

Tom
Clancy

Debt of

Honor

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For Mom and Dad

A man's character is his fate
—*Heraclitus*

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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 night 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 trained 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*, Robbie." The knowledge that Robbie 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