



# THE WAR BENEATH

THE RISE OF OCEANIA

## FIRST EDITION

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THE  
WAR  
BENEATH

THE RISE OF OCEANIA

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THE WAR BENEATH  
THE SAVAGE DEEPS (forthcoming)  
FATAL DEPTH (forthcoming)

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THE FURNACE  
THE FREEZER  
THE VOID

# TIMELINE OF EVENTS

**2020** Despite the fact that global warming is the primary concern for the majority of the planet's population, still little is being done.

**2042** Ocean levels rise higher and faster than expected.

**2055** Shipping begins to experience interruptions due to flooded docks and crane facilities. World markets fluctuate wildly.

**2061** Rising ocean levels swamp Manhattan shore defenses and disrupt Gulf Coast oil shipping; financial markets in North America become increasingly unstable due to flooding.

**2062** Encroaching water pounds major cities such as Mumbai, London, Miami, Jakarta, Tokyo, and Shanghai.

**2063** The Marshall Islands, Tuvalu, and the Maldives disappear.

**2065** Refugee problem escalates in Bangladesh; millions die.

**2069** Shore defenses everywhere are abandoned; massive numbers of people move inland. Inundated coastal cities become major disaster areas.

**2071** Market crash affects entire world; economic depression looms.

**2072** "Breadbasket" regions of North America, South America, Europe, and Asia experience less precipitation than previous years; desertification intensifies.

**2073** Led by China, governments begin establishing settlements on continental shelves. The shallow water environment proves ideal for displaced populations, aquaculture, and as jump-off sites for mining ventures on the deep ocean abyssal plains.

**2080** The number of people living on the ocean floor reaches 100,000.

**2088** Flooding continues on land; the pressure to establish undersea colonies increases.

**2090** Continental shelves are now home to twenty-three major cities and hundreds of deep-sea mining and research facilities. Resources harvested by the ocean inhabitants are now integral to national economies.

**2091** Over five million now live in undersea colonies.

**2093** Led by the American undersea cities of Trieste, Seascope, and Ballard, an independence movement begins.

**2099** The CIA crushes the independence movement.

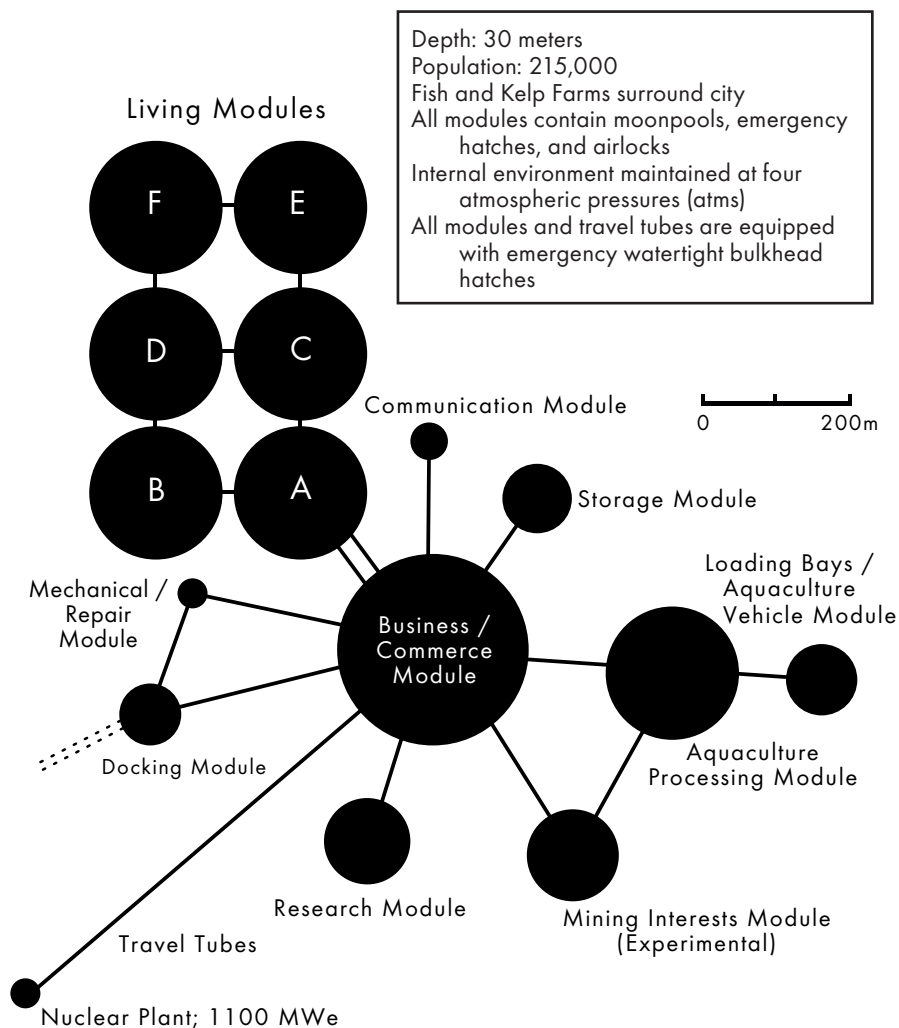
**2128** Over ten million now populate the ocean floor in twenty-nine cities.

