

RANDOM HOUSE *e*BOOKS

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# Scimitar SL-2

Patrick Robinson

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## About the Book

**A volcano. A nuclear missile. An explosive, deadly threat to the West.**

The murder of a prominent geophysicist and the eruption of Mount St. Helens are viewed as coincidence by the White House. But Admiral Morgan suspects the involvement of his nemesis, terrorist Major Ray Kerman. Then comes the chilling threat - Kerman has a nuclear device, Scimitar SL-2, which he intends to launch straight into the heart of the volcano Cumbre Vieja, causing a massive tsunami to devastate the East Coast of the United States. Shocked into action, Admiral Morgan returns to the White House to run Operation High Tide - a desperate race to evacuate the East Coast and locate the nuclear submarine before it launches its deadly weapon ...

## About the Author

Patrick Robinson is the author of seven international bestsellers, as well as his forthcoming novel, *Hunter Killer*. He is also the author of several non-fiction bestsellers including *True Blue* (with Dan Topolski) and *Born to Win*. He is the co-author with Admiral Sir Sandy Woodward of *One Hundred Days*.

Also by Patrick Robinson

*Nimitz Class*  
*Kilo Class*  
*H.M.S. Unseen*  
*Seawolf*  
*The Shark Mutiny*  
*Barracuda 945*  
*Hunter Killer*

Non-fiction  
*Classic Lines*  
*Decade of Champions*  
*The Golden Post*  
*Born to Win*  
*True Blue*  
*One Hundred Days*  
*Horsetrader*

# Scimitar SL-2

Patrick Robinson



arrow books

## CAST OF PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

### **Senior Command (Political)**

Charles McBride (Democrat, Rhode Island – President of the United States)

Vice President Paul Bedford (Democrat, Virginia)

Cyrus Romney (National Security Adviser)

Senator Edward Kennedy (Senior Member Senate Armed Service Committee)

Bill Hatchard (President McBride's Chief-of-Staff)

Admiral Arnold Morgan (Supreme Commander Operation High Tide)

### **National Security Agency**

Rear Admiral George R. Morris (Director)

Lt. Commander James Ramshawe (Assistant to the Director)

### **US Naval and Military Senior Command**

General Tim Scannell (Chairman of the Joint Chiefs)

Admiral Alan Dickson (Chief of Naval Operations)

Admiral Dick Greening (Commander-in-Chief Pacific Fleet CINCPACFLT)

Admiral Frank Doran (Commander-in-Chief Atlantic Fleet CINCLANT)

Rear Admiral Freddie Curran (Commander Submarines Pacific Fleet COMSUBPAC)

General Kenneth Clark (Commandant United States Marine Corps)

US General Bart Boyce (Supreme Allied Commander NATO)

Rear Admiral John Bergstrom (Commander Special War Command SPECWARCOM)

### **Combat Commanders**

Admiral George Gillmore (Search Group Commander, Task Group 201.1 – USS *Coronado*)

Captain Joe Wickman (CO USS *Simpson*)  
Captain C.J. Smith (CO USS *Elrod*)  
Captain Eric Nielsen (CO USS *Nicholas*)  
Captain Clint Sammons (CO USS *Klakring*)  
Major Blake Gill (Commander, Patriot Missile Batteries)

### **US Navy Seahawk Combat Pilots**

Lt. Paul Lubrano  
Lt. Ian Holman  
Lt. Don Brickle

### **Middle Eastern High Command**

Admiral Mohammed Badr (Commander-in-Chief Iranian Navy)  
General Ravi Rashood (HAMAS Supreme Commander Combat)  
Lt. Commander Shakira Rashood (Special Navigation and Targeting – *Barracuda II*)  
Rear Admiral Ben Badr (CO *Barracuda II*)

### **Ship's Company *Barracuda II***

Captain Ali Akbar Mohtaj (Executive Officer)  
Commander Abbas Shafii (senior submariner Iranian Navy and nuclear specialist)  
Commander Hamidi Abdolrahim (Chief Nuclear Engineer)  
Lt. Ashtari Mohammed (Navigation Officer)  
Chief Petty Officer Ali Zahedi (Chief of Boat)  
Chief Petty Officer Ardeshir Tikku (nuclear computer controls specialist)  
Major Ahmed Sabah (freedom fighter and personal bodyguard to General Rashood)

### **Foreign Military**

Colonel Dae-jung (Commandant Nuclear Operations, Kwanmo-bong Complex, North Korea)



Captain Habib Abdu Camara (Commander-in-Chief Navy of Senegal)

**Civilian Connections**

Professor Paul Landon (Volcanologist, University College, London)

David Gavron (Israeli Ambassador to Washington, ex-Mossad Chief)

Mr Tony Tilton (Seattle Bank President and star witness)

Mrs Kathy Morgan (wife of Admiral Arnold Morgan, recalled to White House)

His Excellency Mark Vollmer (United States Ambassador to Dubai)

# PROLOGUE

*10.30 p.m. Thursday 8 May 2008*

*Kensington, London*

PROFESSOR PAUL LANDON, known to an entire generation of university students as 'Lava' Landon, hurried through the lower ground floor doorway of the Royal Geographical Society and out into the darkness of wide, tree-lined Exhibition Road, the capital's highway of enormous museums running south from Hyde Park.

