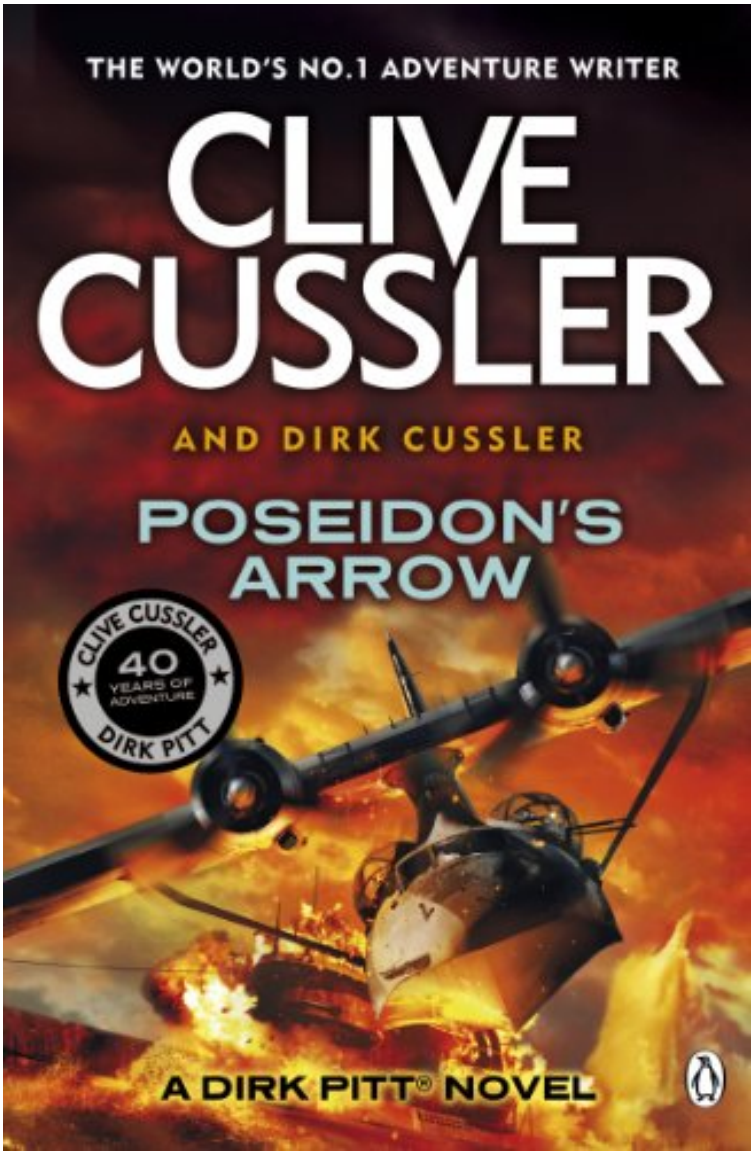
Poseidon's Arrow: Dirk Pitt #22



Par Clive Cussler
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[Ebook free] Poseidon's Arrow: Dirk Pitt #22

Par Clive Cussler : Poseidon's Arrow: Dirk Pitt #22 before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Poseidon's Arrow: Dirk Pitt #22:

Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurPoseidon's Arrow by bestselling Clive Cussler is the twenty-second thrilling Dirk Pitt adventure. In 1943 a submarine returning from a secret mission is attacked, its vital cargo believed lost . . .Three quarters of a century later, NUMA director Dirk Pitt is asked to help locate a missing person: the scientist responsible for the design of the revolutionary Poseidon's Arrow submarine. This craft is so advanced and dangerous that any government would kill to posses it - and not only has its designer disappeared, but so too have the plans.But this is no simple search.It leads Pitt from Washington to the Panama jungle, draws in the full resources of NUMA, and slowly unravels a deadly conspiracy that seeks to bring the world to its knees- and only Pitt can prevent it.Poseidon's Arrow follows Artcic Drift, Crescent

Dawn and Atlantis Found as the next in the enthralling Dirk Pitt adventures. Clive Cussler is on form as ever, fans of previous work in the Dirk Pitt series will love this as will anyone who has enjoyed work from his NUMA files series of indeed the Fargo adventures. Praise for Clive Cussler:'The Adventure King' Sunday Express'Cussler is hard to beat' Daily Mail'The guy I read' Tom Clancy Clive Cussler is the author or co-author of a great number of international bestsellers, including the famous Dirk Pitt; adventures, such as Arctic Drift; the NUMA; Files adventures, most recently Medusa; the Oregon Files, such as The Jungle; the Isaac Bell adventures, which began with The Chase; and the highly successful new series - the Fargo adventures. He lives in Arizona. ExtraitAlso by Clive CusslerTitle PageCopyrightMapPROLOGUE: BARBARIGOPART I: POSEIDONS ARROWChapter 1Chapter 2Chapter 3Chapter 4Chapter 5Chapter 6Chapter 7Chapter 8Chapter 9Chapter 10Chapter 11Chapter 12Chapter 13Chapter 14Chapter 15Chapter 16Chapter 17Chapter 18Chapter 19Chapter 20Chapter 21Chapter 22Chapter 23Chapter 24Chapter 25PART II: RARE EARTHChapter 26Chapter 27Chapter 28Chapter 29Chapter 30Chapter 31Chapter 32Chapter 33Chapter 34Chapter 35Chapter 36Chapter 37Chapter 38Chapter 39Chapter 40Chapter 41Chapter 42PART III: PANAMA RUNChapter 43Chapter 44Chapter 45Chapter 46Chapter 47Chapter 48Chapter 49Chapter 50Chapter 51Chapter 52Chapter 53Chapter 54Chapter 55Chapter 56Chapter 57Chapter 58Chapter 59Chapter 60Chapter 61Chapter 62Chapter 63Chapter 64Chapter 65Chapter 66Chapter 67Chapter 68Chapter 69Chapter 70Chapter 71Chapter 72Chapter 73Chapter 74Chapter 75Chapter 76Chapter 77Chapter 78Chapter 79Chapter 80Chapter 81EPILOGUE: RED DEATHChapter 82Chapter 83Chapter 84Chapter 85An exciting preview of HAVANA STORMOCTOBER 1943THE INDIAN OCEANTHE LIGHT OF A HALF-MOON SHIMMERED OFF THE RESTLESS sea like a streak of flaming mercury. To Lieutenant Alberto Conti, the iridescent waves reminded him of a Monet waterscape viewed in a darkened room. The silvery froth reflected the moonlight back to the sky, illuminating a bank of clouds far to the north, the fringe of a storm that was soaking the fertile coast of South Africa some fifty miles away.Tucking his chin from the moist breeze that buffeted him, Conti turned to face a young seaman standing watch beside him on the conning tower of the Italian submarine Barbarigo.A romantic evening, Catalano, is it not?The sailor gave him a quizzical look. The weather is quite pleasant, sir, if thats what you mean. Though fatigued like the rest of the crew, the seaman still held a rigid demeanor in the presence of officers. It was a youthful piety, Conti considered, one that would eventually vanish.No, the moonlight, Conti said. I bet it shines over Naples tonight as well, glistening off the cobblestone streets. It wouldnt surprise me, in fact, if a handsome officer of the Wehrmacht isnt escorting your fiance on a stroll about Piazza del Plebiscito at this very moment.The young sailor spat over the side, then faced the officer with burning eyes.My Lisetta would sooner jump off the Gaiola Bridge than associate with any German pig. I do not worry, for she carries a sap in her pocketbook while Im away, and she knows how to use it.Conti let out a deep laugh. Perhaps if