**MARCH  
2129** Present day.

# TRIESTE CITY UNITED STATES

## CONTINENTAL SHELF

30 KILOMETERS WEST OF FLORIDA



"Knowledge of the oceans is more than a matter of curiosity. Our very survival may hinge upon it."

—President John F. Kennedy, 1961



PART  
ONE: THE  
GULF OF  
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# 2014

## CHAPTER ONE —

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IT ONLY TOOK TWO SECONDS TO realize someone was following me.

He'd been on my tail from the moment I left work. It had been another grueling shift, hauling in kelp from the massive farms on the perimeter of Trieste City and loading it into the farming module in the southeast quadrant. The stuff grew fifty centimeters a day in the nutrient-rich environment of the continental shelf just off Florida's west coast—the warm water, abundant sunlight, and organic material that washed off the landmass and settled on the shallow seabed generated perfect growing conditions—and was one of the reasons why economies and populations of the world's undersea cities were booming. Harvesting the plants was a daily routine. We then prepared it for export topside for food, or shipped it out for further processing into methane. It was our main source of income.

I didn't mind the manual labor, even though I had trained for a far different type of work. Nevertheless, Trieste City's continued survival and expansion required such efforts. The flooding on land had pushed us to the shelves. It was a harsh environment for people, but I saw it as the future of humanity, and I would do almost anything to see the city thrive. Just as my father had, though his strategy had been far more aggressive. He had *fought* for the city, and died as a result.

Now, at this point in my life, I just wanted to work hard for it.

The man following me watched from a side passage as I left the aquaculture sector and stepped onto the travel tube's conveyor leading to the Commerce

Module. The tube was three meters high with curved bulkheads. A belt also ran in the opposite direction; it carried people toward the processing facilities or the farms for the next shift. They wore either laborer's clothing or wetsuits. All had the same desire as me; you could see it in their features. They wanted Trieste City to continue to grow and prove its necessity to the world's economy. After our short and troubled history, I knew they too would do anything for the colony, even if it meant endangering their own lives. It was hazardous as hell outside, where a work accident, an equipment malfunction, or even some seemingly innocuous creature could take your life in an instant.

Above me, expansive windows looked into the sea. The sun's beams cut through the thirty meters of water to Trieste easily enough. Hundreds of species of fish darted by, and divers and seacars surrounded the city. In the distance, kelp rose toward the surface and languidly swayed in the currents. And, only a kilometer away, a menacing *Reaper* class US warsub—USS *Impaler*. Just close enough for people to see they were always nearby, watching, waiting for trouble.

