



Gunmetal Gray (Gray Man)

By Mark Greaney

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THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER!

Mark Greaney, the #1 *New York Times* bestselling coauthor of Tom Clancy's Jack Ryan novels, delivers another breakneck thriller following the world's deadliest assassin—the Gray Man...

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Court's high stakes hunt for answers takes him across Southeast Asia and leads to his old friend, Donald Fitzroy, who is being held hostage by the Chinese. Fitzroy was contracted to find Fan Jiang, a former member of an ultra-secret computer warfare unit responsible for testing China's own security systems. And it seems Fan may have been too good at his job—because China wants him dead.

The first two kill teams Fitzroy sent to find Fan have disappeared and the Chinese have decided to “supervise” the next operation. What they don't know is that Gentry's mission is to find Fan first and get whatever intel he has to the US.

After that, all he has to do is get out alive...

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Editorial Review

Review

“I LOVE THE GRAY MAN.”—#1 *New York Times* bestselling author Lee Child

“BOURNE FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM.”—*New York Times* bestselling author James Rollins

Praise for *Gunmetal Gray*

“Fans of RPG, Hong Kong action films and high-octane storytelling will love the Gray Man, who battles full-bore through this fast-paced series.”—*The Washington Post*

“Courtland Gentry, also known as the Gray Man, is everything you’d want in a fictional professional killer...[he] always gets the job done for the US of A, and he entertains while doing it...this one is fat, fast, and fun. Clancy's spirit lives on.”—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

“Outstanding...Gray Man fans will close the book happily fulfilled and eagerly awaiting his next adventure.”—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

Praise for *Back Blast*

“Mark Greaney reigns as one of the recognized masters of action and adventure. *Back Blast* is no exception.”—*New York Times* and #1 internationally bestselling author Steve Berry

“Fast-paced [and] tightly written...A great ride.”—*New York Times* bestselling author Larry Bond

“Punches with bone-busting power...Flesh-and-blood priceless.”—*New York Times* bestselling author Stephen Templin

“Greaney’s unraveling of the *Back Blast* mystery is masterly, but it’s the Gray Man’s ability to outthink and outgun...that will keep readers glued to the pages.”—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

“[A] high-energy thriller...Clancy fans will have a blast.”—*Kirkus Reviews*

About the Author

Mark Greaney has a degree in international relations and political science. In his research for the Gray Man novels, including *Gunmetal Gray*, *Back Blast*, *Dead Eye*, *Ballistic*, *On Target*, and *The Gray Man*, he traveled to more than fifteen countries and trained alongside military and law enforcement in the use of firearms, battlefield medicine, and close-range combative tactics. He is also the author of the *New York Times* bestsellers *Tom Clancy Support and Defend*, *Tom Clancy Full Force and Effect*, *Tom Clancy Commander in Chief*, and *Tom Clancy True Faith and Allegiance*. With Tom Clancy, he coauthored *Locked On*, *Threat Vector*, and *Command Authority*.

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Chapter Two

Courtland Gentry sat in the front passenger seat of the Mercedes with his backpack on top of his roll-aboard and both pieces stacked on his lap, much to the confusion of his driver. Normally passengers sat in the back and their luggage rode in the trunk, but Court had hurried off the aircraft and into the front of the car to disrupt any potential surveillance at the FBO, and since the driver didn't know anything about tradecraft, he thought this American to be some kind of a weirdo.

Court hadn't seen the two men on the roof, but he saw them now, or at least he saw the black Aurion varying between six and ten car lengths behind his Mercedes, always there, despite the turnoffs, red lights, and off-and-on gridlocked traffic of a Hong Kong workday.

Court had picked up a tail and he hadn't even been on the ground here in Hong Kong for ten *fucking* minutes.

Terrific.

He considered bailing out of the Mercedes somewhere en route to his destination to lose the surveillance detail, but he figured this driver was probably an informant for Chinese intelligence, and the man would just pass on the fact that his passenger had, with no warning, dived from his hired car and dashed up some alley.

