

# State of Fear

Michael Crichton

Chapter 1

Extract

**PARIS NORD**  
**SUNDAY, MAY 2, 2004**  
**12:00 P.M.**

In the darkness, he touched her arm and said, “Stay here.” She did not move, just waited. The smell of salt water was strong. She heard the faint gurgle of water.

Then the lights came on, reflecting off the surface of a large open tank, perhaps fifty meters long and twenty meters wide. It might have been an indoor swimming pool, except for all the electronic equipment that surrounded it.

And the very strange device at the far end of the pool.

Jonathan Marshall came back to her, grinning like an idiot. “*Qu’est-ce que tu penses?*” he said, though he knew his pronunciation was terrible. “What do you think?”

“It is magnificent,” the girl said. When she spoke English, her accent sounded exotic. In fact, everything about her was exotic, Jonathan thought. With her dark skin, high cheekbones, and black hair, she might have been a model. And she strutted like a model in her short skirt and spike heels. She was half Vietnamese, and her name was Marisa. “But no one else is here?” she said, looking around.

“No, no,” he said. “It’s Sunday. No one is coming.”

Jonathan Marshall was twenty-four, a graduate student in physics from London, working for the summer at the ultra-modern Laboratoire Ondulatoire—the wave mechanics laboratory—of the French Marine

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Institute in Vissy, just north of Paris. But the suburb was mostly the residence of young families, and it had been a lonely summer for Marshall. Which was why he could not believe his good fortune at meeting this girl. This extraordinarily beautiful and sexy girl.

“Show me what it does, this machine,” Marisa said. Her eyes were shining. “Show me what it is you do.”

“My pleasure,” Marshall said. He moved to the large control panel and began to switch on the pumps and sensors. The thirty panels of the wave machine at the far end of the tank clicked, one after another.

He glanced back at her, and she smiled at him. “It is so complicated,” she said. She came and stood beside him at the control panel. “Your research is recorded on cameras?”

“Yes, we have cameras in the ceiling, and on the sides of the tank. They make a visual record of the waves that are generated. We also have pressure sensors in the tanks that record pressure parameters of the passing wave.”

“These cameras are on now?”

“No, no,” he said. “We don’t need them; we’re not doing an experiment.”

“Perhaps we are,” she said, resting her hand on his shoulder. Her fingers were long and delicate. She had beautiful fingers.

She watched for a minute, then said, “This room, everything is so expensive. You must have great security, no?”

“Not really,” he said. “Just cards to get in. And only one security camera.” He gestured over his shoulder. “That one back in the corner.”

She turned to look. “And that is turned on?” she said.

“Oh yes,” he said. “That’s always on.”

She slid her hand to caress his neck lightly. “So is someone watching us now?”

“Afraid so.”

“Then we should behave.”

“Probably. Anyway, what about your boyfriend?”

“Him.” She gave a derisive snort. “I have had enough of him.”

• • •

Earlier that day, Marshall had gone from his small apartment to the café on rue Montaigne, the café he went to every morning, taking a journal article with him to read as usual. Then this girl had sat down at the next table, with her boyfriend. The couple had promptly fallen into an argument.

In truth, Marshall felt that Marisa and the boyfriend didn't seem to belong together. He was American, a beefy, red-faced fellow built like a footballer, with longish hair and wire-frame glasses that did not suit his thick features. He looked like a pig trying to appear scholarly.

His name was Jim, and he was angry with Marisa, apparently because she had spent the previous night away from him. "I don't know why you won't tell me where you were," he kept repeating.

"It is none of your business, that's why."

"But I thought we were going to have dinner together."

"Jimmy, I told you we were not."

"No, you told me you were. And I was waiting at the hotel for you. All night."

"So? No one made you. You could go out. Enjoy yourself."

"But I was waiting for you."

"Jimmy, you do not own me." She was exasperated by him, sighing, throwing up her hands, or slapping her bare knees. Her legs were crossed, and the short skirt rode up high. "I do as I please."

"That's clear."