I snorted and looked away.

A few seconds later I pretended to recognize a woman coming toward me on the opposing conveyer, and I turned as she passed to say a few words to her. She was a school teacher leading a class of seven- and eight-year-olds on a field trip to the farms. They were excited and chattering amongst themselves. As my gaze shifted away from them, I glanced behind me.

He was still there, about twenty meters away.

In the brief second I saw him, I realized there was something oddly familiar there. The shape of his jaw perhaps . . . or the pierce of his eyes. It was a feeling I just couldn't shake, and I had learned long before to trust my hunches. The thought that he was a foreign agent—of a land nation or an undersea city—flashed through my mind, but I disregarded it almost immediately. That part of my life was well behind me now. A member of the United States Submarine Fleet, then? Perhaps, but unlikely. Soldiers were everywhere in the city—we were still a part of the United States, after all—patrolling or on leave, and they could have watched me if necessary. Still, there weren't many other options.

Someone abruptly nudged me in the side and I turned to see what they wanted.

"Hey, Mac, just off work?" the man asked.

My name is Truman McClusky, though most people just called me Mac. It was easier that way, especially as a laborer when a hundred people a day have to yell to get your attention. The man was an old acquaintance, someone

I had worked with while building one of the Living Modules a few years back. I grunted and kept my tone casual. “Yeah. Going to the entertainment district. You?” I knew he wasn’t the type to visit that area, so we would be going our separate ways in less than ten seconds.

“Back to my bunk,” he replied. “I’m exhausted, you know. This business is draining.” He laughed at himself and an instant later left the belt and began to march in a different direction.

His joke made me groan inwardly. However, such a thing was typical of the people here—despite the back-breaking life, they were quite happy to be a part of what had begun as a grand experiment to alleviate the disasters in coastal areas of the planet and the loss of primary breadbasket regions. In fact, seafloor colonization had grown into a venture boasting almost thirty major undersea cities with a combined population of ten million. There was still much to be done, but it seemed as though we were indeed winning the battle. The only real remaining problems were malcontents upset with the increasing military presence of our colonizing nations. Things were coming to a head once again, as they had back in 2099, and that was something that I desperately wanted to avoid.

The Commerce Module was the largest one in Trieste. Four stories up—the highest we could go, otherwise we risked surface vessels scraping the top of the structure—and five stories down, it contained all the business and recreational facilities for the city. The central area was open from floor to ceiling, and with the ceiling mostly window, sunlight penetrated right to the lowest level. Offices and shops that bordered this nine-level atrium had glass fronts that allowed the natural light to filter toward the outer bulkheads. The main walkways that ringed each deck had plants, trees, and vines growing in recessed pots, which helped maintain the atmosphere. It was the most beautiful area of the city; in fact, it was the most famous module of any American colony. We were all proud of it.

The entertainment district was in the lower levels. I marched along the steel grating of the outer walkway to the escalators that led downward. In the reflection of a storefront window I could see the man still behind me, walking casually and doing a fair job of being unobtrusive. He was a professional, there was no doubt of that. He had picked up a newspaper chip at a stand and was reading the latest top stories—most likely about the increasing tension between the United States and China—and only glanced up to track me every fifteen seconds or so.

Down on a lower level, I made my way into a tavern and found a corner where I could conceal myself. I kept watch out the window. Sure enough, a

minute later, the man approached. He sent a fleeting glance in, but it was impossible for him to see anything. With the natural sunlight in the atrium and the bar's darkened interior, all that he got was his own reflection.

He would have to come in if he wanted me now.

He entered.

I crouched farther into the corner as he moved to the bar and ordered a drink in low, mumbled tones. The feeling that I knew this person came back in a surge, for the way he held his body and perched on the stool seemed so damn familiar. I strained to place his face, but still it was impossible. It was as if the man had made an appearance in a dream I'd had a decade earlier, and I had never really known him.