Nope, that wouldn't do. Court's cover for status had to be maintained, which meant Court would just pretend like he didn't see the black car lurking behind him.

He'd been here to HK before, but only once. To the extent he had a regular beat, East Asia certainly wasn't it, so he did his best to push the tail car out of his mind and instead spend his time doing all he could to observe the fabric of life on the streets around him. He noted what the police cars looked like, where the street signs were located, the flow of traffic, and the manner of dress of the commuters. He made a mental note of the cardinal positions of several major buildings in view. He'd spent hours of his flight over from the States prepping for his op here, but he'd not had time to digest more than a thumbnail sketch of this area of operations and, as he had learned countless times in the past, not only was the map not the territory, but most preconceived notions about a place were dead wrong.

You really had to experience a location to know it at an operational level.

Court had a lot of work to do to get up to speed, but his assignment here was as time sensitive as they came, so he'd have to work out the atmospherics of this AO while on the job.

His car drove onto the Tsing Yi Bridge, and he glanced back in the passenger-side mirror to confirm that the black Aurion continued to follow. It was in a reasonable position for a tail car; Court gave these boys credit for knowing their stuff, but he had been either the tailer or the tailee thousands of times in his life, so sniffing out a car on his six was nothing to him.

Both vehicles left the bridge, continued south along the water, and finally entered the Hong Kong district of Tsim Sha Tsui, on the southern tip of Kowloon. The black sedan was still back there, which meant to Court this tail on him was a simple affair. There were no teams of vehicles in radio contact leapfrogging all around, which was what he would have expected if mainland China's Ministry of State Security was working here and had ordered up a large surveillance package on him. Either the guys in the tail car were working for some group not tied to the Chinese intelligence services, or else Chinese intel found him more of a curiosity than a real concern, so they just sent a couple of men to see where he was heading and what he was up to.

Looking away from the mirror, he got his first glimpse of his hotel. The five-star Peninsula Hong Kong sat at the southern tip of Kowloon, just across the street from the harbor ferry terminal. He was anxious to get into his room—not so he could rest after the two-leg, sixteen-hour-long flight from the United States; rather so he could whip out his encrypted phone and call his handler. He would let her know about the surveillance, and he would let her have it, because this bullshit wasn't his damn fault, and it could ruin this mission before it began.

No, Court told himself. This wouldn't hurt the op. It *couldn't*, because his assignment here was possibly the most important of his life. The potential for gain was exponentially larger than any intelligence haul he'd ever heard of short of wartime.

And lives were on the line, including the life of a man who had saved Court Gentry years ago.

Court told himself he would not fail. Regardless of the hurdles ahead, he would see this through somehow, even if he had these Chinese motherfuckers breathing down his neck for the duration of his assignment.

The Mercedes drove around the fountain in front of the Peninsula and stopped under the awning. A bellman opened the back door, but Court climbed out of the front seat with barely a nod to his driver. He handled his own luggage and passed the attentive bellmen with a curt nod, like he was a businessman who did this every day of his life.

Five minutes later he was checked into his twenty-seventh-floor room. It wasn't a suite but it was roomy and ornate, certainly nicer than all but a few accommodations Court had ever stayed in, in his life. It came with a dramatic floor-to-ceiling view of Victoria Harbor. Beyond the congested waterway, the massive skyscrapers of Hong Kong Island shot skyward. Past the stunning urban landscape, lush hills dwarfed the buildings, and

Victoria Peak, the highest point in HK, was completely hidden by the hidden by the low cloud ceiling.

Twenty-seven floors below, Wang Ping Li and Tao Man Koh sat in a conference room in the administrative office of the Peninsula Hotel, watching silently while the day manager stood and left the room. The man had been angry about informing on one of his guests, and he'd made a show about demanding Wang and Tao's credentials, but it was only a show, and while both operatives knew they could have filed a report on the manager's recalcitrance, they weren't here in HK to gauge the party loyalty of hoteliers.

