

RICHARD
TREVAE

THE

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TARASOV
SOLUTION

THE TARASOV SOLUTION

Decades ago, in the midst of the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, a paranoid Kremlin leader ordered the underwater deployment of two nuclear missiles near Cuba's shore; each warhead sealed in a protective cocoon. Buried in the sand, the twin nukes lay undiscovered for half-a-century.

Rumors of the missiles' existence lure the attention of Yuri Tarasov, a pathological arms-merchant obsessed with possessing the doomsday weapons. Together with his ruthless assassin, Ivana Yenko, they board Yuri's high-tech yacht Decadence and head for Cuba.

25-year old MBA Dalton Crusoe is recognized for his quick analytical mind. When asked by friend and mentor Ed Kosko, head of the NSA, to interrogate a retired, Soviet military-officer seeking asylum, Dalton learns of a sinister plot to assassinate President Connor and Russian President Blinikov during an upcoming, historic summit.

In a race against time, Dalton struggles to rescue his kidnapped girlfriend, outwit the evil Tarasov, save the two presidents, and foil a nuclear strike on Washington D.C.!



\$15.95 US

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AUTHOR NOTE

Creating fiction from reality is very cool. As an author one can be drawn to a piece of history but not be restrained by the *historical facts* when conceiving a plausible new story. To take a piece of history, preferably engaging history, and twist it into a credible take-off on reality is what many authors of suspense and thriller novels seek. That is why after several weeks of struggling to come up with an engaging plot for *The TARASOV SOLUTION*, I researched the Cuban missile crisis and asked...*What if history lied to us?*

That question led me into a concept, followed by a broad plot statement, story outline, event manifest, character creation, and story development. When one comes to embrace the plot line concept and the character personas, the dialogue and narratives come forth in gushes. The result is reality-inspired-fiction. I hope you enjoy the novel.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To Jonathan Womack, whose writing advice, commitment to the story, patience and encouragement helped me get the novel to a better place for readers.

To Randy, Andrea, Roger and many others at Charles River Press who helped move the process along while educating me further on the nuances of the effort.

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To Gloria Jasperse, whose reviews of my earlier works were accurate, constructive, gentle, and supportive. She is a great sounding board.

To Barb Yates, whose review skills demonstrate why students love her college literature classes.

To Vicki, my wife, whose propensity to read is only out done by her support and encouragement for my writing. As my first reader, she tweaked content and style through gentle, supportive critiques.

To my extended family, friends, and business associates who have expressed their joy in my writing journey.

DEDICATION

To Megan, Tyler, and Jacqu

PRELUDE

OCTOBER 22, 1962, 0330 HOURS,
510 MILES NORTHEAST OF HAVANA, CUBA

CAPTAIN Demkin poured another shot of vodka. He looked out from the bridge of his Soviet military transport vessel and wondered if he would be shot for disobeying an order from his commander, Admiral Sarkov. The ship was quiet now with only twenty-four of the 220 crew on duty. Alone on the bridge, Demkin recalled his illustrious thirty-year career in the Soviet Navy. Two years ago he received a major promotion to captain, with his own ship, and assumed the commander role for a fleet of military transport vessels. Though not as impressive as a battleship command, it was a serious accomplishment for any Soviet officer. It all seemed to be on the line now with the order from Admiral Sarkov.

If he proceeded as ordered and was discovered, the Americans might use the provocation as a prelude to nuclear war. The nearby Navy warplanes would destroy the assembled Soviet fleet near Cuba. If he ignored the order and attempted to defect, his family would be killed, and he would become a hunted man. The vodka bottle seemed his only solace.

The military transport hung heavy in the water and maneuvered like a snail even in the calm Caribbean waters. Its cargo, among standard construction equip-

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ment, contained nuclear-tipped intermediate-range ballistic missiles destined for two prepared sites: San Cristobel and Sagua la Grande in Cuba. The crew had grown anxious, waiting for orders days after the American Navy set up an embargo around the Cuban landing ports. There they were the American Navy ships, two miles away, intimidating and visible during the day. The tension was growing over the increasing likelihood that a nuclear war could ignite from the stalemate over the Cuban missile sites.

