

Included: A special preview of Rodger Carlyle's
second novel in the Team Walker Series, *The Shadow Game*

BOOKS BY RODGER CARLYLE

THE TEAM WALKER SERIES

The Eel And The Angel

The Shadow Game

THE CHAD GRITT SERIES

Enemy Patriots

The Opposite Of Trust

Two Civil Wars

NONFICTION

Awake

Still Common Sense

**THE EEL AND THE
ANGEL**

**RODGER
CARLYLE**

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and events are products of the author's imagination and bear
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CHAPTER 1

ANDERSON AIR FORCE BASE, GUAM

JUAN PEDRO PARKED his patrol car on the tiny dirt track off from the main patrol road, leaving the engine running as he made his way toward the ocean at the end of the runway. Somewhere in his brain he thought that he had seen a flicker of a red light through the trees above the rocky bluff that protected the end of the runway from the occasional violent Pacific storm. He didn't bother to call in the siting, deciding to wait until he knew for sure what had attracted his attention.

Besides, there were no flight operations that moonlit April night and a need to stretch his legs in the moonlight might, just might, be what had triggered his response. He left the road, moving to the crude trail along the edge of the bluff, a place where the only sounds were from the surf below. Every night he seemed to find some excuse for a stroll along the ocean, usually about halfway through his 10 p.m. to six in the morning shift.

Juan had come to the tiny Pacific Island as an Air Force policeman more than twenty years earlier and fallen in love with the lazy

island life. He'd finished his twenty-year enlistment struggling to figure out what came after the military life.

Returning to Guam, the one duty station where he was truly happy, he had used his former service to land a job with a civilian security-contracting firm and less than a year later Juan had married an island girl half his age and started a new family.

He strained his eyes, looking for the faint glimpse of red light that his brain told him was out there, seeing nothing. His relaxed stroll reflected the complete lack of security threat. The last time anything remotely dangerous had happened was back in August 2019 when some idiot, being chased by local police, had crashed the main gate of the base and disappeared into the jungle. The nutcase was discovered hiding the next day, and rather than just surrender, he attacked one of the guards and was shot dead by an Air Force cop.

Juan stopped at the edge of the bluff, staring off into space, as he often did on these clear nights, still in wonder at a sky that had never been part of his childhood in the bright lights and polluted skies of southern California. Below and to his right, a faint sound lowered his gaze. It sounded like someone clipping a wire with a pair of cutters.

There was something moving only ten feet away. As he reached for the tiny penlight on his belt, he felt a slight prick on his left thigh, followed by what must have been a lightning strike. The most excruciating pain he had ever felt dropped him onto his stomach, writhing in agony. He couldn't take a breath to scream. His eyes fluttered at light speed, as they and every other part of his body tried to come to grips with a wave of burning that seemed to start in the center of his body, radiating out so that even his fingernails seemed on fire. His arms and legs pounded again and again into the ground as his torso contorted. The pain intensified as waves of electric fire swept his body. He prayed for the pain to stop, but it just grew worse.

Through his tears, a person dressed in a black suit knelt beside

him and leaned down whispering. Through his tortured ears he thought he heard, “I sorry, you were supposed to pass out.” It was hard to tell, the words spoken were delivered with an accent that even in normal times he would have misunderstood. Perhaps his hearing was failing. Juan’s shoulder was pulled down as whoever was next to him, knelt on his arm to stop its movement.

He never felt the needle as a full syringe of air was injected into a vein in his wrist. He never felt the edge of a sharp rock as it tore across the wrist, destroying any indication of an injection. A moment later another man grabbed his other arm and the two men together dragged Juan into the jungle holding him until his body stopped moving.

The men went back to the job they had come to do, finishing only minutes later. One of the men tugged Juan’s boots from his feet and slipped them onto his own. He handed his soft rubber shoes to his partner as he hoisted Juan onto a shoulder, then followed his partner down a steep trail to the water below. Carefully lacing Juan’s boots onto the dead guard’s feet, he slid his body into the water. He and his buddy retrieved their air tanks and fins from the brush and slid into the turbulent water, pushing silent winged electric underwater scooters in front of them. They pulled Juan’s body out to sea as they headed into the endless ocean.

A couple of hundred meters offshore, they released the body and dove, navigating to their ride home using a tiny display strapped to their arms.

Five hours later and thousands of miles away, a technician sitting in front of a computer console read the signal from the acoustic listening device now operating at the end of the runway at the American Air Force base on Guam. He called up another screen, copying the signal onto a second page where he compared it to a library of acoustic sounds gathered over years by dozens of operatives from around American Air Force facilities. He called to a tall thin junior officer.

