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The Bourne Ultimatum

Written by Robert Ludlum

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THE BOURNE ULTIMATUM

Robert Ludlum



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For Bobbi and Leonard Raichert,
two lovely people who have enriched
our lives – our thanks

PROLOGUE

Darkness had descended on Manassas, Virginia, the countryside alive with nocturnal undercurrents, as Bourne crept through the woods bordering the estate of General Norman Swayne. Startled birds fluttered out of their black recesses; crows awoke in the trees and cawed their alarms, and then, as if calmed by a foraging co-conspirator, kept silent.

Manassas! The key was here! The key that would unlock the subterranean door that led to Carlos the Jackal, the assassin who wanted only to destroy David Webb and his family . . . Webb! *Get away from me, David!* screamed Jason Bourne in the silence of his mind. *Let me be the killer you cannot be!*

With each scissoring cut into the thick, high wire fence, he understood the inevitable, confirmed by his heavy breathing and the sweat that fell from his hairline. No matter how hard he tried to keep his body in reasonable shape, he was fifty years of age; he could not do with ease what he did thirteen years ago in Paris when, under orders, he had stalked the Jackal. It was something to think about, not dwell upon. There were Marie and his children now – David's wife, David's children – and there was *nothing* he could not do as long as he willed it! David Webb was disappearing from his psyche, only the predator Jason Bourne would remain.

He was *through*! He crawled inside and stood up, instinctively, rapidly checking his equipment with the fingers of both hands. Weapons: an automatic, as well as a CO_2 dart pistol; Zeiss-Ikon binoculars; a scabbarded hunting knife. They were all the predator needed, for he was now behind the lines in enemy territory, the enemy that would lead him to Carlos.

Medusa. The bastard battalion from Vietnam, the unlogged,

unsanctioned, unacknowledged collection of killers and misfits who roamed the jungles of Southeast Asia directed by Command Saigon, the original death squads who brought Saigon more intelligence input than all the search-and-destroys put together. Jason Bourne had come out of Medusa with David Webb only a memory – a scholar who had another wife, other children, all slaughtered.

General Norman Swayne had been an elite member of Command Saigon, the sole supplier of the old Medusa. And now there was a *new* Medusa – different, massive, evil incarnate cloaked in contemporary respectability, searching out and destroying whole segments of global economies, all for the benefit of the few. All financed by the profits from a long-ago bastard battalion, unlogged, unacknowledged – non-history. This modern Medusa was the bridge to Carlos the Jackal. The assassin would find the principals irresistible as clients, and both camps would demand the death of Jason Bourne. *That* had to happen! And for it to happen, Bourne had to learn the secrets concealed within the grounds belonging to General Swayne, head of all procurements for the Pentagon, a panicked man with a small tattoo on his inner forearm. A Medusan.

Without sound or warning, a black Doberman crashed through the dense foliage, its frenzy in full force. Jason whipped the CO_2 pistol from its nylon holster as the salivating attack dog lunged into his stomach, its teeth bared. He fired into its head; the dart took effect in seconds. He cradled the animal's unconscious body to the ground.

Cut its throat! roared Jason Bourne in silence.

No, countered his other self, David Webb. *Blame the trainer, not the animal.*

Get away from me, David!

CHAPTER ONE

The cacophony spun out of control as the crowds swelled through the amusement park in the countryside on the outskirts of Baltimore. The summer night was hot and nearly everywhere faces and necks were drenched with sweat, except for those screaming as they plunged over the crests of a roller coaster, or shrieking as they plummeted down the narrow, twisting gullies of racing water in torpedo sleds. The garishly coloured, manically blinking lights along the central gangway were joined by the grating sounds of emphatic music metallically erupting out of an excess of loudspeakers – calliopes *presto*, marches *prestissimo*. Pitchmen yelled above the din, nasally hawking their wares in monotonic diatribes while erratic explosions in the sky lit up the darkness, sending sprays of myriad fireworks cascading over a small adjacent black lake. Roman candles bright, arching bursts of fire blinding.