He paused on the broad greystone doorstep, a spot where many another great man had stood before him – the explorers, Captain Scott of the Antarctic and Ernest Shackleton; the first conquerors of Everest, Sir Edmund Hillary, who made the summit, and Lord Hunt, who led the historic 1953 expedition.

Like Professor Landon, they were celebrated Fellows of the Royal Geographical Society, and, like him, they had all delivered a series of stunning Spring Lectures inside the great building, at the lectern of the auditorium. Like him, they had packed the place, and held their audience spellbound.

The prime difference between the great adventurers of the twentieth century and Professor 'Lava' Landon was that of subject. Whereas Scott, Shackleton, Hillary and Hunt had entertained with breathtaking accounts of human survival in freezing conditions, the professor had just explained in dazzling detail the forthcoming end of the world. No firm dates, of course. Like all masters of global geophysics, Professor Landon operated in approximate time-slots of 10,000 years.

The oncoming catastrophe would likely occur in around 7,000 years, he concluded. 'But then again,' he added, 'it could just as easily happen next Friday, shortly after lunch.'

The typical Royal Geographical crowd, the understated, well-heeled, scholarly English elite which occupied the auditorium, had loved the lecture. It had been meticulously planned, and flawlessly delivered, with excellent graphics and film clips.

It illuminated the mighty eruptions of volcanoes around the world, the coast-shuddering effects of tidal waves, the ravages of earthquakes. But mostly it focused on the super-eruptions of the past like the one which split Indonesia's Krakatoa apart in 1883, wiping out 36,000 residents of Java and Sumatra.

He told them of the staggering eruption of Wyoming's Yellowstone National Park volcano, which dumped molten magma and ash onto California, Texas and even onto the seabed of the Caribbean. It actually happened 650,000 years ago but 'Lava' Landon made it seem like last summer.

He produced a graphic study of the pulverising blast of Mount St Helens in Washington State, when the north flank swelled into a massive balloon of lava, before exploding, blowing the mountainside asunder and obliterating nearly 400 square miles of forest.

That happened in 1980, and it led Professor Landon inevitably to the climax of his speech – the possibility of a *tsunami*, a Japanese word describing a series of mountainous waves, generated either by an earthquake or, more likely, a massive volcanic landslide into deep ocean.

Professor Landon's closing focus was on the new potential landslide on the southwest coast of La Palma, the northwesternmost of the Canary Islands. Jutting out from deep Atlantic waters, La Palma stands 375 miles off the coast of southern Morocco.

Fact was, he explained, a gigantic hunk of volcanic rock, several miles long, set on a searing fault line in the earth's

crust, had slipped in the last forty or fifty years, maybe 12 feet down the steep cliff, detaching from the west flank. And somewhere behind this colossal, unstable chunk of rock, lay, potentially, the simmering core of the mighty volcano of Cumbre Vieja.

‘That lets rip, the lot goes,’ Professor Landon asserted, brightly. ‘It’d send a staggeringly large rock, several cubic miles of it, crashing off the west flank of the volcano, straight into the Atlantic at more than 200 mph, and surging along the ocean floor, at maybe 400 mph. I’m talking about one of the largest landslides in the past million years. Actually I’m talking about the total collapse of the southwest section of La Palma.’

The packed audience of ex-military and naval officers, scientists, academics and scions of ancient landed families which had always shown an interest in such scientific matters, had listened wide-eyed as the professor explained the establishment of a gigantic column of waves, ascending from the seabed to the surface, driving forward to reach speeds of 500 mph, and rising to a height of maybe 200 feet into the air as they arrived in shallow coastal waters.

He described how the monstrous tidal surge would wipe out large hunks of coastal southern England, Spain and West Africa. And then, within nine hours from the moment of the rock’s impact on the surface of the Atlantic off southwestern La Palma, the massive wall of water would travel across the Atlantic and obliterate the entire East Coast of the United States.