And anyway, after a little huffing and puffing, the manager *was* playing ball. He'd already told them that the guest who'd arrived in the Mercedes was traveling under the name Roger Hartley, and he was ostensibly a businessman from Ohio in the United States. The intelligence officers didn't have the man's passport to look at; hotels here in Hong Kong, unlike in China proper, were under no obligation to take their guest's passports, and the five-star properties like the Peninsula distanced themselves from China by not doing so.

But even though on the surface the Peninsula acted high-minded about guests' rights, in truth Roger Hartley's room was already bugged with listening devices; most four- and five-star hotels in HK maintained rooms wired by MSS as a matter of course, though the bugs weren't turned on unless there was a specific need. Tao would make a call to initiate twenty-four-hour monitoring of Hartley's room now that he had the room number, and he'd follow up hourly with the listeners for updates.

The manager returned with a pair of key cards and handed them over without a word. This would give Tao and Wang access to the room directly across the hall from Hartley; as it happened it had been vacant, but if a guest had been staying there, the annoyed hotel manager would have moved them out under some emergency-repair ruse. Through a pinhole camera Wang and Tao would attach to their door's peephole they would have a perfect view of Hartley's door, and through the motion-detector setting on the device they'd be sure they wouldn't miss him leaving his room.

The manager had also handed over extra copies of cards that would get them into Hartley's room itself, in case they wanted to make entry when the man was out.

After passing over the key cards, the manager walked the two intelligence operatives out of the conference room and back into the lobby. He bid them an insincere good day, then turned and went back inside.

Tao looked to Wang. "He was disrespectful."

"No time to make trouble for him. He gets a pass for now. Let's go to the room."

Tao nodded, then said, "Should we call in more eyes to assist?"

"Who? Everyone else here is working for Ministry of Defense. When Colonel Dai finds out we've been pulled off his operation, he'll be angry enough. If we start removing others to help us, he'll lose his mind."

The two men headed for the elevators. As soon as the door closed, the mobile phone rang in Tao's jacket. He looked at the incoming number, then immediately handed the phone over to Wang.

"It's him."

Wang took the phone from Tao and answered with a report, not even waiting to be asked where the hell they were. "*Way ni hao, Shangxio.*" *Yes, hello, Colonel.* "We were ordered by our Beijing Control to divert from your operation here and proceed to the airport. An American CIA Dassault Falcon Seven X, tail number—"

Wang stopped talking abruptly and just listened; Tao could tell he'd been interrupted. The elevator stopped and the two men headed up the hall.

Wang spoke again, more softly now. "Yes, sir. Our orders were made clear to us. We then followed our subject to the Peninsula, and we have taken a room across from—"

He stopped speaking again; Tao could hear the voice of the man through the phone at Wang's ear.

The two men were already in their room with the door shut when Wang spoke again. "I understand, sir. But this came from our department . . . not yours. Apologies, but despite our seconding to you, our chain of command retains authority to—"

For a third time Wang was interrupted. Tao looked on while Wang listened, nodded compliantly, and ended the call. He looked uncomfortable but made no remarks to his junior colleague.

"What did he say?" Tao finally asked.

The more senior of the two operatives blew out a long sigh. “What do you think? He’s mad we left his op to follow the MSS directive, as if we had a choice.”

Tao was the junior man, but he chanced a comment. “Colonel Dai has his own ass on the line on this operation for some reason. The next call we get from him will be the one ordering us to terminate the subject.”

Wang took off his suit coat, still a little damp from his time on the hot roof at the airport. “He’s after a promotion, or maybe, as you suggest, there is some other reason for his personal involvement. If Dai fails here, it will be men like us who will suffer.”