A row of Hit-the-Gong machines drew contorted faces and thick necks bulging with veins as men sought furiously and frequently in frustration to prove their manhood, crashing heavy wooden mallets down on the deceitful planks that too often refused to send the little red balls up to the bells. Across the way, others shrieked with menacing enthusiasm as they crashed their Dodgem cars into the whirling, surrounding vehicles, each collision a triumph of superior aggression, each combatant a momentary movie star who overcomes all odds against him. *Gunfight at OK Corral* at 9:27 in the evening in a conflict that meant nothing.

Farther along was a minor monument to sudden death, a shooting gallery that bore little resemblance to the innocent

minimum-calibre variety found in state fairs and rural carnivals. Instead, it was a microcosm of the most lethal equipment of modern weaponry. There were mocked-up versions of MAC-10 and Uzi machine pistols, steel-framed missile launchers and anti-tank bazookas, and, finally, a frightening replica of a flamethrower spewing out harsh, straight beams of light through billowing clouds of dark smoke. And again there were the perspiring faces, continuous beads of sweat rolling over maniacal eyes and down across stretched necks – husbands, wives and children – their features grotesque, twisted out of shape as if each were blasting away at hated enemies – wives, husbands, parents, and offspring. All were locked in a never-ending war without meaning – at 9:29 in the evening, in an amusement park whose theme was violence. Unmitigated and unwarranted, man against himself and all his hostilities, the worst, of course, being his fears.

A slender figure, a cane gripped in his right hand, limped past a booth where angry, excited customers were hurling sharp-pointed darts into balloons on which were stencilled the faces of public figures. As the rubber heads exploded, the bursts gave rise to fierce arguments for and against the sagging, pinched remnants of political icons and their dart-wielding executioners. The limping man continued down the gangway, peering ahead through the maze of strollers as if he were looking for a specific location in a hectic, crowded, unfamiliar part of town. He was dressed casually but neatly in a jacket and sports shirt as though the oppressive heat had no effect on him and the jacket was somehow a requirement. His face was the pleasant face of a middle-aged man, but worn and given to premature lines and deep shadows under the eyes, all of which resulted more from the life he had led than the years. His name was Alexander Conklin, and he was a retired covert operations officer in the Central Intelligence Agency. He was also at this moment apprehensive and consumed with anxiety. He did not wish to be in this place at this hour, and he could not imagine what catastrophic event had taken place that forced him to be there.

He approached the pandemonium of the shooting gallery and suddenly gasped, stopping all movement, his eyes locked on a tall, balding man about his own age with a seersucker

jacket slung over his shoulder. *Morris Panov* was walking towards the thunderous counter of the shooting gallery from the opposite direction! *Why?* What had *happened*? Conklin snapped his head around in every direction, his eyes darting towards faces and bodies, instinctively knowing that he and the psychiatrist were being watched. It was too late to stop Panov from entering the inner circle of the meeting ground but perhaps *not* too late to get them both out! The retired intelligence officer reached under his jacket for the small Baretta automatic that was his constant companion, and lurched rapidly forward, limping and flailing his cane against the crowd, smashing kneecaps and prodding stomachs and breasts and kidneys until the stunned, angry strollers erupted in successive cries of shock, a near riot in the making. He then rushed forward, slamming his frail body into the bewildered doctor and shouting into Panov's face through the roars of the crowd.

'What the hell are *you* doing here?'

'The same thing I assume *you* are. David, or should I say *Jason*? That's what the telegram said.'

'It's a *trap*!'

There was a piercing scream overriding the surrounding melee. Both Conklin and Panov instantly looked over at the shooting gallery only yards away. An obese woman with a pinched face had been shot in the throat. The crowd went into a frenzy. Conklin spun around trying to see where the shot came from, but the panic was at full pitch; he saw nothing but rushing figures. He grabbed Panov and propelled him through the screaming, frantic bodies across the gangway and again through the strolling crowds to the base of the massive roller coaster at the end of the park where excited customers were edging towards the booth through the deafening noise.

