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The Bourne Supremacy

Written by Robert Ludlum

Published by Orion Books Ltd

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THE BOURNE SUPREMACY

Robert Ludlum



An Orion paperback

First published in Great Britain in 1986
by Grafton Books
This paperback edition published in 2012
by Orion Books Ltd,
Orion House, 5 Upper St Martin's Lane,
London WC2H 9EA

An Hachette UK company

First published in the USA in 1986
by Random House, Inc.

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-4091-0971-6

Printed and bound in Great Britain
by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

The Orion Publishing Group's policy is to use papers that are natural, renewable and recyclable products and made from wood grown in sustainable forests. The logging and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

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For Shannon Paige Ludlum
Welcome, my dear
Have a great life

CHAPTER ONE

Kowloon. The teeming final extension of China that is no part of the north except in spirit – but the spirit runs deep and descends into the caverns of men's souls without regard for the harsh, irrelevant practicalities of political borders. The land and the water are one, and it is the will of the spirit that determines how man will use the land and the water – again without regard for such abstractions as useless freedom or escapable confinement. The concern is only with empty stomachs, with women's stomachs, children's stomachs. Survival. There is nothing else. All the rest is dung to be spread over the infertile fields.

It was sundown, and both in Kowloon and across Victoria Harbour on the island of Hong Kong an unseen blanket was gradually being lowered over the territory's daylight chaos. The screeching *Aiyas!* of the street merchants were muted with the shadows, and quiet negotiations in the upper regions of the cold, majestic structures of glass and steel that marked the colony's skyline were ending with nods and shrugs and brief smiles of silent accommodation. Night was coming, proclaimed by a blinding orange sun piercing an immense, jagged, fragmented wall of clouds in the west – sharply defined shafts of uncompromising energy about to plunge over the horizon, unwilling to let this part of the world forget the light.

Soon darkness would spread across the sky, but not below. Below, the blazing lights of human invention would garishly illuminate the earth – this part of the earth where the land and the water are anxious avenues of access and conflict. And

with the never-ending, ever-strident nocturnal carnival, other games would begin, games the human race should have abandoned with the first light of Creation. But there was no human life then – so who recorded it? Who knew? Who cared? Death was not a commodity.

A small motorboat, its powerful engine belying its shabby exterior, sped through the Lamma Channel, heading around the coastline toward the harbour. To a disinterested observer it was merely one more *xiao wanju*, a legacy to a first son from a once unworthy fisherman who had struck minor riches – a crazy night of mah-jongg, hashish from the Triangle, smuggled jewels out of Macao – who cared how? The son could cast his nets or run his merchandise more efficiently by using a fast propeller rather than the slow sail of a junk or the sluggish engine of a sampan. Even the Chinese border guards and the marine patrols on and off the shores of the Shenzen Wan did not fire on such insignificant transgressors; they were unimportant, and who knew what families beyond the New Territories on the Mainland might benefit? It could be one of their own. The sweet herbs from the hills still brought full stomachs – perhaps filling one of their own. Who cared? Let them come. Let them go.

The small craft with its Bimini canvas enveloping both sides of the forward cockpit cut its speed and cautiously zigzagged through the scattered flotilla of junks and sampans returning to their crowded berths in Aberdeen. One after another the boat people shrieked angry curses at the intruder, at its impudent engine and its more impudent wake. Then each became strangely silent as the rude interloper passed; something under the canvas quieted their sudden bursts of fury.

The boat raced into the harbour's corridor, a dark, watery path now bordered by the blazing lights of the island of Hong Kong on the right, Kowloon on the left. Three minutes later the outboard motor audibly sank into its lowest register as the hull swerved slowly past two filthy barges docked at the godown, and slid into an empty space on the west side of the Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon's crowded, dollar-conscious waterfront. The strident hordes of merchants, setting up their nightly tourist traps on the wharf, paid no attention; it

was merely one more *jigi* coming in from the catch. Who cared?

