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TOM CLANCY

A JACK RYAN
NOVEL



DEFENSE
PROTOCOL

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Red Storm Rising

Patriot Games

The Cardinal of the Kremlin

Clear and Present Danger

The Sum of All Fears

Without Remorse

Debt of Honor

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The Bear and the Dragon

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Tom Clancy Weapons Grade (by Don Bentley)

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Tom Clancy Shadow State (by M. P. Woodward)

NONFICTION

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Fighter Wing: A Guided Tour of an Air Force Combat Wing

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Airborne: A Guided Tour of an Airborne Task Force

Carrier: A Guided Tour of an Aircraft Carrier

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with General Fred Franks, Jr. (Ret.), and Tony Koltz

Every Man a Tiger: The Gulf War Air Campaign

with General Chuck Horner (Ret.) and Tony Koltz

Shadow Warriors: Inside the Special Forces

with General Carl Stiner (Ret.) and Tony Koltz

Battle Ready

with General Tony Zinni (Ret.) and Tony Koltz

TOM CLANCY

DEFENSE PROTOCOL



ANDREWS & WILSON

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CHINA, TAIWAN, AND THE STRAIT



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PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Jack Ryan Sr: President of the United States

Arnold “Arnie” van Damm: White House Chief of Staff

Mary Pat Foley: Director of National Intelligence

Scott Adler: Secretary of State

Robert Burgess: Secretary of Defense

Admiral Lawrence Kent, USN: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Major General Bruce Kudryk, USA: Joint Chiefs of Staff

CHINA

Li Jian Jun: President of the People’s Republic of China

Qin Hâiyû: Minister of Defense

Cheng Kai: Minister of Foreign Affairs

Qiū Léi: The Night Spider

Scott Kincaid: Deputy Chief of U.S. Mission, Beijing

TASK FORCE 25

Lieutenant Commander Katie Ryan: ONI

Intelligence Specialist 2nd Class “Bubba” Pettigrew: ONI

Lieutenant JG John Conza: ONI

Andrew “Drewski” Miaoulis: Ground Branch

Ted James: CIA

Simran “Sam” Bakshi: CIA

Ben Hart: Ground Branch

Lori Tengco: DIA

Lou Donatelli: DIA

Commander Beechum: Navy SEAL

Master Chief Hurley: Navy SEAL

Senior Chief Max Harden: Navy SEAL

Chief Reed: Navy SEAL

Skip Anderson: Navy SEAL

Scott Todd: Navy SEAL

CNS *NANCHANG* TYPE 055 DESTROYER

Captain Shen Huaqing: Commanding Officer

Colonel Sun Ching-Kuo: Political Commissar

USS *JASON DUNHAM*

Commander Jeffrey Kreutz: Commanding Officer

Lieutenant Commander Karen Cook: Executive Officer

Lieutenant Commander Mitchell Horrillo: Combat Systems Officer

TASK FORCE 99

John Clark

Ding Chavez

Daniel Wu

Lee Hyori

Wilhelm Bauer

Charlotte “Charlie” Adams

Henri Toussaint

PROLOGUE

CHAoyANG PARK PLAZA APARTMENTS

CHAoyANG DISTRICT

BEIJING, CHINA

0833 LOCAL TIME

Something was wrong.

Cheng Kai, minister of foreign affairs, could feel it in his bones. As he walked through the jaw-dropping, eighty-meter-tall atrium—with its arboreal-style pillars and *shan shui*-inspired design—he couldn't shake the sense that he was being watched. No, not watched...judged. But when he scanned the faces of the staff and other residents milling about, nobody was paying him any mind.

I'm being paranoid, he told himself. It's the stress of the job, that's all.

Still, something was *definitely* off. The frequency of people calling and messaging him had dropped noticeably below the daily baseline he'd become accustomed to in the job over the past two years. He was still getting directives, updates, and communications from the Foreign Affairs Commission and from the Central Committee, but the questions and requests for direction from staffers in his own office had almost dried up completely. This was odd, because he'd gradually come to believe that nobody did anything in the Ministry without his prior assent.