'My *God*!' yelled Panov. 'Was that meant for one of *us*?'

'Maybe . . . maybe not,' replied the former intelligence officer breathlessly as sirens and whistles were heard in the distance.

'You said it was a *trap*!'

'Because we both got a crazy telegram from David using a name he hasn't used in five years – *Jason Bourne*! And if I'm

not mistaken, your message also said that under *no* condition should we call his house.'

'That's right.'

'It's a trap . . . You move better than I do, Mo, so move those legs of yours. Get out of here – run like a son of a bitch and find a telephone. A *pay* phone, nothing traceable!'

'What?'

'Call his house! Tell David to pack up Marie and the kids and get out of there!'

'*What?*'

'Someone found us, Doctor! Someone looking for Jason Bourne – who's *been* looking for him for years and won't stop until he's got him in his gun sight . . . You were in charge of David's messed-up head, and I pulled every rotten string in Washington to get him and Marie out of Hong Kong alive . . . The rules were broken and we were found, Mo. *You* and *me*! The only officially recorded connections to Jason Bourne, address and occupation unknown.'

'Do you know what you're saying, Alex?'

'You're goddamned right I do . . . It's Carlos. Carlos the *Jackal*. Get out of here, Doctor. Reach your former patient and tell him to disappear!'

'Then what's he to do?'

'I don't have many friends, certainly no one I trust, but you do. Give him the name of somebody, say one of your medical buddies who gets urgent calls from his patients the way I used to call you. Tell David to reach him or her when he's secure. Give him a code.'

'A *code*?'

'Jesus, Mo, use your *head*! An alias, a Jones or a Smith—'

'They're rather common names—'

'Then Schickelgrubber or Moskowitz, whatever you *like*! Just tell him to let us know where he *is*.'

'I understand.'

'Now get out of here, and *don't go* home! . . . Take a room at the Brookshire in Baltimore under the name of – Morris, Phillip Morris. I'll meet you there later.'

'What are you going to do?'

'Something I hate . . . Without my cane I'm buying a ticket for this fucking roller coaster. Nobody'll look for a cripple on

one of those things. It scares the hell out of me, but it's a logical exit even if I have to stay on the damn thing all night . . . Now get *out* of here! *Hurry!*'

The station wagon raced south down a backcountry road through the hills of New Hampshire towards the Massachusetts border, the driver a long-framed man, his sharp-featured face intense, the muscles of his jaw pulsating, his clear light-blue eyes furious. Beside him sat his strikingly attractive wife, the reddish glow of her auburn hair heightened by the dashboard lights. In her arms was an infant, a baby girl of eight months; in the first backseat was another child, a blond-haired boy of five, asleep under a blanket, a portable guardrail protecting him from sudden stops. The father was David Webb, professor of Oriental studies, but once part of the notorious, unspoken-of Medusa, twice the legend that was Jason Bourne – assassin.

'We knew it had to happen,' said Marie St Jacques Webb, Canadian by birth, economist by profession, saviour of David Webb by accident. 'It was merely a question of time.'

'It's *crazy*!' David whispered so as not to wake the children, his intensity in no way diminished by his whisper. 'Everything's buried, maximum archive security and all the rest of that crap! How did anyone *find* Alex and Mo?'

'We don't know but Alex will start looking. There's no one better than Alex, you said that yourself—'

'He's marked now – he's a dead man,' interrupted Webb grimly.

'That's premature, David. "He's the best there ever was," those were your words.'

'The only time he wasn't was thirteen years ago in Paris.'

'Because you were better—'

'No! Because I didn't know who I was, and he was operating on prior data that I didn't know a damn thing about. He assumed it was *me* out there, but *I* didn't know *me*, so I couldn't act according to his script . . . He's still the best. He saved both our lives in Hong Kong.'

'Then you're saying what I'm saying, aren't you? We're in good hands.'

'Alex's, yes. Not Mo's. That poor beautiful man is dead. They'll take him and break him!'

'He'd go to his grave before giving anyone information about us.'