He looked over his shoulder and searched the establishment. There were only a few other patrons there—all US military—but at first he didn't catch sight of me. Then his glare lingered on my corner.

I stepped out of the shadows and stalked toward him. We made eye contact and he rose from the stool in tentative jerks.

Without thinking, my hand darted to his neck and I poured on the pressure. It was something I shouldn't have done—I was just a civilian now, after all, and security could arrest me for assault—but it just happened. The bartender's jaw dropped at the suddenness of the assault.

"Who are you?" I hissed.

The man's eyes bulged and he struggled to speak. "Mac—don't—" he finally managed.

Startled, I immediately backed off; that voice didn't match the face. "Blake?"

He nodded as he massaged his throat. "Damn it, man. You didn't have to do that."

"You don't look quite the same as you used to," I mumbled.

"That was Shanks's idea. We found out that the other intelligence services have detailed dossiers on me, including photos." He gestured to his face. "So we changed it."

I looked closer. The nose was different. The eyes a dull brown where they used to be a dazzling blue. The hairline had receded, and the ears protruded a bit more. The cheekbones were also more pronounced. But there was no doubt about it now—it was indeed Daniel Blake, an operative of Trieste City Intelligence.

One of my former colleagues.

"Why are you following me?" I whispered as I ushered him to a table and away from the bartender.

"Shanks wants you for something important. A job."

I growled. George Shanks was the Director of TCI. He had recruited me into the intelligence business after my graduation from university eighteen years earlier. I had left the organization, however, following a colossal disagreement with him over TCI policy. He and I were not on good terms, to say the least. I didn't want anything to do with him—or the job—anymore.

"Why follow me? Why not just track me down at my cubicle? Call me?"

"Too scared of tipping off other agents. They've probably bugged your place already, as well as the comm lines. We decided to grab you after work, bring you in that way."

"What other agents?"

He looked cagey. "Another city, of course."

"Chinese? French?"

He shook his head. "Sorry. We have to go see Shanks. He'll fill you in."

I looked my old friend up and down. It all seemed very bizarre, but he had piqued my interest. Still, the prospect of dealing with Shanks again was not something I wanted.

Eventually I gave a reluctant nod. "All right then. Let's go."

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"STILL WORKING THE FARMS, MCCLUSKY?" SHANKS rumbled at me ten minutes later. "Slugging kelp around? It's a little beneath you, isn't it?"

I clenched my teeth as I stared at the man. He hadn't changed much since last I saw him, seven years earlier. He was still a tall, broad-shouldered, and imposing figure. His hair was now salt and pepper, which gave him a distinguished look. But the sneer on his face said volumes. And my own expression, I knew, screamed that the distaste was mutual. Despite my feelings toward him, however, I knew that he was no idiot. He had managed to run Trieste City Intelligence for over twenty years without our own military discovering it, which was no small feat. At least when it came to his job, I knew Shanks was professional enough. I just had serious questions about his morals.

TCI's function was to protect the interests of the city and prevent other intelligence services from compromising our security. We couldn't rely on American forces for that. Not since 2099, anyway. TCI's headquarters were located in the Communication Module, but only a handful of people knew that. There were approximately forty operatives, most of whom were usually out on assignment at any given time.

Blake had escorted me through security and into the tiny office concealed inside a normal relay station. Equipment cluttered it and there was barely room for a desk and two chairs. We stood in silence, guardedly watching each other. Behind the desk a small window looked out into the ocean; the sun above was setting and twilight had reached the undersea city.

"I'm doing a job and helping Trieste," I finally ground out. "Any way possible."

"Anything except staying with TCI?" Shanks said.

"You know why I left. It was your fault."

"That the Chinese caught you? Hardly. We all know who really turned you over."

I winced at the memory. "He had his reasons. I don't pretend to agree with them, but it was your fault he did it, and your fault I quit."

He snorted. "Nonsense. You could have stayed."

