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Robert Ludlum's The Bourne Dominion

Written by Eric Van Lustbader

Published by Orion Books

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Robert Ludlum's™

THE BOURNE DOMINION

A New **Jason Bourne** Novel by
Eric Van Lustbader



An Orion paperback

First published in Great Britain in 2011
by Orion

This paperback edition published in 2011
by Orion Books Ltd,
Orion House, 5 Upper St Martin's Lane,
London WC2H 9EA

An Hachette UK company

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-4091-2139-8

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

The Orion Publishing Group's policy is to use papers that
are natural, renewable and recyclable products and
made from wood grown in sustainable forests. The logging
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PROLOGUE

PHUKET, THAILAND

Jason Bourne eeled his way through the mob. He was assaulted by the bone-juddering, heart-attack-inducing, soul-shattering blast of music coming from ten-foot-tall speakers set on either end of the enormous dance floor. Above the dancers' bobbing heads an aurora borealis of lights splintered, coalesced, and then shattered against the domed ceiling like an armada of comets and shooting stars.

Ahead of him, across the restless sea of bodies, the woman with the thick mane of blond hair made her way around gyrating couples of all possible combinations. Bourne pressed after her; it was like trying to push his way through a soft mattress. The heat was palpable. Already the snow on the fur collar of his thick coat had melted away. His hair was slick with it. The woman darted in and out of the light, like a minnow under the sun-beaten skin of a lake. She seemed to move in a shuddering jerk-step, visible first here, then there. Bourne pushed after her, overamplified bass and drums having highjacked the feel of his own pulse.

At length, he confirmed that she was making for the ladies' room, and, having already plotted out a shortcut, he broke off his direct pursuit and plowed the new route

through the melee. He arrived at the door just as she disappeared inside. Through the briefly open door the smells of weed, sex, and sweat emerged to swirl around him.

He waited for a pair of young women to stumble out in a cloud of perfume and giggles, then he slid inside. Three women with long, tangled hair and chunky, jangling jewelry huddled at the line of sinks, so engrossed in snorting coke they didn't see him. Crouching down to peer under the doors, he went quickly past the line of stalls. Only one was occupied. Drawing his Glock, he screwed the noise suppressor onto the end of the barrel. He kicked open the door and, as it slammed back against the partition, the woman with ice-blue eyes and a mane of blond hair aimed a small silver-plated .22 Beretta at him. He put a bullet through her heart, a second in her right eye.

He was smoke by the time her forehead hit the tiles...

Bourne opened his eyes to the diamond glare of tropical sunshine. He looked out onto the deep azure of the Andaman Sea, at the sail- and motorboats bobbing at anchor just offshore. He shivered, as if he were still in his memory shard instead of on Patong Beach in Phuket. Where was that disco? Norway? Sweden? When had he killed that woman? And who was she? A target assigned to him by Alex Conklin before the trauma that had cast him into the Mediterranean with a severe concussion. That was all he could be certain of. Why had Treadstone targeted her? He racked his brain, trying to gather all the details of his dream, but like smoke they drifted

through his fingers. He remembered the fur collar of his coat, his hair, wet with snow. But what else? The woman's face? That appeared and reappeared with the echo of the flickering star-bursts of light. For a moment the music throbbed through him, then it winked out like the last rays of the sun.

What had triggered the memory shard?

He rose from the blanket. Turning, he saw Moira and Berengária Moreno Skydel silhouetted against the burning blue sky, the blindingly white clouds, the vertical finger hills, umber and green. Moira had invited him down to Berengária's estancia in Sonora, but he had wanted to get farther away from civilization, so they had met up at this resort on the west coast of Thailand, and here they had spent the last three days and nights. During that time, Moira had explained what she was doing in Sonora with the sister of the late drug czar Gustavo Moreno, the two women had asked for his help, and he had agreed. Moira said time was of the essence and, after hearing the details, he had agreed to leave for Colombia tomorrow.

Turning back, he saw a woman in a tiny orange bikini high-stepping like a cantering horse through the surf. Her thick mane of hair shone pale blond in the sunlight. Bourne followed her, drawn by the echo of his memory shard. He stared at her brown back, where the muscles worked between her shoulder blades. She turned slightly, then, and he saw her pull smoke into her lungs from a hand-rolled joint. For a moment, the tang of the sea breeze was sweetened by the drug. Then he saw her flinch and drop the joint into the surf, and his eyes followed hers.

Three policemen were coming down the beach. They wore suits, but there was no doubt as to their identity. She moved, thinking they were coming for her, but she was wrong. They were coming for Bourne.

Without hesitation, he waded into the surf. He needed to get them away from Moira and Berengária because Moira would surely try to help him and he didn't want her involved. Just before he dived into an on-coming wave, he saw one of the detectives raise his hand, as if in a salute. When he emerged onto the surface, far beyond the surf line, he saw that it had been a signal. A pair of WaveRunner FZR's were converging on him from either side. There were two men on each, the driver and the man behind him clad in scuba. These people were covering all avenues of escape.

As he made for the *Parole*, a small sailboat close to him, his mind was working overtime. From the coordination and meticulous manner in which the approach had been made, he knew that the orders had not emanated from the Thai police, who were not known for either. Someone else was manipulating them, and he suspected he knew who. There had always been the chance that Severus Domna would seek retribution for what he had done to the secret organization. But further speculation would have to come afterward; first he had to get out of this trap and away to keep his promise to Moira to ensure Berengária's safety.