'He won't have a choice. They'll shoot him up to the moon with Amytals and his whole life will be on tape. Then they'll kill him and come after me . . . after us, which is why you and the kids are heading south, *way* south. The Caribbean.'

'I'll send *them*, darling. Not me.'

'Will you *stop* it! We agreed when Jamie was born. It's why we got the place down there, why we damned near bought your kid brother's *soul* to look after it for us . . . Also, he's done pretty damn well. We now own half interest in a flourishing inn down a dirt road on an island nobody ever heard of until that Canadian hustler landed there in a seaplane.'

'Johnny was always the aggressive type. Dad once said he could sell a broken-down heifer as a prime steer and no one would check the parts.'

'The point is he loves you . . . and the kids. I'm also counting on that wild man's – Never mind, I trust Johnny.'

'While you're trusting so much in my younger brother, don't trust your sense of direction. You just passed the turn to the cabin.'

'Goddamn it!' cried Webb, braking the car and swerving around. '*Tomorrow!* You and Jamie and Alison are heading out of Logan Airport. To the island!'

'We'll discuss it, David.'

'There's nothing to discuss.' Webb breathed deeply, steadily, imposing a strange control. 'I've been here before,' he said quietly.

Marie looked at her husband, his suddenly passive face outlined in the dim wash of the dashboard lights. What she saw frightened her far more than the spectre of the Jackal. She was not looking at David Webb the soft-spoken scholar. She was staring at a man they both thought had disappeared from their lives forever.

CHAPTER TWO

Alexander Conklin gripped his cane as he limped into the conference room at the Central Intelligence Agency in Langley, Virginia. He stood facing a long impressive table, large enough to seat thirty people, but instead there were only three, the man at the head the grey-haired DCI, director of Central Intelligence. Neither he nor his two highest-ranking deputy directors appeared pleased to see Conklin. The greetings were perfunctory, and rather than taking his obviously assigned seat next to the CIA official on the DCI's left, Conklin pulled out the chair at the far end of the table, sat down, and with a sharp noise slapped his cane against the edge.

'Now that we've said hello, can we cut the crap, gentlemen?'

'That's hardly a courteous or an amiable way to begin, Mr Conklin,' observed the director.

'Neither courtesy nor amiability is on my mind just now, *sir*. I just want to know why airtight Four Zero regulations were ignored and maximum-classified information was released that endangers a number of lives, including mine!'

'That's *outrageous*, Alex!' interrupted one of the two associates.

'Totally inaccurate!' added the other. 'It couldn't happen and you know it!'

'I don't know it and it did happen and I'll tell you what's outrageously *accurate*,' said Conklin angrily. 'A man's out there with a wife and two children, a man this country and a large part of the world owe more to than anyone could ever repay, and he's running, hiding, frightened out of his mind

that he and his family are targets. We gave that man our word, *all* of us, that no part of the official record would ever see the light of day until it was confirmed beyond *doubt* that Ilich Ramirez Sanchez, also known as Carlos the Jackal, was dead . . . All right, I've heard the same rumours you have, probably from the same or much better sources, that the Jackal was killed here or executed there, but no one – repeat *no one* – has come forward with indisputable proof . . . Yet a part of that file was leaked, a very vital part, and it concerns me deeply because my name is there . . . Mine and Dr Morris Panov, the chief psychiatrist of record. We were the only – repeat *only* – two individuals acknowledged to have been close associates of the unknown man who assumed the name of Jason Bourne, considered in more sectors than we can count to be the rival of Carlos in the killing game . . . But that information is buried in the vaults here in Langley. How did it get out? According to the rules, if anyone wants any part of that record – from the White House to the State Department to the holy Joint Chiefs – he has to go through the offices of the director and his chief analysts right here at Langley. They have to be briefed on all the details of the request and even if they're satisfied as to the legitimacy, there's a final step. *Me.* Before a release is signed, *I'm* to be contacted, and in the event I'm not around any longer, Dr Panov is to be reached, either one of us legally empowered to turn the request down flat . . . That's the way it is, gentlemen, and no one knows the rules better than I do because I'm the one who *wrote* them – again right here at Langley, because this was the place I knew best. After twenty-eight years in this corkscrew business, it was my final contribution – with the full authority of the President of the United States and the consent of Congress through the select committees on intelligence in the House and the Senate.'

