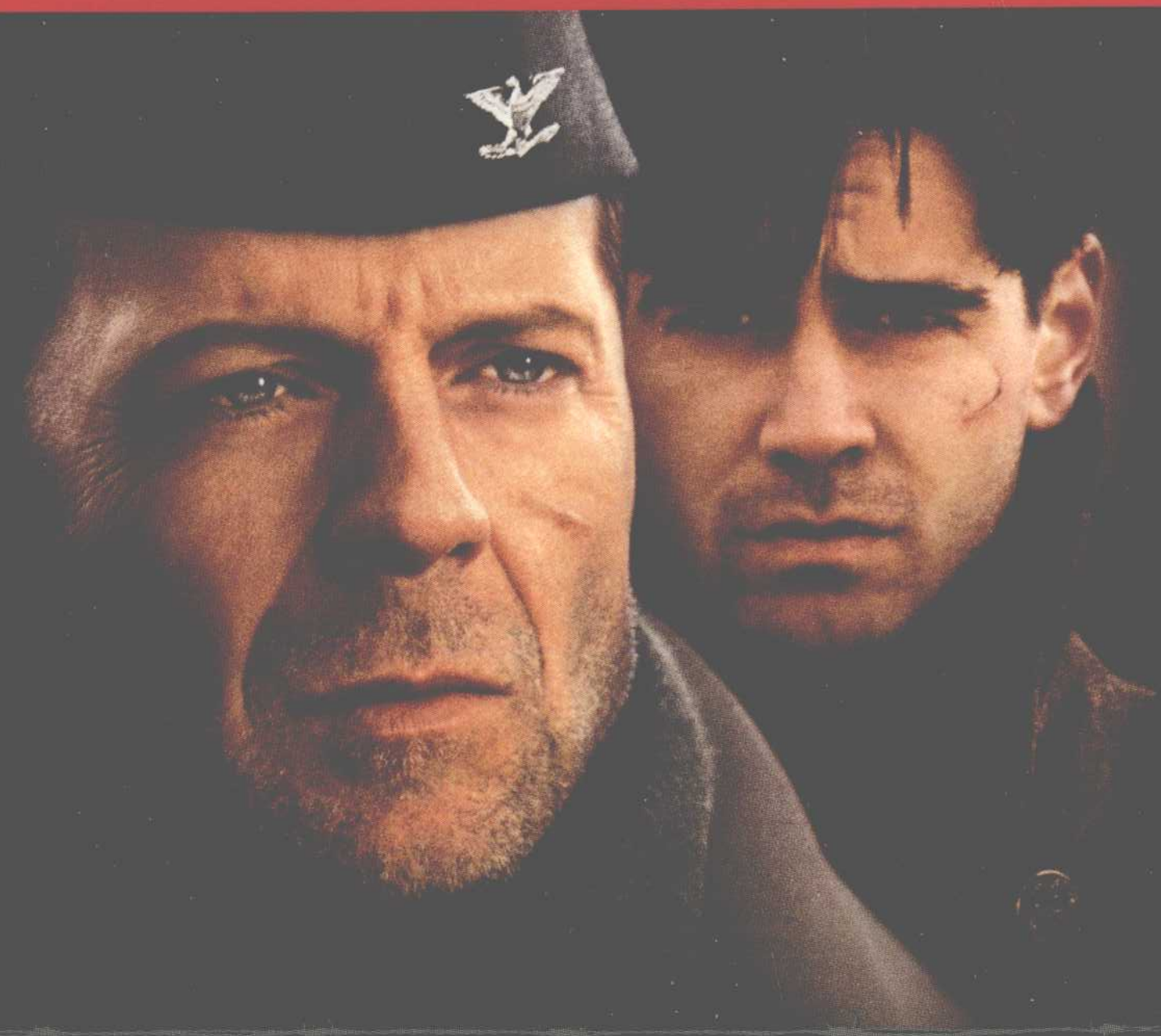


JOHN KATZENBACH

Bestselling author of *The Analyst*



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THE TRAVELER*

DAY OF RECKONING*

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THE SHADOW MAN*

STATE OF MIND*

HART'S WAR*

THE ANALYST*

Nonfiction

FIRST BORN: The Death of Arnold Zeleznik, Age Nine:

Murder, Madness, and What Came After

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*This book is for Nick, Justine, Cotty, Phoebe,
Hugh, and Avery.*