A polite throat clearing announced the first officer's arrival. "You called for me, sir?" inquired the young sailor.

"Yes, Sergey. Listen carefully to me now."

Sergey straightened and focused in on the next words from his captain.

"I want you to clear the mini sub launch chamber of all personnel except for you and the two or three men you need to load two missiles in cocoons onto the cargo platforms attached to the mini sub. Is that understood?"

"Yes, sir. I understand and I know the right men for the job." Sergey could smell the alcohol on the captain's breath and knew he had been drinking for some time.

Captain Demkin looked at Sergey and nodded as if in approval. Moments passed as the captain constructed his next command.

"At precisely 0430 I want you to deploy the mini sub

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with the two SS-5 IRBM, ten-kiloton warhead missiles from the subsurface hatch.” Demkin looked for any hesitation from the young officer; none appeared. “You alone will navigate the mini sub from our current position to the reef wall nearer Cuba and drop the cocoons in sixty meters of water. Here are your coordinates for the drop.”

The young officer looked with shock and confusion at the orders Demkin just announced.

“Then when you return, if asked, I want you to report to your crew that the missiles were offloaded to our destroyer fleet for security purposes.” Drawing uncomfortably close to the first officer, Demkin said, “Is that clear?”

Without hesitation, the first officer saluted, snapped his heels together, straightened, and replied. “Clear, sir. Well, actually no, sir. Why are we unloading them before we make port?”

“Because we may never make port if the Americans discover we’re carrying missiles. It’s for our own protection, and the order comes directly from Admiral Sarkov.” The captain was angry over the orders he had to carry out. “Now do you understand?” growled the captain, his frustration growing.

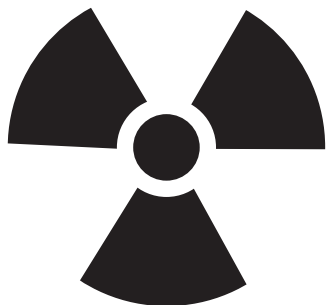
“Yes, sir, I understand.”

“Dismissed,” barked the captain.

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Sergey whirled and left the bridge.

The captain reached again for the near-empty vodka bottle and slung it to his mouth, depleting the contents before wiping his lips and forehead with a towel. Alone once more on the bridge, the distant lights of the Soviet and American ships were clear and caused Demkin to say to himself, "One way or another, I will never survive this decision."



ONE

PRESENT DAY, THE WHARTON SCHOOL, PENNSYLVANIA

THE panel resembled a collection of old librarians: two women and four men, all in their seventies. The men were dressed in formal, ill-fitting, three-piece suits, and long business skirts and jackets adorned the women. The room was solemn and dark except for the well-lit podium where the examiners sat and an old, oak desk with a reading lamp positioned in the far right corner. That's where Dalton waited.

Jameson Dalton Crusoe had worked hard on getting this behind him, a promise made to his mother. He had managed to cram two years of intense study and work assignments into twenty months. Driven by a mother who never let Dalton slack off on any assignment and a father whose business acumen and integrity were evident to young JD at an early age, the die was cast. He graduated from the Annapolis Naval Academy two years earlier at the top of his class. His well-connected mentor, with the Navy Secretary approval, offered him a chance to forgo active military service for five years if he agreed to participate in a new curriculum for excep-

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tional individuals in an accelerated training program in the government arena. Dalton agreed as long as he could pursue his MBA concurrently.