‘If Cumbre Vieja blows, this *will* happen,’ he confirmed. ‘A rare and terrible mega-*tsunami*. Scientific research has estimated a number of intense waves, still perhaps 150 feet high, crashing into the restricted seaways off Lower Manhattan, and then flattening the Wall Street area of New York with its very first sweep.

‘The opening tidal wave would suck the debris out of the streets, and flatten the ground, before the next one of the

wave series hit, demolishing buildings up to possibly fifteen blocks from the waterfront. And these giant waves – each one more than 100 feet high – would keep coming, progressively, until all of New York City was levelled.

‘The biggest *tsunami* in recorded history. And all because of a single volcano.’

Professor Paul Landon was one of the world’s pre-eminent volcanologists, Benfield Greig Professor of Geophysical Hazards at University College, London, and Director of the university’s Hazard Centre.

He had worked on the slopes of dozens of the world’s most dangerous volcanoes, often successfully forecasting powerful eruptions. His nickname was well earned. And his skill in assessing the temperature and intent of the magma was matched only by his brilliance at the lectern.

A bearded man of medium height, with pale blue eyes and the inevitable tweed sports jacket, chequered shirt and college tie, he was forty-four years old and at the height of his game, his lectures in demand all over the world.

‘Lava’ Landon lived outside London in the commuter belt of Buckinghamshire with his wife Valerie, a City lawyer. Their two sons, aged fourteen and fifteen, collectively considered their father to be more or less insane, hearing almost every day of their young lives that the world would probably end next week.

Their scepticism didn’t faze Professor Landon in the least; like many of his fellow academics he was quite astonishingly self-absorbed and fireproof to criticism. As he stood now in the hoofprints of the mighty Scott, Shackleton, Hillary and Hunt, he reflected on an evening’s work well done.

He knew he had mesmerised the entire audience. What he wasn’t aware of, however, was one particular listener. Seated among the sea of spellbound faces, at the back at the auditorium, a twenty-three-year-old Palestinian freedom fighter, Ahmed Sabah, was taking notes, intent on every word, every graphic.

After the speech, Sabah had slipped out quickly and was now waiting quietly in the dark southern precincts of the Albert Hall, London's spectacular rounded concert hall, situated a few yards from the Royal Geographical Society.

As 'Lava' Landon walked along Kensington Gore, turning into the courtyard of the great hall of music, named for Queen Victoria's consort Prince Albert, several thousand fans began to flood through the doors after a concert celebrating popular bands of the eighties.

It actually took Paul Landon four more minutes to reach the top of the long, wide flight of steps, which lead down from the hall to the notoriously dark rear side road. There were hundreds of fans headed the same way and they almost engulfed the great geophysicist on the steps.

Directly below him he could see a black Range Rover, illegally parked, close to the sidewalk, no lights, facing the wrong way, with no one in the driver's seat.

Ahmed Sabah and his two colleagues chose that moment to strike from behind. They expertly rammed a black canvas bag over Paul Landon's head, holding him in an iron grip, and bundled him down the last two steps and into the back of the waiting vehicle.

There was no time to cry out, no time to fight back. An accented voice kept hissing into his ear, urging him to remain quiet unless he wanted to die and against his left kidney he could feel the unmistakable push of a large knife.

It's curious how the swarm of preoccupied people could have missed entirely what was happening in their midst. It must have been their single-minded determination to get home - searching for cabs, or late buses, hoping to make the London underground station at South Kensington in time for one of the infrequent late-night trains.

No one paid attention to the incident, certainly not the two London policemen, on patrol with a large German shepherd named Roger, who were swept along by the

throng spilling out of the concert hall at the top of the steps, 30 feet above the scene of the kidnap.

True to the modern ethos of the London police they missed the crime but homed in instantly on the illegal parking, fighting their way down the steps to apprehend the Range Rover's driver, their hands already fumbling urgently for their trusty breathalysers.

By the time they arrived, the driver's seat was occupied. Seated behind the wheel, his eyes hidden behind dark glasses, was the former SAS major, Ray Kerman, currently known as General Ravi Rashood, Supreme Commander of the revolutionary forces of HAMAS and quite possibly the most dangerous and wanted terrorist in the world.

Right now he was revving the engine impatiently, causing the policemen to unleash the huge dog, which flew at the car in two bounds, teeth bared, going for the driver's right arm through the open window.

Big mistake, Roger. From the back seat of the Range Rover, Ahmed Sabah almost blew the dog's head off with a burst from a silenced AK-47. The policeman running in front could not believe what he had seen with his own eyes, and he stopped some three yards from the vehicle, the late attack dog Roger in a heap at his feet.

Ahmed's light machine-gun spoke quietly again, three dull muffled thumps, and a short line of bullets through the forehead flung the constable backwards to the ground, dead.