we armed all of our women, then neither the Germans nor the Allied Forces would dare set foot in our country.Having been at sea for weeks, and away from his homeland for months more, Catalano found little humor in the comment. He scanned the horizon, then nodded toward the dark, exposed bow as their submarine sliced through the waves.Sir, why have we been relegated to transport duty for the Germans rather than the merchant raiding, for which the Barbarigo was built?Were all puppets on the Fhrers string these days, Im afraid, Conti replied, shaking his head. Like most of his countrymen, he had no idea that forces were at work in Rome that would, in a matter of days, oust Mussolini from power and announce an armistice with the Allies. To think that we had a larger submarine fleet than the Germans in 1939, yet we now take our operational orders from the Kriegsmarine, he added. The world is not so easily explained at times.It doesnt seem right.Conti gazed across the subs large forward deck. I guess the Barbarigo is too big and slow for the latest armed convoys, so we are now little more than a freighter. At least we can say our Barbarigo attained a proud wartime record before her conversion.Launched in 1938, the Barbarigo had sunk a half dozen Allied ships in the Atlantic during the early days of the war. Displacing over a thousand tons, she was much larger than the feared Type VII U-boats of the German wolf pack. But as German surface ship losses began to mount, Admiral Dnitz suggested converting several of the large Italian sommergibili into transport vessels. Stripped of her torpedoes, deck gun, and even one of her heads, the Barbarigo had been sent to Singapore as a cargo vessel, filled with mercury, steel, and 20mm guns for the Japanese.Our return cargo is deemed highly critical to the war effort, so somebody has to act as the mule, I suppose, Conti said. But deep down, he was angered by the transport duty. Like every submariner, he had something of the hunter in him, a longing to stalk the enemy. But now an enemy encounter would mean death for the Barbarigo. Stripped of its weaponry and floundering along at twelve knots, the submarine was more a sitting

duck than a feared attacker.As a white-tipped wave splashed against the bow, Conti glanced at his illuminated wristwatch.Less than an hour to sunrise.Heeding the unspoken command, Catalano hoisted a pair of binoculars and scanned the horizon for other vessels. The lieutenant followed suit, circling the conning tower with his eyes, taking in the sea and sky. His thoughts drifted to Casoria, a small town north of Naples, where his wife and young son awaited him. A vineyard grew behind their modest farmhouse, and he suddenly longed for the lazy summer afternoons when he would chase his boy through the sprouting vines.Then he heard it.Over the drone of the submarines twin diesel engines, he detected a different sound, something of a high-pitched buzz. Snapping erect, he didnt waste time fixing a position.Secure the hatch! he cried.He immediately dropped down the interior ladder. The emergency dive alarm rang out an instant later, sending the crew scurrying to their stations. In the engine room, a massive clutch was engaged, killing the diesel engines and transferring drive power to a bank of battery-powered electric motors. Seawater began to slosh across the forward deck as Catalano sealed the conning tower hatch, then descended to the control room.Normally, a well-trained crew could crash-dive a submarine in under a minute. But since it was loaded to the gills in transport mode, there was little the Italian sub could do quickly. With agonizing leisure, it finally sagged under the surface nearly two minutes after Conti had detected the approaching aircraft.His boots clanking on the steel ladder as he descended into the control room, Catalano turned and scurried forward to his emergency dive station. The clatter of the diesel engines had fallen quiet as the sub converted to battery propulsion, and the crew mirrored the silence by speaking in hushed tones. The Barbarigos skipper, a round-faced man named De Julio, stood rubbing sleep from his eyes as he asked Conti if theyd been seen.I cant say. I didnt actually see the aircraft. But the moon is bright and the seas are relatively calm. I am sure we are visible.We will know soon enough.The captain stepped to the helm station, scanning the depth gauge. Take us to twenty meters, then full right rudder.The submarines chief steersman nodded as he