

# Prologue



## Sunset, Sunrise

In retrospect, it would seem an odd way to start a war. Only one of the participants knew what was really happening, and even that was a coincidence. The property settlement had been moved up on the calendar due to a death in the attorney's family, and so the attorney was scheduled for a red-eye flight, two hours from now, to Hawaii.

It was Mr. Yamata's first property closing on American soil. Though he owned many properties in the continental United States, the actual title transfer had always been handled by other attorneys, invariably American citizens, who had done precisely what they had been paid to do, generally with oversight by one of Mr. Yamata's employees. But not this time. There were several reasons for it. One was that the purchase was personal and not corporate. Another was that it was close, only two hours by private jet from his home. Mr. Yamata had told the settlement attorney that the property would be used for a weekend getaway house. With the astronomical price of real estate in Tokyo, he could buy several hundred acres for the price of a modestly large penthouse apartment in his city of residence. The view from the house

he planned to build on the promontory would be breathtaking, a vista of the blue Pacific, other islands of the Marianas Archipelago in the distance, air as clean as any on the face of the earth. For all those reasons Mr. Yamata had offered a princely fee, and done so with a charming smile.

And for one reason more.

The various documents slid clockwise around the circular table, stopping at each chair so that signatures could be affixed at the proper place, marked with yellow Post-it notes, and then it was time for Mr. Yamata to reach into his coat pocket and withdraw an envelope. He took out the check and handed it to the attorney.

“Thank you, sir,” the lawyer said in a respectful voice, as Americans always did when money was on the table. It was remarkable how money made them do anything. Until three years before, the purchase of land here by a Japanese citizen would have been illegal, but the right lawyer, and the right case, and the right amount of money had fixed that, too. “The title transfer will be recorded this afternoon.”

Yamata looked at the seller with a polite smile and a nod, then he rose and left the building. A car was waiting outside. Yamata got in the front passenger seat and motioned peremptorily for the driver to head off. The settlement was complete, and with it the need for charm.

Like most Pacific islands, Saipan is of volcanic origin. Immediately to the east is the Marianas Trench, a chasm fully seven miles deep where one geological plate dives under another. The result is a collection of towering cone-shaped mountains, of which the islands themselves are merely the tips. The Toyota Land Cruiser followed a moderately smooth road north, winding around Mount Achugao and the Mariana Country Club toward Marpi Point. There it stopped.

Yamata alighted from the vehicle, his gaze resting on some farm structures that would soon be erased, but instead of walking to the building site for his new house, he headed toward the rocky edge of the cliff. Though a man in his early sixties, his stride was strong and purposeful as he moved across the uneven field. If it had been a farm, then it had been a poor one, he saw, inhospitable to life. As this place had been, more than once, and from more than one cause.

His face was impassive as he reached the edge of what the locals called Banzai Cliff. An onshore wind was blowing, and he could see and hear the waves marching in their endless ranks to smash against the rocks at the base of the cliff—the same rocks that had smashed the bodies of his parents and siblings after they, and so many others, had jumped off to evade capture by the advancing U.S. Marines. The sight had horrified the Marines, but Mr. Yamata would never appreciate or acknowledge that.

The businessman clapped his hands once and bowed his head, both to call the attention of the lingering spirits to his presence and to show proper obeisance to their influence over his destiny. It was fitting, he thought, that his purchase of this parcel of land now meant that 50.016% of the real estate on Saipan was again in Japanese hands, more than fifty years since his family's death at American hands.

He felt a sudden chill, and ascribed it to the emotion of the moment, or perhaps the nearness of his ancestors' spirits. Though their bodies had been swept away in the endless surf, surely their *kami* had never left this place, and awaited his return. He shuddered, and buttoned his coat. Yes, he'd build here, but only after he'd done what was necessary first.

First, he had to destroy.

It was one of those perfect moments, half a world away. The driver came smoothly back, away from the ball, in a perfect arc, stopped for the briefest of moments, then accelerated back along the same path, downward now, gaining speed as it fell. The man holding the club shifted his weight from one leg to the other. At the proper moment, his hands turned over as they should, which caused the club head to rotate around the vertical axis, so that when the head hit the ball it was exactly perpendicular to the intended flight path. The sound told the tale—a perfect *tink* (it was a metal-headed driver). That, and the tactile impulse transmitted through the graphite shaft, told the golfer everything he needed to know. He didn't even have to look. The club finished its follow-through path before the man's head turned to track the flight of the ball.

