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THE SAVAGE DEEPS

THE RISE OF OCEANIA



ChiZine Publications

FIRST EDITION

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THE SAVAGE DEEPS

THE RISE OF OCEANIA



Books by Timothy S. Johnston

ChiZine Publications

THE WAR BENEATH
THE SAVAGE DEEPS
FATAL DEPTH (forthcoming)

Carina Press

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.

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.

2062-2065

Encroaching water pounds major cities such as Mumbai, London, Miami, Jakarta, Tokyo, and Shanghai. The Marshall Islands, Tuvalu, and the Maldives disappear. 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.

2071-2072

Market crash affects entire world; economic depression looms. Famine and 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.

2093

Led by the American undersea cities of Trieste, Seascape, 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.

2129

Tensions between China and the United States, fueled by competition over The Iron Plains and a new Triestrian submarine propulsion system, skyrockets. The USSF occupies Trieste following The Second Battle of Trieste.

FEBRUARY 2130

Present day.

"I love the sea, born of an inconceivable deluge, because it is made of water. Water, as fluid as our souls, shapeless, enslaved to none but to gravity. Water, welcoming our bodies in a total embrace, setting us free from our weight. Water, mother of all life, fragile guarantor of our survival."

—Captain Jacques-Yves Cousteau, Ocean Explorer, Inventor, and Innovator

13 February, 2130 AD

**PRELUDE:
THE
APPROACHING
STORM**

THE SAVAGE DEEPS

Location: The Gulf of Mexico
Latitude: 27° 34' 29" N
Longitude: 54° 56' 11" W
Depth: 25 meters
Vessel: USS *Impaler*
Time: 2300 hours

THE MASSIVE WARSUB HOVERED SILENTLY NEAR the seafloor. Her maneuvering screws were set to station-keeping and an anchor stretched to the sandy bottom. It was night in the world above, and the ship's hull shimmered in the murky sea. Fish darted about and kelp swayed just under the vessel. In the half-light filtering through the water, infantry in scuba gear practiced hand-to-hand combat on the bottom, and troops riding swift scooters flitted about. These small vessels had needle guns mounted to their stabilizers, and one by one their operators fired simulated rounds at each other. The murmur of ordered commands from facemask speakers and screams from officers angry at troops not following instructions echoed in the waters closest to the offending soldiers.

The troops reset for another try, and repeated the war game scenario.

Above the nightly training session, the 250 meter-long warsub was in silhouette with the full moon directly overhead. Small bubbles escaped from soldiers' masks as they wrestled with trainers and as they cried out in pain from perfectly applied wristlocks and arm bars. Torpedo tube hatches on the hull of USS *Impaler* opened and shut repeatedly during weapons drills.

It had been months of such training exercises; the USSF clearly expected trouble.

Soon.

Inside the warsub, in a small cabin near the bow, Captain Heller and First Officer Lieutenant Commander Schrader sat at a steel table. They had been discussing the crew's preparedness and the infantry's training for over an hour before Heller finally pushed aside his notes and set his pen down.

He leveled his hard eyes on Schrader but said nothing.

Schrader shifted under the glare. He had served with the captain for years now and knew the man well. Normally he was calm, bordering on cold, but there were times when his emotions flared like a storm and had the potential to engulf everything and everyone around him.

Schrader worried that something had stirred within the captain lately. Trieste City had consumed him for months. A year earlier, the undersea city

had attempted yet another bid for freedom. George Shanks, who had headed up Trieste City Intelligence, and Janice Flint, the former mayor of the city, had launched a battle in the waters around the ocean colony. Many USSF sailors had died in that fight, along with Triestrian citizens and crews from Chinese subs. In the end, Trieste had surrendered and the USSF had arrested Shanks and Flint, but the colony had become a continuing source of concern for Heller.

Eventually Schrader managed, "Sir?"

Heller sighed. "Truman McClusky is on my mind."

McClusky was now mayor of Trieste, though he had taken part in The Second Battle of Trieste, and in fact had been a major cause of it. He had led *Impaler* on a grand chase around the world's oceans, sunk Chinese vessels, attacked an Australian undersea city, killed French and Chinese and American sailors, and yet still he was wandering the travel tubes and cabins of Trieste freely. In fact, the citizens of the city had elected him as mayor shortly after The Battle.