Then, like the boat people out in the channel, the stalls on the waterfront nearest the insignificant intruder began to quiet down. Excited voices were silenced amid screeching commands and countercommands as eyes were drawn to a figure climbing up the black, oil-soaked ladder to the pier.

He was a holy man. His shrouded figure was draped in a pure white caftan that accentuated his tall slender body – very tall for a *Zhongguo ren*, nearly six feet in height, perhaps. Little could be seen of his face, however, as the cloth was loose and the breezes kept pressing the white fabric across his dark features, drawing out the whiteness of his eyes – determined eyes, zealous eyes. This was no ordinary priest, anyone could see that. He was a *heshang*, a chosen one selected by elders steeped in wisdom who could perceive the inner spiritual knowledge of a young monk destined for higher things. And it did not hurt that such a monk was tall and slender and had eyes of fire. Such holy men drew attention to themselves, to their personages – to their eyes – and generous contributions followed, both in fear and in awe; mostly fear. Perhaps this *heshang* came from one of the mystic sects that wandered through the hills and forests of the Guangze, or from a religious brotherhood in the mountains of far-off Qing Gaoyuan – descendants, it was said, of a people in the distant Himalayas – they were always quite ostentatious and generally to be feared the most, for few understood their obscure teachings. Teachings that were couched in gentleness, but with subtle hints of indescribable agony should their lessons go unheeded. There was too much agony on the land and the water – who needed more? So give to the spirits, to the eyes of fire. Perhaps it would be recorded. Somewhere.

The white-robed figure walked slowly through the parting crowds on the wharf, past the congested Star Ferry pier, and disappeared into the growing pandemonium of the Tsim Sha Tsui. The moment had passed; the stalls returned to their hysteria.

The priest headed east on Salisbury Road until he reached the Peninsula Hotel, whose subdued elegance was losing the

battle with its surroundings. He then turned north into Nathan Road, to the base of the glittering Golden Mile, that strip of strips where opposing multitudes shrieked for attention. Both natives and tourists alike took notice of the stately holy man as he passed crowded storefronts and alleys bulging with merchandise, three-story discos and topless cafés where huge, amateurish billboards hawked Oriental charms above stalls offering the steamed delicacies of the noonday *dim sum*. He walked for nearly ten minutes through the garish carnival, now and then acknowledging glances with a slight bow of his head, and twice shaking it while issuing commands to the same short, muscular *Zhongguo ren*, who alternately followed him, then passed him with quick, dancelike steps, turning to search the intense eyes for a sign.

The sign came – two abrupt nods – as the priest turned and walked through the beaded entrance of a raucous cabaret. The *Zhongguo ren* remained outside, his hand unobtrusively under his loose tunic, his own eyes darting about the crazy street; a thoroughfare he could not understand. It was *insane!* Outrageous! But he was the *tudi*; he would protect the holy man with his life, no matter the assault on his own sensibilities.

Inside the cabaret the heavy layers of smoke were slashed by roving coloured lights, most whirling in circles and directed toward a platform stage where a rock group ululated in deafening frenzy, a frantic admixture of punk and Far East. Shiny black, tight-fitting, ill-fitting trousers quivered maniacally on spindly legs below black leather jackets over soiled white silk shirts open to the waist, while each head was shaved around its skull at the temple line, each face grotesque, heavily made up to accentuate its essentially passive Oriental character. And as if to emphasize the conflict between East and West, the jarring music would occasionally, startlingly, come to a stop, as the plaintive strains of a simple Chinese melody emerged from a single instrument, while the figures remained rigid under the swirling bombardment of the spotlights.

The priest stood still for a moment surveying the huge crowded room. A number of customers in varying stages of drunkenness looked up at him from the tables. Several rolled coins in his direction before they turned away, while a few got

out of their chairs, dropped Hong Kong dollars beside their drinks, and headed for the door. The *heshang* was having an effect, but not the effect desired by the obese, tuxedoed man who approached him.