When his father died suddenly during Dalton's first year at Annapolis, it hit JD hard. His sorrow turned to anger then mellowed to determination to be the best at all things he pursued. He committed himself to making his parents proud by exceeding their expectations. If his thesis work was accepted, he was done and ready to move into the quasi-private sector as a consultant to his friend and professional mentor. In reality Dalton made the first steps toward a consultant role a year ago when he investigated a senator accused of corruption charges involving a complex financial influence scheme operating out of the Cayman Islands. The senator had diverted some \$7 million in illegal campaign funds to offshore accounts then provided favorable votes on military contracts to the donors. The dossier on the senator was so complete, he plea-bargained himself minimal jail time for an immediate resignation and formal expulsion from the Senate. Friends advised Dalton to next pursue a law degree, yet he felt compelled to get on with his career. If he needed legal expertise, he'd hire it. That assignment, under the oversight of Ed Kosko, matured Dalton and tempered his sometimes compulsive need to be the best toward a reasoned, thoughtful approach supported by his high intellect and cool-

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headed decision making. The well-documented success of his first serious assignment helped him overcome the loss of his father. Dalton had proven to himself he had not failed his father's expectations.

The review had been an exhausting five-hour question-and-answer period to accept or reject his master's essay or, more accurately, an abbreviated thesis paper. He felt his analysis and conclusions were sound and he had answered all their questions directly and completely without receiving anything more than professional critiquing. He hoped they were able to follow his analysis of how international financial policy and fiscal management could be effectively used to influence trade, economic growth, and internal stability for emerging democratic economies in the Middle East and eastern Europe.

Finally, after several minutes of whispering and sharing of notes, the department head, Dr. Robbins, announced, "Congratulations, Mr. Crusoe. Your work towards an MBA in International Finance is exemplary."

With synchronous motion, Dr. Robbins and all the panel members rose in applause and spewed chatty words of enthusiasm and congratulations. Jameson Dalton Crusoe had completed his MBA at Wharton in a record twenty months, while being kept busy by his mentor, Ed Kosko. Dalton was the entire faculty's favorite and, at twenty-five years of age, looked and

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acted the part of an accomplished businessman and statesman.

Dalton greeted panel members warmly and thanked them for their support. Dr. Robbins approached Dalton, pulling him by the arm away from the still-chatty group, and asked, “Has Ed made you an offer yet to join his staff full time?”

“Well, I believe that’s the general expectation as of yesterday morning when he called me with a new assignment.” Dalton’s face shone with a broad smile.

“Where do you go this time, my young friend?” inquired Robbins.

“It begins in the Caribbean and then settles into boring research and investigations, I’m afraid,” offered Dalton.

“I assume that attractive lady friend of yours may accompany you on this dreadful mission,” teased Robbins as he smiled and shook Dalton’s hand before walking away.

Dalton gestured with a smile and a nod, careful to not reveal anything of the high-level assignment. His bags were nearly packed, and he was taking an aircraft flying in from a special hangar at Langley in the morning. The plane was the private business aircraft of Ed Kosko, newly confirmed head of the National Security Agency and friend of President Jerome Conner.

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Carolyn McCabe was not aware of Dalton's new assignment and had made plans for the evening days ago. She had arranged a quiet dinner at one of Dalton's favorite restaurants, Hemingway's, a seafood place with a Cuban decor and tropical themes. This was to be the prelude to a romantic night celebrating his MBA in international finance. When Dalton and Carolyn arrived at Hemingway's around 7:15 p.m., the staff had already set aside a prime booth and decorated the space with celebration balloons and streamers announcing his achievement. The meal was excellent, as expected, and after a short time, they left for Carolyn's apartment to relax and enjoy some private time. Carolyn found herself becoming more and more connected with Dalton and began to realize she was falling in love. Having lost both parents, her mother only three years ago, Dalton was the practical and emotional equivalent of family.

Dalton would have normally spent the night; however, with his early departure the next morning, he held her in a deep embrace and told her he had to leave and finish packing. Her disappointment was immediate. Pretending to pout, Carolyn attempted to flirt and dissuade him from going, although she knew he was serious and let him leave feeling guilty.

In an effort to make it up to her, without revealing

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any detail, Dalton suggested they spend the upcoming Labor Day weekend in Ocean City, Maryland, where his mother maintained a beach house. Several times over the summer, the two had stole away and enjoyed the sand and surf.