Unfortunately, Ryan wasn't the one holding the club.

Jack shook his head with a rueful grin as he bent to tee up his ball. "Nice hit, Robby."

Rear Admiral (lower half) Robert Jefferson Jackson, USN, held his pose, his aviator's eyes watching the ball start its descent, then bounce on the fairway about two hundred fifty yards away. The bounces carried it another thirty or so. He didn't speak until it stopped, dead center. "I meant to draw it a little."

"Life's a bitch, ain't it?" Ryan observed, as he went through his setup ritual. Knees bent, back fairly straight, head down but not too much, the grip, yes, that's about right. He did everything the club pro had told him the previous week, and the week before that, and the week . . . bringing the club back . . . and down . . .

. . . and it wasn't too bad, just off the fairway to the right, a hundred eighty yards, the best first-tee drive he'd hit in . . . forever. And approximately the same distance with his driver that Robby would have gotten with a firm seven-iron. About the only good news was that it was only 7:45 A.M., and there was nobody around to share his embarrassment.

*At least you cleared the water.*

"Been playing how long, Jack?"

"Two whole months."

Jackson grinned as he headed down to where the cart was parked. "I started in my second year at Annapolis. I have a head start, boy. Hell, enjoy the day."

There was that. The Greenbrier is set among the mountains of West Virginia. A retreat that dates back to the late eighteenth century, on this October morning the white mass of the main hotel building was framed with yellows and scarlets as the hardwood trees entered their yearly cycle of autumn fire.

"Well, I don't expect to beat you," Ryan allowed as he sat down in the cart.

A turn, a grin. "You won't. Just thank God you're not working today, Jack. I am."

Neither man was in the vacation business, as much as each needed it, nor was either man currently satisfied with success. For Robby it meant a flag desk in the Pentagon. For Ryan, much to his surprise even now, it had been a return to the business world instead of to the academic slot that he'd

wanted—or at least thought he'd wanted—standing there in Saudi Arabia, two and a half years before. Perhaps it was the action, he thought—had he become addicted to it? Jack asked himself, selecting a three-iron. It wouldn't be enough club to make the green, but he hadn't learned fairway woods yet. Yeah, it was the action he craved even more than his occasional escape from it.

"Take your time, and don't try to kill it. The ball's already dead, okay?"

"Yes, sir, Admiral, sir," Jack replied.

"Keep your head down. I'll do the watching."

"All *right*, Robby." The knowledge that Robby would not laugh at him, no matter how bad the shot, was somehow worse than the suspicion that he might. On last reflection, he stood a little straighter before swinging. His reward was a welcome sound:

*Swat.* The ball was thirty yards away before his head came up to see it, still heading left . . . but already showing a fade back to the right.

"Jack?"

"Yeah," Ryan answered without turning his head.

"Your three-iron," Jackson said, chuckling, his eyes computing the flight path. "Don't change anything. Do it just like that, every time."

Somehow Jack managed to put his iron back in the bag without trying to wrap the shaft around his friend's head. He started laughing when the cart moved again, up the right-side rough toward Robby's ball, the single white spot on the green, even carpet.

"Miss flying?" he asked gently.

Robby looked at him. "You play dirty, too," he observed. But that was just the way things went. He'd finished his last flying job, screened for flag, then been considered for the post of commander of the Naval Aviation Test Center at Naval Air Station, Patuxent River, Maryland, where his real title would have been Chief Test Pilot, U.S. Navy. But instead Jackson was working in J-3, the operations directorate for the Joint Chiefs of Staff. War Plans, an odd slot for a warrior in a world where war was becoming a thing of the past. It was more career-enhancing, but far less satisfying than the flying billet he'd really wanted. Jackson tried to

shrug it off. He'd done his flying, after all. He'd started in Phantoms and graduated to Tomcats, commanded his squadron, and a carrier air wing, then screened early for flag rank on the basis of a solid and distinguished career during which he'd never put a foot wrong. His next job, if he got it, would be as commander of a carrier battle group, something that had once seemed to him a goal beyond the grasp of Fortune itself. Now that he was there, he wondered where all the time had gone, and what lay ahead. "What happens when we get old?"