The second policeman, seeing the dog but not yet his fallen colleague, ran instinctively towards the driver. But he was too late. The general was out on the sidewalk and seized the astonished cop's raised right arm, flinging him down in one fluid motion, his head almost on the seat.

He grabbed him by the throat and rammed his head against the door's recess. A split second later Ahmed slammed the door shut with stupendous force, cracking the policeman's skull from the bridge of his nose to the hairline.

At that moment, the Range Rover became the most expensive nutcracker since Pyotr Tchaikovsky worked his magic more than one hundred years before.

Ravi spun the police officer around and, with the butt of his gloved right hand, thundered a terrible upward punch into his already bleeding nose. The force rammed the bone clean into the brain, the classic unarmed combat killing blow of the SAS. The London bobby was dead before he slumped back onto the edge of the sidewalk.

The men from HAMAS had practised the 'defensive' operation for weeks, and there had been no mistakes. Only the presence of the big German-bred attack dog had surprised them. But not for long. From the moment they first grabbed the professor, to their quick getaway, only seventeen seconds had passed.

And now the Range Rover made a full turn around, its lights still dark, and headed for Exhibition Road, the back-seat prisoner unaware of the carnage that quickly grew smaller in the rear-view mirror.

It took a full five minutes for two or three people among the pop concert crowd to realise that something had happened. No, Roger was not taking a nap. Yes, that was actual blood. Yes, the policeman lying flat on his back had indeed been shot dead and the holes in his forehead were not birthmarks. And, yes, the other chap in the blue coat slumped face down in the gutter was definitely a policeman. And no, he was not drunk. And yes, like Roger and his colleague, he was also dead.

Two London policemen, and their guard dog, slain at the bottom of the great stone stairway, south of the Albert Hall.

Finally, more than seven minutes after the Range Rover had left, someone dialled London's 999 Emergency Service on a cellphone. Within another five minutes, two patrol cars were on the scene. By that time General Rashood and his men had changed cars and were driving leisurely through



west London to a cast-iron 'safe house' owned by a few fellow Muslims in the suburb of Hounslow.

Professor Landon's hands were now bound together with plastic masking tape, and he was still in the bag, in every sense of the phrase. He was sitting between two of the world's most lethal Muslim fundamentalists and in answer to his frightened pleas to know what was going on, since his captors plainly had the wrong man, he was told softly and firmly, *keep quiet, Dr Landon, we wish only to talk to you and then you will be set free.*

The first part was accurate. Almost. The second part was a lie. 'Lava' Landon already knew far too much.

Back at the scene of the crime, two ambulances were transporting the bodies of the murdered officers to St Mary's Hospital, Paddington, an RSPCA van was loading the carcass of Roger into a box and the police were desperately looking for witnesses.

But no one had heard gunshots. No one had actually seen either policeman being attacked. No, it was impossible to identify the exact type of four-wheel-drive wagon, which may have contained the criminals. No one had seen its number plate.

Someone thought it had driven off with no lights. Someone thought it turned right, down Exhibition Road. Someone else thought it turned left. No one could cast a single ray of light on the physical appearance of its occupants.

It was the most brutal slaying of police officers in London for nearly half a century, since the night gangsters gunned down three policemen in Shepherd's Bush, a couple of miles to the west of the Albert Hall.

But at that time the police had been pretty sure who had committed the crime within about five minutes of the shooting. This time they did not have the remotest idea. They had no clues, no witnesses, and absolutely no motives

to work on. And, of course, they had no notion whatsoever that a celebrity kidnap victim was being held in the back of the getaway vehicle.

The interrogation of Professor Landon began at one o'clock in the morning. The black bag had been removed from his head, his wrists were unbound, and he was given coffee at a large dining-room table in a white room with no windows. Flanking the door were two Middle Eastern-looking guards, wearing blue jeans, black boots and short brown leather jackets. Both were holding AK-47s.

Before him sat a broad-shouldered, British Army officer type, more formally dressed, no longer wearing sunglasses. He too was Middle Eastern in appearance, but his voice and tone could have been honed nowhere else on earth but at a leading English public school.

The discussion was about volcanoes.