Even though Trieste was now under USSF control, the military still allowed her people to elect an official to act as a liaison between the USSF and the colonists. The title "mayor" was only a word, though, and didn't hold much meaning.

"Why's that?" Schrader asked.

Heller removed his round wire-frame glasses and rubbed his bald head. The sinews in his forearms rippled. He was in his standard USSF blue uniform, but as captain he permitted himself one modification—he kept his sleeves rolled up. "Yes, McClusky is only a figurehead. The people need to feel as though they have a say in issues. We didn't want them to feel humiliated following The Battle. We don't want this fight for freedom they can't win to bubble up again. I don't want McClusky to try anything."

"But we've beaten them twice." In fact, Schrader thought, the first time it had happened, the CIA had killed McClusky's father. The impact that had had on the son hadn't escaped him.

"Still," Heller said, "they are continuing the nonsense."

"Hoping for independence?" Schrader snorted. "That's ridiculous. With us right here?" He gestured around them, referring to the city just a few hundred meters to the east of their current location. It was a silly motion; they were in the cramped confines of the captain's office. "We'd crush them again."

"Obviously." Heller frowned. "If we ever decided to arrest or kill Mayor McClusky, we would need proof of his treason, otherwise it would cause an uproar with the citizens of the city. They probably elected him to protect him. They worship the man, especially since his father's assassination in 2099." He paused, and then said, "Early in The Battle, the Chinese undersea forces fled."

“But the Chinese lost a lot in the—”

Heller held up a finger. “No. I’m not referring to the Chinese Submarine Fleet. That’s controlled by mainland China. It’s an important distinction. I’m referring to the forces of the Chinese underwater cities. Sheng City and New Kowloon, for instance.”

Schrader considered the information for a few moments. “They don’t have many reserves. They were scared of losing warsubs and sailors.”

Heller took a deep breath and exhaled. “Perhaps.” He studied Schrader’s eyes. “Or they left to prepare for another day. Perhaps the Chinese undersea cities were working with Trieste. Something connected the two colonies.” Another pause. “Or someone.”

Schrader could tell that Heller was still trying to figure it out. And anything Heller put his mind to, he would achieve.

It was inevitable.

Heller said, “Let me introduce you to some people.” He pushed the intercom button on the bulkhead behind him and whispered a command. Then he sat in silence.

Schrader watched him but said no more. He knew Heller liked that he didn’t push, that he knew when to watch and listen.

The muted sounds of the sub echoed in the cabin as they waited. A few clangs, the sigh of the ventilation system, commands over the loudspeaker related to the ongoing training on the seafloor.

And then the hatch slid open and two men stepped over the threshold. A USSF seaman escorted them in.

“That’ll be all, Seaman Abernathy,” Heller said. The hatch slid shut. Then to Schrader: “These are my two spies at Trieste.”

—••—

SCHRADER’S FACE ERUPTED INTO SURPRISE. HE knew Heller had been watching Trieste closely, but hadn’t known exactly *how* closely.

The first man through the hatch was Robert Butte. The last name was pronounced “Beaut.” He was an important government official and well-liked by the citizens there.

Heller looked at Schrader and smiled. The blood had drained from the XO’s face. “You know Robert, obviously.”

“Yes,” Schrader said, still staring at the man. “And you are the USSF’s spy at Trieste?” He shook his head in surprise. “The deputy mayor? McClusky’s right hand man?” The fact the second most powerful person in the undersea



city was a USSF informant must have been Heller's crowning achievement in the year since The Battle.

Heller then pointed to the second man. "This is Rafe Manuel. He works in Trieste City Control with McClusky."

Schrader now turned his attention to the second man. "You are also informing for us?"

The man nodded. He was Hispanic with dark eyes wrinkled at their corners. "Yes, Commander Schrader. I work with the mayor and deputy mayor there. I—"

Heller interrupted. "You told me over coded message that you had some information about what McClusky is up to."

Manuel swallowed. "Yes. He has been sending subs out to the Atlantic. These subs don't come back."