"Some of us take up golf, Rob."

"Or go back to stocks and bonds," Jackson countered. *An eight-iron*, he thought, *a soft one*. Ryan followed him to his ball.

"Merchant banking," Jack proffered. "It's worked out for you, hasn't it?"

That made the aviator—active or not, Robby would always be a pilot to himself and his friends—look up and grin. "Well, you turned my hundred thou' into something special, Sir John." With that, he took his shot. It was one way to get even. The ball landed, bounced, and finally stopped about twenty feet from the pin.

"Enough to buy me lessons?"

"You sure as hell need 'em." Robby paused and allowed his face to change. "A lot of years, Jack. We changed the world." And that was a good thing, wasn't it?

"After a fashion," Jack conceded with a tight smile. Some people called it an end to history, but Ryan's doctorate was in that field, and he had trouble with the thought.

"You really like it, what you're doing now?"

"I'm home every night, usually before six. I get to see all the Little League games in the summer, and most of the soccer games in the fall. And when Sally's ready for her first date, I won't be in some goddamned VC-20B halfway to nowhere for a meeting that doesn't mean much of anything anyway." Jack smiled in a most comfortable way. "And I think I prefer that even to playing good golf."

"Well, that's a good thing, 'cuz I don't even think Arnold Palmer can fix your swing. But I'll try," Robby added, "just because Cathy asked me to."

Jack's pitch was too strong, forcing him to chip back

onto the green—badly—where three putts carded him a seven to Robby's par four.

"A golfer who plays like you should swear more," Jackson said on the way to the second tee. Ryan didn't have a chance for a rejoinder.

He had a beeper on his belt, of course. It was a satellite beeper, the kind that could get you almost anywhere. Tunnels under mountains or bodies of water offered some protection, but not much. Jack plucked it off his belt. It was probably the Silicon Alchemy deal, he thought, even though he'd left instructions. Maybe someone had run out of paper clips. He looked at the number on the LCD display.

"I thought your home office was New York," Robby noted. The area code on the display was 202, not the 212 Jack had expected to see.

"It is. I can teleconference most of my work out of Baltimore, but at least once a week I have to catch the Metro-liner up there." Ryan frowned. 757-5000. The White House Signals Office. He checked his watch. It was 7:55 in the morning, and the time announced the urgency of the call more clearly than anything else could. It wasn't exactly a surprise, though, was it? he asked himself. Not with what he'd been reading in the papers every day. The only thing unexpected was the timing. He'd expected the call much sooner. He walked to the cart and the golf bag, where he kept his cellular phone. It was the one thing in the bag, actually, that he knew how to use.

It took only three minutes, as an amused Robby waited in the cart. Yes, he was at The Greenbrier. Yes, he knew that there was an airport not too far from there. Four hours? Less than an hour out and back, no more than an hour at his destination. Back in time for dinner. He'd even have time to finish his round of golf, shower, and change before he left, Jack told himself, folding the phone back up and dropping it in the pocket of the golf bag. That was one advantage of the world's best chauffeur service. The problem was that once they had you, they never liked to let go. The convenience of it was designed only to make it a more comfortable mode of confinement. Jack shook his head as he stood at the tee, and his distraction had a strange effect. The drive up the second fairway landed on the short grass, two hundred ten yards

downrange, and Ryan walked back to the cart without a single word, wondering what he'd tell Cathy.

The facility was brand-new and spotless, but there was something obscene about it, the engineer thought. His countrymen hated fire, but they positively loathed the class of object that this room was designed to fabricate. He couldn't shake it off. It was like the buzz of an insect in the room—unlikely, since every molecule of the air in this clean-room had gone through the best filtration system his country could devise. His colleagues' engineering excellence was a source of pride to this man, especially since he was among the best of them. It would be that pride that sustained him, he knew, dismissing the imaginary buzz as he inspected the fabrication machinery. After all, if the Americans could do it, and the Russians, and the English, and the French, and the Chinese, and even the Indians and Pakistanis, then why not them? There was a symmetry to it, after all.