If not me, then who is authorizing the daily decisions?

In the bureaucratic machine that was the Chinese government, a single misstep—not necessarily even a mistake—could end a man's career.

Or worse...

As the nation's top diplomat, a position analogous to the United States secretary of state, Cheng was responsible for overseeing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the People's Republic of China. In addition to negotiating treaties, advising the State Council on international affairs, and representing China in the United Nations, his Ministry's mandate was to formulate, communicate, and administer China's foreign policy abroad. In today's complex geopolitical world, a world driven by communication and messaging, his position made him one of the most recognizable and powerful men in China, second only to President Li Jian Jun.

Cheng would never boast about this fact, to do so would be unwise, but his power was real and everyone knew it.

His thoughts took him to the moment two years ago when President Li had offered him the position. Li's words played back in Cheng's mind with all the clarity and poignancy as if the man were speaking to him now:

"In accepting this position, you will be the face and the fist of China's foreign policy. You will be the hand world leaders shake first, and the mouth that delivers the ultimatums and unpleasant truths behind closed doors that I cannot. For the next five years, you will be my wolf warrior—barking, snarling, and howling. You will defend the people against the hostile rhetoric of the West. You will defend the nation's honor when China is disrespected by foreign governments and foreign press. And you will defend me when dirty lies and propaganda try to sully my name and reputation. Are you up for the challenge, my friend?"

Cheng had agreed immediately and unequivocally, without giving the gravity or true meaning of Li's words much thought. *That* version of Cheng had been hungry for power and opportunity. He'd had eyes on the foreign affairs minister position for over a decade and had worked tirelessly to prove and endear himself to the Chinese president. He'd obediently and aggressively tried to demonstrate his skill and willingness to implement Li's political vision at every opportunity. And for this tireless effort, obedience, and loyalty, he had been rewarded.

But recently, he had doubts that had begun to plague him.

No, “doubts” was too strong a word. Second thoughts...he was having second thoughts.

After all, words matter.

Diplomacy was a profession defined by words—both spoken and unspoken. He’d witnessed the power of words firsthand over the past two years, as other nations’ foreign policy was both made and unmade by the power of his words. As foreign minister he spoke for China. He spoke for the Party. He spoke for President Li. But speaking for the latter, unfortunately, had proven to be more challenging and precarious than he’d ever imagined.

President Li was a difficult man to please.

Pulling his roller suitcase behind him, Cheng stepped out of the lobby and under the covered porte cochere, where his driver and car were waiting. The black Hongqi H9 luxury sedan sat idling at the curb just ahead, waiting to deliver him to the airport for his trip to Laos to represent China at the upcoming East Asia Summit. This would be his fifth time attending the EAS, his second as foreign minister. The eighteen-nation convention was held annually to dialogue about political, environmental, and economic topics related to the stability and prosperity of East Asia. The original membership had only included East Asian countries, but the United States and Russian Federation had muscled their way into the mix in 2011 with dramatic effect. This summit would be no different than the last, Cheng presumed, with the U.S. contingent exerting their influence at every turn to challenge China’s hegemony in setting the agenda and controlling regional policy.

Cheng paused momentarily beside the car to make sure he was seen, but the driver did not get out to load Cheng’s bag and open the door, as was the normal practice. Instead, the trunk popped open while the driver remained in the driver’s seat, not turning to even look at Cheng. Annoyed, Cheng rolled his suitcase to the rear of the vehicle, placed it in the trunk himself, and shut the lid. He then walked to the rear passenger-side door and let himself into the vehicle. Once he was settled into his seat, he looked toward the driver, who had yet to greet him, and that’s when he noticed this H9 was not like the regular fleet of black cars that served the upper echelon of

China's government ministries. This one had a tinted-glass divider between the passenger and driver compartments like one would find in a fancy limousine.

Or a police car, said the voice in his head.

