AP tincess Astria Princess Ragnhild Coast Princess Murroa y Enbul Riiser-Larse \* New Schwal ser-Larsen Queen Ice Shell Coats Enderby CHOOSERS Land ell Lars Christensen er Ice Shorthe 20 SLAIN Ameri Highla EST \* South Pole -8327 JAMES H. COBB ARCTICA Byrd Land Mits G.P. PUTNAM'S SONS NEW YORK Roosevelt MI Pen. Erebus" Ross 12450 Sound McMurda Cape Hallett larie Cape Adare Adélie Coas Cane Hudson 10 \* South

Coast of Coast of Princess Murros A Princess Murros A Princess Murros A Princess Murros A Princess AR theess Astro Princess Ragnhild Coast Shelf Coast 300 Riiser-Larse \* New Schwal er-Larsen Queen May Ice Shelf Prince. Coats Enderby CHOOSERS land ell Lars Christensen er Ice Shelf the æ SLAIN Americ Highla EST \* South Pole -8327 JAMES H. COBB Byrd Land Q ARCTICA DU OMES RE Ross Ie G.P. PUTNAM'S SONS NEW YORK Roosevelt. 1 M Pen. Erebus ' Ross Source Source McMurda Cape Hallett Jarie Cape Adare Adélie Coas Cane Hudson 10 \* South

G. P. Putnam's Sons Publishers Since 1838 200 Madison Avenue New York, NY 10016

This is a work of fiction. The events described are imaginary and the characters are fictitious and not intended to represent specific living persons. When persons or entities are referred to by the names of actual living persons, they are portrayed in fictitious circumstances; the reader should not infer that these events actually happened.

Copyright © 1996 by James H. Cobb All rights reserved. This book, or parts thereof, may not be reproduced in any form without permission. Published simultaneously in Canada

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Cobb, James H.

Choosers of the slain / by James H. Cobb

p. cm.

ISBN 0-399-14197-9

1. Imaginary wars and battles—Fiction. 2. Twentyfirst century—Fiction. 3. Antarctic regions—Fiction. I. Title.

PS3553.0178C48 1996 813'.54—dc20

96-775

CIP

Printed in the United States of America 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

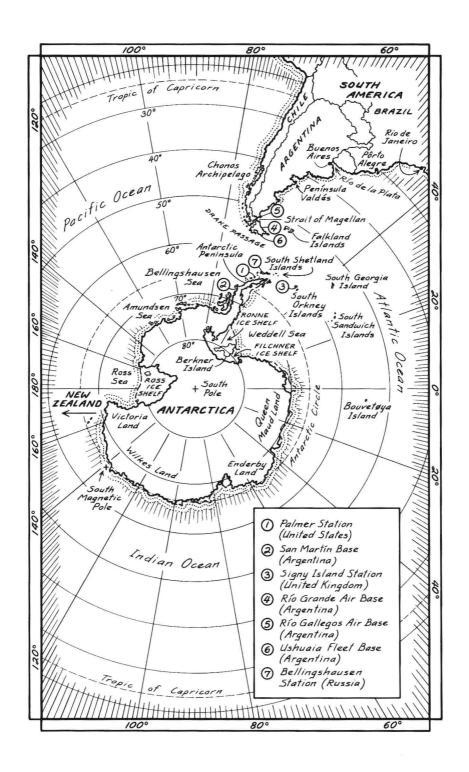
Book design by Junie Lee Map by Jackie Aher

## Dedicated to the members of "Task Force Cunningham"

To the Chief, as always

To the two Kathys, who helped reacquaint me with the English language

And to Sherrill and Laurel, who instructed me in the care and feeding of a heroine



此为试读,需要完整PDF请访问: www.ertongbook.com

## Choosers of the Slain

## SIGNY BASE ANCHORAGE SOUTH ORKNEY ISLANDS, ANTARCTICA

0630 HOURS: MARCH 19, 2006

"Awake and about, woman! There's a hot plankton count to be done."

Captain Evan York peeled the covers off his first mate and applied a hearty slap across her bare bottom. She in turn responded with a squealed curse, yanked them back up over her head, and burrowed deeper into her corner of the double bunk. York smiled down at the curl of tousled blond hair that showed from beneath the heavy Hudson's Bay blankets. Roberta Eggerston had been sharing his life and bed for the better part of five years now and yet she maintained her own individuality. Among other things, she would never be a morning person.