"After what I found out about you? I could never have—"

"Your father would have condoned what I did! I've saved this city countless times, and I'm not about to apologize for it!"

A sudden jolt shot through me; the mention of my father had taken me aback. Partly because I didn't think Shanks had a right to even think about him, let alone mention him in open conversation, and partly because deep inside, in a place that I didn't even want to admit to myself existed, I knew that Shanks was right. My father would have disagreed with my decision. Still, the accusation stung. I knotted my fists. "How dare you bring him into this!"

By now Shanks's face was red with anger. "He wanted the best for Trieste! I should know—I served with him when you were just a kid!"

I took a step toward him, not really sure what I was going to do. Then a cough from the side caught my attention, and I stopped suddenly, aware that I had let my composure crack because of a longstanding feud I had thought was gone forever. For seven years I had thought this part of my life was behind me. Now, in less than thirty minutes, it was back in full force. And it shook me to the core.

Blake had been wise to interrupt us. "Why don't you brief him, sir?" he said with a hint of apprehension.

Shanks glared at the man for a hard moment. The only sound was from the ventilation fans in the ceiling. Then, finally, he deflated. "You're right. I don't want to push him away." He turned back to me. With a pained expression, he continued, "To put it bluntly, we need your help."

"For what?" I gestured at Blake. "You've got other operatives."



"You have special knowledge that could mean the difference between success and failure, McClusky."

I rolled my eyes. "It's always about life or death, isn't it? Don't you think you tend to overstate things a bit, Shanks?"

He slammed his palm on a nearby shelf and a handful of electronic components clattered to the deck. "Dammit, the danger here is real! If you don't help, it could mean the end of the city!"

I paused as I sized him up. He had started to sweat and tendons had popped out on his neck. Apart from his hatred of me, I had never seen him quite like this.

"What is it?" I asked.

He took a breath and gathered his thoughts. "Someone stole some sensitive information from us yesterday. Specifically, the plans for a crucial piece of technology that we can't let any other country or undersea city get their hands on. If they do, they will have dominance over every other nation involved in the colonization of the seafloor. *We* developed it, and *we* need to be the ones to put it to use. If they beat us to the punch, say goodbye to mining the seafloor, to control over our own consshelf, even to the currently accepted sealanes that we use for travel. It'll all be over." He hesitated, then added, "It could even lead to war, both in the ocean and on land."

I glanced at Blake for an instant, but his face was blank. He didn't know either. I turned back to the director. "What could be so important?"

He shook his head. "No way. Not until you agree to help, and even then your access to information will be limited. I'll reinstate your position as Operative First Class, and you'll go get the information back from the people who stole it."

I thought for a long minute. I didn't want back in this business, but I knew that Shanks wouldn't have asked for help unless he really needed it. Perhaps it was that important, after all.

"So why me? At least explain that much."

He turned to his desk and touched a button on his computer. An instant later an image filled a display screen. "Here's the man who stole the information."

It was a security video. I peered closely at the figure on the monitor. The room he was in wasn't well lit and the image was slightly blurry. Regardless, for the second time in less than an hour, I had the impression that I knew who it was, that something deep within me *already* knew, and that my conscious mind was just a step behind. It was the way he moved. The way he jerked his head to the side when he thought there was danger nearby.

The broad shoulders. The dark hair. He was in a lab of some sort, clearly anxious that someone might catch him where he shouldn't be. He turned slightly and Shanks abruptly froze the picture.

I gasped. The face on the screen was clear.

I knew who it was.

That man was the reason the Chinese military had interrogated and tortured me ruthlessly for four months in Sheng City. He was Johnny Chang, former operative of TCI. Seven years earlier he had betrayed and given me up while on a covert mission. He was a traitor to Trieste—and a former colleague—and until today I had thought he was still at Sheng. I thought I'd never see him here again.