repeated the command, eyeing the gauges before him as his grip tightened on a large metal steering wheel. The control room fell silent as the men awaited their fate.A THOUSAND FEET ABOVE THEM, a lumbering British PBY Catalina flying boat released two depth charges that whirled toward the sea like a pair of spinning tops. The aircraft was not yet equipped with radar; it was the RAF planes rear gunner who had spotted the milky wake of the Barbarigo, angling across the rippled surface. Thrilled with his find, he pressed his nose against the acrylic window, wide-eyed, as the twin explosives splashed into the sea. Seconds later, two small geysers of spray shot into the air.A bit late, I believe, the copilot said.I suspected as much. The pilot, a tall Londoner who wore a clipped mustache, banked the Catalina in a tight turn with all the emotion of pouring a cup of tea.Dropping the charges was something of a guessing game, as the submarine had already disappeared from view, though its surface wake was still visible, and the plane had to strike quickly. The airborne depth charges activated at a preset depth of only twenty-five feet. Given enough time, the sub would easily dive beyond their range.The pilot lined up for another run, tracking a marker buoy they had released ahead of the initial attack. Eyeing the remnants of the subs fading wake, he gauged the vessels unseen path, then gunned the pig-bellied Catalina just past the buoy.Coming up on her, he told the bombardier. Release if youve got a target.The bombardier for the eight-man crew sighted the sub and flipped a toggle switch, releasing a second pair of depth charges stowed under the Catalinas wings.Depth charges away. Spot-on this time, Id say, Flight Lieutenant.Lets try one more for good measure, then see if we can raise a surface ship in the vicinity, the pilot replied, already banking the plane hard over.INSIDE THE BARBARIGO, the twin blasts shook the bulkheads with a deep shudder. The overhead lights flickered and the hull groaned, but no rush of water penetrated the interior. For a moment, the explosions deafening roar seemed to be the worst consequence, ringing in each crewmans ears like the bells of St. Peters Basilica. But then the ringing was overpowered by a metallic clang that reverberated from the stern, followed by a high-pitched squeal.The captain felt a slight change in the vessels trim. Fore and aft damage reports, he yelled. Whats our depth?Twelve meters, sir, the pilot said.No one in the control room spoke. A cacophony of hisses and creaks permeated the compartment as the sub dove deeper. But it was the sound they didnt hear that prickled their earsthe splash and click of a pair of depth charges detonating alongside the submerged vessel.The Catalina had dropped wide on its last pass, its pilot guessing north while the Barbarigo veered south. The last muffled explosions barely buffeted the submarine as it plunged beneath the reach of the depth charges. A collective sigh was expelled as, to a man, the crew realized they were safe for the time being. Their only fear now would be if an Allied surface ship could be summoned to renew the attack.Their relief was cut short by a cry from the steersman.Captain, we seem to be losing speed.De Julio stepped close and examined a bank of gauges near the pilots seat.The electrical motors are operational and engaged, the young

sailor said, wrinkling his brow. But I show no revolutions on the driveshaft.Have Sala report to me at once.Yes, sir. A sailor near the periscope turned to retrieve the Barbarigos chief engineer. Hed taken only two steps when the engineer appeared in the aft passageway.Chief Engineer Eduardo Sala moved like a bulldozer, his squat frame churning forward in a blunt gait. He approached the captain and stared at him with harsh black eyes.Sala, there you are, the captain said. What is our operational status?The hull is secure, sir. We do have heavy leakage at the main shaft seal, which we are attempting to stem. I can report one injury, Engineer Parma, who fell and broke his wrist during the attack.Very well, but what about the propulsion? Are the electric motors disabled?No, sir. I disengaged the main drive motors.Are you crazy, Sala? We were under attack and you disengaged the motors?Sala looked at the captain with contempt.They are irrelevant now, he said quietly.What are you saying? De Julio asked, wondering why the engineer was evasive.Its the screw, Sala said. A blade was bent or warped by the depth charge. It made