In another part of the building, the special material was being roughly shaped even now. Purchasing agents had spent quite some time acquiring the unique components. There were precious few. Most had been made elsewhere, but some had been made in his country for use abroad. They had been invented for one purpose, then adapted for others, but the possibility had always existed—distant but real—that the original application beckoned. It had become an institutional joke for the production people in the various corporations, something not to take seriously.

But they'd take it seriously now, the engineer thought. He switched off the lights and pulled the door shut behind him. He had a deadline to meet, and he would start today, after only a few hours of sleep.

Even as often as he'd been here, Ryan had never lost his mystical appreciation for the place, and today's manner of arrival hadn't been contrived to make him look for the ordinary. A discreet call to his hotel had arranged for the drive to the airport. The aircraft had been waiting, of course, a twin-prop business bird sitting at the far end of the ramp, ordinary



except for the USAF markings and the fact that the flight crew had been dressed in olive-green nomex. Friendly smiles, again of course, deferential. A sergeant to make sure he knew how to use the seat belt, and the perfunctory discussion of safety and emergency procedures. The look-back from the pilot who had a schedule to meet, and off they went, with Ryan wondering where the briefing papers were, and sipping a U.S. Air Force Coca-Cola. Wishing he'd changed into his good suit, and remembering that he had deliberately decided not to do so. Stupid, beneath himself. Flight time of forty-seven minutes, and a direct approach into Andrews. The only thing they left out was the helicopter ride in from Andrews, but that would only have attracted attention. Met by a deferential Air Force major who'd walked him over to a cheap official car and a quiet driver, Ryan settled back in his seat and closed his eyes while the major took the front seat. He tried to nap. He'd seen Suitland Parkway before, and knew the route by heart. Suitland Parkway to I-295, immediately off that and onto I-395, take the Maine Avenue Exit. The time of day, just after lunch, guaranteed rapid progress, and sure enough, the car stopped at the guard shack on West Executive Drive, where the guard, most unusually, just waved them through. The canopied entrance to the White House basement level beckoned, as did a familiar face.

"Hi, Arnie." Jack held his hand out to the President's chief of staff. Arnold van Damm was just too good, and Roger Durling had needed him to help with the transition. Soon enough President Durling had measured his senior staffer against Arnie, and found his own man wanting. He hadn't changed much, Ryan saw. The same L. L. Bean shirts, and the same rough honesty on his face, but Arnie was older and tired than before. Well, who wasn't? "The last time we talked here, you were kicking me loose," Jack said next, to get a quick read on the situation.

"We all make mistakes, Jack."

*Uh-oh.* Ryan went instantly on guard, but the handshake pulled him through the door anyway. The Secret Service agents on post had a pass all ready for him, and things went smoothly until he set off the metal detector. Ryan handed over his hotel room key and tried again, hearing yet

another ping. The only other metal on his body except for his watch turned out to be his divot tool.

“When did you take up golf?” van Damm asked with a chuckle that matched the expression of the nearest agent.

“Nice to know you haven’t been following me around. Two months, and I haven’t broken one-ten yet.”

The chief of staff waved Ryan to the hidden stairs to the left. “You know why they call it ‘golf’?”

“Yeah, because ‘shit’ was already taken.” Ryan stopped on the landing. “What gives, Arnie?”

“I think you know,” was all the answer he got.

“Hello, Dr. Ryan!” Special Agent Helen D’Agustino was as pretty as ever, and still part of the Presidential Detail. “Please come with me.”

The presidency is not a job calculated to bring youth to a man. Roger Durling had once been a paratrooper who’d climbed hills in the Central Highlands of Vietnam, he was still a jogger, and reportedly liked to play squash to keep fit, but for all that he looked a weary man this afternoon. More to the point, Jack reflected quickly, he’d come straight in to see the President, no waiting in one of the many anterooms, and the smiles on the faces he’d seen on the way in carried a message of their own. Durling rose with a speed intended to show his pleasure at seeing his guest. Or maybe something else.