Prologue

THE NIGHT SKY

Now he was an old man who liked to take chances. In the distance, he counted three separate waterspouts bridging the space between the slick blue water surface at the edge of the Gulf Stream and the gray-black phalanx of clouds belonging to the approaching late-afternoon thunderstorms moving steadily out of the west. The waterspouts were narrow cones of darkness, swirling with all the force their landed cousins, tornadoes, had. They were less subtle, though; they did not possess the terrifying suddenness that belonged to storms on the land. They grew instead out of the inexorable buildup of heat and wind and water, finally arcing between the clouds and the ocean. They seemed to the old man to be stately, moving heavily across the waves. They were visible from miles away, and thus easier to avoid—which is what every other boat working the edge of the great river of water that flows north from deep in the warmth of the Caribbean had already done. The old man was left alone on the sea, bobbing up and down on the slow rhythms of the waves, his boat's engine quiet, the twin baits he'd set out earlier lying flat and motionless on the water's inky surface.

He stared at the three spirals and thought to himself that the spouts were perhaps five miles distant, but the winds racing within each funnel at more than two hundred miles per hour could leap those miles easily. As he watched, it occurred to him that the waterspouts had gradually picked up their pace, as if they'd grown lighter, and suddenly more nimble. They seemed to be dancing together as they moved toward

him, like two eager men who kept cutting in on each other on the dance floor as they jockeyed for the attentions of an attractive young lady. One would stop and wait patiently while the other two moved in a slow circle, then suddenly swing closer, while the other bounced aside. A minuet, he thought, danced by courtiers at a Renaissance court. He shook his head. That wasn't quite right. Again he watched the dark funnels. Perhaps a square dance in some rural barn, the air filled with fiddle music? A wayward breeze suddenly caused a pennant on one of the outriggers to flap hard, making a slapping sound, before it, too, fled, as if it were frightened by the stronger winds moving relentlessly in his direction.

The old man took in a sharp breath of hot air.

Less than five miles, he told himself. More like three.

The waterspouts could cover that distance in minutes if that was their desire. Even with the big two-hundred-horse engine in back, which would shoot the open fisherman across the waves at thirty-five knots, he knew he was already too late. If the storms wanted to catch him, they could.

He thought their dance in a way elegant, in a way stylized. But it had energy. Enthusiasm. It had rhythm and syncopation. He strained and imagined for an instant that the winds carried sounds of music. Strains of blaring horns, beating drums, and wild soaring strings. A quick, decisive riff from a guitar. He looked up at the darkening sky, huge black thunderheads that muscled their way across the blue Florida air toward him. Big-band music, he told himself abruptly. That's what it is. Jimmy Dorsey and Glenn Miller. The music of his youth. Music that burst with jazzy excitement and force, bugles driven with abandon.

A thunderclap riveted the distance and he saw a streak of lightning flash toward the ocean's surface. The wind picked up around him, steadily, whispering a warning in the snapping of the lines to the riggers and the pennants. He looked again at the waterspouts. Two miles, he said.

Leave and live. Stay and die.

He smiled to himself. Not time for me yet.

In a single, quick motion, he twisted the ignition key on the console, firing up the big Johnson motor, which growled at

him, as if it had been impatient, waiting for his command, reproaching him for trusting his life to the vagaries of an electronic switch and a gas-powered engine. He idled the boat in a half-circle, putting the storm at his back. A spatter of raindrops spotted his blue denim work shirt, and he could abruptly taste the fresh rainwater on his lips. He moved swiftly to the stern and reeled in the two baits. He hesitated one moment longer, staring at the waterspouts. Now they were a mile away, looming large and terrifying, looking down at him as if astonished at the temerity of the insignificant human at their feet, nature's giants stopped in their charge by his insolence, hesitating, shocked by his challenge. The ocean had changed color, the blue deepening to a dense dark gray, as if trying to reach up and blend with the approaching storm.

He laughed as another thunderclap, closer, like a cannon, exploded in the air.

"Can't catch me," he shouted into the wind. "Not yet."

And with that he thrust the throttle forward. The open boat surged through the gathering waves, engine pitch high like a mocking laugh, the bow rising up, then settling into a plane, skimming across the ocean, heading for clear skies and the last, quickly fading sunshine of the long summer day, a few miles ahead, and closer to the shoreline.

As was his habit, he stayed out on the water until long after the sun had set. The storm had wandered far out to sea, maybe causing some problems for the large container ships beating their steady paths up and down the Florida Straits. Around him, the air had cleared, the sweep of heavens blinking with the first stars of the night-deep sky. It was still hot, even out on the water, the air surrounding him with a slippery humid grip. He was no longer fishing, in fact had not really done so in hours. Instead, he sat on a cooler in the stern, holding a half-finished bottle of cold beer in his hand. He took the opportunity to remind himself that the day was coming when the engine would stall, or his hand wouldn't be quick enough on the ignition switch, and a storm such as that evening's would teach him one last lesson. This thought made him shrug inwardly. He thought to himself that he'd had a luxurious life, filled with success and replete with the trappings of

happiness—all of it delivered by the most astonishing accident of luck.