Tao held up a finger. “No. Not men *like* us. It will be us, exactly. That’s why we should terminate the CIA man and—”

Wang waved a hand in the air. “I’ve been doing this longer than you, Tao. Get it out of your head. We’re here on a surveillance job for MSS, and then we will go back to being two more good little soldiers for Defense Ministry. Nobody is killing anybody until we find Fan Jiang, or until someone gets in our way.”

Tao said, “Ross Hartley is in Dai’s way already. And Colonel Dai doesn’t mess around.”

Chapter Three

Court had spent almost all of the past sixteen hours in the air, minus a short refueling stop in Los Angeles, and he’d worked through nearly all of the flight. He’d known nothing about his assignment when he boarded the Falcon, not even if he would accept it, but before the plane took to the sky he’d read his eyes-only orders and he was fully on board with the mission. And by the time the plane had reached its cruising altitude, Court had sketched out a mental to-do list for the long flight ahead of him.

The flight attendant, herself a CIA employee, had brought him dinner and offered him drinks, but he ate lightly and drank nothing but water and coffee, knowing he needed a plan of action to hit the ground running in HK more than he needed a buzz, a heavy stomach, and some shut-eye.

Now he knew that both jet lag and hunger would kick in before long, but he had more work to do. He opened his carry-on and his backpack and dumped everything out onto the bed. He went through each item slowly and carefully, because he'd not packed these bags himself and none of these belongings were his.

He'd already been through this gear on the plane, but he wanted to go over it again. In addition to clothing and toiletries, it had all manner of mission-specific items, from encrypted mobiles to infrared scopes masked as binoculars. He'd taken only a small portion of the equipment left for him on the Falcon, and now he decided to pare this down even more. Most anything could have a GPS tracker in it these days, and he didn't want the CIA knowing his exact whereabouts, just in case someone in the CIA had passed on the tip about the plane's identity and arrival here in the first place.

Now he sat on his bed and searched everything that came off the plane with him.

He knew what he had to do to get back on track. Tonight he would lose his tail, and tomorrow, when no one knew he was the guy who got off that CIA aircraft, he would intentionally pick it back up again, because those were his orders from Langley.

This was going to be a weird op, of this he was certain.

He'd come to meet with a man who had been detained by the Chinese, and since he didn't know where this man was, the only way find him was to make the Chinese aware of who he was and who he was looking for.

But they could *not* know he was here on a mission for the CIA, or this whole operation would fall to pieces.

He grabbed a pillow from the bed, stepped into the closet, lay down on the carpet, and fell asleep while the hot Hong Kong day raged on outside.

Several hours later Court sat at the bar at the Felix, an ultra-chic Philippe Starck–designed restaurant on the top floor of the hotel. The view over the harbor was breathtaking; the lights of Hong Kong Island to the south looked like the Manhattan skyline as seen by a helicopter from just a few hundred yards away. In fact, in many ways it was more dramatic; HK was the world's tallest urban agglomeration, with one building reaching 118 stories and 312 buildings here standing at least 150 yards high, many more than in New York City.

While Court ate a steak and drank a beer at the bar with his back to the windows, forty-four buildings on both sides of Victoria Harbor flashed colors synchronized to music in the nightly Symphony of Lights show. Well-dressed men and women stood at the windows of the Felix and marveled at the spectacle, even though it happened every evening.

Court didn't turn and look at the lights, and neither did one other man in the room. Tao Man Koh sat at a table near the window high above the harbor and sipped a glass of wine. Through the reflection in the glass next to him he could see the back of the American, and he kept eyes out for anyone who might try to communicate with him in a clandestine fashion.

So far he'd not seen a thing that gave him any impression that Roger Hartley was anything other than a businessman here having a meal, but he continued his covert surveillance, careful not to give himself away.