"What do you mean by that?" Schrader asked, perplexed.

Heller responded. "He means they're going to some secret location. A hidden base perhaps, and the independence movement at Trieste is doing something there. I mean to find out what."

Schrader stared at the men standing before them. Heller was clearly convinced there was still an independence movement, and Schrader was too smart to question his captain about it right then. But it did surprise him. "Do either of you know what it is?"

The reply was in stereo: "No."

"Do you know where this base is?" Heller asked Manuel.

"Not precisely. They go north. That's all I know."

"North." Heller growled the single word and stared at the man. Manuel could only stare back, but his discomfort was clear.

"That's right," he finally replied.

"But why do all sonar reports show the ships going *south*? Around the curve of South America and out to the Mid-Atlantic Ridge?"

Manuel shook his head. He hesitated and his eyes flicked away for a heartbeat. "I can't explain that."

Heller turned to the deputy mayor. "Can you explain it, Robert?"

The man seemed surprised. "I didn't even know this much, Captain. Rafe here works in Sea Traffic Control. He sees the tracks of the subs. I don't."

"And McClusky has never spoken of this mystery to you?"

"No."

Robert Butte stood ramrod stiff now, and locked eyes with Heller.

Heller looked away and seemed to process this information. "I trust you," he said finally. Then he slid out from behind the table in one lithe motion

and stepped toward Manuel. "On the other hand, I believe that you're lying to me." His voice was coarse.

Manuel backed away slightly, but it was difficult in the small cabin. "I'm not—"

In a flash Heller snapped out a hand and locked it around the man's throat. He squeezed and reeled the man toward him. Manuel was wiry and thin, and no match for *Impaler's* captain. "I'm telling the truth," Manuel gasped.

"Right. The ships are going *north*. Do you still claim that? Do you not realize we have ships equipped with sonar too?" His teeth were bared and his arm flexed horribly.

Then in one sudden movement he spun the man around and stepped behind him. He kicked at the back of Manuel's knees, which buckled instantly. Heller held the man in place as he forced him backward precariously. "You've been spying for us, but you're working for McClusky, *aren't you?*"

Schrader sat frozen, riveted on the scene, perplexed and shocked at Heller's sudden display of force. The deputy mayor also seemed astonished.

Silence descended on the cabin as Heller forced the man backward. Gasping air was the only sound now. Manuel's forehead beaded with sweat as he struggled, but it was useless. Heller had his knee in the man's spine as he pulled Manuel backward. Creases traced across the captain's forehead, and his face had turned red. Either in rage or exertion, Schrader couldn't tell.

Manuel cried out—

And a tremendous crack echoed through the chamber.

Heller stepped away and shoved the man's limp body to the deck.

But Manuel wasn't dead. His eyes jerked about in confusion. He was probably realizing his spine had snapped, Schrader thought . . . that Heller had just broken his back with his bare hands.

Heller started to kick him in the face. Again and again the sound of wet thuds filled the cabin. And then he started to stomp on him. And through it all he yelled between gritted teeth, "You were trying to deceive me! You were spying for *him* and telling me that you were working for *us!*"

He yelled it over and over. Eventually he grabbed a shelf bolted to the bulkhead to provide balance as he slammed his right boot down on the man's forehead. Manuel was gurgling now. His words were mere gasps masked by blood bubbling out from his nose and from between shattered teeth.

Three more tremendous thuds pierced the cabin and Heller screamed something unintelligible.

He stepped back, breathing hard. Schrader stared at the man in shock. He had been so calm and calculating one second. And then—

And then—

Heller exhaled one long breath and struggled to gain control. It took only five seconds. His breathing returned to normal and his expression showed absolute serenity. Then he turned to the deputy mayor, who had pressed himself into a corner. Despite being a large man—easily 220 pounds—he was terrified. Heller said, “You see what happens when people disappoint me.” He pointed at the mangled mess twisted on the deck at his feet. Air still escaped from its lungs, but slowly.

There was no air being inhaled anymore.

The captain continued. “He lied to me. He was trying to deceive me.”

A pause. And then Butte said, “I will only tell you the truth.”