"You know what you can do with your plankton count," she growled, "at least till the cabin is a decent temperature and the tea's ready."

"Shackleton never had to put up with this kind of sass from any of his subordinates."

"Shackleton never got to sleep with any of his subordinates either, at least not so's the history books mention."

York smiled again, rolled out of the bunk, and reached for his clothes: thermal long johns and a single pair of heavy wool socks, insulated jumpsuit, and the ubiquitous white plastic "bunny boots" of the Antarctic. He'd had his custom-made by Camtors of the Falkland Islands with full-length composite deck soles for ship-board use.

Topping off his outfit with a Day-Glo orange sea parka, he tucked a pair of mittens in his pocket. He left the master stateroom, heading aft along the narrow companionway to the wheelhouse.

Presently, he would kick the main cabin heater up to day temperature and start the breakfast brew-up, but first, the young master of the *Skua* wanted a morning's look around.

The big motor-sailor had been born out of the love both he and Roberta had for sailing and their mutual fascination with the Antarctic. She was a seventy-five-foot ketch with a reenforced steel hull, designed specifically for long-range ice cruising. They had built her using a small inheritance York had received upon his graduation from Cambridge plus every other penny they had been able to earn, beg, or borrow.

It had been worth it. Basing out of Port Stanley, he and Roberta had sailed south with college-student crews for the past three seasons, chartering out as a research vessel to the British Antarctic Survey. It was a rare thing to successfully turn a dream into a viable way of making a living, but they had done it.

While York had a passion for the southern polar seas, he also had a profound and wary respect for them. Even while lying at anchor off the BAS's South Orkney base at Signy Island, he had maintained a round-the-clock deck watch. At the moment, said watch didn't look too happy.

"Morning, Geoffery. How's the new day?" York asked, stepping out into the cockpit.

"Bloody cold! That's how it is!" the younger day replied miserably, surrounded by the frost haze of his own breath. "I had to be a total loony to ever get involved in this. 'Excellent field experience,' my frostbitten ass!"

"Shouldn't worry," York said, stepping to the rail and eyeing the slushy pancake ice that had accumulated around the hull during the long, late-season night. "That nip of frost in the air means that it's just about time for us to bugger off for home. Pack'll be closing in soon. Two weeks from now you'll be back in England, thrilling the ladies with your exploits."

"If they haven't frozen off by then," Geoffery replied, doing a little jig step to try to stamp some feeling into his feet. "At any rate, I was just going to shout you up. We've got company coming." "Oh, where away?"

"Just coming into the channel. I think she's that Argy."

The Skua was holding some fifty yards offshore in the little cupshaped harbor on the southern coast of Signy Island. Now a ship was just rounding the western headland and was slowly nosing into the steel-blue waters of the bay. She was an icebreaker, wide-hulled and buff-bowed, her high-stacked military-gray superstructure clearly outlined against the snow-shrouded hills on the farside of the inlet.

"That's the *Presidente Sarmiento* all right, but what the blazes is she doing here? She doesn't have any more calls scheduled this late in the season."

Frowning slightly, York ducked back into the wheelhouse and lifted a pair of binoculars from the rack beside the hatch frame. Returning to the cockpit, he surveyed the new arrival, being careful not to let the chilled metal of the eyepieces touch his face.

Same old *Presidente*. The Argentine naval vessel wasn't listing, nor did she show any outward sign of storm or fire damage. Engine trouble? Or maybe they were just dropping in for a chat. York hoped that they might have a little fresh produce to spare.

Suddenly he stiffened. There was something different here. As the icebreaker came around fully broadside in the channel, York could make out the smallish boxlike structure that had been added to her foredeck. A turret, and from it protruded the slim, bellmouthed muzzle of an autocannon.

"What the hell?"

"Problem, Skipper?"

"The Presidente, she's mounting a bow chaser."

"A what?"

"A gun, she's mounting a gun!"

"So?" Geoffery shrugged. "She's a navy ship and all that."

"So remember the treaty. Heavy military weapons aren't permitted south of the Antarctic Circle."