contact with the hull and sheared off.One of the blades? De Julio asked.No... the entire screw.The words hung in the air like a death knell. Absent its single screw propeller, the Barbarigo would be tossed about the sea like a cork. Its home port of Bordeaux suddenly seemed as far away as the moon.What can we do? the captain said.The gruff engineer shook his head.Nothing but pray, he said softly. Pray for the mercy of the sea.1JUNE 2014MOJAVE DESERT, CALIFORNIAIT WAS A MYTH, THE MAN DECIDED, AN OLD WIVES tale. Often he had heard how the deserts broiling daytime temperatures gave way to freezing cold at night. But in the high desert of Southern California in July, he could testify, that wasnt the case. Sweat soaked the underarms of his thin black sweater and pooled in a damp mass around his lower back. The temperature was still at least ninety degrees. He glanced at his luminescent watch, verifying it was indeed two in the morning.The heat didnt exactly overwhelm him. Hed been born in Central America and had lived and fought guerrilla campaigns in the regions jungles his entire life. But the desert was new to him, and he simply hadnt expected the nighttime heat.He gazed across the dusty landscape to a conglomeration of glowing streetlamps. They marked the entrance to a large open-pit mining complex spread across the hills before him.Eduardo should nearly be in place opposite the guard station, he said to a bearded man lying prone in a nearby sandy depression.He was similarly clad in black, from combat boots to the thin stocking cap pulled low over his head. Sweat glistened off his face as he sipped from a water bottle.I wish he would hurry. There are rattlesnakes around here.His partner grinned in the dark. Juan, that would be the least of our problems.A minute later, the handheld radio on his belt chirped with two static transmissions.Thats him. Lets move.They arose and put on light backpacks. Lights from the mine buildings were sprinkled across the hillside in front of them, casting a pale glow over the barren desert. They hiked a short distance to a chain-link fence that encircled the complex. The taller man knelt and rummaged through his pack for a pair of wire cutters.Pablo, I think we can get through without cutting, his partner whispered, then pointed to a dry wash that ran beneath the fence.The sandy ground was soft in the middle of the creek bed, and he easily pushed some of it aside with his foot. Pablo joined him in scraping away the loose soil until they had excavated a small hole beneath the fence. Pushing their packs under it, they quickly shimmied through.A low blend of rumbling noises filled the air, the mechanical bedlam of an open-pit mine that operated around the clock. The two men stayed clear of the guard station, to their right, and made their way up a gentle slope toward the mine itself. A ten-minute hike brought them to a cluster of aged buildings crisscrossed with large conveyor belts. A front-end loader at the far end was shoveling piles of ore onto one of the moving belts, which transported it to a hopper on stilts.The two men were headed to a second cluster of buildings farther up the hill. The mine pit blocked their way, forcing them to cut through the operations area, where ore was crushed and milled. Clinging to the shadows, they darted along the perimeter, then worked their way along the back of a large storage building. Reaching an exposed area between buildings, they moved quickly, striding past a semiburied bunker to their left. Suddenly a door flung open at the center of the building ahead of them. The two men split up, Juan ducking to the side and scrambling behind the bunker while Pablo sprinted ahead toward the side of the building.He didnt make it.A bright yellow beam snapped on, blinding him.Hold it right there or youll regret taking that next step, said a low, gravely voice.Pablo stopped in midstride. But as he made an exaggerated stop, he deftly withdrew a mini automatic pistol from his left hip and concealed it in the palm of his gloved hand.The overweight security guard walked slowly toward him, keeping his flashlight pointed into Pablos eyes. The guard could see the intruder was a large, well-proportioned man, over six feet tall. His coffee-colored skin was smooth and pliant, in contrast to black eyes that burned with malignant intensity. A lighter band of flesh crossed his chin and left jaw, the souvenir from an ancient knife fight.The guard saw enough to know he wasnt an accidental trespasser and stopped a healthy distance away, clutching