While Tao watched the target, his partner Wang Ping Li stood in the middle of the hotel room of the man he knew as Roger Hartley, checking the area carefully one more time. He'd done this an hour earlier upon his arrival in the room, scanning for anything out of the ordinary, thinking that if Hartley was CIA, he might have prepped his room with hidden cameras or listening devices of his own, or he might have placed objects in specific ways so that he'd know immediately if anything had been tampered with. It was tradecraft 101, and while Wang worked these days as a direct-action operative for the Ministry of State Security, he'd been trained as a simple spook and he knew how to scan a room for telltales.

Wang had spent an additional half hour going through the man's luggage, taking apart his laptop, and looking through the top dozen places someone might hide items in a hotel room. He took the drawer out of the desk, unscrewed heating ducts, searched below trash can liners, behind wall art, under the mattress; even in the toilet tank.

He didn't find a single item of interest.

The phone buzzed in Wang's pocket, and he checked it quickly; it was Tao.

Wang answered in a whisper. "He's moving?"

"Negative. No movement. He ate dinner and he is just sitting and drinking a—"

“I don’t give a shit what he’s drinking. You are to inform me when he leaves.”

Tao asked, “Anything in his room?”

“Nothing. Unless he has something on him right now, he is clean. We might find ourselves following this son of a bitch for days waiting for him to meet someone.”

“Doubt it.”

Before Wang could respond, his phone told him another call was coming. “Shit. It’s Dai now.”

“Let me know what he—”

Wang hung up and rejected the new call. He wasn’t going to talk to Dai from his target’s room. Instead he left and went across the twenty-seventh-floor hallway to his own room, where he immediately hit redial.

Dai answered after several rings. “Still on your little errand for Beijing?”

“Yes, sir.”

“What do you have to report?”

“Our target is sitting in the Felix bar at the top of the Peninsula.”

“What is he doing?”

“He had dinner, and now he’s drinking. Just sitting there. We think he may be waiting to meet someone, but perhaps he’s just jet-lagged and lingering over dinner. I have searched his room, but I’ve found nothing to indicate why he is here.”

“I didn’t bring you and Tao to Hong Kong to sit in a bar all night. Your real target here could be slipping out of the city at this very moment.”

“I understand, sir, but I saw no way to avoid my orders from the Ministry of State Security, which supersedes your command at the Ministry of Defense. I report first to—”

“Wang, let me ask you . . . when I break your fucking neck the next time I see you, will *that* supersede your orders from State Security?”

Wang just gazed at the floor of his hotel room. Finally he said, “What do you want me to do, sir?”

“Has MSS ordered you to move on the target?”

“No. Just investigate and report contacts.”

“How long is the target registered at the hotel?”

Wang hesitated, knowing his answer was going to send Colonel Dai into orbit. “Eight days, sir.”

As Wang fully expected, Dai screamed at him. “You aren’t sitting in a *fucking* hotel for eight days!”

“Sir, if you would like to speak with MSS I am sure they can send in another team from Beijing and—”

“They already have more assets here in Hong Kong than they are comfortable with! They won’t send anyone else!”

Wang had no answer to this so he just sat there, his phone to his ear.

“You will confront the target. Immediately.”

“I’m sorry, sir, I don’t understand.”

“I am ordering you to end this wasted journey and take him. I’m not telling you to terminate the subject. You have drugs to obtain information, do you not?”

“You issued them to each of us the day we arrived.”

“Use them. Find out who he is, what he wants. Those drugs will render his memory foggy, so he won’t have any idea you questioned him. Then throw him in his bathtub, turn the shower on, and break his leg with the heel of your shoe. When he wakes he’ll be too fucked up to know what happened and too injured to continue his mission here.”

Wang spoke the truth now, but his heart wasn’t in it. He knew he would lose. “Colonel, you have no authority to order me to circumvent my orders from my divisional director.”

“My op here is a national priority mission! I will pull rank on you and change your orders. Call your masters at MSS in exactly fifteen minutes and you will see that your mandate and rules of engagement have been updated. But after that, return to Beijing, don’t come back to me. I’ll have no use for you or your partner after you challenge my authority. I have thirty-four other men here who would not dare this insubordination that you seem so comfortable with.”