Jumping at the chance, Carolyn said, “Yes, I’ll drive out there Friday afternoon and open the place up for us, OK?”

“Great, I’ll rent a car from near Langley on my return and be there by evening, hopefully.”

Carolyn looked flirtatiously at him and said, “Don’t be late, JD. You would not want to miss anything.”

Dalton smiled and winked to acknowledge the insinuation, and handed her the condo key, wondering if the new assignment from Ed would turn out to be as easy as it appeared.



8:30 A.M. THE NEXT DAY, WEDNESDAY BEFORE LABOR DAY, LANGLEY, VIRGINIA

The ten-seat Gulfstream took off from Langley at 7:00 a.m. and flew to pick up Dalton outside the Wharton campus. It was refueled and ready to depart. Two men, already on the aircraft, joined Dalton on his trip to Guantanamo, Cuba: Wilson and Cotter. Both were young Secret Service types dressed in suits, armed,

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and wearing the requisite aviator sunglasses. Each man had a background in Special Forces and was moved out after less than fifteen months' field time to join the NSA. Their intellect and ability to work effectively together impressed Ed Kosko. He followed their progress from the beginning of their service together, eighteen months ago. No one really expected any trouble on the investigative mission, although Ed Kosko seldom took chances he did not have to.

Dalton sat down, sipped a Starbucks coffee, and opened the classified file he received just three days prior. The folder had a photo of a sixty-seven-year-old Russian exile Sergey Kreftkova, living in Cuba and asking for asylum in the United States in exchange for providing sensitive military and missile technology information. The dossier revealed nothing of detail about the exile's information except to say it went back to the Cuban missile crisis. Most agencies in the U.S. government dismissed the communication as a feeble attempt by a former Soviet naval officer to gain accommodations in the United States. Ed felt differently and assigned Dalton to interview the man.

Ed had had his eye on Dalton as well. A maturity well beyond his twenty-five years, a strong physical presence, excellent verbal skills, a lightning-fast mind, and a black belt in karate made Dalton stand out among his contemporaries. Dalton's earlier work for Kosko was

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so well received that other governmental units, including the CIA and FBI, were preparing to court Dalton for employment. Dalton had no such ambitions, as Ed had become a de facto uncle of sorts, following the death of Jonathon Crusoe. Included in the file on Sergey Kreftkova was a formal confirmation of Dalton's NSA Consultant's salary, initially set at \$225,000, along with a congratulatory note on his MBA achievement. Dalton read the note and reflected on how important Ed had been in his life.

Dalton felt this assignment might lead to a false end. Nevertheless, he figured that Ed was challenging him with a series of diplomatically sensitive roles to test his skill sets. He liked Ed and felt his career inevitably would intertwine with his.

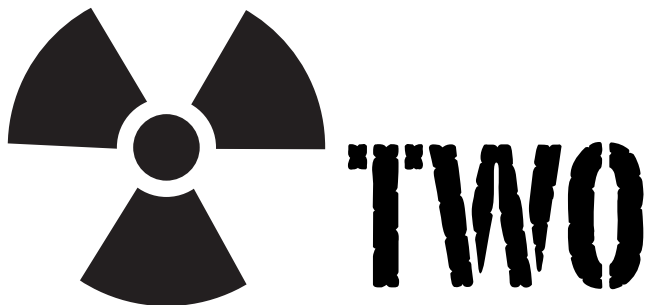
Damn, thought Dalton, with more notice, Carolyn could have joined me. I'm sure this interview can be disposed of in one day. However if I am delayed through the weekend, maybe she can join me in Nassau for a couple of nights.

Carolyn Katrina McCabe had been on campus about a year and immediately caught Dalton's eye. She was also studying in the finance department at Wharton, working toward her PhD. Carolyn was a striking brunette with a firm, curvaceous shape toned from years of tennis and swimming. They had been an item for almost seven months, and both were feeling their lives

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would be forever linked. They were romantically involved though committed to their graduate education and starting their careers.