"Yes," she said, and at that moment she turned to Marshall and said, "What is that you are reading? It looks very complicated."

At first Marshall was alarmed. She was clearly talking to him to taunt the boyfriend. He did not want to be drawn into the couple's dispute.

"It's physics," he said briefly, and turned slightly away. He tried to ignore her beauty.

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“What kind of physics?” she persisted.

“Wave mechanics. Ocean waves.”

“So, you are a student?”

“Graduate student.”

“Ah. And clearly intelligent. You are English? Why are you in France?”

And before he knew it, he was talking to her, and she introduced the boyfriend, who gave Marshall a smirk and a limp handshake. It was still very uncomfortable, but the girl behaved as if it were not.

“So you work around here? What sort of work? A tank with a machine? Really, I can’t imagine what you say. Will you show me?”

And now they were here, in the wave mechanics laboratory. And Jimmy, the boyfriend, was sulking in the parking lot outside, smoking a cigarette.

“What shall we do about Jimmy?” she said, standing beside Marshall while he worked at the control panel.

“He can’t smoke in here.”

“I will see that he does not. But I don’t want to make him more angry. Can I let him in, do you think?”

Marshall felt disappointment flood through him. “Sure. I guess.”

Then she squeezed his shoulder. “Don’t worry, he is busy later with other business of his.”

She went and opened the door at the back of the lab, and Jimmy came in. Marshall glanced back and saw him hanging back, hands in his pockets. Marisa came up to stand beside Marshall again, at the control panel.

“He’s all right,” she said. “Now show me.”

The electric motors at the far end of the tank whirred, and the wave paddles generated the first wave. It was a small wave, and it rippled smoothly down the length of the tank, to splash on a slanted panel at the near end.

“So, this is a tidal wave?” she said.

“It is a simulation of a tsunami, yes,” Marshall said, his fingers tapping the keyboard. On the control panel, displays showed temperature and pressure, generated false-color images of the wave.

“A simulation,” she said. “Meaning what?”

“We can make waves up to one meter high in this tank,” Marshall said. “But the real tsunamis are four, eight, ten meters high. Occasionally even more.”

“A wave in the ocean that is ten meters?” Her eyes widened. “Really?” She was looking toward the ceiling, trying to imagine it.

Marshall nodded. That would be over thirty feet high, the height of a three-story building. And it would be moving at eight hundred kilometers an hour, roaring up to the shore.

“And when it comes to the shore?” she said. “Is that the slope at this end? It looks like a pebble texture on it. Is that the shore?”

“That’s right,” Marshall said. “How high the wave goes up the shore is a function of the angle of the slope. We can adjust the slope to any angle.”

The boyfriend came forward, moving closer to the tank, but still he hung back. He never said a word.

Marisa was excited. “You can adjust it? How?”

“It is motorized.”

“To any angle?” She giggled. “Show me *vingt-sept* degrees. Twenty-seven.”

“Coming up.” Marshall typed at the keyboard. With a slight grinding sound, the slope of the shore angled higher.

The American boyfriend went closer to the tank to look, drawn by the activity. It *was* fascinating, Marshall thought. Anybody would be interested. But the guy never spoke. He just stood and watched the pebbled surface tilt. Soon it stopped.

“So that is the slope?” she said.

“Yes,” Marshall said. “Although in point of fact, twenty-seven degrees is fairly steep, more than the average shoreline in the real world. Maybe I should set it to—”

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Her dark hand closed over his. “No, no,” she said. Her skin was soft. “Leave it. Show me a wave. I want to see a wave.”

Small waves were being generated every thirty seconds. They rippled along the length of the tank, with a slight whoosh. “Well, I first have to know the shape of the shoreline. Right now, it’s flat beach, but if it was an inlet of some kind . . .”

“Will it change to make an inlet?”

“Of course.”

“Really? Show me.”

“What kind of inlet do you want? A harbor, a river, a bay . . .”

“Oh,” she said, shrugging, “make a bay.”

He smiled. “Fine. How big?”