'That's heavy artillery, Mr Conklin,' commented the grey-haired director, sitting motionless, his voice flat, neutral.

'There were heavy reasons for pulling out the cannons.'

'So I gather. One of the sixteen-inchers reached me.'

'You're damned right he did. Now there's the question of accountability. I want to know how that information surfaced and most important, *who* got it.'

Both deputy directors began talking at once, as angrily as Alex, but they were stopped by the DCI, who touched their arms, a pipe in one hand, a lighter in his other. 'Slow down and back up, Mr Conklin,' said the director gently, lighting his pipe. 'It's obvious that you know my two associates, but you and I never met, have we?'

'No. I resigned four and a half years ago, and you were appointed a year after that.'

'Like many others – quite justifiably, I think – did you consider me a crony appointment?'

'You obviously were, but I had no trouble with that. You seemed qualified. As far as I could tell, you were an apolitical Annapolis admiral who ran naval intelligence and who just happened to work with an FMF marine colonel during the Vietnam war who became president. Others were passed over, but that happens. No sweat.'

'Thank you. But do you have any "sweat" with my two deputy directors?'

'It's history but I can't say either one of them was considered the best friend an agent in the field ever had. They were analysts, not field men.'

'Isn't that a natural aversion, a conventional hostility?'

'Of course it is. They analysed situations from thousands of miles away with computers we didn't know who programmed and with data we hadn't passed on. You're damned right it's a natural aversion. We dealt with human quotients; they didn't. They dealt with little green letters on a computer screen and made decisions they frequently shouldn't have made.'

'Because people like you had to be *controlled*,' interjected the deputy on the director's right. 'How many times, even today, do men and women like you lack the full picture? The *total* strategy, and not just *your* part of it?'

'Then we should be given a fuller picture going in, or at least an overview so we can try to figure out what makes sense and what doesn't.'

'Where does an overview stop, Alex?' asked the deputy on the DCI's left. 'At what point do we say, "We can't reveal this . . . for everyone's benefit"?'

'I don't know, you're the analysts, I'm not. On a case-by-case basis, I suppose, but certainly with better communication

than I ever got when I was in the field . . . Wait a minute. *I'm* not the issue, *you* are.' Alex stared at the director. 'Very smooth, *sir*, but I'm not buying a change of subject. I'm here to find out who got what and how. If you'd rather, I'll take my credentials over to the White House or up to the Hill and watch a few heads roll. I want answers. I want to know what to *do*!'

'I wasn't trying to change the subject, Mr Conklin, only to divert it momentarily to make a point. You obviously objected to the methods and the compromises employed in the past by my colleagues, but did either of these men ever mislead you, lie to you?'

Alex looked briefly at the two deputy directors. 'Only when they had to lie to me, which had nothing to do with field operations.'

'That's a strange comment.'

'If they haven't told you, they should have . . . Five years ago I was an alcoholic – I'm still an alcoholic but I don't drink any more. I was riding out the time to my pension, so nobody told me anything and they damn well shouldn't have.'

'For your enlightenment, all my colleagues said to me was that you had been ill, that you hadn't been functioning at the level of your past accomplishments until the end of your service.'

Again Conklin studied both deputies, nodding to both as he spoke. 'Thanks, Casset, and you, too, Valentino, but you didn't have to do that. I was a drunk and it shouldn't be a secret whether it's me or anybody else. That's the dumbest thing you can do around here.'

'From what we heard about Hong Kong, you did a hell of a job, Alex,' said the man named Casset softly. 'We didn't want to detract from that.'

'You've been a pain in the ass for longer than I care to remember,' added Valentino. 'But we couldn't let you hang out as an accident of booze.'

'Forget it. Let's get back to Jason Bourne. That's why I'm here, why you damn well had to see me.'