My arms tightened at my sides and my heart pounded. Despite my hatred for Director Shanks and my claim that he was the real reason I had left the service, the complete truth was far more complicated. Suffice to say that Johnny Chang had also played a huge role, not the least of which was the torture I had suffered while in captivity.

In the years since, I had known that if I ever saw Johnny Chang again, I would kill him.

And now I had my chance.

# CHAPTER TWO

WE STOOD IN THAT OFFICE AND stared at the frozen image on the display without speaking for what felt like an eternity. The revelation had stunned even Blake.

I turned to him. "You didn't know?"

"I knew the Chinese were involved. But this . . ." He shook his head. "This is huge. I wish I were the one going, Mac. I owe him for what he did."

We all owed him, but I most of all, and Blake knew it. He glanced away from the screen and fixed me with a penetrating glare. "Are you going to do it?" There was an unspoken message in that question. If I declined the mission, he would go in my place.

"I'll do it," I said in a soft voice.

I was back. After a seven year absence from TCI, I was in the game again. When I had awoken that morning, I'd assumed it would be the same as any other day. Now here I was, mentally preparing myself to pursue and kill a traitorous operative of TCI. A former friend. It was surreal.

There was an unmistakable look of relief on Shanks's face. "I had hoped you would agree. You are, after all, the best person for the job."

"Why's that?" I mumbled, but I already knew the answer.

"You know the Chinese. You've been on more missions to Sheng, Lau Tsi, Hanzhou, and New Kowloon Cities than any other person I've got. If they're going back to one of those places, you're well-equipped to follow them."

"What if this is a mainland China operation and the cities know nothing about it?"

He winced. "We'll have to hope that's not the case. Johnny Chang crossed us and defected to Sheng City. According to our information, he still works for them."

"But of course you want me to stop him before he gets anywhere near the city."

"Yes. Which brings up the real reason we contacted you. You *know* Johnny Chang. You worked closely with him on numerous occasions. You know where he'll be going, what he'll be doing, and why he'll be doing it."

But it was more than that, I realized. He had been my closest friend. I knew him better than any other operative.

At least, I *thought* I had. Until his betrayal.

Shanks continued, "On this mission, you're our secret weapon, McClusky. He doesn't know you're involved. It'll shock him, throw him off guard. I'm hoping you'll nail him before he makes it too far."

"And when I get him?"

"Bring him back here."

I tried not to let my face show disappointment. I would have to make it look like an accident, then.

"We have a seacar prepped and ready in the Docking Module. One other person will accompany you."

"It'll be good to work with Blake again."

Shanks shook his head. "Not him. A scientist. The person who developed the stolen technology."

My jaw dropped. "What? A civilian? Come on, Shanks. On this mission I could use help from someone trained in these things—an operative. This is ridiculous."

"Like it or not, that's the way it is. Blake will escort you to your cubicle and then to the docks. You'll meet your companion there."

I glared at him for a heartbeat, but could tell there was no use. Blake looked equally angry at missing out on the opportunity, but held his objections in check.

Finally, I muttered to Shanks, "How much does the civilian know?"

"About TCI? A little. You don't have to conceal anything, if that's what you're asking. I've granted full security clearance." He paused for a moment, as if he were struggling with a decision about something. And then, "Contact us in the usual manner. We'll be waiting for your word. Bring him back to us."

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Timothy S. Johnston is a lifelong fan of thrillers and science fiction thrillers in both print and film. His greatest desire is to contribute to the genre which has given him so much over the past four decades. He wishes he could personally thank every novelist, screenwriter, filmmaker, director and actor who has ever inspired him to tell great stories. He has been an educator for twenty years and a writer for thirty. He lives on planet Earth, but he dreams of the stars. Visit [www.timothysjohnston.com](http://www.timothysjohnston.com) to register for news alerts, read his blog and reviews, and learn more about his current and upcoming thrillers. Timothy is also the author of futuristic murder mystery/thrillers *The Furnace*, *The Freezer*, and *The Void*.