With the whir of electric motors, the shoreline began to sink into a curve, the slope indenting into a bowl.

“Fantastic,” she said. “Come on, Jonathan, show me the wave.”

“Not yet. How big is the bay?”

“Oh . . .” She gestured in the air. “One mile. A bay of one mile. Now will you show me?” She leaned toward him. “I do not like to wait. You should know this.”

He smelled her perfume. He typed quickly. “Here it comes,” he said. “A big wave, coming into a one-mile bay, with a twenty-seven-degree slope.”

There was a much louder whoosh as the next wave was generated at the far end of the tank, and then it rippled smoothly toward them, a raised line of water about six inches high.

“Oh!” Marisa pouted. “You promised me it would be *big*.”

“Just wait,” he said.

“It will grow?” she said, giggling. She put her hand on his shoulder again. Then the American glanced back, and gave her a dirty look. She jerked her chin in the air, defiant. But when he looked back at the tank, she took her hand away.

Marshall felt despondent again. She was just using him, he was a pawn in this game between them.

“You said it will grow?” she said.

“Yes,” Marshall said, “the wave will grow as it comes to the shore. In deep water a tsunami is small, but in shallow water it builds. And the inlet will concentrate its power, so it goes higher.”

The wave rose higher, and then smashed against the curved shore at the near end. It foamed white, and sloshed up the sides of the shore. It came up about five feet, he guessed.

“So it comes high,” she said. “In the real world?”

“That’s about forty, fifty feet,” he said. “Fifteen meters.”

“Ooh la la,” she said, pursing her lips. “So a person cannot run away from this.”

“Oh no,” Marshall said. “You can’t outrun a tidal wave. There was a wave in Hilo, Hawaii, in 1957, came right down the streets of the town, tall as the buildings, people ran from it but—”

“So that’s it?” the American said. “That’s all it does?” His voice was growly, like he needed to clear his throat.

“Don’t mind him,” she said quietly.

“Yes, that’s what we do here,” Marshall said. “We generate waves—”

“Jesus fucking A,” the American said. “I could do that in my bathtub when I was six months old.”

“Well,” Marshall said, gesturing to the control panel, and the monitors displaying data, “we generate a lot of databases for researchers around the world who are—”

“Yeah, yeah. That’s enough. Boring as whale shit. I’m leaving. You coming, Marisa, or not?” He stood and glared at her.

Marshall heard her suck in her breath.

“No,” she said. “I am not.”

The American turned and walked off, slamming the door loudly as he left.

Her apartment was just across the river from Notre Dame, and from the balcony in the bedroom he had a beautiful view of the cathedral, which



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was lighted at night. It was ten o'clock, but there was still a deep blue in the sky. He looked down at the street below, the lights of the cafés, the crowds walking on the streets. It was a busy and glamorous scene.

"Don't worry," she said, behind him. "If you're looking for Jimmy, he won't come here."

Actually, the thought hadn't occurred to him, until she mentioned it. "No?"

"No," she said. "He will go elsewhere. Jimmy has many women." She took a sip of red wine, then set the glass down on the bedside table. Unceremoniously, she pulled her top over her head and dropped her skirt. She was wearing nothing beneath.

Still in her high heels, she walked toward him. He must have seemed surprised, because she said, "I told you: I do not like to wait," and threw her arms around him and kissed him hard, fiercely, almost angrily. The next moments were awkward, trying to kiss while she tore off his clothes. She was breathing hard, almost panting. She never spoke. She was so passionate she seemed almost angry, and her beauty, the physical perfection of her dark body, intimidated him, but not for long.

Afterward she lay against him, her skin soft but her body taut beneath the surface. The bedroom ceiling had a soft glow from the church façade opposite. He was relaxed, but she seemed, if anything, to be energized, restless after making love. He wondered if she had really come, despite her moans and her final cries. And then abruptly, she got up.

"Anything wrong?"

She took a sip of wine. "To the toilet," she said, and turned away, passing through a door. She had left her wineglass. He sat up and took a sip, seeing the delicate pattern of her lipstick on the rim.