Wang knew this was bullshit. Dai was just being petulant. Why would he get MSS to change its instructions so that Wang and Tao could return to their mission here, if Dai no longer wanted Wang and Tao involved in his mission? And Tao and Wang were two of the best; that was why MSS had wanted them looking into the CIA aircraft, but it was also why Dai had requested them personally to come down here and kill Fan Jiang.

No, Dai wouldn’t send Wang and Tao back to the mainland.

But Wang also knew Dai had the capacity to make his life hell if he disobeyed him.

Wang said, “No need to contact Beijing, sir. We will comply immediately.” Wang didn’t need enemies at MOD, especially not someone who could make or break everyone in his family. And on top of this, Wang wouldn’t mind roughing up the CIA officer. He’d never done that before.

“Very well,” Dai said.

“I will do as you say and report back to you with what we found out.”

Dai snapped back. “No. You can tell MSS all about your American, I don’t care about him. I only care about my target here in HK. I want you back on *my* job first thing in the morning.”

“*Shi de, xian sheng.*” *Yes, sir.*

Wang hung up and called Tao.

Tao answered with, “Target has asked for the check.”

“Our plans have changed.” Wang explained Dai’s orders.

When Wang finished, Tao asked, “Rules of engagement?”

“We force compliance. We meet resistance with escalating resistance.”

“Up to?”

A pause. “Up to everything.”

“Told you.”

“You *told* me this would be an assassination. It’s not that. We take him as he returns to his room. Overpower him, tie him up, drug him, get the intel, and bust him up. Dai wants us back with him in the morning.”

“I hope this guy is a fighter,” Tao chuckled. “I’ll get my check and head up.”

Court didn’t really want the third beer; he’d barely sipped it, spending most of his time fiddling with his wedding band and pretending to surf the Internet on his phone. He only wore the band for the op; he wasn’t married, but the Agency had put it in his backpack on the plane, and he’d recognized it for what it was, so he slipped it on, along with a set of designer eyeglasses that did nothing for his vision but used a special refracted glass to obscure and break up the outline of his face to hamper facial recognition software.

Court took his time lounging here at the bar, for the simple reason that he wanted the lookout seated behind him to report to whoever was in his room right now that the coast was clear.

He’d ID’d the watcher behind him minutes after his arrival, pegged him as likely to be one of the men who’d followed him from the airport, because this still felt like a small op. If he was right about that, then there would just be a few other men involved, and they would be conducting a site exploration in Court’s room three floors down right now. If this was, indeed, the case, Court wanted to give them plenty of time to do their work.

It wasn’t that Court was afraid to confront a couple of guys in his room. The fact was he didn’t need the aggravation. He wanted to give the Chinese the time they needed to go through his belongings so he could convince them he was no one worth following, or at least that they didn’t need to call in any backup.

He’d decided to simply check out of his hotel tomorrow morning and lose his tail then, but for now he just wanted to look as sedentary, nonthreatening, and downright boring as possible to the men watching him.

Finally he paid his bill, then went to the bathroom here at the Felix to take a leak, giving the men downstairs even more time to clear out of his room. He stood at a space-age-looking urinal in front of floor-to-ceiling windows that looked out and down thirty floors, which Court found bizarre and a little silly, but it was a decent distraction for a man taking his time while taking a piss, and as far as bathrooms went, this one was indeed memorable.

Finally he headed for the elevator. The watcher was gone from his seat by the windows, which Court hoped meant this surveillance team had pulled the plug for the night.

Court fiddled with his key card outside his door for a moment, then slid it into the lock, all the while hoping like hell the sweep had been completed and the man performing it had done a decent job hiding evidence of his search. If it was obvious his belongings had been disturbed he’d need to report it to hotel management,

just to continue along with his ruse that he was like any other Western businessman here. It would be in keeping with his legend that he'd freak out if someone went through his stuff while he was at dinner, so if the goons who searched his room couldn't be bothered to refold his clothes and zip his luggage back up, then Court would have to make a scene.