'May I be of assistance, Holy One?' asked the cabaret's manager.

The priest leaned forward and spoke into the man's ear, whispering a name. The manager's eyes widened, then he bowed and gestured toward a small table by the wall. The priest nodded back in appreciation and walked behind the man to his chair as adjacent customers took uncomfortable notice.

The manager leaned down and spoke with a reverence he did not feel. 'Would you care for refreshment, Holy One?'

'Goat's milk, if it is by chance available. If not, plain water will be more than sufficient. And I thank you.'

'It is the privilege of the establishment,' said the tuxedoed man, bowing and moving away, trying to place the slow, softly spoken dialect he could not recognize. It did not matter. This tall, white-robed priest had business with the *laoban*, and that was all that mattered. He had actually used the *laoban*'s name, a name seldom spoken in the Golden Mile, and on this particular evening the powerful taipan was on the premises – in a room he would not publicly acknowledge knowing. But it was not the province of the manager to tell the *laoban* that the priest had arrived; the berobed one had made that clear. All was privacy this night, he had insisted. When the august taipan wished to see him, a man would come out to find him. So be it; it was the way of the secretive *laoban*, one of the wealthiest and most illustrious taipans in Hong Kong.

'Send a kitchen stick down the street for some fuck-fuck mother goat's milk,' said the manager harshly to a head boy on the floor. 'And tell him to be damn-damn quick. The existence of his stinking offspring will depend upon it.'

The holy man sat passively at the table, his zealous eyes now gentler, observing the foolish activity, apparently neither condemning nor accepting but merely taking it all in with the compassion of a father watching errant children.

Abruptly through the whirling lights there was an intrusion.

Several tables away a bright camper's match was struck and quickly extinguished. Then another, and finally a third, this last held under a long black cigarette. The brief series of flashes drew the attention of the priest. He moved his shrouded head slowly toward the flame and the lone, unshaven, coarsely dressed Chinese drawing in the smoke. Their eyes met; the holy man's nod was almost imperceptible, barely a motion, and was acknowledged by an equally obscure movement as the match went out.

Seconds later the crudely dressed smoker's table was suddenly in flames. Fire shot up from the surface, spreading quickly to all the articles of paper on the surface – napkins, menus, *dim sum* baskets, isolated eruptions of potential disaster. The dishevelled Chinese screamed and, with a shattering crash, overturned the table as waiters raced, shrieking, toward the flames. Customers on all sides leaped from their chairs as the fire on the floor – narrow strands of pulsing blue flame – inexplicably spread in rivulets around excited, stamping feet. The pandemonium grew as people rapidly slapped out the small fires with tablecloths and aprons. The manager and his head boys gestured wildly, shouting that all was under control; the danger had passed. The rock group played with even greater intensity, attempting to draw the crowd back into its frenzied orbit and away from the area of diminishing panic.

Suddenly, there was a greater disturbance, a more violent eruption. Two head boys had collided with the shabbily dressed *Zhongguo ren* whose carelessness and outsized matches had caused the conflagration. He responded with rapid *Wing Chun* chops – rigid hands crashing into shoulder blades and throats – as his feet hammered up into abdomens, sending the two *shi-ji* reeling back into the surrounding customers. The physical abuse compounded the panic, the chaos. The heavy-set manager, now roaring, intervened and he, too, fell away, stunned by a well-placed kick to his rib cage. The unshaven *Zhongguo ren* then picked up a chair and hurled it at the screaming figures near the fallen man as three other waiters rushed into the melee in defence of their *Zongguan*. Men and women who only seconds ago were merely screaming now began thrashing their arms about, pummelling anyone and

everyone near them. The rock group gyrated to its outer limits, frantic dissonance worthy of the scene. The riot had taken hold, and the burly peasant glanced across the room at the single table next to the wall. The priest was gone.

The unshaven *Zhongguo ren* picked up a second chair and smashed it down across a nearby table, splintering the wooden frame and swinging a broken leg into the crowd. Only moments to go, but those moments were everything.