There was other movement out on the bay. York hadn't picked

up on them at first in the thin, metallic light of the polar dawn. The icebreaker was being preceded by a flotilla of small craft; four big twelve-passenger Zodiacs were powering in toward the black-shale beach below Signy Station.

York brought his glasses up again, studying the forms huddling behind the low gunwales of the inflatables.

White! They were wearing white. On the ice, high-visibility Day-Glo colors were universal for outer clothing. In an emergency situation, you wanted to be seen, not concealed.

White could only mean camouflage.

"Geoffery, turn everyone out and get them into survival suits! You too! Then tell the first mate to get up here straightaway! Move!"

Startled, the younger man vanished below. York returned his attention to the events unfolding at the station, not disbelieving but not wanting to believe.

The Zodiacs had reached the shore and had ridden up over the dirty gray rime ice along the tideline. Disembarking swiftly and expertly, the troops they had carried sprinted upslope, unslinging their assault rifles as they ran. One figure dropped to his knee and began squeezing off precise three-round bursts at the green-painted huts of the Survey base.

For God's sakes, why shoot? York thought. The only weapon ashore was a single-shot .22 used for collecting bird specimens. As the sound of gunfire echoed across the bay, Roberta appeared at the wheelhouse hatch.

"Evan, what's happening?"

"It's the Argentines. Launch our Zodiac and the life rafts. Get everyone over the side."

"Why?"

"Don't ask questions! Go!"

Obediently, she dropped belowdecks. York ducked back into the wheelhouse and went for the communications console. He broke the seals on both of the *Skua*'s emergency transponder beacons and activated them, then turned his attention to the powerful sideband radio set.

"CQ, CQ, CQ. This is BASK Skua, calling BASG South Georgia. Do you copy?"

He lifted his thumb from the microphone key and was rewarded by a high-pitched warbling squeal from the speaker. Evan York had never heard cascade jamming before, but he could guess what it was. He swore and started to punch in an alternate frequency.

Up forward, Roberta Eggerston ran her people through the often practiced, but never before needed, drill of abandoning ship. Because she was a skilled mariner in her own right, she followed procedure and refused to be flustered or panicked. Swiftly, she got the life raft, survival packs, and crew over the rail. With her duty accomplished, Roberta acted for herself. She hurried back aft along the deck to the ketch's wheelhouse, a small fearful figure swaddled in an orange foam survival coverall.

York still leaned over the sideband transceiver, glowering at it as it squalled in electronic agony.

"Evan, please, what is going on?"

"The damned Argentines are attacking Signy Base. They're jamming all the BAS frequencies. I can't get through to anyone!"

"What do they think they're doing?"

"I don't know. We can't get out of the bay past their ship, and they'll likely have a boarding party alongside us in a few minutes. We've got to get word out about what's happening here!"

The jamming warble from the speaker was cut off to be replaced by a calm voice speaking a mildly accented English.

"Motor vessel Skua, motor vessel Skua, secure your radio transmitters and make no further attempt at communications. I repeat, make no further attempt at communications or we will be forced to fire on you."

York wasn't listening. Instead he had started to flip feverishly through the pages of the radio log.

"We still might have something here, Bobbie," he said, not looking up. "The Yanks use a different block of frequencies than we do. We might be able get through to Palmer Station before the Argys can figure out what's up."

York began to key a new setting into the transceiver.

"Evan, if you transmit again they'll start shooting at us!"

"I know, I know!" York brought himself in check. "Look, we have got to let someone know what's going on out here. For our sake, and for the sake of the people at Signy."

The two could sense that the world they had so carefully built together was coming to its end. Their dream was suddenly going to hell around them, and they had only enough time left to speak as captain and first mate. All of the things they had to say as a man and a woman had to be said with their eyes in the few seconds they had left.

"Bobbie, you take the crew and head for shore. You'll be safer there. You'll have to surrender to the Argentines, but there's no other choice. Leave me the small life raft. I'll make one try to reach Palmer, then I'll follow you in. Get going now, everything will work out."

She was crying as she went forward. For a moment, York considered calling after her that he loved her, then turned back to the radio.

"CQ, CQ, CQ. BASK Skua calling USARP Palmer. Emergency, do you copy?"