The Gulfstream gathered speed and quickly lifted off, penetrating the sky and revealing a brilliant sunrise, which glistened as a golden glow off the chevron clouds below. He relaxed, thought of the night before with Carolyn, and fell asleep.



CRYSTALLIA MARINA, FIFTEEN MILES EAST OF GUANTANAMO

THE small, attractive marina had a nice outside patio restaurant and bar. The weather was a clear and warm eighty-two degrees plus the humidity effect. Sergey Kreftkova sat alone at the restaurant's far end studying a photo, now eight years old, of his beautiful niece, whom he had never met. He hoped this meeting would gain his asylum in the United States and he could connect with his only living relative. Sergey wore a large-brimmed, tan hat, sport jacket, and a blue dress shirt beneath, just as he described himself for recognition. As he tucked the photo away, the two NSA agents walked over, introduced themselves with fictitious names, and examined the Soviet exile's photo identification. After a moment, Wilson, the more serious of Dalton's men, motioned for Dalton to join them.

Dalton extended his hand, "Hello, Mr. Kreftkova. I'm Dalton Crusoe and I work for Ed Kosko."

Standing to formally greet Dalton, Sergey offered his hand. "I'm pleased to meet you, sir." His English was

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correct yet accented like most Russians. It was clear he was well educated, alert, and nervous.

A waitress came by and asked in Spanish if they wanted menus or just drinks. Dalton motioned, pointed to himself, and said, "Coke," then pointed to Sergey and the two companions. All accepted the drink offer, which he hoped would temper the heat and ease the building tension.

"Mr. Kreftkova, you have asked for this meeting, so we're here. What is it you have or know that may be of interest to the USA?" Dalton focused in on the Russian and looked for any evidence of deceit. Sergey pointed to the sea and said in a soft voice, "It was October of 1962. I was serving aboard the military support vessel Kladna, first officer to Captain Demkin. We were delivering four SS-5, ten-kiloton nuclear warhead missiles to Cuba." Nervous and uncomfortable, the Russian paused.

Dalton held his breath, a chill spreading through him as he waited for Sergey to continue.

"On the morning of October 31, 1962," resumed Sergey, "near the height of the confrontation, Captain Demkin received direct orders from Admiral Sarkov at the Kremlin. My captain commanded me to prepare two of our missiles in submersible cocoons, attach them to our mini sub, and off-load them through underwater hatches on the Kladna. I was instructed to drop them

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on the ocean floor for future retrieval after the embargo passed.”

Dalton looked directly at the man and, in a firm voice, said, “We have monitored the island ever since the crisis and never found any evidence missiles landed on the Cuban shore, either before, during, or after the embargo.”

“I have no doubt that is the case, sir; they are still there, in the sea.”

At this point Dalton’s two-man security team stiffened, looked at each other, then to Dalton. The stakes had just gotten greater, so it seemed to Dalton, although he was not about to be taken in by a wild story without confirmation and plenty of it. With no emotion or reaction, Dalton folded his hands, and asked, “Do you have proof, or am I to take this on your word alone?”

Now the Russian was exercising caution as he reached into his jacket pocket and withdrew a large manila envelope stuffed with papers. “These are copies of the ship’s log and transcripts of communications between Admiral Sarkov and Captain Demkin hours before releasing two missiles. In addition, I added photos I took of the missiles and their warheads, for my own protection. I have the precise location of the warheads and missiles as was originally recorded in the log, except I removed the coordinate information. When I’m certain we have an understanding, I will give you

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the coordinates.” Sergey held out the envelope and asked, “Do I have your assurance that I will be given asylum in the U.S. if these prove to be authentic?”

Dalton, not ready to react to the demand for asylum, asked, “Why didn’t the Russian Navy come and retrieve those weapons under the guise of a fishing trawler or the like?”