“How’s the brokerage business, Jack?” The handshake that accompanied the question was dry and hard, but with an urgency to it.

“It keeps me busy, Mr. President.”

“Not too busy. Golf in West Virginia?” Durling asked, waving Ryan to a seat by the fireplace. “That’ll be all,” he told the two Secret Service agents who’d followed Ryan in. “Thank you.”

“My newest vice, sir,” Ryan said, hearing the door close behind him. It was unusual to be so close to the Chief Executive without the protective presence of Secret Service guards, especially since he had been so long out of government service.

Durling took his seat, and leaned back into it. His body language showed vigor, the kind that emanated from the mind rather than the body. It was time to talk business. “I

could say I'm sorry to interrupt your vacation, but I won't," the President of the United States told him. "You've had a two-year vacation, Dr. Ryan. It's over now."

Two years. For the first two months of it, he'd done exactly nothing, pondered a few teaching posts in the sanctity of his study, watched his wife leave early every morning for her medical practice at Johns Hopkins, fixed the kids' school lunches and told himself how wonderful it was to relax. It had taken those two months before he'd admitted to himself that the absence of activity was more stressful than anything he'd ever done. Only three interviews had landed him a job back in the investment business, enabled him to race his wife out of the house each morning, and bitch about the pace—and just maybe prevent himself from going insane. Along the way he'd made some money, but even that, he admitted to himself, had begun to pall. He still hadn't found his place, and wondered if he ever really would.

"Mr. President, the draft ended a lot of years ago," Jack offered with a smile. It was a flippant observation, and one he was ashamed of even as he said it.

"You've said 'no' to your country once." The rebuke put an end to the smiles. Was Durling that stressed-out? Well, he had every right to be, and with the stress had come impatience, which was surprising in a man whose main function for the public was being pleasant and reassuring. But Ryan was not part of the public, was he?

"Sir, I was burned out then. I don't think I would have been—"

"Fine. I've seen your file, all of it," Durling added. "I even know that I might not be here now except for what you did down in Colombia a few years ago. You've served your country well, Dr. Ryan, and now you've had your time off, and you've played the money game some more—rather well, it would seem—and now it's time to come back."

"What post, sir?" Jack asked.

"Down the hall and around the corner. The last few residents haven't distinguished themselves there," Durling noted. Cutter and Elliot had been bad enough. Durling's own National Security Advisor had simply not been up to the task. His name was Tom Loch, and he was on the way out, the morning paper had told Ryan. It would seem that the

press had it right for once. "I'm not going to beat around the bush. We need you. I need you."

"Mr. President, that's a very flattering statement, but the truth of the matter is—"

"The truth of the matter is that I have too much of a domestic agenda, and the day only has twenty-four hours, and my administration has fumbled the ball too many times. In the process we have not served the country as well as we should have. I can't say that anywhere but inside this room, but I can and must say it here. State is weak. Defense is weak."

"Fiedler in Treasury is excellent," Ryan allowed. "And if you want advice about State, move Scott Adler up. He's young, but he's very good on process and pretty good on vision."

"Not without good oversight from this building, and I don't have the time for that. I will pass your approbation on to Buzz Fiedler," Durling added with a smile.

"He's a brilliant technician, and that's what you need across the street. If you're going to catch the inflation, for God's sake, do it now—"

"And take the political heat," Durling said. "That's exactly what his orders are. Protect the dollar and hammer inflation down to zero. I think he can do it. The initial signs are promising."

Ryan nodded. "I think you're right." *Okay, get on with it.*

Durling handed over the briefing book. "Read."

"Yes, sir." Jack flipped open the binder's cover, and kept flipping past the usual stiff pages that warned of all manner of legal sanctions for revealing what he was about to read. As usual, the information United States Code protected wasn't all that different from what any citizen could get in *Time*, but it wasn't as well written. His right hand reached out for a coffee cup, annoyingly not the handleless mug he preferred. The White House china was long on elegance but short on practicality. Coming here was always like visiting a particularly rich boss. So many of the appointments were just a little too—

"I know about some of this, but I didn't know it was this . . . interesting," Jack murmured.