*How many genuine eruptions in the world in recent years?*

*Probably a hundred since 2002, maybe a few more.*

*Can you name some?*

*Certainly . . . Montserrat in the West Indies . . . Karangetang, Indonesia . . . San Cristobal, Nicaragua . . . Tangkubanparahu in Java . . . at least three on the Kamchatka Peninsula, Siberia . . . Fuego in Guatemala . . . Stromboli in Italy . . . Kavachi Seamount, Solomon Islands . . . Chuckinadak Island, Alaska . . .*

*How many in the past twelve months?*

*You mean serious ones, or just rumblings?*

*How many explosions?*

*Well, Colima in Mexico . . . Etna in Sicily . . . Fuego, Guatemala . . . the one in the Solomon Islands, and all three of the big ones on Kamchatka . . . plus Kilauea in Hawaii . . . Maman in Papua New Guinea . . . always the Soufrière Hills in Montserrat . . . with a bit of a shout from Mount St Helens in Washington State. Also some dire rumblings in the Canary Islands - the most serious of all.*

*Because of the tsunami?*

*Absolutely.*

By 7 a.m. Professor Landon was growing anxious. One hour from now, he was due in his office in the splendid white-pillared Benfield Greig building on Gower Street, near Euston Square. As the senior professor in UCL's Department of Geological Sciences, his absence from his second-floor lecture room was sure to be noticed. But the questions continued, and he had little choice but to answer them.

*What would it take to explode an active rumbling volcano? A big bomb? Maybe a couple of cruise missiles straight down the crater?*

*Well, the magma is very close to the surface in the Montserrat volcano on the western side of the island. I should think you could bring that one forward with a well-aimed hand grenade. It's never really stopped erupting in the last five years.*

*How about Mount St Helens?*

*More difficult. But there have been small explosions and a lot of rumblings in the past several months. And remember. When St Helens blew in 1980 it unleashed forces equal to four Hiroshimas every second. But it's very dangerous now and getting worse. I'd say four big cruise missile explosions bang in the right place on the vulnerable south side would almost certainly unleash its lava again.*

*And Cumbre Vieja?*

*You mean to cause the mega-tsunami I was talking about last night? No conventional explosion would prise that huge hunk of rock off the cliffside. The volcano would have to erupt. And you'd need a sizeable nuclear blast to make that happen.*

*You mean a full-blooded nuclear bomb?*

*No, no. Not that big. But you mentioned cruise missiles. And if you were thinking short-range, not ballistic, I'd say a medium-sized nuclear warhead would probably blow a big enough hole to release the magma.*

*And that starts the landslide into the bottom of the ocean?*

*No. No. Not on its own. You see, that whole line of volcanoes in southern La Palma contains a vast amount of water deep in the mountains. The release of the magma bursting up to the surface creates stupendous heat inside the rock. In turn this causes several cubic miles of water to boil rapidly, and then expand, like a pressure cooker. That's what will blow the mountain to pieces, and will most certainly collapse the entire southwest section of La Palma into the sea. A landslide on a scale not seen on this earth for a million years.*

*So, if you fired a missile at the vulnerable spot on the volcano of Cumbre Vieja, which you said tonight was the most active, you'd need it to penetrate the surface and then explode deep below the ground.*

*It would need to hit hard and pierce the rock strata which guards the lava, before it blew. The released magma surging up from the core of the earth would then erupt into the atmosphere, drawing zillions of tons of incinerating magma right behind it. The underground lakes would boil, and then flash off into steam. That's when the whole mountain range would explode.*

The former Major Ray Kerman liked Professor Landon. This was a man who expertly understood explosions, both natural and man-made, and who was consumed by his subject. And he did not dwell upon ramifications. He spoke frankly, as a scientist. Very much to the point. Untroubled by the obvious innuendoes of the equally obvious terrorist who held him prisoner. The science was what mattered to Professor Landon.

Yes, General Rashood liked him. This whole thing was rather a pity.

'Thank you, Professor,' said the HAMAS general. 'Thank you very much. We'll have some breakfast now, and talk more.'

# CHAPTER ONE

*Thursday 8 January 2009*

*The White House, Washington, DC*

THE BRAND NEW Democratic Administration, fresh from a narrow election victory, was moving into the West Wing. With the exception of the President, who knew he was going anyway at the end of his second term, every hour of every day was a trauma for the outgoing Republicans. For the big-hitters of the military and government handing over the reins to what most of them believed to be a bunch of naive, inexperienced, half-assed limousine liberals, led by an idealistic young President from Rhode Island, who would have been pushed to hold down a proper executive job, well, anywhere, was appalling.

And today was probably the worst day of all. Admiral Arnold Morgan, the retiring President's National Security Adviser, was about to leave the White House for the last time. His big nineteenth-century naval desk had already been cleared and removed, and now there were only a few goodbyes left. The door to his office was wide open, and the admiral, accompanied by his alarmingly beautiful secretary Kathy O'Brien, was ready to go. In attendance was the Secretary of State Harcourt Travis, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Tim Scannell, the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Alan Dickson, the Director of the National Security Agency, Rear Admiral George Morris, and his personal assistant Lt. Commander James Ramshawe, American by birth, Australian parents.