“Sir,” he offered, pointing at the display, “you can inform the general that an American KC-46 Pegasus tanker has just departed Guam. We are operational.”

“That is good to hear,” replied the officer. “It is one more move in our ability to track the American military and gives our country another data source to offer our allies. The more they keep the Americans off guard using what we sell them, the lower the chance that China will end up confronting American military power.”

At almost the exact same moment, a small boat from the American naval base reached the dock with the body of a security guard who had been missing for hours. The Navy doctor who helped lift the body from the boat stepped onto the dock, shaking his head.

“Any idea what happened, Commander?” asked an Air Force colonel staring down at the body.

“No, sir. Other than a small abrasion on his wrist, I see no obvious wound. Maybe an allergic reaction to a bug bite or a heart attack.” The doctor leaned over the body, pulling at a khaki pants leg. There’s a small puncture through the fabric on the front of his left thigh, and there appears to be a small swelling below it. God only knows what might have caused it. There are a lot of animals whose sting or bite that can quickly kill you once you end up in the Pacific.” The doctor watched as two medics lifted the body onto a stretcher. “Maybe he just went for a walk and fell. The shore below the runway is really rugged.”

CHAPTER 2

VIRGINIA

MATHEW CHANG, DIRECTOR of the CIA had called the meeting against his own better judgment. He'd always managed to avoid conspiracy theories that weren't vetted by his own agency. A young naval lieutenant from the Farragut Technical Analysis Center, the technical analysis group for Naval Intelligence had forwarded a report up the chain of command that created a minor furor in his own office. Some Whiz Kid, as two deputy directors referred to him, managed to patch together half a dozen unrelated stories and deduced a new threat that no other source was reporting. Chang read the synopsis and personally called several counterparts to find confirmation. Hell, no other source even considered the report credible; just two of his own deputies.

Right on time his phone rang, the reminder of a meeting that he just didn't have time for. The Director picked up his briefing folder and coffee cup, slipped through the side door of his office and into his small private conference room. Deputy Director of Science and Technology, Pete Wilson squeezed the shoulder of the spit and polish young officer, busily taping on the laptop at one

end of a small rectangular table. “Lieutenant Gritt, this is Director Chang.”

Chang could tell that the young man was trying to figure out whether to salute or shake hands, so he extended his hand. He had always believed the best way to get rid of a pest was to kill it with kindness before sending it on its way with an assignment that would take the rest of the pest’s life to accomplish. “Okay Lieutenant, show me what you came up with. I’ve only got about fifteen minutes.”

“Yes sir,” offered the young man, tapping on the laptop, as Wilson, Chang and the fourth party at the meeting, Jana Taylor, the recently appointed CIA director of Operations slid into their chairs.

Chang was impressed as the young man immediately launched his presentation, wasting no time on introducing himself or background. The brevity was unusual and refreshing.

“My first slide is a photograph taken nineteen months ago on the coast of Washington State. It shows two FBI agents with a box that was found at an unmanned control station and hub for a major cross-Pacific fiber optic cable. The box was inside the small facility, actually sitting in one of the equipment racks along with equipment that was supposed to be there. The technician who discovered it has no idea how long it has been installed. He was trouble shooting a problem and noted that the box did not appear on any of his ‘as built’ drawings. It was plugged in and had patch cords connecting it to the cable frame used by our military to communicate with facilities in Hawaii and Alaska.”

The young lieutenant tapped another key, and a new photo popped up on the screen.

“This is a collage of pictures that one of our assets in Taiwan forwarded to us. He did not divulge where he got it. The Chinese have infiltrated the military in Taiwan over the last several years, but the other side of that is the Taiwanese also have a solid intelligence network on the mainland. You will note that they are all of

the flight tests of the new F-35C that were being conducted at the Whidbey Island Naval Air Station in Washington state fourteen months ago. The last one, lower right, shows two Navy technicians holding a box that is substantially different from the one collected in slide one. This one was found in the tiny hut where radio and telemetry data for the test is converted from radio to terrestrial signals. The box had no purpose in the facility.”

The lieutenant tapped another key, bringing up another frame. The picture looked like the kind of incidental trash you might find along any highway. “This, sir, was picked up by some facility maintenance people at the Newport News Shipyard. The location where it was found offers a view of the final assembly area for our Ford class nuclear carriers. The trash isn’t as important as the fiber optic cable that security found coiled just under the surface of the bay. There was nothing connected to the cable. They traced it and found that it ran more than a mile out into the Atlantic where they found the other end resting on a large cement block.” The man tapped another key, bringing up a split photo. “The one on the right is the end on the land, and the other is the abandoned end on the block. You will note that the block has bolts that would allow a box, approximately three feet by four feet to be anchored, although there was nothing on the block when it was found.”