On the farside of the bay, the bow turret of the Argentine warship indexed around and the gun barrel recoiled. Simultaneously with the flat crack of the cannon shot, a thirty-foot plume of water jetted into the air off of the *Skua*'s bow.

"CQ, CQ, CQ. BASK Skua calling USARP Palmer. Emergency, repeat, emergency! Do you copy?"

Dead air, unjammed but dead air, and then . . .

"BASK Skua, this is USARP Palmer. We read you four by four. What is your situation?"

He could hear the droning of the outboard motor of *Skua*'s Zodiac and the sound of Roberta screaming his name. He could also hear the rhythmic coughing of the Argentine gun mount as it began to walk a stream of shells in on the anchored ketch.

"Palmer, this is *Skua* at Signy Station. The Argentines are landing here in force! I repeat, the Argentines are landing here in force! Armed troops are ashore at the station! It's a bloody invasion!"

York did not hear Palmer Station's reply. Nor did he hear the forty-millimeter shell that exploded through the side of the wheel-house just inches from his head.

RIO DE JANEIRO

1630 HOURS: MARCH 20, 2006

Amanda Lee Garrett had long ago learned that she required a certain amount of time to herself. Given her chosen profession, however, such time was hard to come by. When a chance at a free afternoon had presented itself, the first in several weeks, she had set out to make the most of it.

She had lunched at one of Rio's finest churrascurias, the steak houses that served the spicy barbecued cuisine of Brazil's south-eastern goucho country, a pleasantly old-school establishment where the staff apparently still considered a woman dining alone to be a little scandalous, or at least a pity. She had lingered for a time over a second glass of the good but rough local wine and then moved on.

She had wandered along the warm, tree-lined streets of the Ipanema district and had browsed in the shops and boutiques of the Rua Visconete de Paraja, looking at everything yet seeking nothing in particular. Eventually, gravitating eastward, Amanda

had found herself on the famed black and white tiled promenade overlooking the beach at Ipanema.

The pale sands and low surf called to her, making the decision of how she would spend the rest of her afternoon an easy one. She hadn't really planned or prepared for a day at the beach, but it would make a good excuse to buy a new swimsuit.

That, in turn, had led to this soft and shaded patch of sand at the foot of the seawall. It was midweek and the seaside wasn't excessively crowded, just enough so that the air was filled with a happy jumble of samba and New Swing coming from a few radios and CD players. Her clothes, bundled into a plastic shopping bag, made a comfortable pillow and she was content to drowse lazily and people-watch.

Likewise, she was content to be watched. Aware of the occasional appreciative glances that came her way, Amanda gave the white satin one-piece she had chosen a surreptitious smoothing tug. The suit was staid compared to the locally favored tangas and monokinis, but the form that it sheathed was a good one, a trimly compact dancer's body, firm-breasted and flat-stomached. Her features were good as well, strong yet feminine, framed by thick, cinnamon-colored hair and dominated by her large—and, as one past lover had described them, dangerously hazel—eyes.

Amanda Garrett was an attractive woman, not classically beautiful, but attractive. At age thirty-five, she was also wise enough to know it. She was neither vain nor shy about the fact. She simply accepted it as a minor but pleasant part of her being. So she was neither surprised nor displeased when, out of the corner of her eye, she noticed another shadow flowing across the sand to merge with the patch of shade she was occupying.

"Hello, I really hope you speak English, because I think I'd like to get to know you."

Amanda came up onto her elbow a little faster than she had intended. Good Lord, this boy was beautiful!

"What would you do if I didn't?" she inquired curiously.

"Keep on trying, I guess." He shrugged and dropped down

onto the sand a couple of feet away. "Things would be a little more complicated, but it'd still be worth it."

She would guess his age as being somewhere in the late twenties, but he had that kind of boyish grin that made her think of high-school-grad-going-on-college-freshman. On the other hand, he had obviously been around enough to be just a little bit bored with some of the more conventional male-female approach-and-contact rituals, much as she was.

"That was an interesting opening. Direct and with a minimum of cute."

"I've found that cute seldom works with the class acts of this world. Honest does."

Amanda nodded. "True."