The priest stepped through the door far back in the wall near the entrance of the cabaret. He closed it quickly, adjusting his eyes to the dim light of the long, narrow hallway. His right arm was stiff beneath the folds of his white caftan, his left diagonally across his waist, also under the sheer white fabric. Down the corridor, no more than twenty-five feet away a startled man sprang from the wall, his right hand plunging beneath his jacket to yank a large, heavy-calibre revolver from an unseen shoulder holster. The holy man nodded slowly, impassively, repeatedly, as he moved forward with graceful steps appropriate to a religious procession.

'*Amita-fo, Amita-fo*,' he said softly, over and over again as he approached the man. 'Everything is peaceful, all is in peace, the spirits will it.'

'*Jou matyeh*?' The guard was beside a door; he shoved the ugly weapon forward and continued in a guttural Cantonese bred in the northern settlements. 'Are you lost, priest? What are you doing here? Get out! This is no place for you!'

'*Amita-fo, Amita-fo* . . .'

'Get *out! Now!*'

The guard had no chance. Swiftly the priest pulled a razor-thin, double-edged knife from the folds at his waist. He slashed the man's wrist, half severing the hand with the gun from the guard's arm, then arced the blade surgically across the man's throat; air and blood erupted as the head snapped back in a mass of shining red; he fell to the floor, a corpse.

Without hesitation, the killer-priest slid the blemished knife into the cloth of his caftan where it held, and from under the right side of his robe he withdrew a thin-framed Uzi machine gun, its curved magazine holding more ammunition than he

would need. He raised his foot and crashed it into the door with the strength of a mountain cat, racing inside to find what he knew he would find.

Five men – *Zhongguo ren* – were sitting around a table with pots of tea and short glasses of potent whisky near each; there were no written papers anywhere in sight, no notes or memoranda, only ears and watchful eyes. And as each pair of eyes looked up in shock the faces were contorted with panic. Two well-dressed negotiators plunged their hands inside their well-tailored jackets while they spun out of the chairs; another lunged under the table as the remaining two sprang up screaming and raced futilely into silk-covered walls, spinning around in desperation, seeking pardons yet knowing none would be forthcoming. A shattering fusillade of bullets ripped into the *Zhongguo ren*. Blood gushed from fatal wounds as skulls were pierced and eyes were punctured, mouths torn apart, bright red in muted screams of death. The walls and the floor and the polished table glistened sickeningly with the bloody evidence of death. Everywhere. It was over.

The killer surveyed his work. Satisfied, he knelt down by a large, stagnant pool of blood and moved his index finger through it. He then pulled out a square of dark cloth from his left sleeve and spread it over his handiwork. He rose to his feet and rushed out of the room, unbuttoning the white caftan as he ran down the dim hallway; the robe was open by the time he reached the door to the cabaret. He removed the razorlike knife from the cloth and shoved it into a scabbard on his belt. Then, holding the folds of cloth together, his hood in place, the lethal weapon secure at his side, he pulled the door back and walked inside, into the brawling chaos that showed no sign of lessening. But then why should it be different? He had left it barely thirty seconds ago and his man was well trained.

'*Faai-di!*' The shout came from the burly, unshaven peasant from Canton; he was ten feet away, overturning another table and striking a match, dropping it on the floor. 'The police will be here any moment! The bartender just reached a phone, I saw him!'

The killer-priest ripped the caftan away from his body and

the hood from his head. In the wild revolving lights his face looked as macabre as any in the frenzied rock group. Heavy makeup outlined his eyes, white lines defining the shape of each, and his face was an unnatural brown. 'Go in front of me!' he commanded the peasant. He dropped his costume and the Uzi on the floor next to the door while removing a pair of thin surgical gloves; he shoved them into his flannel trousers.