Heller grinned. There was sweat trickling down the side of his face. He brushed it away absently. “Good. I want to know where those ships are going.”

The deputy mayor swallowed but maintained eye contact with Heller. “I’ll do my best, Captain.”

“You better.” He pointed down without looking. “This is not a fate you should want for yourself.”

There was no response.

“I’ve also heard that there is a new recruit coming to Trieste.”

Butte frowned. “People arrive every month to become Triestrians.”

“Yes, but this one is coming for some other purpose. He is coming to help with this independence movement. Find out who he is and why he wants to help.”

Butte nearly snorted but obviously thought better of it. He collected himself in time and said, “Do you have any other information to help? Age? A name?”

“No. That’s your job.” Then Heller turned to Schrader. “Dump this carcass out the moonpool.” He punched the hatch control and stepped over the threshold, leaving bloody footsteps behind him. There was brain matter mixed in with the blood. “Clean this up,” he barked as his steps rang into the distance.

Outside, Seaman Abernathy was standing guard. His face was a rigid mask, but it was clear that he had heard the commotion.

The hatch closed.

Another command echoed over the comm system, but neither Schrader nor Butte paid any attention. They looked at each other.

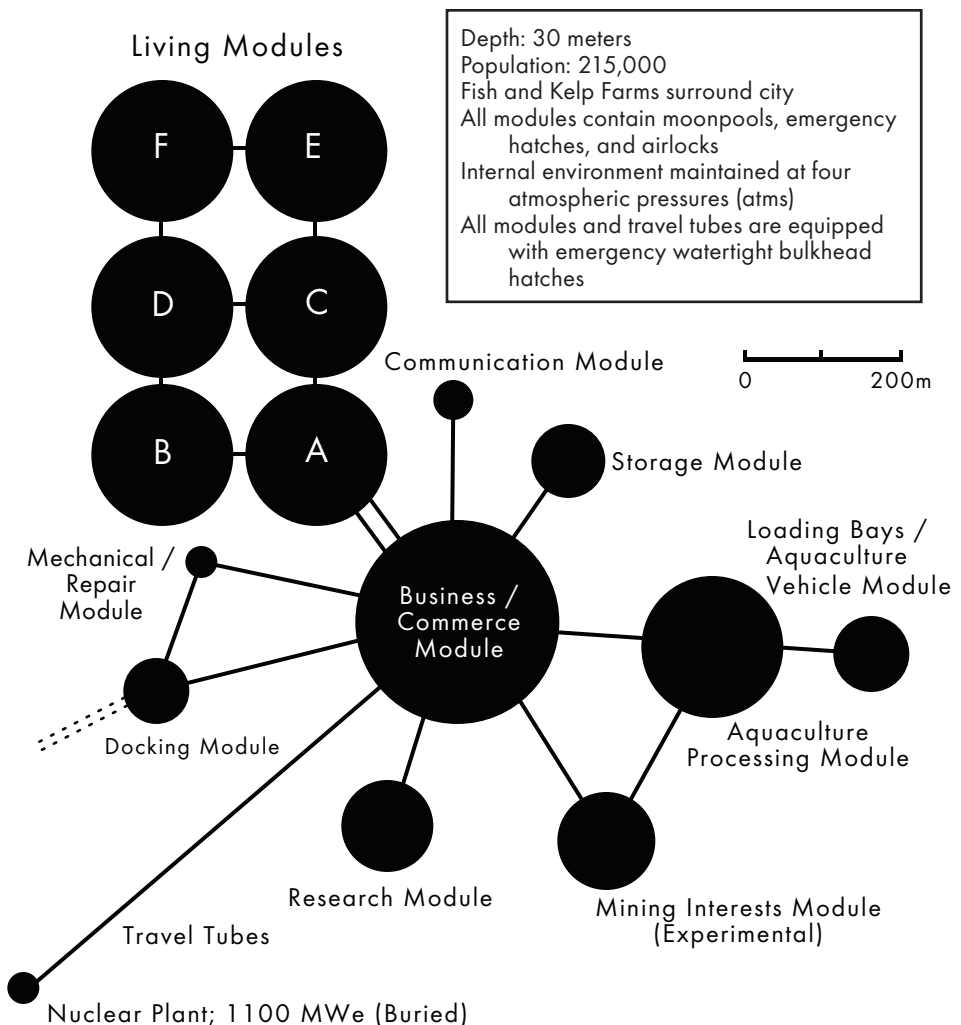
Neither could believe what had just happened.