'That's also why I momentarily sidetracked us, Mr Conklin. You have professional differences with my deputies, but I gather you don't question their integrity.'

'Others, yes. Not Casset or Val. As far as I was concerned, they did their jobs and I did mine; it was the system that was fouled up – it was buried in fog. But *this* isn't, *today* isn't. The rules are clear-cut and absolute, and since I wasn't reached, they were broken and I *was* misled, in a very real sense, *lied* to. I repeat. How did it happen and *who* got the information?'

'That's all I wanted to hear,' said the director, picking up the telephone on the table. 'Please call Mr DeSole down the hall and ask him to come to the conference room.' The DCI hung up and turned to Conklin. 'I assume you're aware of Steven DeSole.'

'DeSole the mute mole.' Alex nodded.

'I beg your pardon?'

'It's an old joke around here,' explained Casset to the director. 'Steve knows where the bodies are buried, but when the time comes he won't even tell God unless He shows him a Four Zero clearance.'

'I assume that means the three of you, especially Mr Conklin, consider Mr DeSole a thorough professional.'

'I'll answer that,' Alex said. 'He'll tell you anything you have to know but no more than that. Also, he won't lie. He'll keep his mouth shut, or tell you he can't tell you, but he won't lie to you.'

'That's another thing I wanted to hear.' There was a brief knock on the door and the DCI called out for the visitor to enter. A medium-sized, slightly overweight man with wide eyes magnified behind steel-rimmed glasses walked into the room, closing the door behind him. His casual second glance at the table revealed Alexander Conklin to him; he was obviously startled by the sight of the retired intelligence officer. Instantly, he changed his reaction to one of pleasant surprise, crossing to Conklin's chair, his hand extended.

'Good to see you, old boy. It's been two or three years now, hasn't it?'

'More like four, Steve,' replied Alex, shaking hands. 'How's the analysts' analyst and keeper of the keys?'

'Not much to analyse or to lock up these days. The White House is a sieve and the Congress isn't much better. I should get half pay, but don't tell anyone.'

'We still keep some things to ourselves, don't we?' interrupted the DCI, smiling. 'At least from past operations. Perhaps you earned double your pay then.'

'Oh, I suspect I did.' DeSole nodded his head humorously as he released Conklin's hand. 'However, the days of archive custodians and armed transfers to underground warehouses are over. Today it's all computerized photo scans entered by machines from on high. I don't get to go on those wonderful trips any longer with military escorts, pretending I'll be deliciously attacked by Mata Hari. I haven't had a briefcase chained to my wrist since I can't remember when.'

'A lot safer that way,' said Alex.

'But very little I can tell my grandchildren about, old boy . . . "What did you do as a big spy, Grandpa?" . . . "Actually, in my last years, a great many crossword puzzles, young man."'

'Be careful, Mr DeSole,' said the DCI, chuckling. 'I shouldn't care to put in a recommendation to cut your pay . . . On the other hand, I couldn't, because I don't believe you for an instant.'

'Neither do I.' Conklin spoke quietly, angrily. 'This is a set-up,' he added, staring at the overweight analyst.

'That's quite a statement, Alex,' countered DeSole. 'Would you mind explaining it?'

'You know why I'm here, don't you?'

'I didn't know you *were* here.'

'Oh, I see. It just happened to be convenient for you to be "down the hall" and ready to come in here.'

'My *office* is down the hall. Quite far down, I might add.'

Conklin looked at the DCI. 'Again, very smooth, *sir*. Bring in three people you figure I've had no major run-ins with outside of the system itself, three men you've determined I basically trust, so I'll believe whatever's said.'

'That's fundamentally accurate, Mr Conklin, because what you'll hear is the truth. Sit down, Mr DeSole . . . Perhaps at this end of the table so that our former colleague can study us as we explain to him. I understand it's a technique favoured by field officers.'

'I haven't a *damn* thing to explain,' said the analyst as he headed for the chair next to Casset. 'But in light of our former

colleague's somewhat gross remarks, I'd like to study *him* . . . Are you *well*, Alex?'