He wasn't overly tall, not many inches over her own medium height, and he had a hard body. Not a muscle builder, but lean and whipcord wiry. Mediterranean dark, maybe with some Greek lineage in that black and curly hair. His eyes, though, were a particularly penetrating shade of blue.

Those eyes were also giving her a frank survey. Not an ogling that she found offensive, but more of a connoisseur's complimentary consideration. Amanda did suspect, however, that her new swimsuit had been mentally peeled off and tossed into the nearest trash can. Well, fair was fair. She'd had her own momentary visualization of slipping down those well-worn denim trunks to see if that wonderful tan went all over.

- "Okay, then, we'll go with honest. My name's Vince."
- "Amanda."
- "Amanda . . . Let's see, that means 'worthy of being loved.' It suits you."
  - "And what does Vince mean?"
  - "Vince, a contraction of Vincent, which means 'invincible.' "
  - "Which has yet to be proven." Amanda smiled.
- "That's what I get for memorizing those name derivations out of the back of the dictionary. Gah! How bad am I bleeding?"

She chuckled softly. "Not too badly."

He could make her laugh, that was important, and honesty did work well with her. He wasn't exactly what she had visualized as the man of her dreams, but there might be definite potential here for a playmate.

"Stay and be welcome, Vincent, and let's see where doing some more honest gets us."

He returned her smile. They each understood the game they were beginning, and the beach at Rio on a late summer's afternoon was a wonderful place to play it. With luck, they both could win.

As it was, though, they were allowed only a few minutes. Both became aware of a disturbance out on the water, a rumble of engines and a chorus of perturbed voices. Something about the sound of those engines made Amanda sit up abruptly.

A ship's boat, a navy-gray, semirigid Zodiac with a stern steering station, was nosing its way inshore, pushing a scattering bow wave of swimmers and waders ahead of it. It rode up onto the sand and a slender figure in khaki hopped over the inflated sidehull and trotted up the beach toward them.

"Damn, damn, damn!" Amanda muttered under her breath.

"Begging the Captain's pardon, but your presence is urgently required back aboard ship."

Commander Amanda Lee Garrett, United States Navy, sighed and got to her feet, brushing off the sand. Time to herself was over.

"Okay, Lieutenant, what's going on?"

Lieutenant Christine Rendino's inquisitive pixie features, normally expressive to the extreme, remained carefully neutral. "I really couldn't say, ma'am. The executive officer just dispatched me to locate you."

"I see. Very well, then, return to the gig and stand by to shove off. I'll be with you in a second."

Amanda knelt down to retrieve the bag that held her uniform. Her new acquaintance had come up on one knee, looking wary and a little unnerved.

"We all have to make a living somehow," she said wryly. "It

was a very good pass. If it's any consolation, I think I might have gone out to intercept it."

Following an impish impulse, she leaned forward and lightly brushed her lips against his. Then, getting back to her feet, she started down to the waiting boat and her responsibilities.

The gig's twin outboards churned up a flurry of sandy foam as they backed off the beach. Slewing about, they went up on the plane and headed for Sugar Loaf Point and Rio's inner harbor.

Amanda rode one of the side benches while Christine Rendino stretched out comfortably on the deck, her back propped against the steering-station windscreen and her legs extended out ahead of her over the keel line. It was a rather casual stance in the presence of a superior officer, but then, that could sum up a great deal of Lieutenant Rendino's military career.

The lithe ash-blonde had entered the service via the University of California's NROTC. She had graduated with honors but had never quite managed to fit into the classic mold of "an officer and a lady." She survived and even prospered because of two things: one, that she was very good, if not brilliant, at her job, the other, the long-held belief within the naval community that intelligence officers were always just a little bit peculiar.

Beyond that, during the tour of duty she and Amanda had shared on the same Fleet staff in the Pacific, she had become a friend, comrade, and confidante. When Amanda had moved on to her own command, she had expended a considerable portion of her accumulated store of favors to ensure that Christine came along with her.

"All right, Chris. What's really going on?"

"Not sure, boss ma'am, but my sit-guess is that it's big, local, and we're being sent to do something about it."

Now that they had a degree of privacy, the intel had released the sober-faced control she had exhibited on the beach and was backsliding into her more usual state of casual frankness.