“Good luck,” Schrader whispered.

The pool of blood on the deck continued to spread outward.

TRIESTE CITY UNITED STATES CONTINENTAL SHELF

30 KILOMETERS WEST OF FLORIDA



PART ONE: SECRETS

CHAPTER ONE

THE BODY WAS ON THE DECK at my feet. There were five of us surrounding it, staring down with shocked expressions. The smell rising from the corpse was nauseating and I noted hands drifting toward noses to block the odor. I'd dealt with plenty of death in the past—some of it at my own hands—but I hadn't dealt with rotting bodies before.

"It's unquestionably a murder," the person at my left said.

He was Cliff Sim, Chief Security Officer for City Security at Trieste. Generally speaking, the United States Submarine Fleet enforced their rules at our colony, and City Security took care of internal issues.

Like this one.

The corpse was male. But apart from that we couldn't really tell much. His face had been completely smashed and there were only pieces of skin left. Gray and tattered and rotting. I could see inside the skull in a few places and even some bright white bone was visible. The skull was empty.

The insides of his head had spilled out.

"Could a seacar's thruster have done this?" I asked. "Or perhaps a surface vessel?"

We lived thirty meters underwater, under a constant four atmospheres of pressure. We were always venturing outside in scuba gear or in seacars, and sometimes we even jumped into moonpools for recreation, venturing to other

modules without air tanks, and so on. We couldn't swim to the surface, for we lived in a saturation environment. If we did . . .

Death by The Bends.

A horrible, excruciating way to die.

We were prisoners of these deeps. Prisoners in our modules and seacars. We loved the life and what we had accomplished so far, colonizing the continental shelves of the United States, but there were many hazards always nearby.

"No way," Grant Bell said. He worked at City Control with me. His voice was usually calm and confident. Now it wavered. "Those aren't slices on his face. Something's crushed his skull."

"Still. Screws aren't sharp. The edges are blunt." But I knew it was a stretch. A thruster would have cut the head clean off. I remembered returning to the city the day after The Second Battle of Trieste last year. Almost two thousand mangled bodies had drifted in the waters surrounding the city. Their final moments of life had left their faces twisted in the anguish of a crushing and watery death. Some had been missing limbs. Some had been dismembered.

Some had been pulverized beyond recognition.

As I'd powered the seacar *SC-1* into the Docking Module following our surrender, I'd had to thread between the bodies. Clotted blood had tinted the waters, and I'd known our screws were further chopping the corpses and drifting limbs and leaving a trail of chum behind.

It had been a tragic scene, but all those Triestrians had died for the dream of independence. A dream I was going to bring them.

Or end up just like them while fighting for it.

I'd hidden my revulsion at the time. I'd had to appear as the confident leader of Trieste.

For better or for worse, after that battle, I'd suddenly become the beacon of hope and freedom my father had been.

I pulled myself back to the present and considered what machinery we had around the city that could have done such a thing to the man at my feet. The kelp processing facility perhaps, where we prepared the plants for export. But no. It was definitely murder—I was just trying to come up with some other possible explanation.

I didn't want to believe it.

His legs and arms were twisted about haphazardly. A puddle of water was expanding around him, his clothes were in tatters, and wisps of brown hair protruded from the remaining bits of rotting scalp.

I turned to the two men who had brought him in. "Where was he?"

"Drifting near the Docking Module. Obscured and trapped in the grasses."

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 to register for news alerts, read his blog and reviews, and learn more about his current and upcoming thrillers. Timothy is the author of *THE WAR BENEATH* and *THE SAVAGE DEEPS*. His futuristic murder mystery/thrillers include *THE FURNACE*, *THE FREEZER*, and *THE VOID*. Follow Timothy on Facebook @TSJAuthor and Twitter @TSJ_Author.

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