As the great man took his leave, they all stood in a small 'family' huddle, veterans in the last half dozen years of

some of the most brutal secret operations ever conducted by the United States military. Their devotion to Arnold had grown from the series of great triumphs on the international stage, due, almost entirely, to the strengths of the admiral's intellect.

Like Caesar, Admiral Morgan was not lovable – except to Kathy – but his grasp of international politics, string pulling, poker playing, threats and counter-threats, Machiavellian propaganda, and the conduct of restricted, classified military operations, was second to none. At all of the above he was a virtuoso, driven by an unbending sense of patriotism. During his reign in the West Wing he had intimidated, cajoled, outwitted and bullied some of the most powerful men on earth. His creed was to fight and fight, and never to lower his blade short of victory. General Douglas MacArthur and General George Patton were his heroes. And now the admiral was departing, leaving his Washington confidants devastated, convinced that another heaven and another earth must surely pass before such a man could be again.

Many of the high-ranking civilians would go themselves within a few short weeks of the incoming Democrats, but none so utterly ignominiously as Admiral Morgan himself. Called on the telephone by a Miss Betty-Ann Jones, a Southern liberal who had never been to Washington before, he was told, 'President McBride thinks it would be better if y'all resigned raht now, since he dun't think you and he's gonna get along real well.'

Arnold Morgan had needed no second bidding. Five minutes later he had dictated his short letter of resignation to Kathy, and ten minutes later they were working on their wedding date, the colossal job of National Security Adviser no longer standing between them.

At Arnold's farewell dinner, at a favourite Georgetown restaurant, Secretary Travis, always the voice of irony and sly humour, had arrived at the table humming theatrically

loudly, the tune of 'Those Wedding Bells Are Breaking Up That Old Gang Of Mine.' Shortly he would return to Harvard to take up a professorship.

The military members of Arnold's inner circle would remain at their posts, more or less, under a new Commander-in-Chief.

And now Admiral Morgan stood at the great oak door to his office. He hesitated briefly, and nodded curtly to the empty room. Then he strode outside to the corridor, where his former colleagues waited. He smiled with some difficulty. 'I'd be grateful,' he said, 'if each one of you would come and take me by the hand.'

And so they said their farewells, each consumed by the private sense of trust they all shared with the National Security Chief. The last handshake was with the youngest of them, Lt. Commander Ramshawe, with whom Admiral Morgan had a near father-son relationship.

'I'll miss you, Jimmy,' he said.

'And I'll miss you, sir,' replied the young officer. 'I don't suppose you'll ever know how much.'

'Thanks, kid,' said the admiral informally. And then he turned on his heel, immaculately tailored in a dark grey suit, gleaming black leather lace-up shoes, blue shirt and Naval Academy tie.

He walked resolutely, shoulders back, upright, full of dignity, with his bride-to-be, Kathy, at his side. He walked among the portraits of Presidents past, nodding sharply to General Eisenhower, as he always did. He walked like a man not departing, but like a young officer recently summoned to the colours. In his mind a lifetime of thoughts, a lifetime of service to his country. The different people he had been . . . the commanding officer of a surface ship and then of a nuclear submarine out of Norfolk, Virginia . . . the Intelligence tsar, head of the National Security Agency in Maryland . . . and finally the right hand of a faltering Republican President who ended up knowing neither loyalty

nor patriotism. That never mattered. Arnold had enough for both of them.

Walking along the familiar corridors, the admiral heard once more the swish of the waves on a ship's hull heading out of a threatened harbour into the great rolling swells of the ocean, the metallic scream of the anchor chain, the terse instructions of the COB, and, in the deepest recesses of his mind, the shouts and commands of long-lost US Navy SEALs whom he had never seen, never met. Obeying his orders. Always obeying. As he himself obeyed his. Mostly.

He heard again the bells of the watch, tolling off the hours. And the smooth slide of his submarine's periscope. Once outside, he knew he would inevitably glance upwards in the chill December breeze, and he would see it, snapping so damn proudly, right above him. The flag, always the flag.

He wore no overcoat, though Kathy was cosily engulfed in a light brown full-length shearling number. And just before they turned left towards the main doors and out onto the West Wing veranda, she stretched out her right hand to take his, confirming once more he would not be alone as he left his quarterdeck for the last time and steered their ship into the long years of retirement. Admiral Morgan was sixty-four.