“Lieutenant,” said Chang, “would you scroll back one photo.”

The picture of trash came up.

“Can you blow that picture up? I’d like a better view, a close-up.”

The lieutenant spent a few seconds on the computer before enlarging the image and then enlarging it again. “I’m told that you grew up reading and speaking Mandarin, sir,” offered Gritt. “We believe that what you have on the screen are wrappers and plastic pouches of the same rations that the Chinese issue to their Marines. They had been buried, but some dog at the Newport facility dug them up, or we would have never found any of this.”

“The Lieutenant has three more similar photos,” offered Wilson. “The boxes you have seen, and the photo of trash all seem to be of Chinese manufacture. The Navy’s analysis of the Newport News materials may indicate that while the *Gerald Ford* was being constructed, someone had a camera recording the whole process, sending the recordings to some type of capture device offshore. We’re guessing that both the camera and capture device were pulled after construction, and that whoever planted the camera got what they needed and aren’t interested in detail on the new ship, the *Doris Miller*.”

“Mat,” offered director Taylor, rising from her chair and standing next to the young officer, “these incidents all indicate a very sophisticated ability to penetrate our best security. The areas where these intrusions happened are all blanketed with acoustic and magnetic sensors. If the Navy is right, then somehow the Chinese got close enough to send in divers and plant recording devices and even put men ashore to take pictures in spite of our millions spent to keep them out.”

“Didn’t we tap the underground cable that allowed the Russians to communicate along their bases from Vladivostok to north of Kamchatka? We pulled that off decades ago,” replied Chang.

“True,” replied Taylor, “but we did it by infiltrating Russian territorial waters where there were virtually no defenses. Unless one of their destroyers had passed directly over the submarine we used while operating their underwater sensors, there was no way for them to detect the intrusion. This is different. We had our best defense up.”

Mat Chang smiled as he read from the screen. “Energy bars with raisins and hydration drinks with salt and sugar,” he offered. “The people who buried this crap were on land long enough to require a drink and food.” He sighed, realizing that this wild goose chase had just become a goose hunt.

“Lieutenant Gritt, what is the Navy’s opinion of how this could be accomplished?”

“Sir, a decade ago, your folks sent us some sketchy intel about the Chinese working on a completely stealthy submarine. We looked at the data and came to the conclusion that no submarine that was a threat, meaning attack or boomer, could possibly be built using the concept in that intel. Maybe we weren’t broad enough in our threat evaluation. The Chinese have perfected a small undetectable submarine and are using it to pick our pockets.”

“Lieutenant, we need a few minutes to digest all this,” said Chang. “Make sure that Dr. Wilson knows where to find you.”

“Pete, if you will show Lieutenant Gritt out to his escort, I’ll cancel my lunch with Senator Wurtz and get Maggie on some sandwiches. We will reconvene in ten minutes.



“Okay, Jana, you called this meeting. Beyond the obvious, what is the threat here?”

Jana Taylor had started her government career as one of the first women to complete the hell that was Navy Seal training. With few missions available to her, and butting heads with the prejudice against women, and the Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell policy, she retired her hard-won Navy commission and joined the Central Intelligence Agency in clandestine operations. Over a quarter century she had amassed a record of achievement and educational commitment second to none.

She smiled at Chang, brushing her gray-streaked plain brown hair from in front of ordinary brown eyes. “Well, Mat, what we don’t know can hurt us, and we don’t know a damned thing about how pervasive this thing is. But the thing that led Pete and I to raise hell with you over this obscure report was the ARCTIC ANGEL PROJECT. Eventually we will have half a dozen facilities for this shield. But for now, all we have is one prototype as far out in the wilds of the Aleutian Islands of Alaska as it could be. It is in a place where we have no immediate backup if the Chinese or the

Russians or even the forces of Paraguay wanted to launch a sneak, small force penetration operation. We have been counting on the fact that, to the world, even our own forces, it doesn't exist. We have the facility ringed by every sensor we have in the inventory. But if someone finds out, the two-dozen guards there aren't much of a deterrent to a small group of trained commandos who can reach the facility undetected. Even if they call for help, it will take hours for a rapid reaction force to reach them."

"I agree with Jana," offered Wilson. "But of equal importance, is what she led with. We technology guys are always rattled by a phenomenon we don't understand. We don't have a clue about this submarine thing, and until we do, we can't guarantee any site close to the ocean can be secured."

Mat Chang ripped the end from a package of Lay's potato chips. "So, if this is real, we have three tasks. First, figure out where they have been, or are snooping on us. Second, work with the Defense folks to come up with a strategy for ARCTIC ANGEL without blowing our cover. Third, figure out what technology the Chinese are using to move a sub into our waters without a hint that it is there."