As soon as Court entered his room, his shoulders sank. Down the little entry hall, past the bathroom ahead on his left, he could just see the front edge of his king-sized bed. His laptop was lying open there; cords, chargers, and socks were strewn about, hanging down to the floor.

Shit, his room had been tossed. He'd have to call the front desk and throw a fit, to pretend he thought housekeeping had rummaged through his belongings.

As he moved forward into the room, he knew the bathroom on his left was a blind spot, and there was a chance a member of the site exploration team was still in there, either working or hiding. The chance was small considering the lookout in the bar had had ten minutes to warn anyone in his room, but if these guys sucked so bad at their job they didn't even try to clean up after themselves, it was also possible their comms were down.

But even though he thought it possible he might be about to disturb someone in the act, he knew he had to remain in cover. He couldn't just fly into the room and waylay anyone standing there. That wasn't the normal behavior of a businessman who had just downed a steak dinner at a swanky bar.

If it turned out there *was* someone in there squeezing out Court's toothpaste into a rubber glove, Court would just feign shock and confusion, then adopt a posture of nervous anger.

He passed the bathroom and looked in matter-of-factly, and suddenly his already thumping heart began to pound harder. An Asian man in a black tracksuit and dark wraparound sunglasses sat on the toilet seat, and he held a pistol with a suppressor on the end, leveled at Court's chest.

This Court had not expected.

He slowly raised his hands.

Now he heard a key card placed in the door behind him, and then a second man entered. Court looked back

over his shoulder to confirm that it was the man in the suit and tie from the bar. He wore dark glasses now, as well.

So, still just the two guys, he said to himself. It seemed to him MSS could scare up fifteen operatives if they wanted something bad to happen to a CIA officer in HK. Perhaps whatever was going on here was off the book, or MSS just didn't think they needed much muscle to do whatever it was they were about to do.

Court thought about Suzanne Brewer's assurances that MSS didn't get physical with CIA. Either these dudes weren't MSS, they didn't think he was CIA, or the rules had changed. There was an equation he'd have to solve to sort all this out, but that was a problem for down the road.

The man in the bathroom stood up slowly. He appeared calm, professional, and his English was accented but more than adequate. "Sit on chair by window." He motioned with the pistol for Court to enter the main area of the bedroom, and Court complied.

Across the ransacked space, a swivel chair pulled out from the desk sat positioned with its back just inches away from the twenty-seventh-floor window looking out over Victoria Harbor. On the desk to the right of the chair, a set of high-end steel handcuffs lay on a towel.

Court said, "If it's money . . . I have a little cash. My credit cards are in my—"

He felt the tip of the suppressor of the pistol jabbed against the back of his head. The man in the tracksuit spoke from behind. "You sit in chair!"

Court sighed now. "Okay, pal. I sit in chair."

Court crossed the room and sat down. The man in the business suit spun him around to face the window; Court couldn't help but look straight down, twenty stories, to the roof of an adjacent seven-story building below. Beyond that was a busy road, the headlights and taillights snaking in either direction in red and white. Court felt hands on his wrists, and then his arms were yanked behind him and the steel cuffs were clicked tightly in place.

His pockets were rummaged through. His wallet, his phone, and his hotel room key were tossed on the bed, and then he was swung back around to face the two men.

The men spoke to one another in Mandarin for a moment; neither seemed particularly worked up about what they were doing. Then the guy in the tracksuit disappeared into the bathroom.

While he was out of view, Court looked to the other man. “Do you speak English? Will you tell me what is going on?”

The man in the business suit made no reply. Instead he just went to the bed, laid his pistol down on it, and unzipped a black satchel. From it he pulled out two small blue items. In seconds he opened one up and Court recognized it for what it was.

A surgical mask.

Uh-oh.

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