He looked at the bed and saw the dark streaks on the sheets from her heels. She had not taken them off until midway through their love-making. Now the heels were tossed away, coming to a stop beneath the window. Signs of their passion. He still felt, even now, as if he were in a dream. He had never been with a woman like this. Beautiful like this, living in a place like this. He wondered how much this apartment cost, the wood paneling, the perfect location . . .

He took another sip of wine. He could get used to this, he thought. He heard water running in the bathroom. A humming sound, a tuneless song.

With a *bang!* the front door slammed open and three men burst into the bedroom. They were wearing dark raincoats and hats. Terrified, Marshall set the wineglass on the table—it fell—and dived for his clothes beside the bed to cover himself, but in an instant the men were on him, grabbing him with gloved hands. He yelled in alarm and panic as they threw him over, shoving him facedown on the bed. He was still yelling as they pushed his face into a pillow. He thought they were going to suffocate him, but they didn't. One man hissed, "Be quiet. Nothing will happen if you are quiet."

He didn't believe him, so he struggled, calling out again. Where was Marisa? What was she doing? It was happening so fast. One man was sitting on his back, knees digging into his spine, his cold shoes on Marshall's bare buttocks. He felt the man's hand on his neck, shoving him into the bed.

"Be quiet!" the man hissed again.

The other men had each taken one of his wrists, and they were pulling his arms wide, spread-eagling him on the bed. *They were getting ready to do something to him.* He felt terrified and vulnerable. He moaned, and somebody hit him on the back of the head. "Quiet!"

Everything was happening quickly, it was all impressionistic. Where was Marisa? Probably hiding in the bathroom, and he couldn't blame her. He heard a sloshing sound and saw a plastic baggie and something white in it, like a golf ball. They were placing the baggie under his armpit, on the fleshy part of his arm.

*What the hell were they doing?* He felt the water cold against his underarm, and he struggled but they held him tight, and then inside the water, something soft pressed against the arm, and he had a *sticky* sensation, like sticky chewing gum, something sticky and tugging against the flesh of his arm, and then he felt a little pinch. Nothing, hardly noticeable, a momentary sting.

The men were moving quickly, the baggie was removed, and at that

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moment he heard two surprisingly loud gunshots and Marisa was screaming in rapid French—“*Salaud! Salopard! Bouge-toi le cul!*”—and the third man had tumbled off Marshall’s back and fallen to the ground, then scrambled up, and Marisa was still screaming, there were more shots, and he could smell powder in the air, and the men fled. The door slammed, and she came back, stark naked, babbling in French he could not understand, something about *vacherie*, which he thought was a cow but he wasn’t thinking straight. He was starting to tremble on the bed.

She came over and threw her arms around him. The barrel of the gun was hot and he yelled, and she set it aside. “Oh Jonathan, I am so sorry, so sorry.” She cradled his head against her shoulder. “Please, you must forgive me, it is all right now, I promise you.”

Gradually his trembling stopped, and she looked at him. “Did they hurt you?”

He shook his head, no.

“Good. I did not think so. Idiots! Friends of Jimmy, they think they make a joke, to scare you. And me I am sure. But you are not hurt?”

He shook his head again. He coughed. “Perhaps,” he said, finding his voice at last. “Perhaps I should be going.”

“Oh, no,” she said. “No, no, you cannot do this to me.”

“I don’t feel—”

“Absolutely no,” she said. She pushed closer to him, so her body was touching his. “You must stay a while.”

“Should we call the police?”

“*Mais non*. The police will do nothing. A quarrel of lovers. In France we do not do this, call the police.”

“But they broke in . . .”

“They are gone now,” she said, whispering in his ear. He felt her breath. “There is only us, now. Only us, Jonathan.” Her dark body slid down his chest.

It was after midnight when he was finally dressed and standing at the window, looking out at Notre Dame. The streets were still crowded.

“Why will you not stay?” she said, pouting prettily. “I want you to stay. Don’t you want to please me?”