Pete Wilson stood up, brushing crumbs from his shirt into a napkin neatly folded in his lap. He folded the napkin over and over to ensure none of the crumbs fell out. He crossed the room, laying rather than dropping the napkin into a wastebasket. "This seems to be a fair assessment of the problem."

Chang smiled. If Pete just had a pencil protector in his shirt pocket the moment would perfectly describe the Technology Director.

Jana shook her head. "One more small complicating problem, gentlemen. Just in the last couple of weeks, we've noticed an increase in Chinese intelligence aircraft and snooper ships in the general area of the ARCTIC ANGEL facility. I'm not convinced that they haven't figured out that we are up to something out on

that island. The main facility will be complete this month and the stealth laser platform is scheduled to begin movement from California to the facility in weeks.”

“Then, we need to add a fourth item,” continued Chang. “We need to figure out what the Chinese already know.”

CHAPTER 3

VIRGINIA

CHANG AND DEPUTY Director Taylor had always had a great relationship, probably born of watching each other's careers. While Jana's career had been focused on European operations, many of them clandestine, Chang's area of expertise had been Asia. His grandfather had been a General in the Army of the Republic of China and after their exile to Taiwan had immigrated to the United States, somehow with a very substantial nest egg.

Jana remembered having a drink with Chang after her body language gave away her concern over a Chinese American running intelligence operation on China. Chang had run up a big tab on his credit card as Jana subtly pressed him with questions. Chang's father had been a West Point grad who had retired in just twenty years and gone on to start a joint venture with a couple of officers who he worked with. The company integrated American and Korean technologies, all in the defense industry.

Chang had also sailed through West Point, and then spent three years bored out of his mind as an Army Intelligence officer. He'd negotiated an early release from his commitment courtesy of his new employer, the Central Intelligence Agency.

With the death of his father, Mat Chang left the agency to take over as president of the family firm. To his surprise, that move involved him more deeply in intelligence and on a level that a career CIA employee would never see.

When a former West Point classmate became President, Mat accepted an offer to head up the Central Intelligence Agency after he was assured of direct access to POTUS and gotten that man's agreement that he could slash the agency's red tape. Not only had Jana accepted the man's history, she had grown to consider Chang the most effective operative that she had ever worked with. She was elated when the President made him director.

He'd passed over a dozen more experienced career employees to pick Pete Wilson to run Science and Technology and did the same to slide his old friend Jana into the Director of Operations job. Wilson had been the Agency liaison to his company. No one in the world had overcome more to succeed than Jana, which made her, a can't fail appointment. She'd even taken up golf so that she and Mat could get completely away from the bureaucrats that both detested.

Jana pushed the tee into the soft ground, concentrating on getting her ball to rest on the tee as she struggled with her close-up vision, a function of head trauma from a mission a decade before. "Pete and I were a bit surprised that you signed onto the data that Lieutenant Gritt presented. It was plenty thin."

"Jana, my family has been battling the communists since the 1940s. Family members who stayed on the mainland after the retreat to Taiwan were never heard from again. This secret sub thing is just the kind of low-cost attack that they favor. Their espionage has allowed them to close a fifty-year technology gap in less than fifteen years. We're still ahead but only by a decade. Our next move will widen that advantage again, but only if they can't steal the technology before it is fully implemented. If this sub is real, we need to stop it now."

“Mat, I don’t have anyone in mind that I trust with this project. The couple of go-to people I’d consider, are both buried in critical work.” Jana relaxed, as she watched her ball sail about a hundred and fifty yards directly down the middle of the fairway.

Her old friend and boss lobbed a slight hook into the ruff about fifty yards further down the arrow straight manicured grass in front of them. “I was kind of thinking it might be a job for an old timer. We’re looking for a high-tech system, but this looks like a good old shoe leather investigation. We just need to look at every site that may be vulnerable without raising an alarm. Of all the things we don’t need right now is to risk the Chinese somehow figuring out that we are chasing their stealth boat. We need to ascertain the damage before they go dark on us. I’m thinking we give someone almost complete control, and back them with a small Special Forces team. We can use base security testing as a cover.”

“You’re thinking of Thad Walker, aren’t you?”

Mat smiled, as he tugged a pitching wedge from his golf bag. “Only because he never fails, and nobody outside of the few old timers left around the company, even know who he is.”

Jana lofted a three iron up to within thirty yards of the green. She had learned to love working things like this out with Mat, each speaking a sentence only when they hit a shot. It allowed a lot of time in between to think through each piece of the puzzle.