'He's well,' answered the deputy director named Valentino. 'He's snarling at the wrong shadows but he's well.'

'That information couldn't have surfaced without the consent and cooperation of the people in this room!'

'What information?' asked DeSole, looking at the DCI, suddenly widening his large eyes behind his glasses. 'Oh, the max-classified thing you asked me about this morning?'

The director nodded, then looked at Conklin. 'Let's go back to this morning . . . Seven hours ago, shortly after nine o'clock, I received a call from Edward McAllister, formerly of the State Department and currently chairman of the National Security Agency. I'm told Mr McAllister was with you in Hong Kong, Mr Conklin, is that correct?'

'Mr McAllister was with us,' agreed Alex flatly. 'He flew undercover with Jason Bourne to Macao, where he was shot up so badly he damn near died. He's an intellectual oddball and one of the bravest men I've ever met.'

'He said nothing about the circumstances, only that he was there, and I was to shred my calendar, if need be, but to consider our meeting with you as Priority Red . . . Heavy artillery, Mr Conklin.'

'To repeat. There are heavy reasons for the cannons.'

'Apparently . . . Mr McAllister gave me the precise maximum-classified codes that would clarify the status of the file you're talking about – the record of the Hong Kong operation. I, in turn, gave the information to Mr DeSole, so I'll let him tell you what he learned.'

'It hasn't been touched, Alex,' said DeSole quietly, his eyes levelled on Conklin. 'As of nine-thirty this morning, it's been in a black hole for four years, five months, twenty-one days, eleven hours and forty-three minutes without penetration. And there's a very good reason why that status is pure, but I have no idea whether you're aware of it or not.'

'Where that file is concerned I'm aware of *everything*!'

'Perhaps, perhaps not,' said DeSole gently. 'You were known to have a problem, and Dr Panov is not that experienced where security matters are concerned.'

'What the hell are you driving at?'

'A third name was added to the clearance procedures for that official record on Hong Kong . . . Edward Newington McAllister, by his own insistence and with both presidential and congressional authority. He made sure of it.'

'Oh, my *God*,' said Conklin softly, hesitantly. 'When I called him last night from Baltimore he said it was *impossible*. Then he said I had to understand for myself, so he'd set up the conference . . . Jesus, what *happened*?'

'I'd say we'd have to look elsewhere,' said the DCI. 'But before we do that, Mr Conklin, you have to make a decision. You see, none of us at this table knows what's in that maximum-classified file . . . We've talked, of course, and as Mr Casset said, we understood that you did a hell of a job in Hong Kong, but we don't know what that job *was*. We heard the rumours out of our Far East stations which, frankly, most of us believed were exaggerated in the spreading, and paramount among them was your name and that of the assassin Jason Bourne. The scuttlebutt then was that you were responsible for the capture and execution of the killer we knew *as* Bourne, yet a few moments ago in your anger you used the phrase "the unknown man who *assumed* the name of Jason Bourne," stating that he was alive and in hiding. In terms of specifics, we're at a loss – at least *I* am, God knows.'

'You didn't pull the record out?'

'No,' answered DeSole. 'That was my decision. As you may or may not know, every invasion of a maximum-classified file is automatically marked with the date and hour of penetration . . . Since the director informed me that there was a large Security Agency flap over an illegal entry, I decided to leave well enough alone. Not penetrated in nearly five years, therefore not read or even known about and consequently not given to the evil people, whoever they are.'

'You were covering your ass right down to the last square inch of flesh.'

'Most assuredly, Alex. That data has a White House flag on it. Things are relatively stable around here now and it serves no one to ruffle feathers in the Oval Office. There's a new man at that desk, but the former President is still very much alive and opinionated. He'd be consulted, so why risk trouble?'

Conklin studied each face and spoke quietly. 'Then you really *don't* know the story, do you?'

'It's the truth, Alex,' said Deputy Director Casset.

'Nothing but, you pain,' agreed Valentino, permitting himself a slight smile.