“I’m sorry,” he said. “I have to go. I don’t feel very well.”

“I will make you feel better.”

He shook his head. In truth, he really did not feel well. He was experiencing waves of dizziness, and his legs felt oddly weak. His hands were trembling as he gripped the balcony.

“I’m sorry,” he said again. “I have to leave.”

“All right, then I will drive you.”

Her car, he knew, was parked on the other side of the Seine. It seemed far to walk. But he just nodded numbly. “All right,” he said.

She was in no rush. They strolled arm in arm, like lovers, along the embankment. They passed the houseboat restaurants tied up to the side, brightly lit, still busy with guests. Above them, on the other side of the river, rose Notre Dame, brilliantly lit. For a while, this slow walk, with her head on his shoulder, the soft words she spoke to him, made him feel better.

But soon he stumbled, feeling a kind of clumsy weakness coursing through his body. His mouth was very dry. His jaw felt stiff. It was difficult to speak.

She did not seem to notice. They had moved past the bright lights now, under one of the bridges, and he stumbled again. This time he fell on the stone embankment.

“My darling,” she said, worried and solicitous, and helped him to his feet.

He said, “I think . . . I think . . .”

“Darling, are you all right?” She helped him to a bench, away from the river. “Here, just sit here for a moment. You will feel better in a moment.”

But he did not feel better. He tried to protest, but he could not speak. In horror he realized he could not even shake his head. *Something was very wrong.* His whole body was growing weak, swiftly and astonishingly

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weak, and he tried to push up from the bench, but he could not move his limbs, he could not move his head. He looked at her, sitting beside him.

“Jonathan, what is wrong? Do you need a doctor?”

Yes, I need a doctor, he thought.

“Jonathan, this is not right . . .”

His chest was heavy. He was having trouble breathing. He looked away, staring straight ahead. He thought in horror: *I am paralyzed.*

“Jonathan?”

He tried to look at her. But now he could not even move his eyes. He could only look straight forward. His breathing was shallow.

“Jonathan?”

*I need a doctor.*

“Jonathan, can you look at me? Can you? No? You cannot turn your head?”

Somehow, her voice did not sound concerned. She sounded detached, clinical. Perhaps his hearing was affected. There was a rushing sound in his ears. It was harder and harder to breathe.

“All right, Jonathan, let’s get you away from here.”

She ducked her head under his arm and with surprising strength got him to his feet. His body was loose and floppy, sagging around her. He could not control where he looked. He heard the clicking of footsteps approaching and thought, *Thank God.* He heard a man’s voice say in French, “Mademoiselle, do you need help?”

“Thank you, but no,” she said. “Just too much to drink.”

“Are you sure?”

“He does this all the time.”

“Yes?”

“I can manage.”

“Ah. Then I wish you *bonne nuit.*”

“*Bonne nuit,*” she said.

She continued on her way, carrying him. The footsteps became fainter. Then she paused, turned to look in all directions. And now . . . *she was moving him toward the river.*

“You are heavier than I thought,” she said, in a conversational tone.

He felt a deep and profound terror. He was completely paralyzed. He could do nothing. His own feet were scraping over the stone.

*Toward the river.*

“I am sorry,” she said, and she dropped him into the water.

It was a short fall, and a stunning sense of cold. He plunged beneath the surface, surrounded by bubbles and green, then black. He could not move, even in the water. He could not believe this was happening to him, he could not believe that he was dying this way.

Then slowly, he felt his body rise. Green water again, and then he broke the surface, on his back, turning slowly.

He could see the bridge, and the black sky, and Marisa, standing on the embankment. She lit a cigarette and stared at him. She had one hand on her hip, one leg thrust forward, a model’s pose. She exhaled, smoke rising in the night.

Then he sank beneath the surface again, and he felt the cold and the blackness close in around him.

At three o’clock in the morning the lights snapped on in the Laboratoire Ondulatoire of the French Marine Institute, in Vissy. The control panel came to life. The wave machine began to generate waves that rolled down the tank, one after another, and crashed against the artificial shore. The control screens flashed three-dimensional images, scrolled columns of data. The data was transmitted to an unknown location somewhere in France.