No one who was there would ever forget the departure of Arnold Morgan. Each and every man in the lower corridor felt a sense of control slipping away, as if a giant warship had somehow lost its helm. There had already been reports of civilians replacing the Marine guards at the White House. Patient young men in their early thirties were shaking their heads and talking sadly about the primitive ways of the US military under a Republican Administration. The new young ideologues came from a different world, the world of the future, where education of the Third World was paramount. Where no one was evil, just ignorant. Where death and destruction were to be replaced by more and more financial aid, where tyrants must be taught the ways of the West, not murdered. And where the poor and the helpless had to be



given succour, and trained Americans had to work on their lack of self-esteem. And where absolutely no one could ever be harmed in the interests of revenge, conquest or the destruction of a rogue regime.

Massive naval and military cuts were on the horizon. President Charles McBride was a globalist, certain in his own mind that reason, reason and mercy, would always prevail, however misguided a foe may appear. But like President Clinton, and Carter before him, McBride was a vacillator, a career politician accustomed to compromises, always looking for the middle ground. He was a man of none but political conviction, the way forward for the lifelong lightweight. And he was chronically inexperienced in the harsher reaches of international diplomacy. President-elect McBride would not have recognised a scheming, self-interested statesman at six paces.

The one thing Charles McBride did know, however, was the futility of spending zillions of dollars on defence, if you weren't planning to fight. No one had yet told him the age-old mantra of the wise – *you want peace, you better prepare for war. And if you don't, you'll end up paying for it in blood, sorrow and tears.* Or, as Chairman Mao would say, *real power comes from the barrel of a gun.*

Most of the men still standing in the corridor had a distant idea of the truth of that creed. And most of them believed it was probably true. And that everything would be fine, so long as the USA held the biggest gun of all. But if ever there was a US President who could have used Arnold Morgan in the next office, it was surely the forty-seven-year-old Charles McBride.

And as Arnold's footsteps disappeared from the building, General Scannell muttered, 'Jesus. I don't know what's gonna happen now.'

And Harcourt Travis added, 'Neither, General, do I.'

A few hours later, Admiral Morris and Lt. Commander Ramshawe sat disconsolately in the rear seat of the Navy staff car driving back to the National Security Agency in Fort Meade, Maryland.

'Hard to believe he's gone, Jimmy,' grunted the Agency's Director.

'I just can't seem to accept it.'

'Nor I.'

'It's not gonna be the same any more, is it?'

'Nothing is. It's gonna be worse. Because right here we got an incoming President who does not understand what kind of threats this country might face. He thinks we're all crazy.'

'I know he does - can you imagine, sir? Getting some secretary to call up and tell Admiral Morgan he's fired. Bloody oath.'

'God knows who he'll replace him with.'

'Oh, he'll probably come up with some nice little social worker, team leader in the Peace Corps or something . . . Jesus, I can't believe this is happening.'

Jimmy Ramshawe shook his head.

'The trouble with Intelligence,' said Admiral Morris, 'is that you need someone in government who starts off believing you are not some kind of a dumb ass and who will listen knowing that we speak from the kind of experience he simply doesn't have. Otherwise there's no point having a vast Intelligence network, which costs billions to run. Not if its top operatives are wasting half their time trying to prove the unprovable, to guys who are supposed to be on our side.'

'I know, sir. That was the best thing about Admiral Morgan. He never dismissed what we said, always took it into consideration, at least. He was some kind of a bloke, right? The best I ever met.'

'And the best you ever will meet, young James.'

The two men rode in companionable but sombre silence to the northwestern suburbs of Washington and then out into the country to Fort Meade. Once there, the Director headed to his office, while Lt. Commander Ramshawe retreated to the chaos of his own paper-strewn lair for one of his favourite parts of the week.

Thursday afternoons. For thirty-year-old Ramshawe it represented a couple of hours of pleasurable study. It was the day his personal newspapers arrived: the *Daily Mail* and the *Telegraph* from London, the *Age* from Melbourne, the *Morning Herald* from Sydney and the *Toronto Globe*.

All of them were full of snippets of news, diplomatic, military, government, society, finance – stuff you would not necessarily find in the *Washington Post* or even the *Wall Street Journal*.

Curiously, there was one page Jimmy loved above all others. It was the Court and Society page of the London *Daily Telegraph*, a somewhat glorious mishmash of esoteric events, starting with the daily routine of the Queen and the various members of her family who were paid by the British Government's Civil List.

Her appointments were listed, as were those of Prince Philip and Prince Charles. There was reported all manner of obscure educational events and appointments, at England's great public schools, and the universities of Oxford, Cambridge and London. There were lists of mourners at important memorial services, lists of medals, awards and appointments for the Navy, Army and Air Force, including Commonwealth Services.

There were records of service reunions, announcements of important engagements, weddings and funerals. An *In Memoriam* column in which service families annually remembered officers who had fallen in action, often as long as sixty years ago.