“Pete has been combing through the reports on the Chinese surveillance of the Arctic project.” Mat’s next shot bounced twice and then ran well past the green. “He thinks it might be an opportunity to let them find what we think they are looking for.”

Jana’s wedge shot rolled up to within four feet of the pin. “I’m not sure that I understand that. Giving them anything on Arctic Angel seems damned risky.”

Mat decided on a thirty-foot put rather than another wedge shot. He’d never mastered getting enough backspin to stop his ball from rolling well past where it landed. “He thinks we can give

them just enough to think they know what they are dealing with; just enough that they quit digging.” His shot came up ten feet short of the cup.

“Okay, but what’s that got to do with Thad Walker?” Jana went ahead and putted in for her par.

“You both think that Arctic Angel is a logical target for the stealth sub. We’re going to have to read Walker in on most of the project since part of what we need to do is secure that site.” His put rimmed the cup and stopped six inches away.

“Agreed, but I still don’t see how that fits into Pete’s plan?”

Mat’s ball finally dropped into the cup. Both of them began the slow walk to the next green as their security detail began to move as well. Neither wrote a score on their scorecard.

“I just think we put the two of them together and see if they can kill two birds with one stone. We use Angel as bait to study this sub and give the Chinese enough to ‘think’ they understand Arctic Angel.”

“Let’s call in the dogs,” said Jana. “That’s our usual five holes and you’re playing like you hate this game.”

“I do hate this game. I’d much prefer floating down the Madison in Montana with a fly rod, catching brown trout.”

Jana laughed. “You going to Montana to talk to Thad yourself?”

CHAPTER 4

FLATHEAD LAKE MONTANA

THE DIRECTOR'S PRIVATE Gulfstream jet touched down on the long runway at Malmstrom Air Force Base in Great Falls. It taxied past a huge portion of America's strategic bomber force before stopping in a parking place well away from normal base activity. Since even he hadn't figured out that he was making this trip until the night before, Chang was traveling light, with no advance security. He and the two guards who had volunteered their time as a break from the hustle of D.C. to ride on the plush private jet fanned out talking to a half-dozen military policemen who met them. A third very junior agent struggled down the ramp carrying the hastily thrown together luggage of four men.

The base commander met Chang near a waiting helicopter. "It's the best I can do with no notice," he offered.

"It will work just fine. I'm on my way to surprise an old friend and we will need to land in a small meadow next to his home on Flathead Lake."

The base commander knew better than to ask any questions.

"I may need the helicopter for a couple of days, if that's all

right with you,” said Chang. “I’ll have your crew keep you posted. If there is any ground expense, the Agency will take care of it.”

The backbone of the Rocky Mountains stretched about half-way between Great Falls and Thad Walker’s house on Montana’s largest lake. That meant that they had to fly high, but the trip was only about 150 miles. It was still mid-morning as the helicopter began to circle the small field next to the house. Chang could tell from the air, that his old colleague was there as expected. Walker was a man of routine, and part of that was an early morning row out on the lake, in a boat he’d built himself. Walker was on the dock as they circled. A large black dog stood on the shore barking.

Walker, now in his early seventies, met the men at the house as if a helicopter dropping from the sky was an everyday experience. He extended his hand to Chang but said nothing with the others around. The two men wandered back down to the dock as the two Air Force pilots found a place in the shade and opened a thermos of coffee. Chang’s security detail spread out trying to look casual in their suits, in a place that never had seen a suit before.

“Well that was quite an entrance,” offered Walker, working his way down the gravel path, his cane planted carefully next to his bad leg with each step.

“Time was of the essence,” laughed his old friend. “I’m about to tell you a story and would appreciate your feedback. If that feedback includes any interest in helping your country out of a small jam, then we will talk about spending a day fishing to flesh in the details.”

“It’s a little early for the lake to produce well.”

“If you still have that buddy with the tackle shop over on the Madison, I was thinking that we could saddle up that chopper and catch a half day floating the river. We will need to borrow his boat, since we can’t really talk in front of him. I can row if you’re too old to handle the boat.”

“Well, look what D.C. and dealing with that bureaucracy has

done to you – brought out the asshole that all of us suspected all along,” said Walker with a laugh.

The two men sat on the dock, Walker pulling off his tennis shoes and dangling his feet in the water. He listened as Chang outlined the Chinese intelligence efforts, troubled by his old friend’s description of their success. He smiled, as Chang pulled off his shoes, stuffing his socks in them as he rolled up his pants, plunging his feet into the brutally cold April water.

“Well, my old friend, just what would you have me do to help fix this fucking mess?”