At four o’clock, the control panel went dark, and the lights went out, and the hard drives erased any record of what had been done.

**PAHANG**  
**TUESDAY, MAY 11**  
**11:55 A.M.**

The twisting jungle road lay in shadow beneath the canopy of the Malay rain forest. The paved road was very narrow, and the Land Cruiser careened around the corners, tires squealing. In the passenger seat, a bearded man of forty glanced at his watch. "How much farther?"

"Just a few minutes," the driver said, not slowing. "We're almost there."

The driver was Chinese but he spoke with a British accent. His name was Charles Ling and he had flown over from Hong Kong to Kuala Lumpur the night before. He had met his passenger at the airport that morning, and they had been driving at breakneck speed ever since.

The passenger had given Ling a card that read "Allan Peterson, Seismic Services, Calgary." Ling didn't believe it. He knew perfectly well that there was a company in Alberta, ELS Engineering, that sold this equipment. It wasn't necessary to come all the way to Malaysia to see it.

Not only that, but Ling had checked the passenger manifest on the incoming flight, and there was no Allan Peterson listed. So this guy had come in on a different name.

Furthermore, he told Ling he was a field geologist doing independent consulting for energy companies in Canada, mostly evaluating potential oil sites. But Ling didn't believe that, either. You could spot those petroleum engineers a mile off. This guy wasn't one.

So Ling didn't know who the guy was. It didn't bother him. Mr. Peterson's credit was good; the rest was none of Ling's business. He had only one interest today, and that was to sell cavitation machines. And this looked like a big sale: Peterson was talking about three units, more than a million dollars in total.

He turned off the road abruptly, onto a muddy rut. They bounced through the jungle beneath huge trees, and suddenly came out into sunlight and a large opening. There was a huge semicircular gash in the ground, exposing a cliff of gray earth. A green lake lay below.

"What's this?" Peterson said, wincing.

"It was open-face mine, abandoned now. Kaolin."

"Which is . . . ?"

Ling thought, this is no geologist. He explained that kaolin was a mineral in clay. "It's used in paper and ceramics. Lot of industrial ceramics now. They make ceramic knives, incredibly sharp. They'll make ceramic auto engines soon. But the quality here was too low. It was abandoned four years ago."

Peterson nodded. "And where is the cavitator?"

Ling pointed toward a large truck parked at the edge of the cliff. "There." He drove toward it.

"Russians make it?"

"The vehicle and the carbon-matrix frame are Russian made. The electronics come from Taiwan. We assemble ourselves, in Kuala Lumpur."

"And is this your biggest model?"

"No, this is the intermediate. We don't have the largest one to show you."

They pulled alongside the truck. It was the size of a large earthmover; the cab of the Land Cruiser barely reached above the huge tires. In the center, hanging above the ground, was a large rectangular cavitation generator, looking like an oversize diesel generator, a boxy mass of pipes and wires. The curved cavitation plate was slung underneath, a few feet above the ground.

They climbed out of the car into sweltering heat. Ling's eyeglasses



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clouded over. He wiped them on his shirt. Peterson walked around the truck. "Can I get the unit without the truck?"

"Yes, we make transportable units. Seagoing containers. But usually clients want them mounted on vehicles eventually."

"I just want the units," Peterson said. "Are you going to demonstrate?"

"Right away," Ling said. He gestured to the operator, high up in the cab. "Perhaps we should step away."

"Wait a minute," Peterson said, suddenly alarmed. "I thought we were going to be alone. Who is that?"

"That's my brother," Ling said smoothly. "He's very trustworthy."

"Well . . ."

"Let's step away," Ling said. "We can see better from a distance."

The cavitation generator fired up, chugging loudly. Soon the noise blended with another sound, a deep humming that Ling always seemed to feel in his chest, in his bones.

Peterson must have felt it, too, because he moved back hastily.

