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# ROBERT LUDLUM

THE

# HOLCROFT COVENANT



**THE  
HOLCROFT  
COVENANT**  

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**ROBERT LUDLUM**



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THE HOLCROFT COVENANT  
*A Bantam Book / published by arrangement with  
The Robertmary Company*

PRINTING HISTORY

*Richard Marek edition published March 1978  
9 printings through August 1978*

*Bantam edition / February 1979*

<i>2nd printing .. February 1979</i>	<i>6th printing . . . . August 1980</i>
<i>3rd printing .. February 1979</i>	<i>7th printing .. December 1980</i>
<i>4th printing . . . . March 1979</i>	<i>8th printing .. February 1981</i>
<i>5th printing . . . . March 1979</i>	<i>9th printing . . . . April 1981</i>
<i>10th printing . . . November 1981</i>	

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For information address: Richard Marek Publishers,  
200 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016.*

ISBN 0-553-20783-0

*Published simultaneously in the United States and Canada*

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

19 18 17 16 15

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# **THE HOLCROFT COVENANT**



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ROBERT LUDLUM'S first novel, *The Scarlatti Inheritance* (1970) brought him immediate literary success. The book and its successors, including *The Osterman Weekend*, *The Chancellor Manuscript*, *The Holcroft Covenant*, *The Matarese Circle* and *The Bourne Identity*, have all been on bestseller lists here and in England as well as in the Netherlands, Argentina, Brazil, Greece, Iran, Japan and Portugal. It was in the late sixties, at the age of forty, that Mr. Ludlum changed professions and became a writer. Listed in *Who's Who in the East* as producer-actor, Mr. Ludlum appeared in many Broadway, regional, and television dramas in the fifties, receiving excellent reviews for his performances. He also appeared in over 200 network television shows including "Omnibus," "Studio One," and "Robert Montgomery." Throughout the sixties Mr. Ludlum combined performing with producing and was responsible for over 300 productions employing major stars of the English and American stage. He was the moving force in building one of the most prestigious playhouses in the country in Paramus, N.J., and was instrumental in bringing to Broadway such hits as "The Front Page" and "The Owl and the Pussycat." His work as a producer brought him artistic citations from the American National Theatre and Academy, Actor's Equity Association, and the William Whitney Foundation. Born in New York City, and a graduate of Wesleyan University (1951), Mr. Ludlum lives in Connecticut with his wife, Mary Ryde, a former stage and television actress, and his three children.



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# Prologue

MARCH 1945

The hull of the submarine was lashed to the huge pilings, a behemoth strapped in silhouette, the sweeping lines of its bow arcing into the light of the North Sea dawn.

The base was on the island of Scharhörn, in the Helgoland Bight, several miles from the German mainland and the mouth of the Elbe River. It was a refueling station never detected by Allied Intelligence and, in the cause of security, little known among the strategists of the German High Command itself. The undersea marauders came and went in darkness, emerging and submerging within several hundred feet of the moorings. They were Neptune's assassins, come home to rest or going forth to press their attacks.

On this particular dawn, however, the submarine lashed to the dock was doing neither. For it, the war was over, its assignment intrinsic to the origins of another war.

Two men stood in the well of the conning tower, one in the uniform of a commanding officer of the German Navy, the other a tall civilian in a long dark overcoat—the collar turned up to ward off the North Sea winds—yet hatless, as if to defy the North Sea winter. Both looked down at the long line of passengers who slowly made their way toward the gangplank amidships. As each passenger reached the plank, a name was checked off against a list, and then he or she was led—or carried—aboard a submarine.

A few walked by themselves, but they were the exceptions. They were the oldest, some having reached their twelfth or thirteenth birthdays.

The rest were children. Infants in the arms of stern-faced army nurses, who surrendered their charges to a



unit of navy doctors at the plank; preschoolers, and early graders clutching identical traveling kits and one another's hands, peering up at the strange black vessel that was to be their home for weeks to come.

"Incredible," said the officer. "Simply incredible."

"It's the beginning," replied the man in the overcoat, his sharp, angular features rigid. "Word comes from everywhere. From the ports and the mountain passes, from the remaining airfields all over the Reich. They go out by the thousands. To every part of the world. And people are waiting for them. Everywhere."

"An extraordinary accomplishment," said the officer, shaking his head in awe.

"This is only one part of the strategy. The entire operation is extraordinary."

"It's an honor to have you here."

"I wanted to be. This is the last shipment." The tall civilian kept his eyes on the dock below. "The Third Reich is dying. These are its rebirth. These are the *Fourth Reich*. Unencumbered by mediocrity and corruption. These are the *Sonnenkinder*. All over the world."

"The children . . ."

"The Children of the Damned," said the tall man, interrupting. "They are the Children of the Damned, as millions will be. But none will be like these. And these will be everywhere."

# 1

JANUARY 197—

*"Attention! Le train de sept heures à destination de Zurich partira du quai numéro douze."*

The tall American in the dark-blue raincoat glanced up at the cavernous dome of the Geneva railway station, trying to locate the hidden speakers. The expression on his sharp, angular face was quizzical; the announcement was in French, a language he spoke but little and understood less. Nevertheless, he was able to distinguish the word *Zurich*; it was his signal. He brushed aside the light-brown hair that fell with irritating regularity over his forehead and started for the north end of the station.

The crowds were heavy. Bodies rushed past the American in all directions, hurrying to the gates to begin their journeys to scores of different destinations. None seemed to pay attention to the harsh announcements that echoed throughout the upper chambers in a continuous metallic monotone. The travelers in Geneva's *Bahnhof* knew where they were going. It was the end of the week; the new mountain snows had fallen and the air outside was crisp and chilling. There were places to go, schedules to keep, and people to see; time wasted was time stolen. Everyone hurried.