“We’re looking for an old hand that we can trust to find out how big the hole is and then help figure out how the Chinese are pulling this off. As part of the effort, we’d like to get some idea of what they might already know.”

Walker’s worn feet were getting really cold, but he wasn’t about to admit that yet. He soaked them every morning to reduce the swelling. “Seems to me, to be a multi-team project that requires nothing more than spending whatever time is necessary, using whatever resources you already have available to dig and dig. Over a reasonable period of time, the details will paint the picture. Why do you need me?”

“Well, it’s the last part that has us really worried. We are building out a prototype defensive system that will change the balance of power for a decade or two, maybe longer. The problem is that we’re building it in a place that is really vulnerable to this Chinese technology. It could be very vulnerable. It’s important enough to risk a shooting war, if either the Russians or the Chinese figure out what we are doing before the system is operational. We’re trying to keep this completely secret right up to the time we finish testing. If this gets out, we’re liable to have a division of bad guy troops landing on a beach secured by a handful of Air Force cops.”

Walker pulled his blue feet from the water and began to massage the parts that always hurt as they warmed up. “You and I

have discussed how difficult it is to keep a black project secret. I am assuming that you can't read me in on the technology that you want me to help secure. But I have to ask, why don't you just put a division of our people out wherever this thing is to protect it?"

"Thad, that could just be enough of a tipoff to ensure that we end up with a shooting war. We need an experienced lead, given whatever resources they require, to put together and run a plan to blunt the intelligence attack and buy the time to get our 'project' operational."

"Are you paying for the fishing trip and to reimburse Uncle Sam for the use of one of his helicopters and the security staff? I'm too old to get dragged in front of some congressional hearing to explain misappropriation of government assets." He used his cane to get to his feet. "I'm on a retiree's income."

Chang looked up at the new \$80,000 GMC pickup parked next to Walker's home. He knew that his old colleague bought a new one every time the ashtrays got full, usually full of chewing gum wrappers, as Walker didn't smoke. "Yea, I guess so," Chang replied with a laugh. "I already pay about a hundred times the average taxes of most Americans, but yeah, I'll pick up the tab."

"Well, April's damned boring around here, I guess I'm in," replied Walker. His Gordon Setter, Winchester followed both men toward the house. Chang marveled at how the black and tan hunting dog stayed glued to Walker's left leg. He smiled, knowing of Walker's early life, one of constant chaos and how the man had overcome that. Thad Walker was the most thoughtful and disciplined man Chang knew, just the man to take on a task with 90 percent unknowns. Even his hunting dog was trained to a cutting edge.

The dog trotted in front of them only when one of Chang's security men appeared at the top of the hill.

"Win, sit," ordered Walker who patted the dog on the head as he passed. "Friend," he said, pointing at the guard.

CHAPTER 5

MADISON RIVER NEAR BOZEMAN MONTANA

ONE OF THE nice things about fishing the Madison was that for most of the distance, a person floating the river had cell coverage. That worked out for Chang and Walker, as they took their time working the sixteen foot drift boat along the shoreline, casting mostly terrestrial bug pattern flies toward the bank, hoping to find the large brown trout that laid near the bank to pick off insects that fell from overhanging grasses and brush.

Taking turns rowing with the other in the front of the boat casting, they communicated with a boat in front and one in back, each rowed by a local fishing guide. The guides had little to do except row as the security people in front of each boat spent all of their time watching along the banks and directing their guides each time the two men in the middle boat called to let them know they were stopping.

“It’s really nice of your buddy in the tackle shop to put this together with no notice,” said Chang, as he carefully released a fourteen-inch trout. Winchester stood, head over the edge of the

boat, nose almost in the water watching the fish swim away. He shook with excitement.

"Piece of cake," replied Walker. "It helps that I own the shop, and other than cover the expenses and taxes, he gets to keep any profits." He moved the boat further out into the current. "Don't even think about keeping a trout. Win will just pick it up and drop it back in the river."

The two men used fishing, much like Jana and Mat used golf. They had been fishing together since both ended up operating a very VIP float fishing operation on Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula years before as a cover for research on a new Russian radar system. The business still operated, now as a purely fishing venture. Chang's notoriety as director of the CIA meant that he could no longer fish there.

"Seems to me," offered Walker, as he slowed the boat allowing Chang to work a drift that was one of Walker's favorites, "that we either need complete specifications on this Chinese sub or the sub itself."

Chang smiled. This was the Thad Walker that he'd come to recruit. "Getting our hands on that sub would probably be about as difficult as any operation we've ever tried," answered Chang. "It has to be among the most carefully guarded secrets in the Chinese inventory. This caught us completely by surprise." He watched a couple of mallards working on a nest near a tiny side water. The president would never approve seizing a Chinese naval vessel so he would never ask. But if it somehow ended up running aground where it could be studied...