Within a dozen powerful strokes he'd come to the *Parole*. Hoisting himself over the side, he was about to stand up when a fusillade of bullets caused the boat to rock back and forth. He began to crawl toward the

middle of the boat, grabbing a coil of nylon rope. His hands gripped either gunwale. The WaveRunners were closer when the second fusillade came, their violent wakes causing the boat to dance and shudder so violently, it was easy for him to capsize it. He dived backward over the side, arms pinwheeling, as if he'd been shot.

The pair of WaveRunners crisscrossed the area around the overturned boat, their occupants looking for the bobbing of a head. When none appeared, the two scuba divers drew down their masks and, as the drivers slowed their vehicles, tumbled over the side, one hand keeping their masks in place.

Completely invisible to them, Bourne was treading water under the overturned boat, the trapped air sustaining him. But that respite was short-lived. He saw the columns of bubbles through the transparent water as the divers plunged in on either side of the boat.

Quickly he tied off one end of the nylon rope to the starboard cleat. When the first of the divers came at him from below, he ducked down, wrapped the cord around the diver's neck, and pulled it tight. The diver let go of his speargun to counter Bourne's attack and Bourne ripped off his mask, effectively blinding him. Then he grabbed the speargun as it floated free, turned, and shot the oncoming second diver through the chest.

Blood ballooned out in a thick cloud, dispersed by the current rising from the deep. Bourne knew it wasn't wise to stay in these waters when blood was spilled. Lungs burning, he rose, breaking the surface under the overturned boat. But almost immediately he dived back

down to find the first diver. The water was dark, hazy with the gout of blood. The dead diver hung in the mist, arms out to the sides, fins pointing straight down into darkness. Bourne was in the midst of turning when the nylon rope looped around his neck and was pulled tight. The first diver drove his knees into the small of Bourne's back while he hauled on the rope from both sides. Bourne tried grabbing at the diver, but he swam backward out of the way. Though it was clamped shut, a thin line of bubbles trailed from the corner of Bourne's mouth. The rope was cutting hard into his windpipe, holding him below the surface.

He fought the urge to struggle, knowing that this would both pull the rope tighter and exhaust him. Instead he hung motionless for a moment like the diver not three feet away, twisting in the current, playing dead. The diver pulled him close as he drew his knife to deliver the coup de grâce across Bourne's neck.

Bourne reached back and pressed the PURGE button on the regulator. Air shot out with such force it caused the diver to loosen his mouth, and, with a thick plume of bubbles, Bourne tore the regulator free. The cord loosened around his neck. Taking advantage of the diver's surprise, Bourne freed himself. Turning, he tried to pinion the diver's arms, but his adversary drove the knife toward his chest. Bourne knocked it away, but as he did so the diver wrapped his arms around Bourne's body so he couldn't surface to get air.

Bourne pressed the diver's octopus—the secondary regulator—into his mouth and sucked air into his fiery lungs. The diver scrabbled for his regulator, but Bourne

fought him off. The man's face was white and pinched. He tried again and again to position the knife so that it would cut Bourne or the octopus, to no avail. He blinked heavily several times and his eyes began to turn up as all the life drained out of him. Bourne lunged for the knife, but the diver let it go. It spiraled down into the deep.

Though Bourne was now breathing normally through the octopus, he knew that following a purge there would be very little air left in the tanks. The diver's legs were locked around him, ankles crossed. In addition, the nylon cord had become entangled with both of them, building a kind of cocoon. He was working on freeing himself when he felt the powerful ripple. A chill rolled through him, rising from the depths. A shark came into view. It was perhaps twelve feet long, silvery black, slanting unerringly upward toward Bourne and the two dead divers. It had smelled the blood, sensed the thrashing bodies in the water transmitting the telltale vibrations that told it there was a dying fish, possibly more than one, for it to feast on.

Struggling, Bourne swung around, the diver in tow. Unbuckling the harness of the second diver's air tanks, he pushed them off. Immediately the corpse sank down amid its black clouds of blood. The shark changed course, heading directly for the body. Its mouth hinged open and it took an enormous bite out of the diver. Bourne had given himself a respite, albeit a short one. Any minute now more sharks would be drawn to join in a feeding frenzy; he had to be out of the water by then.

He unsnapped the first diver's weight belt, then pulled off his tanks. Then he fitted the mask over his

face. Taking one last aborted breath, he let the tanks go—they were out of air, anyway. The two of them, locked in a macabre embrace, began to rise toward the surface. As they did so, Bourne worked on the nylon cord, unwinding it from around them. But the diver's legs were still imprisoning his hips. Try as he might, he couldn't unlock them.

He broke the surface and immediately saw one of the WaveRunners bouncing over the water directly at him. He waved. In the mask, he was hoping the driver would assume he was one of his divers. The WaveRunner slowed as it neared him. By this time, he'd managed to untangle the rope. As the craft swung around, he grabbed on to its back. When he tapped the driver on the knee, the WaveRunner took off. Bourne was still half in the water, and the vehicle's speed loosened the diver's death grip. Bourne pounded on the diver's knees, heard a crack of bone, and then he was free.

He swung up onto the WaveRunner and broke the driver's neck. Before he tossed him into the water, he unhooked the speargun from his belt. The driver of the second WaveRunner had seen what was happening and was in the process of turning when Bourne drove directly at him. The driver made the wrong choice. Drawing a handgun, he squeezed off two shots, but it was impossible to aim accurately on the bucking vehicle. By this time Bourne was close enough to make the leap. He swung the speargun, launching the WaveRunner's driver off the vehicle even while he took control of it.

Alone, now, on the sapphire water, Bourne sped away.