"These cavitation generators are hypersonic," Ling explained, "producing a radially symmetric cavitation field that can be adjusted for focal point, rather like an optical lens, except we are using sound. In other words, we can focus the sound beam, and control how deep the cavitation will occur."

He waved to the operator, who nodded. The cavitation plate came down, until it was just above the ground. The sound changed, becoming deeper and much quieter. The earth vibrated slightly where they were standing.

"Jesus," Peterson said, stepping back.

"Not to worry," Ling said. "This is just low-grade reflection. The main energy vector is orthogonal, directed straight down."

About forty feet below the truck, the walls of the canyon suddenly seemed to blur, to become indistinct. Small clouds of gray smoke obscured the surface for a moment, and then a whole section of cliff gave way, and rumbled down into the lake below, like a gray avalanche. The whole area filled with smoke and dust.

As it began to clear, Ling said, "Now we will show how the beam is focused." The rumbling began again, and this time the cliff blurred much farther down, two hundred feet or more. Once again the gray sand gave way, this time sliding rather quietly into the lake.

"And it can focus laterally as well?" Peterson said.

Ling said it could. A hundred yards north of the truck, the cliff was shaken free, and again tumbled down.

"We can aim it in any direction, and any depth."

"Any depth?"

"Our big unit will focus at a thousand meters. Although no client has any use for such depths."

"No, no," Peterson said. "We don't need anything like that. But we want beam power." He wiped his hands on his trousers. "I've seen enough."

"Really? We have quite a few other techniques to demon—"

"I'm ready to go back." Behind his sunglasses, his eyes were unreadable.

"Very well," Ling said. "If you are sure—"

"I'm sure."

Driving back, Peterson said, "You ship from KL or Hong Kong?"

"From KL."

"With what restrictions?"

Ling said, "How do you mean?"

"Hypersonic cavitation technology in the US is restricted. It can't be exported without a license."

"As I said, we use Taiwanese electronics."

"Is it as reliable as the US technology?"

Ling said, "Virtually identical." If Peterson knew his business, he would know that the US had long ago lost the capacity to manufacture such advanced chipsets. The US cavitation chipsets were manufactured in Taiwan. "Why do you ask? Are you planning to export to the US?"

"No."

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“Then there is no difficulty.”

“What’s your lead time?” Peterson said.

“We need seven months.”

“I was thinking of five.”

“It can be done. There will be a premium. For how many units?”

“Three,” Peterson said.

Ling wondered why anyone would need three cavitation units. No geological survey company in the world owned more than one.

“I can fill that order,” Ling said, “upon receipt of your deposit.”

“You will have it wired to you tomorrow.”

“And we are shipping where? Canada?”

“You will receive shipping instructions,” Peterson said, “in five months.”

Directly ahead, the curved spans of the ultra-modern airport designed by Kurokawa rose into the sky. Peterson had lapsed into silence. Driving up the ramp, Ling said, “I hope we are in time for your flight.”

“What? Oh yes. We’re fine.”

“You’re heading back to Canada?”

“Yes.”

Ling pulled up at the international terminal, got out, and shook Peterson’s hand. Peterson shouldered his day bag. It was his only luggage. “Well,” Peterson said. “I’d better go.”

“Safe flight.”

“Thank you. You, too. Back to Hong Kong?”

“No,” Ling said. “I have to go to the factory, and get them started.”

“It’s nearby?”

“Yes, in Pudu Raya. Just a few kilometers.”

“All right, then.” Peterson disappeared inside the terminal, giving a final wave. Ling got back in the car and drove away. But as he was heading down the ramp, he saw that Peterson had left behind his cell phone on the car seat. He pulled over to the curb, glancing back over his shoulder. But Peterson was gone. And the cell phone in his hand was

lightweight, made of cheap plastic. It was one of those prepaid-card phones, the disposable ones. It couldn't be Peterson's main phone.

It occurred to Ling that he had a friend who might be able to trace the phone and the card inside it. Find out more about the purchaser. And Ling would like to know more. So he slipped the phone into his pocket and drove north, to the factory.