"Yeah, you're probably right," said Walker. "I suspect that even finding out where its home port is could take months if not years, and then we'd have to figure out how to penetrate their security. Might be easier to use HUMINT, Human Intelligence; good old fashioned spycraft. Maybe find a scientist or bureaucrat who worked on the project and pay them enough to change their life forever." He pulled the boat into the bank. "It's your turn to row." Win leaped from the boat to water a nearby tree.

Chang called his escorts, advising that they would be stopped for ten minutes. He stowed his rod along the side of the boat as Walker made his way to the casting rail in the front of the boat, carefully leaning into the platform to compensate for his weak leg.

"If you don't mind, I've got a couple of days of work to do before I can tear into this, and I need to arrange a sitter for Win," said Walker, as he tied a grasshopper pattern on his leader. "A bit early for hoppers, but sometimes the big old fish have such vivid memories that they hit it anyway. Let's go." He made a couple of false casts as the boat worked its way away from the bank. "I'll catch a commercial flight."

"Take your couple of days," replied Chang, but we can save a day if I send a plane for you. We can make it a night pickup in Missoula. I'll leave the guy you call the Kid to coordinate it and as your driver. As I recall you refer to anyone under fifty as Kid. I'll work on a location where you can take your dog."

"Yup, that's what I thought you'd say, replied Thad. "That would be a lot more comfortable for an old guy like me, and Win hates those big plastic kennels." He hooked a nice fish, losing it as he tried to release it anyway. Win glared at him just as he did when Thad missed a pheasant that Win had pointed. "It sure would be nice to take a look in that Chinese sub," he mumbled.

"What in the hell are you talking about?" offered Mat.

"I'm just thinking that we could kill several birds with one stone if we got our hands on that submarine. We'd learn how the damned thing works and I'll bet there would be a logbook with all of its missions, telling us where they have already snooped on us."

"But it would also change how the Chinese use it after we gave it back. It's not like the old days when we could just leave the crew in the middle of the Pacific without life vests."

"If it was easy, you wouldn't have come all the way out here," said Thad. He hooked a huge fish that began to run downstream, tearing line from his reel. "Or maybe you would have, just for the fishing."

CHAPTER 6

BEIJING

ONE THING THAT made General Quing's job a bit easier than his counterpart in the United States was that virtually all of the military intelligence operations were part of the Peoples Liberation Army. Every aspect of the Chinese military was part of the PLA, even the Air Force and Navy. While China had its share of inter-service rivalry, the intelligence operations had been centralized in 2016 into what was now labeled the Strategic Support Force.

Years before, Major General Dai Quingman had developed a military theory after watching U.S. operations in the Baltic and in the Middle East. He was the first Chinese general officer to recognize that information was often more important than bullets in war and that timely intelligence gave you a huge advantage at the beginning of hostilities and became more important as you tried to end them. He had been put in charge of what the military called 4PLA, the intelligence group that conducted electronic intelligence. 2PLA – the group responsible for HUMINT, human intelligence and spycraft – had resisted the turn to electronic intelligence for some time until someone finally pointed out that the group had trouble recruiting spies from outside of China, and

all their operators looked Chinese. In between the two groups, 3PLA was responsible for clandestine operations. 4PLA had slowly become the tail that wagged the dog.

Those three groups developed rapidly improving capabilities to the point where their abilities began to rival and worry the leadership of Chinese Communist Party. In the early 2000's military intelligence was hobbled by party hacks and policies. They were afraid that the centralized intelligence was a threat to the Party. In 2016, newly powerful President and General Secretary of the Party, Xi Jinping ordered a reorganization and cut much of the red tape that was hobbling intelligence operations.

Quing's job was to work through the political and technical problems of integrating all military intelligence, and he was slowly succeeding in molding the new Strategic Support Force. The simple fact that the heads of all three former divisions were now seated in his private conference room proved that. Quing, though was struggling to pay attention as General Ling worked his way through the second hour of what his Human Intelligence group was working on.

"In the first three months of the year," rattled the director of Human Intelligence, "we have placed twelve assets into major American universities. We successfully recruited two American students who are studying here in China. We—"

Quing interrupted his subordinate. "General, all of your report is about assets, with very little about what they are telling you. As I noted when I set this meeting up, the field commanders, especially those of the Air and Rocket Forces are deeply concerned about the facility that the Americans are building on Kiska Island. We have gathered almost nothing through airborne and naval intelligence targeting the project. Just normal construction chatter about a facility on one square mile that the American's carved out of the Historical Park and Aleutian Marine Park."