“Admiral Sarkov died suddenly two days after we had deployed the mini sub with the missiles in their cocoons and told no one at the Kremlin of his orders to Demkin.” Sergey studied each man at the table.

They paused while the refreshments arrived, which gave Dalton a moment to fathom the gravity of the situation. The story was brazen at the least; incredible if true.

“When Captain Demkin arrived home weeks after the embargo ended, no one at the Kremlin wanted to hear of any more issues involving the Cuban Missile Crisis. Khrushchev was embarrassed and humiliated at the Kremlin, even though the public perception was not as damning.”

“The Russian leaders didn’t forget about the missile inventory on your ship, did they?” demanded Dalton.

“No, sir. When Demkin realized that the Sarkov order was known to no one beyond himself and me, we changed the log to show only two missiles were loaded on board the Kladna, and it was never challenged. Since

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Admiral Sarkov oversaw the naval nuclear weapons inventory, the information chain stopped at his office.” Sitting back in his chair, appearing even more nervous, Sergey then said, “Demkin took the secret to his grave. He died thirty-three years ago in an auto accident, or so we were told by the Kremlin.”

“So you think the missiles and the warheads are still intact, resting on the Caribbean bottom? Could they have survived that long?” Dalton was trying to think of any question to trap the Russian, yet the man never flinched. He was beginning to worry that perhaps all this could be true.

“Similar arrangements were made for missiles stored in cocoons along the harbors and bays dominating the Croatian Dalmatian coast, formerly Yugoslavia, where the Russian Navy was concentrated until the early 1990s. Every cocoon, dozens in fact, recovered years later preserved the missile and warhead in perfect condition.”

Dalton tried a different tack. “Why don’t you just stay in Cuba and enjoy the sunshine rather than seek asylum in the U.S.?” inquired Dalton.

“During the period when Russia destroyed its large nuclear arsenal, former KGB operatives discovered the manifest change on Captain Demkin’s vessel. They assume I may know the details, so two years ago; I left Russia and found my way to Cuba. Unfortunately, these Russian mercenaries, lead by a Yuri Tarasov and con-

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nected with international terrorists, have come to believe the story is true and are looking to capture me to learn what I know.”

Dalton now knew this was a serious national security matter and felt Sergey was telling the truth. At least he knew the United States couldn't take a chance and let these weapons fall into terrorists' hands. Leaning in to Sergey, Dalton said, “I do believe you, and I'm willing to guarantee you asylum in the U.S. if these documents hold up against our intelligence records. I will need to inspect your documents and material in support of your story. Agreed?”

“Yes, then we are agreed. Here are the documents, although I will not provide the exact warhead coordinates until our understanding is formalized. When can I expect to be taken to the U.S.?”

“After I review the documents, I will make a few calls tonight and arrange for you to come to Guantanamo tomorrow for transport and questioning at the NSA.” Dalton looked at the Russian for approval. “You must provide us the exact geographic coordinates which locate the weapons or the asylum guarantee is invalid. Understood?”

“Yes, that will be fine.” Extending a small, folded paper note, Sergey said, “Here are my cell phone number and the hotel where I'm staying.” Sergey stood and smiled at Dalton then extended his hand to each man.

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Wilson acknowledged the meeting's end with a strong grasp and firm shake. "We will be in touch soon."

In choreographed fashion, Cotter placed a minute listening bug and tracking device beneath the band of Sergey's hat as he retrieved it from a vacant chair at the table. Sergey nodded, walked away, and left the restaurant.

"Did you get all that conversation on disk, as well as on camera?" Dalton asked Cotter, the younger agent.

"Yes, sir, I got it all. And I placed the tracker bug."