'My word on it,' added Steven DeSole, his clear, wide eyes rigid on Conklin.

'And if you want our help, we should know something besides contradictory rumours,' continued the director, leaning back in his chair. 'I don't know if we *can* help, but I do know there's little we can do so completely in the dark.'

Again Alex looked at each man, the lines in his pained face more pronounced than ever, as if the decision was momentarily too difficult for him. 'I won't tell you his name because I've given my word – maybe later, not now. And it can't be found in the record, it's not there either; it's a cover – I gave my word on that, too. The rest I'll tell you because I do want your help and I want that record to remain in its black hole . . . Where do I begin?'

'With this meeting perhaps?' suggested the director. 'What prompted it?'

'All right, that'll be quick.' Conklin stared pensively at the surface of the table, absently gripping his cane, then raised his eyes. 'A woman was killed last night at an amusement park outside Baltimore—'

'I read about it in the *Post* this morning,' interrupted DeSole, nodding, his full cheeks jiggling. 'Good *Lord*, were you—'

'So did I,' broke in Casset, his steady brown eyes on Alex. 'It happened in front of a shooting gallery. They closed the guns down.'

'I saw the article and figured it was some kind of terrible accident.' Valentino shook his head slowly. 'I didn't actually read it.'

'I was given my usual thick sheaf of scissored newspaper stories, which is enough journalism for anyone in the morning,' said the director. 'I don't remember any such article.'

'*Were* you involved, old boy?'

'If I wasn't, it was a horrible waste of life . . . I should say if we weren't involved.'

'*We?*' Casset frowned in alarm.

'Morris Panov and I received identical telegrams from Jason Bourne asking us to be at the amusement park at nine-thirty last night. It was urgent, and we were to meet him in front of the shooting gallery, but we were not, under any condition, to call his house or anyone else . . . We both independently assumed that he didn't want to alarm his wife, that he had something to tell us individually that he didn't want her to know . . . We arrived at the same time, but I saw Panov first and figured it was a bad scene. From any point of view, especially Bourne's, we should have reached each other and talked before going up there; instead, we had been told not to. It smelled, so I did my best to get us out of there fast. The only way seemed to be a diversion.'

'You stampeded them,' said Casset, making a statement.

'It was the only thing I could think of, and one of the few things this goddamned cane is good for other than keeping me upright. I cracked every shin and kneecap I could see and lanced a few stomachs and tits. We got out of the circle, but that poor woman was killed.'

'How did you figure it – *do* you figure it?' asked Valentino.

'I just don't know, Val. It was a trap, no question about that, but what kind of trap? If what I thought then and what I think now are correct, how could a hired marksman miss at that distance? The shot came from my upper left – not that I necessarily heard it – but the position of the woman and the blood all over her throat indicated that she had turned and caught the bullet in her body swing. It couldn't have come from the gallery; those guns are chained and the massive haemorrhage in her neck was caused by a far larger calibre than any of the toys there. If the killer wanted to take out either Mo Panov or me, his telescopic cross hairs wouldn't be that far off the mark. Not if my thinking is right.'

'"Right," Mr Conklin,' interjected the DCI, 'meaning the assassin, Carlos the Jackal.'

'*Carlos*?' exclaimed DeSole. 'What in heaven's name has the Jackal to do with a killing in *Baltimore*?'

'Jason Bourne,' answered Casset.

'Yes, I gather that, but this is all terribly confusing! Bourne was a scum hit man out of Asia who moved to Europe to

challenge Carlos and lost. As the director just said, he went back to the Far East and was killed four or five years ago, yet Alex talks as if he's still alive, that he and someone named Panov got telegrams from him . . . What in God's name does a dead scumball and the world's most elusive assassin have to do with last night?'

'You weren't here a few minutes ago, Steve,' again Casset answered quietly. 'Apparently they had a lot to do with last night.'

'I *beg* your pardon.'

'I think you should start at the beginning, Mr Conklin,' said the director. 'Who *is* Jason Bourne?'

'As the world knew him, a man who never existed,' replied the former intelligence officer.