Life is easy, he reminded himself, when you should have died.

The old man turned and glanced off to the north. He could see a distant glow from Miami, fifty miles away. But the immediate darkness around him seemed complete, although oddly liquid. There was a looseness to the atmosphere in Florida that he suspected was created by the ever-present heat and humidity. Sometimes, as he looked up into the sky, he longed for the tight clarity of the night in his home state of Vermont. The darkness there had always seemed to him to be pulled taut, stretched to its limits across the heavens.

It was the moment for which he waited out on the water, a chance to stare up into the great expanse above him without the irritation of light and city noise. The mighty North Star, the constellations, as familiar to him as the breathing of his wife as she slept. He picked them out, comforting in their constancy. Orion and Cassiopeia, Aries and Diana, the hunter. Hercules, the hero, and Pegasus, the winged horse. The two dippers, the easiest of all, Ursa Major and Ursa Minor, the first he'd learned as a child more than seventy years earlier.

He took a deep breath of steamy air, then he spoke out loud, adopting a deep, drawling southern accent that wasn't his own but had belonged once, years before, to someone he knew—not for long, but knew well—and said:

“Find us the way home, Tommy, willya?”

There was a lilt to the words, almost a singsong quality. After more than fifty years, they still rang in his ear with the same easygoing grinning tones, just as they had once, coming across the tinny intercom of the bomber, the drawl defeating even the most deafening noise from the engines and the bursts of flak exploding outside.

And he answered out loud, just as he had back then dozens of times:

“Nobody worry about a damn thing. I could find the base blindfolded.”

He shook his head. Except for the last time. Then all his skills, reading radio beacons, dead reckoning, and marking the stars with an octant, none had done them any good.

He heard the voice again: "Find us the way home, Tommy, willya?"

I'm sorry, he said to the ghosts. Instead of finding the way home I found death.

He took another swig of beer, then held the cool glass of the bottle to his forehead. With his free hand he started to reach into his shirt pocket, where he had placed a page torn from that morning's *New York Times*. He stopped his fingers, just as they reached the paper. He told himself that he didn't need to read it again. He could remember the headline: FAMED EDUCATOR DIES AT 77; WAS INFLUENTIAL WITH DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTS.

Now, he said, I must be the last who was there that knows what truly happened.

He took a deep breath. He remembered suddenly a conversation he'd had with his eldest grandchild, when the boy was only eleven and had come to him holding a picture. It was one of the few photos the old man had of that time when he himself was young, not that much older than his grandson. It showed him sitting by an iron stove, reading intently. His wooden bunk was in the background. Some rough woolen clothes were hanging from a makeshift line. There was an unlit candle on the table beside him. He was very thin, almost cadaverously so, and his hair was cropped short. In the picture, he had a small smile on his face, as if what he was reading was humorous. His grandson had asked:

"When was this taken, grandfather?"

"During the war. When I was a soldier."

"What did you do?"

"I was a navigator on a bomber. At least, that's what I was for a while. Then I was merely a prisoner, waiting for the war to end."

"If you were a soldier, did you kill anyone, grandfather?"

"Well, I helped to drop the bombs. And they probably killed people."

"But you don't know?"

"That's right. I don't know for sure."

But that, of course, was a lie.

He thought to himself: Did you kill anyone, grandfather?

And then the honest answer: Yes, I did. I killed a man. And not with a bomb dropped from the air. But it's a long story.

He felt the obituary in his pocket, tapping the fabric of his shirt with his hand.

And now I can tell it, he thought.

The old man stared up into the sky once again, and sighed deeply. Then he turned to the task of discovering the narrow inlet into Whale Harbor. He knew all the navigation buoys by heart, knew each light that dotted the Florida shoreline. He knew the local currents and the daily tides, could feel the slip of the boat through the water, and knew if it was being pulled even slightly off its course. Steering through the darkness, he traveled slowly, but steadily, with the utter confidence of a man walking late at night through his own house.

Chapter One

THE NAVIGATOR'S RECURRING DREAM

He had just awakened from the dream when the tunnel coming out beneath Hut 109 collapsed. It was just before dawn, and it had been raining hard off and on since midnight. It was the same dream as always, a dream about what had happened to him two years earlier, as close to being as real in the dream as real was until the very end.

In the dream, he didn't see the convoy.

In the dream, he didn't suggest turning and attacking.

