belt, Daniel; it’s going to be a rough ride back.”

Stunned, Daniel turned to walk back to get his belongings just as the chief engineer exclaimed, “Captain, we have an inbound Navy Seahawk five miles out that just appeared on radar. He’s requesting permission to land.”

“Permission granted.” Porter looked at Daniel, “What have you gotten yourself into, son?”

“I don’t know, sir,” Daniel shrugged. He gathered his charts and data sheets from the bridge. “Sir, can you contact my office and tell them I need to go to Langley?”

“Yeah, I’ll make a call, and...be careful, son.”

Daniel made his way to his quarters, shoving documents, laptop, and minimal belongings into a duffel bag before finding his way to the ready room to suit up in the required anti-exposure flight suit. He left the warmth and safety of the rig’s interior, stepped into the frigid, North Atlantic air and headed for the helipad. The cold Atlantic winds were made worse by strong rotor wash that buffeted everything on deck. Daniel hastened toward the Seahawk, hunched against the currents that swirled around him in a frozen vortex. A crewman offered his hand, pulling Daniel

aboard the dark-gray chopper before sliding the door closed.

“Mr. Bowman, welcome aboard, sir,” the crewmember shouted. “This is going to be a rough ride, so stow your bags securely, and cinch down your harness good and tight. I’ll help make sure you are properly secured.”

Daniel looked out the window of the chopper, offering thumbs up to Porter, who looked back from the bridge. Porter gestured with a reassuring smile and nod before telling his crew to get back to the critical business of anchoring North Star One.

As the Navy SH-60B Seahawk’s twin turbine engines howled under full power, slowly turning the military chopper back into the teeth of the storm, a crewmember again shouted over the headset, “Mr. Bowman, we have to make a stop for fuel on the *Normandy* before we can continue on to the mainland. It’s going be a bit dicey, but you’re in good hands. I would hang on when we are on final approach, though. You know how to swim, right?” the crewmember asked without smiling, patting him on the shoulder.

Daniel nodded, yes, with an anxious feeling in the pit of his stomach.

“Good to go,” said the Seahawk crewmember.

As the chopper bounced through the dark sky toward the Navy cruiser, it was buffeted by strong winds that rattled gear and nerves. Daniel gazed out the window into the turbulent blackness, barely noticing the jolts. *The man mentioned Shadow Walker. What did he have to do with this? He hadn’t spoken with him in years.*

None of the Navy crew on the chopper spoke much to him during the flight, other than to offer safety advice, periodic

arrival information, or weather updates. The updates seemed to get worse with every passing notification, as the helo headed southwest into the pitch-black sky, illuminated only by the worsening storm's flashes of lightning.

"Mr. Bowman," a crewman shouted, "Mr. Bowman, sir," rousing Daniel out of his thoughts. "We are ten minutes from the *Normandy*. I need you to follow any directions I give without question. Do you understand? If we go into the drink, it's going to be real cold. It'll take your breath. Try to fight that instinct, and wait till the last moment to fill your lungs. Your life vest will float, but you may have to get out of the chopper on your own. I'll get the door open for you if I can, but if I can't, you need to pull the emergency release yourself. Get to the surface as fast as you can, and the *Normandy* will try to pick you up. Your EPIRB (Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon) will help them locate you. Got it?"

Daniel nodded, acknowledging the sobering commands.

"Don't worry, Mr. Bowman, the water's too cold for swimming tonight," the crewman again shouted to Daniel, as the green glare of the control panel reflected off his face and night-vision goggles.

As the lights of the Ticonderoga-class cruiser, USS *Normandy*, broke through the low cloud cover on the dark horizon, Daniel watched out the front window. The pilot wrestled the stick to keep the Seahawk level and on proper glide slope toward the rolling ship. Given a go-ahead for landing from *Normandy*'s tower, the Seahawk made an initial pass as the moving ship adjusted course to keep its bow slicing into the breaking waves.

Coming from behind the ship, the Seahawk rolled wings level at 0.75 miles at sixty knots, while the pilot gained

visual sight of the stabilized glide slope indicator on the rear of the ship. At a half mile, the pilot began a decelerating descent, establishing a nose-up attitude as the helo bucked around the sky. Decelerating through fifty knots, the Seahawk pilot engaged the automatic flight-control system, changing from airspeed to attitude hold.

“*Normandy* tower, this is Navy Seahawk eight, one, zero requesting permission to land.”

“Roger, Seahawk eight, one, zero, permission granted. Be advised, we are approaching limited wave off capability, pitch eight, roll twelve, list two to starboard with sea state between five and six. We have winds at twenty-five to twenty-seven knots, gusts to forty and swells of fifteen to twenty,” said a *Normandy* radioman.

“Copy that, *Normandy* tower,” squawked the pilot. The copilot made altitude calls at one hundred, sixty, and forty feet, followed by rapid calls for more and less power. Altimeter warnings started buzzing throughout the cockpit. Daniel watched anxiously as the pilot tried to wrestle the turbulent chopper down toward the deck of the *Normandy*.

“Pull up! Pull up!” shouted the copilot, as the radio buzzed the same warnings from the *Normandy* tower.

The *Normandy* pitched up hard and the comparatively fragile Seahawk barely avoided a catastrophic collision as the pilot yelled out to the copilot, “We need to gain altitude...that was too close.”

With the Seahawk pulled back from the ship to recover level control, the pilot said, “We’re almost at our limit here. I’m starting to get Master Caution warnings. Looks like overheating. We’re at maximum torque in these crosswinds. If we don’t get on the deck soon we may have to ditch.”