For a cabaret in the Golden Mile to summon the police was not a decision easily arrived at. There were heavy fines for poor management, stiff penalties for endangering tourists. The police knew these risks and responded quickly when they were taken. The killer ran behind the peasant from Canton who joined the panicked crowd at the entrance screaming to get out. The coarsely dressed brawler was a bull; bodies in front of him fell away under the force of his blows. Guard and killer burst through the door and into the street, where another crowd had gathered shrieking questions and epithets and cries of bad joss – misfortune for the establishment. They threaded their way through the excited onlookers and were joined by the short, muscular Chinese who had waited outside. He grabbed the arm of his defrocked charge and pulled his priest into the narrowest of alleys, where he took out two towels from under his tunic. One was soft and dry, the other encased in plastic – it was warm and wet and perfumed.

The assassin gripped the wet towel and began rubbing it over his face, sinking it around and into the sockets of his eyes and across the exposed flesh of his neck. He reversed the cloth and repeated the process with even greater pressure, scrubbing his temples and his hairline until his white skin was apparent. He then dried himself with the second towel, smoothed his dark hair, and straightened the regimental tie that fell on the cream-coloured shirt under his dark blue blazer. '*Jau!*' he ordered his two companions. They ran and disappeared in the crowds.

And a lone, well-dressed Occidental walked out into the strip of Oriental pleasures.

Inside the cabaret the excited manager was berating the bartender who had called the *jing cha*; the fines would be on

his fuck-fuck head! For the riot had inexplicably subsided, leaving the customers bewildered. Head boys and waiters were mollifying the patrons, patting shoulders and clearing away the debris, while straightening tables and producing new chairs and dispensing free glasses of whisky. The rock group concentrated on the current favourites, and as swiftly as the order of the evening had been disrupted it was restored. With luck, through the tuxedoed manager, the explanation that an impetuous bartender had mistaken a belligerent drunk for something far more serious would be acceptable to the police.

Suddenly, all thoughts of fines and official harassment were swept away as his eyes were drawn to a clump of white fabric on the floor across the room – in front of the door to the inner offices. White cloth, pure white – the priest? The *door!* The *laoban!* The *conference!* His breath short, his face drenched with sweat, the obese manager raced between the tables to the discarded caftan. He knelt down, his eyes wide, his breathing now suspended, as he saw the dark barrel of a strange weapon protruding from beneath the folds of white. And what made him choke on his barely formed terror was the sight of tiny specks and thin streaks of shiny, undried blood soiling the cloth.

'*Go hai matyeh?*' The question was asked by a second man in a tuxedo, but without the status conferred by a cummerbund – in truth the manager's brother and first assistant. 'Oh, damn the Christian *Jesus!*' he swore under his breath as his brother gathered up the odd-looking gun in the spotted caftan.

'*Come!*' ordered the manager, getting to his feet and heading for the door.

'The police!' objected the brother. 'One of us should speak to them, calm them, do what we can.'

'It may be that we can do *nothing* but give them our heads! *Quickly!*'

Inside the dimly lit corridor the proof was there. The slain guard lay in a river of his own blood, his weapon gripped by a hand barely attached to his wrist. Within the conference room itself, the proof was complete. Five bloodied corpses were in spastic disarray, one specifically, shockingly, the focus of the manager's horrified interest. He approached the body and the

punctured skull. With his handkerchief he wiped away the blood and stared at the face.

'We are dead,' he whispered. 'Kowloon is dead, Hong Kong dead. All is dead.'

'*What?*'

'This man is the Vice-Premier of the People's Republic, successor to the Chairman himself.'

'Here! *Look!*' The first-assistant brother lunged toward the body of the dead *laoban*. Alongside the riddled, bleeding corpse was a black bandanna. It was lying flat, the fabric with the curlicues of white discoloured by blotches of red. The brother picked it up and gasped at the writing in the circle of blood underneath: *JASON BOURNE*.

The manager sprang across the floor. 'Great Christian Jesus!' he uttered, his whole body trembling. 'He's come back. The assassin has come back to Asia! *Jason Bourne!* He's come *back!*'