OUTSIDE CRYSTALLIA MARINA

The vintage 1957 Chevrolet Impala two-door hardtop was in excellent shape and blended in with the numerous older cars owned by well-off Cuban citizens. Waiting in the parked vehicle's driver seat, the Russian ex-KGB agent Taros Zolyar, watched as Dalton and his team entered the marina. The earlier wiretaps on Sergey Kreftkova paid off to a certain extent. The exiled Russian was desperately trying to get asylum in the States. Whether he'd told the story about the cocooned missiles was uncertain. The "three business types" he'd met with were most certainly Americans. Taros was

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convinced Sergey had been the first officer under Demkin, probably carried out the deployment order, and likely had the documentation to confirm the missiles existence and location. As Kreftkova left the marina restaurant, Taros captured a dozen facial photos of him. Within minutes, the digital photos were uploaded by satellite to the 225-foot Decadence, a yacht anchored off Cayman Brac and serving as their local command post. Fully equipped with communications, navigation, submersibles, helicopter, tenders, and small Zodiac ship-to-shore boats, the Decadence could also provide an impressive offensive attack if needed.

Yuri Tarasov saw the e-mail come in and was downloading the photos from Taros. The facial-recognition software examined inventoried early service and college photos of Sergey Kreftkova. Despite the fact that some forty-five years had passed, the software identified the face as that of Sergey with a 94.1 percent confidence level.

Speaking into his satellite phone while staring at the computer screen, Yuri said, "That's what I've been looking for, Taros. Good work. Now the security team will fly over to assist you. I want to move quickly to recover the weapons before the Americans, or anyone else, gets too interested."

After a brief pause, Taros replied, "I should be at the helicopter landing site in fifteen minutes . . . with Kreftkova."

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Yuri Tarasov had been a section chief for the KGB five years before it was dismantled. His connections allowed him to organize a vast, successful merchant arms business, occasionally providing the mercenaries themselves. He made millions procuring and selling weapons to various splinter groups and terrorists throughout the Middle East and former Soviet states that had gained independence after perestroika. Yuri had no theology and, therefore, none of the holy jihad predispositions present in many of his customers. His interest was purely wealth, lots of it, and the power that came with it. He made a point of knowing everything he could about a proposed deal: the players, where the money was coming from, the security at the weapon's transfer point, local politicians and police to be paid off for looking the other way, and most important, how to ensure no paper trail led back to him. He was obsessed with controlling all details of his business. His reputation for performance without a hitch allowed him to charge a security deposit before negotiations began. If the buyer backed out, Yuri had compensation to complete his end of the procurement from his suppliers and keep their trust. Yuri Tarasov paid well and on time and demanded total performance from his suppliers and

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buyers. Messing up a deal with Yuri Tarasov was always followed quickly with consequences, usually the lethal kind. In the post-Soviet society, it was easy for an ambitious and ruthless ex-spook to develop his business relying on old KGB types still in the political arena. He had become a one-stop-shopping source for insurgent groups to arm, finance, and on occasion, recruit mercenaries for their efforts.

Never one to mix business with pleasure, Tarasov had few true friends, only well-paid stooges and mercenaries to carry out his plans and personal pursuits. He loved the water and made a point of traveling on his extravagant yacht, the *Decadence*, a component of his business dealings. Traveling by sea made his precise location elusive. He was careful never to overuse his satellite phones for his negotiations as they could be tracked by nosy governments and competitors. For the better part of two decades, Yuri Tarasov was a ruthless businessman to those who dealt with him and a vaguely defined entrepreneur to those who'd merely heard of him. Recent changing political winds brought his activities into the public view and spawned campaign slogans for eliminating the arms merchants operating out of Russia.

The new Russian president, Georgi Blinikov, did not come from the old Soviet system; rather he was a comparatively young reformer bent on broad democratic

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policies, and he was an outspoken critic of the widespread corruption in Russian politicians. Four months into office and he had already set his sights on Yuri Tarasov and his operation. Unwinding a corrupt political system and finding former Communist party members who could be trusted and willing to serve the new president's agenda was difficult. Everyone talked about the problem with dealers such as Tarasov, although few were willing to do anything about it. Tarasov had spread the money far and wide from his lucrative arms business, and his reputation for eliminating opponents was legendary. Once a partner in an arms deal with Yuri Tarasov, you were a partner for life, and if you chose to ignore or fail a request of Yuri's, you were first out the money then likely dead. Nevertheless, Blinikov made it a clear objective to eliminate arms dealers from making Russia the provider of choice for terrorists. His message was generating new hope for the average Russian on the street who was tired of nothing ever happening to help the underclass while the corrupt got wealthier.