The American hurried, too, for he also had a schedule to keep and a person to see. He had learned before the announcement that the train for Zurich would leave from track twelve. According to the plan, he was to walk down the ramp to the platform, count seven cars from the rear, and board at the first entrance. Inside, he was to count again, this time five compartments, and knock twice on the fifth door. If everything was in order, he would be admitted by a director of La Grande Banque de Genève,

signifying the culmination of twelve weeks of preparations. Preparations that included purposely obscured cablegrams, transatlantic calls made and received on telephones the Swiss banker had determined were sterile, and a total commitment to secrecy.

He did not know what the director of La Grande Banque de Genève had to say to him, but he thought he knew why the precautions were deemed necessary. The American's name was Noel Holcroft, but Holcroft had not been his name at birth. He was born in Berlin in the summer of 1939, and the name on the hospital registry was "Clausen." His father was Heinrich Clausen, master strategist of the Third Reich, the financial magician who put together the coalition of disparate economic forces that insured the supremacy of Adolf Hitler.

Heinrich Clausen won the country but lost a wife. Althene Clausen was an American; more to the point, she was a headstrong woman with her own standards of ethics and morality. She had deduced that the National Socialists possessed neither; they were a collection of paranoiacs, led by a maniac, and supported by financiers interested solely in profits.

Althene Clausen gave her husband an ultimatum on a warm afternoon in August: Withdraw. Stand against the paranoiacs and the maniac before it was too late. In disbelief, the Nazi listened and laughed and dismissed his wife's ultimatum as the foolish ravings of a new mother. Or perhaps the warped judgment of a woman brought up in a weak, discredited system that would soon march to the step of the New Order. Or be crushed under its boot.

That night the new mother packed herself and the new child and took one of the last planes to London, the first leg on her journey back to New York. A week later the Blitzkrieg was executed against Poland; the Thousand Year Reich had begun its own journey, one that would last some fifteen hundred days from the first sound of gunfire.

Holcroft walked through the gate, down the ramp, and on to the long concrete platform. *Four, five, six, seven. . . .* The seventh car had a small blue circle stenciled beneath the window to the left of the open door. It was the symbol of accommodations superior to those in first class: enlarged compartments properly outfitted for confer-



ences in transit or clandestine meetings of a more personal nature. Privacy was guaranteed; once the train was moving, the doors at either end of the car were manned by armed railway guards.

Holcroft entered and turned left into the corridor. He walked past successive closed doors until he reached the fifth. He knocked twice.

"Herr Holcroft?" The voice behind the wood panel was firm but quiet, and although the two words were meant as a question, the voice was not questioning. It made a statement.

"Herr Manfredi?" said Noel in reply, suddenly aware that an eye was peering at him through the pinpoint viewer in the center of the door. It was an eerie feeling, diminished by the comic effect. He smiled to himself and wondered if Herr Manfredi would look like the sinister Conrad Veidt in one of those 1930s English films.

There were two clicks of a lock, followed by the sound of a sliding bolt. The door swung back and the image of Conrad Veidt vanished. Ernst Manfredi was a short, rotund man in his middle to late sixties. He was completely bald, with a pleasant, gentle face; but the wide blue eyes, magnified beyond the metal-framed glasses, were cold. Very light blue and very cold.

"Come in, Herr Holcroft," said Manfredi, smiling. Then his expression changed abruptly; the smile disappeared. "Do forgive me. I should say *Mister* Holcroft. The *Herr* may be offensive to you. My apologies."

"None necessary," replied Noel, stepping into the well-appointed compartment. There was a table, two chairs, no bed in evidence. The walls were wood-paneled; dark-red velvet curtains covered the windows, muffling the sounds of the figures rushing by outside. On the table was a small lamp with a fringed shade.

"We have about twenty-five minutes before departure," the banker said. "It should be adequate. And don't be concerned—we'll be given ample warning. The train won't start until you've disembarked. You'll not have to travel to Zurich."

"I've never been there."

"I trust that will be changed," said the banker enigmatically, gesturing for Holcroft to sit opposite him at the table.

"I wouldn't count on it." Noel sat down, unbuttoning his raincoat but not removing it.

"I'm sorry, that was presumptuous of me." Manfredi took his seat and leaned back in the chair. "I must apologize once again. I'll need your identification. Your passport, please. And your international driver's license. Also, whatever documents you have on your person that describe physical markings, vaccinations, that sort of thing."

Holcroft felt a rush of anger. The inconvenience to his life aside, he disliked the banker's patronizing attitude. "Why should I? You know who I am. You wouldn't have opened that door if you didn't. You probably have more photographs, more information on me, than the State Department."

"Indulge an old man, sir," said the banker, shrugging in self-deprecation, his charm on display. "It will be made clear to you."

Reluctantly, Noel reached into his jacket pocket and withdrew the leather case that contained his passport, health certificate, international license, and two A.I.A. letters that stated his qualifications as an architect. He handed the case to Manfredi. "It's all there. Help yourself."

With seemingly greater reluctance, the banker opened the case. "I feel as though I'm prying, but I think . . ."

"You should," interrupted Holcroft. "I didn't ask for this meeting. Frankly, it comes at a very inconvenient time. I want to get back to New York as soon as possible."

"Yes. Yes, I understand," said the Swiss quietly, perusing the documents. "Tell me, what was the first architectural commission you undertook outside the United States?"

Noel suppressed his irritation. He had come this far; there was no point in refusing to answer. "Mexico," he replied. "For the Alvarez hotel chain, north of Puerto Vallarta."

"The second?"

"Costa Rica. For the government. A postal complex in 1973."

"What was the gross income of your firm in New York last year? Without adjustments."

"None of your damned business."