Jimmy regularly devoured this page, making notes which he would later transfer to his private computer file. For a

new Flag Officer Submarines, Royal Navy, for example, he would fill in the new man's name and career highlights, just in case Fort Meade needed him in the future. Quick cross-reference. Instant knowledge. Lt. Commander Ramshawe was the consummate Intelligence professional.

In the *Telegraph* of Monday, 5 January, there were a few items which amused him and a few that caused him to scribble hurriedly, but there was one word, in particular which almost caused him to spill his coffee.

'Murdered' it said. Right there in the dreariest of Universities sections. A small down-column paragraph announcing the appointment of a new Senior Lecturer at the Benfield Greig Geohazard Research Centre at University College, London. Dr Hillary Betts, a volcanologist, *replacing Professor Paul Landon, who was discovered murdered in west London last May.*

'Murdered! Streuth,' said James. 'Never saw that bloody word on this page before. Like seeing a stripper illustrating a prayer book.'

Instinctively, he went on line, looked up the London *Telegraph* and keyed in a search for Professor Paul Landon. To his surprise a sizeable front-page headline in the edition of Monday, 12 May appeared.

PROFESSOR PAUL LANDON MISSING  
*World's Top Volcano Expert Vanishes after Royal  
Geographical Lecture*

There followed a detailed account of Professor Landon and his achievements, followed by a police report on his failure to return home to Buckinghamshire after addressing the Royal Geographical Society on the evening of 8 May.

There were quotes from the Royal Geographical Society's General Secretary, and from colleagues at University College, and of course from his wife. But no one had the slightest idea what had happened to him.

Lt. Commander Ramshawe soon found out for himself. The front-page headline over all eight columns on Thursday 15 May read:

PROFESSOR PAUL LANDON FOUND MURDERED  
*Washed Up on Thames Island - Two Bullets to the Brain*

In the opinion of the police pathologist, Paul Landon had been shot twice in an 'execution-style' killing, and then dumped in the river. The coxswain of a London rowing club eight had spotted the body washed by the flood tide onto Chiswick Eyot, a small island landmark for racing shells, halfway along the Oxford-Cambridge Boat Race course between Putney and Mortlake.

There were as yet no suspects, but there was no doubt in the minds of the Metropolitan Police. This was a cold-blooded murder, though why anyone should want to kill an apparently harmless academic remained a total mystery.

Lt. Commander Ramshawe liked mysteries, and for the next hour he scrolled to and from various editions of the *Telegraph* spanning the early summer to the autumn. He found the inquest, the funeral, a feature on Professor Landon's area of expertise. But he never found a single clue as to why the hell anyone should want to kill him.

He switched to the London *Daily Mail*, a more adventurous downmarket tabloid, which might have come up with a different, more original idea. No such luck. For the week after the professor's disappearance the *Mail* was totally preoccupied with two murdered London policemen and their dog:

GALLANT ROGER KILLED IN ACTION BESIDE HIS MASTERS  
*Police Slaying Baffles Scotland Yard*

It beat the hell out of Jimmy Ramshawe too. But the only paragraph which did interest him was one which began: *The*

*Metropolitan Police are believed to have called in the Special Branch, owing to the manner of death of one of the officers, but last night this could not be confirmed.*

So far as Jimmy knew, this probably meant MI5, or even MI6, Britain's equivalent of the CIA. And although the murder of London cops was not his business and neither, of course, was the killing of a UCL professor, he nonetheless logged a full notation about the strange and mysterious death of Paul Landon.

He found it hard to dismiss the incident from his mind. And at the end of the day, he was still puzzling over it on the way to the Australian Embassy in Washington, where he was dining with his fiancée Jane Peacock, daughter of the Ambassador. It was almost 8 p.m. before he arrived and he gratefully accepted a tall glass of cold Foster's lager from Miss Peacock before joining her parents in the dining room. Jimmy had always got along very well with Ambassador John Peacock. Their families had been friends for many years, and indeed Jimmy's parents, who lived in New York, were due to stay at the embassy two weeks from now.

He waited until they were well into the main course, a superb rib of beef, cooked to perfection and accompanied by a particularly elegant Australian red wine, Clonakilla Shiraz, made up in the Canberra district in the temperate foothills, a couple of hundred miles south of Sydney. John Peacock was a lifelong collector of good wine and owned an excellent cellar at his home overlooking the harbour in Sydney. As Australian Ambassador to the USA, he was expected to serve vintages from his own country and he rose to the occasion every time.

Jimmy waited until they were all smoothly into a second glass before broaching the subject which had been on his mind for the past six hours.

'You ever read anything about a volcano professor in London who managed to get murdered last May, John?'

'Maybe. What was his name?'