With encouragement from American President Jerome Conner, Blinikov arranged a meeting in Washington to discuss improving relations and removing the international arms dealers operating out of Russia. Tarasov felt he could right his ship by eliminating Blinikov and discouraging the Americans from getting involved in Russian internal politics. The

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upcoming meeting between Conner and Blinikov was the perfect opportunity to remove all obstacles in his way.



Tarasov had heard stories about the missing nukes for years, and Kreftkova's disappearance from Russia gave the rumors new life. The first officer and Demkin were suspected of altering the ship's log to cover the weapon's release although no inquiries were begun until long after Demkin died. Kreftkova covered his role well, and never revealed the missile deployments even to his family. Sergey had lost his wife many years ago to cancer, and his only other living relative was a niece born in America after his sister had left Russia while he was at sea. His niece married an American educator and gave birth to a daughter. Tarasov could find no contact between Kreftkova and the niece, though he suspected she may know something.

Ironically, Sarkov's family, supposing murder rather than a heart attack, ultimately convinced the Russian Navy to investigate the admiral's death. In the course of their research, it was discovered Admiral Sarkov had left a written copy of his order to Demkin sealed in an unmarked envelope and hidden in his office. Only when Sarkov's old desk was being replaced did a clerical

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worker notice it taped to the back of the center drawer. Once she had opened the orders and told a few friends, Yuri Tarasov quickly found her and, posing as a naval investigator, offered her a handsome reward. With the letter as proof Sarkov's order was given, whether Kreftkova carried out the order remained an open question. Yuri's intense search for him could yield the answer.

Finding and securing two ten-kiloton nuclear bombs overlooked for decades by Russian and UN authorities was a dream come true for a merchant arms dealer such as Tarasov. Kidnapping Kreftkova, extracting the details of Sarkov's order to Demkin, and learning the sunken treasure's location were Tarasov's top priorities. The trail led his agents to Cuba hours before Sergey Kreftkova was scheduled to meet with Dalton Crusoe. Assuming Kreftkova had struck a deal with the Americans and told them of the missiles, the stakes had risen dramatically. Yuri knew he could command anywhere from fifteen to twenty million U.S. dollars for a usable nuclear warhead. Without an ongoing public search for missing warheads, Yuri could maximize the price and attract the largest, most sophisticated, and well-financed terrorist groups on Earth. The thought of such a windfall engulfed Yuri's mind. In any event, he wanted—no needed—the warheads to resolve his own issues concerning Blinikov and President Conner. Ever since

RICHARD TREVAE

Blinikov took office with a mandate to clean up the Russian political system, Yuri had formed a plan to have both the money and a solution to stop the new Russian president. The money gained by selling the warheads was tempting, though secondary to stopping the forces threatening to topple his thriving business.

He would use all means at his disposal, including betraying a past client and kidnapping the last remaining member of Sergey Kreftkova's extended family, a niece, living in the US.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Part adventurer, part businessman, part author, Richard Trevae is a chemical engineer with an MBA in Finance and Management. Trevae matured a startup design/construction/development firm into a publicly traded company that later merged with a parent corporation generating four billion dollars in annual revenues. His articles concerning business valuation, mergers, acquisitions, and management practices have been published in various trade associations and business newspapers. Writing “reality inspired fiction” has become his latest passion, commencing with, “THE FUSION BREAKTHROUGH,” followed by the prequel, “THE TARASOV SOLUTION.” His extensive world traveling has provided a rich backdrop for the exotic locales featured in his novels. Mr. Trevae lives with his wife along the picturesque shores of Lake Michigan where he is working on his next novel.