“‘Interesting?’” Durling replied with an unseen smile. “That’s a nice choice of words.”

“Mary Pat’s the Deputy Director of Operations now?” Ryan looked up to see the curt nod.

“She was in here a month ago to plead her case for upgrading her side of the house. She was very persuasive. Al Trent just got the authorization through committee yesterday.”

Jack chuckled. “Agriculture or Interior this time?” That part of CIA’s budget was almost never in the open. The Directorate of Operations always got part of its funding through legerdemain.

“Health and Human Services, I think.”

“But it’ll still be two or three years before—”

“I know.” Durling fidgeted in his seat. “Look, Jack, if it mattered to you that much, then why—”

“Sir, if you’ve read through my file, you know why.” *Dear God*, Jack wanted to say, *how much am I expected to—* But he couldn’t, not here, not to this man, and so he didn’t. Instead he went back into the briefing book, flipping pages, and read as rapidly as comprehension permitted.

“I know, it was a mistake to downplay the human-intelligence side of the house. Trent and Fellows said so. Mrs. Foley said so. You can get overloaded in this office, Jack.”

Ryan looked up and almost smiled until he saw the President’s face. There was a tiredness around the eyes that Durling was unable to conceal. But then Durling saw the expression on Jack’s own face.

“When can you start?” the President of the United States asked.

The engineer was back, flipping on the lights and looking at his machine tools. His supervisory office was almost all glass, and elevated slightly so that he could see all the activity in the shop with no more effort than a raised head. In a few minutes his staff would start arriving, and his presence in the office earlier than any of the team—in a country where showing up two hours early was the norm—would set the proper tone. The first man arrived only ten minutes later,

hung up his coat, and headed to the far corner to start the coffee. Not tea, both men thought at the same time. Surprisingly Western. The others arrived in a bunch, both resentful and envious of their colleague, because they all noticed that the chief's office was lit and occupied. A few exercised at their worktables, both to loosen themselves up and to show their devotion. At start-time minus two hours, the chief walked out of his office and called for his team to gather around for the first morning's talk about what they were doing. They all knew, of course, but they had to be told anyway. It took ten minutes, and with that done, they all went to work. And this was not at all a strange way for a war to begin.

Dinner was elegant, served in the enormous high-ceilinged dining room to the sound of piano, violin, and the occasional *ting* of crystal. The table chatter was ordinary, or so it seemed to Jack as he sipped his dinner wine and worked his way through the main course. Sally and little Jack were doing well at school, and Kathleen would turn two in another month, as she toddled around the house at Peregrine Cliff, the dominating and assertive apple of her father's eye, and the terror of her day-care center. Robby and Sissy, childless despite all their efforts, were surrogate aunt and uncle to the Ryan trio, and took as much pride in the brood as Jack and Cathy did. There was a sadness to it, Jack thought, but those were the breaks, and he wondered if Sissy still cried about it when alone in bed, Robby off on a job somewhere. Jack had never had a brother. Robby was closer than a brother could ever have been, and his friend deserved better luck. And Sissy, well, she was just an angel.

"I wonder how the office is doing."

"Probably conjuring up a plan for the invasion of Bangladesh," Jack said, looking up and reentering the conversation.

"That was last week," Jackson said with a grin.

"How do they manage without us?" Cathy wondered aloud, probably worrying about a patient.

"Well, concert season doesn't start for me until next month," Sissy observed.

“Mmmm,” Ryan noted, looking back down at his plate, wondering how he was going to break the news.

“Jack, I know,” Cathy finally said. “You’re not good at hiding it.”

“Who—”

“She asked where you were,” Robby said from across the table. “A naval officer can’t lie.”

“Did you think I’d be mad?” Cathy asked her husband.

“Yes.”

“You don’t know what he’s like,” Cathy told the others. “Every morning, gets his paper and grumbles. Every night, catches the news and grumbles. Every Sunday, watches the interview shows and grumbles. Jack,” she said quietly, “do you think I could ever stop doing surgery?”

“Probably not, but it’s not the same—”

“No, it’s not, but it’s the same for you. When do you start?” Caroline Ryan asked.