Without a word from the driver, the H9 pulled away from Chaoyang Park Plaza and glided into Beijing traffic. Cheng was about to knock on the glass divider and tell the man to lower it, when his mobile phone chimed with a text message. He retrieved it from his pocket and glanced at the screen. The sender was his wife. She'd forwarded a hyperlink with no accompanying message. Normally, he would have ignored something like this, but his wife was a good partner. She understood the stress and difficulties of his job, and she had always supported him without complaint. She knew her place, and long ago had ceased calling or texting him during working hours, only contacting him with urgent matters that she was not equipped to deal with herself. Because this was out of character, he clicked on the link.

A web page opened on his mobile browser for the *Global Times*—China's international propaganda and daily tabloid newspaper. The headline article read "Foreign Minister under Investigation for Corruption and Infidelity," and was accompanied by the most unflattering picture of Cheng imaginable—a picture that was digitally altered. In the photograph, he was sitting at a lavish dinner table with his arm around a Caucasian woman's shoulders. His expensive suit looked disheveled and his eyes bloodshot—as if from a night of drinking. But worst of all was his laughing expression, which somehow looked maniacal and pathetic at the same time.

A wave of heat flushed his cheeks so hot that his head suddenly felt like it was mounted atop a stovepipe. The picture was an expertly constructed deepfake—his visage grafted onto another man's body. He knew this with absolute confidence because he'd never seen the woman in the picture before in his life, nor had he sat at that table. As foreign minister, he only drank alcohol in a ceremonial capacity, and he never, ever let himself get intoxicated. In his profession, drunkenness was an occupational hazard. The outrage he felt barely eclipsed the second- and third-place emotions of shock

and humiliation. He'd been completely blindsided by this political assassination piece. And make no mistake, that's *exactly* what it was...a journalistic kill shot.

"I'm going to have your head on a platter, Guo," Cheng growled, calling out the paper's editor in chief by name. "How did you do it without me catching wind first?"

Then, as if someone had just poured a bucket of ice water down the stovepipe, his neck and chest went suddenly tight and cold with realization. The reason it had happened without warning was because the hit job had been sanctioned. Guo wouldn't authorize a story such as this in a vacuum; that's not how the *Global Times* operated. The paper was an instrument of the Party. To run this smear campaign, Guo would have had Li's blessing first.

Or be operating on his orders...

Cheng had never experienced the medical phenomenon known as hyperventilation, but felt pretty sure he was experiencing it now, as his breaths came in small, rapid, unproductive gasps. He felt the mobile phone slip from his grip and fall into the footwell. Panic overwhelmed him, and he lowered his head between his knees in primal reflex to try to catch his breath and stave off the wave of vertigo.

This is it...I'm out...Oh shit, God help me, I'm out. But why?

His mind went back to the warning his close friend Qin Hâiyû had given him about speaking his mind too freely about controversial things. Perhaps Qin had been right?

His phone chimed from the floor.

Head still between his knees, he glanced at the screen. It was another text from his wife. A three-word message that simply said: *Is this true?*

"It's not true," he muttered in between gasps. "It's not true..."

While he stared at it, the screen on the phone flickered once, then went black.

A moment later, the car braked to a hard stop. Both rear doors opened simultaneously and two men in black suits, neither of whom he recognized,

got in, the one on Cheng's side shoving him forcefully toward the middle.

"What's going on? Who are you?" he said, the adrenaline dump magically restoring Cheng's breath and some measure of mental clarity.

The man on his left pulled a candy bar-sized white plastic cylinder from his suit coat pocket. Gripping it in one hand, the man jammed the bottom end of the tube into Cheng's thigh and pressed a button with his thumb. Cheng felt the needle from the auto-injector punch through his suit pants and puncture his flesh. A sharp burn followed as the delivery system injected him with whatever drug these men had been ordered to dose him with.

Wide-eyed with fear, Cheng met the eyes of the man holding the injector.

"Why?" he heard himself ask as his eyelids began to close.

The enforcer in the black suit answered, his hard, cold words echoing from very far away: "President Li thanks you for your service, Minister Cheng," the man said with a malevolent smile. "But your service is no longer needed..."