In the dream, they didn't get shot down.

And in the dream, no one died.

Raymund Thomas Hart, a skinny, quiet young man of unprepossessing appearance, the third in his family after both his father and grandfather to carry the saint's name with its unusual spelling, lay cramped in his bunk in the darkness. He could feel damp sweat gathered around his neck, though the spring night air was still chilled with the leftover cold of winter. In the short moments before the wooden supporting beams eight feet underground snapped under the weight of the rain-soaked earth and the air filled with the whistles and shouts of the guards, he listened to the thick breathing and snores of the men occupying the bunk beds around him. There were seven other men in the room, and he could recognize each by the distinctive sounds they made at night. One man often spoke, giving orders to his long-dead crew, another whimpered and sometimes cried. A third had asthma, and when the weather turned damp wheezed through the night.

Tommy Hart shivered once and pulled the thin gray blanket up to his neck.

He went over all the familiar details of the dream as if it were being played out like a motion picture in the darkness surrounding him. In the dream, they were flying in utter quiet, no engine sound, no wind noise, just slipping through the air as if it were some clear, sweet liquid, until he heard the deep Texas drawl of the captain over the intercom: "Ahh, hell boys, there ain't nothin' out here worth shootin' at. Tommy, find us the way home, willya?"

In the dream, he would look down at his maps and charts, octant and calipers, read the wind drift indicator and see, just as if it were a great streak of red ink painted across the surface of the blue Mediterranean waves, the route home. And safety.

Tommy Hart shivered again.

His eyes were open to the nighttime, but he saw instead the sun reflecting off the whitecaps below them. For an instant, he wished there was some way he could make the dream real, then make the real a dream, just nice and easy, reverse the two. It didn't seem like such an unreasonable request. Put it through proper channels, he thought. Fill out all the standard military forms in triplicate. Navigate through the army bureaucracy. Snap a salute and get the commanding officer to sign the request. Transfer, sir: One dream into reality. One reality into dream.

Instead, what had truly happened was that after he had heard the captain's command, he'd crawled forward into the Plexiglas nose cone of the B-25 to take one last look around, just to see if he could read a landmark off the Sicilian coastline, just to be completely certain of their positioning. They were flying down on the deck, less than two hundred feet above the ocean, beneath any probing German radar, and they were blistering along at more than two hundred fifty miles per hour. It should have been wild and exhilarating, six young men in a hot rod on a winding country road, inhibitions left behind like a patch of rubber from tires squealed in acceleration. But it wasn't that way. Instead, it was risky, like skating gingerly across a frozen pond, unsure of the thickness of the ice creaking beneath each stride.

He had squeezed himself into the cone, next to the bomb-

sight and up to where the twin fifty-caliber machine guns were mounted. It was, for a moment, as if he were flying alone, suspended above the vibrant blue of the waves, hurtling along, separated from the rest of the world. He stared out at the horizon, searching for something familiar, something that would serve as a point on the chart that he could use as their anchor for finding the route back to the base. Most of their navigation was done by dead reckoning.

But instead of spotting some telltale mountain ridge, what he'd seen just on the periphery of his field of vision was the unmistakable shape of the line of merchant ships, and the pair of destroyers zigzagging back and forth like alert sheepdogs guarding their flock.

He'd hesitated, just an instant, making swift calculations in his head. They'd been flying for more than four hours and were at the end of their designated sweep. The crew was tired, eager to return to their base. The two destroyers were formidable defenses, even for the three bombers flying wing to wing in the midday sun. He had told himself at that moment: Just turn away and say nothing, and the line of ships will be out of sight in seconds and no one will know.

But instead, he did as he'd been taught. He had listened to his own voice as if it were somehow unfamiliar.

"Captain, targets off the starboard wing. Distance maybe five miles."

Again, there'd been a small silence, before he'd heard the reply: "Well, I'll be a damn horned frog. Tommy, ain't you the peach. You remind me to take you back with me to West Texas and we'll go hunting. You got some pair of eyes, Tommy. Eyes sharp like yours, boy, ain't no jackrabbit for miles gonna get away from us. We'll have ourselves some fine fresh jackrabbit stew. Ain't nothin' in this world taste any better, boys. . . ."

Whatever else the captain had said, Tommy Hart had lost in the shuffle, as he quickly crawled back through the narrow tunnel toward the midships, making way for the bombardier to assume his position in the nose. He was aware that the *Lovely Lydia* was making a slow bank to the right, and knew that their movement was being mimicked by *The Randy Duck* on their left and *Green Eyes* off their starboard wing. He returned to the small steel chair he occupied just behind the