"Sir, I have nothing new to report. The one asset that I have close to Boeing states just what he has been reporting for a year.

Boeing is contracting the construction of..." Ling referred to his notes. "...of a twelve thousand square foot concrete and steel facility with living quarters for thirty-five staff. The project includes a new port with modern docks and a new 10,000-foot airstrip. Boeing claims it is their first project for the American Park Service. My agent only has secondhand information on other Boeing employees who are actually working on the project."

"That we knew months ago," replied Quing. "Based on satellite photos, the project is almost complete. General Liu's aircraft detected minute trace amounts of radiation from one shipment that was moved to the site three months ago. We assume that the site will be powered by a small nuclear reactor. What in the hell is so important about this facility that the Americans would violate their own laws on disrupting parks and marine sanctuaries and their long-standing aversion to standalone nuclear power? General Liu's people have also detected signals that indicate a very unique radar being tested. It may be linking with the data from their new low earth orbit observations satellites."

"Sir," said Ling, "all I have is the same guess that I gave you when we discussed that nuclear reactor installation. Maybe this is the location of the new laser weapon that I warned you about three years ago. Boeing and Raytheon are working on a large aperture laser. With adequate nuclear power, such a laser could concentrate its beam and attack targets at great distances. The limitation would be the height of the installation and the curvature of the earth. Most of our analysts believe that the best use of such a weapon would be to target cruise missiles and aircraft." Ling snuffed out the cigarette that he hadn't touched in five minutes.

"Could such a laser be used to intercept intercontinental missiles?" Quing looked around the room, realizing that none of the people in the room were going to volunteer an answer. Finally, he turned to his director of electronic intelligence. "General, Liu, can you answer that question?"

“Maybe,” was Liu’s answer. A laser weapon will lose a great deal of power just penetrating the earth’s atmosphere. I am no expert on such weapons, but any missile with a trajectory well away from the weapon would probably survive a beam that had to fight its way through our atmosphere. In the North Pacific, where the weather is often terrible, the beam would be even more degraded. Our newest technology allows us to change the trajectories of our rockets, making them hard for America to hit with their anti-rocket missiles.” Liu toyed with the coffee cup in front of him. “But the Americans are damned good at technology or we wouldn’t spend so much money and effort to steal what they engineer. A laser could retarget in seconds. If such a laser was capable of hitting high-flying rockets, it would change everything. For ultra-high-speed rockets, it wouldn’t have to penetrate the skin as it would to destroy the electronics of an ICBM. If it just opened a minute tear in the outer hull, the friction of the missile moving at thousands of kilometers per hour would rip the vehicle apart.”

The youngest member of the assembly faked a cough to be recognized. General Yang had come out of the Army’s special operations, driven to complete two doctorates in the time given him to get one. He ran clandestine operations for the PLA.

“Yes, Yang,” offered Quing with a wide grin. “You have a plan of how we can swoop in with one of your operations teams and answer all of our questions?”

Yang, just thirty-three and one of the military’s rising stars, laughed. The generational difference between him and the others showed as his laugh was met with icy stares. “No, sir, but we could mount an EEL mission to see what we might find. Our EEL could put men on that island without any construction workers noticing. We could grab one of them and interrogate him.”

“General Yang,” replied Quing, “one of the things that we have worked out with all of our adversaries is to respect the game we all

play. Part of that respect is a tacit agreement that we don't kill or kidnap theirs and they don't kill or kidnap ours."

"Sir, sometimes such sacrifices are necessary."

"Like when two of your operators on an EEL mission helped a healthy security man drown on that Guam project?"

"The Americans reported that he drowned, probably after falling into the ocean. The waters of the North Pacific are far more dangerous than those around Guam. One man who goes missing won't stir up any suspicion."

"Perhaps Yang, but how will you select a construction worker with the knowledge to tell us what they are building and how threatening it is? If one doesn't help much, do you propose to grab another and then another until you can piece together a picture. Won't several missing men create just the security apparatus that could stop you when we have a legitimate target on that island? Won't it send the American's on a mission to understand your EEL?"

"Respectfully, General Quing, if the Americans build a laser weapon that can shoot down our missiles, cruise missiles and aircraft, then we are rendered impotent. Where are we then, sir?"

"General Yang, that would probably leave us right where we are now, as a strong regional power rather than a Pacific-wide power. It would leave us naked, our strategic deterrence very weak. Our work would increase, as the party demanded that we develop comparable weapons and defenses for theirs. Your team's ability to penetrate their security around that island might be our only way to do that quickly. Don't piss away our only advantage by forcing the enemy to build a wall around a facility that you may need to target later. I am not saying that is acceptable, but that is my answer to your question."