a.357 Magnum.How about you put your hands on your head and then you can tell me where your friend went.The rumble of a nearby conveyor drowned out Juans footsteps as he sprinted from the bunker and plunged a knife into the guards kidney. Shock registered on the guards face momentarily before his whole body tensed. A wayward shot erupted from his revolver, whistling high over Pablos head. Then the guard fell, his body kicking up a swirl of dust as it struck the ground.Pablo thrust his gun forward, expecting additional guards to rush to the scene, but none came. The gunshot had been lost amid the rumbling of conveyor belts and the pounding of the rockcrusher. A quick radio call to Eduardo confirmed there was no activity at the front gate. No one else in the facility had realized their presence.Juan wiped his knife clean on the shirt of the dead man. How did he spot us?Pablo glanced toward the bunker. For the first time, he noticed a red-and-white sign on the door proclaiming DANGER: EXPLOSIVE MATERIALS. That bunker houses explosives. It must be under surveillance.Blind luck, he cursed to himself. The explosives bunker wasnt marked on his map. Now their whole operation was jeopardized.Should we blow it? Juan asked.They had been ordered to disrupt the facility but to make it look accidental. That had suddenly become a tall order. The bunker explosives could be made useful, but it was too far from their actual target.Let it be.Do we leave the guard here? Juan asked.Pablo shook his head. He unbuckled the guards holster, then pulled off the mans shoes. He searched the guards pockets and retrieved his wallet and half a pack of cigarettes. He stuffed those, along with the.357 Magnum, into his backpack. A growing pool of blood was dampening the ground around his feet. He kicked some loose sand over the blood, then grasped one of the guards arms. Juan grabbed the other, and they dragged the body into the darkness.Thirty yards away, they reached an elevated conveyor on which melon-sized chunks of ore whirled by. With a labored heave, the men swung the guards body onto the moving belt. Pablo watched as the guard was carried up the conveyor and deposited into a large metal hopper.The ore, a mixed fluorocarbonate known as bastnasite, had already passed through an initial crusher and sorter. The guards body joined a second round of pulverization that smashed the ore to baseball-sized pieces. A tertiary crushing repeated the process, pounding the rocks into a fine gravel. Had anyone examined the rough brown powder that accumulated off the final conveyor, they would have noticed an odd red tint that marked the guards last remains.Though the crushing and milling were important stages in the mines operations, they were less critical than the secondary complex up the hill. Pablo eyed the lights of several buildings in the distance, where the milled ore was leached and separated into a handful of mineral components. Spotting no moving vehicles in the area, he and Juan took off at a quick clip.The men had to skirt the eastern edge of the open pit, jumping into a culvert when a dump truck rumbled by. A short time later, Eduardo alerted them that a security guard was making the rounds in a pickup truck. They ducked behind a mound of tailings, then lay frozen for nearly twenty minutes until the truck returned to the front gate.They moved toward the two largest buildings in the upper complex, then veered right and approached a small shack that fronted a towering propane tank. Juan took the wire cutters and snipped an opening in the surrounding chain-link fence. Pablo slipped through, circled the big tank, and knelt before its fill valve. Removing a small plastic explosives charge from his backpack, he attached a detonator cap and placed it beneath the valve. He set the digital timer for twenty minutes, activated it, and scurried back through the fence.On the ground a few feet away, Pablo scattered the guards shoes, gun, and holster. The wallet came next, still containing its cash, then the rumpled pack of cigarettes. It was a long shot, but a superficial investigation might finger the guard for accidentally igniting a leaky tankthen being vaporized by the blast.The two men scurried toward the next building, a large metal structure containing dozens of mechanized vats filled with leaching solutions. A small group of graveyard shift laborers monitored the vats.The two intruders made no attempt to enter the building; instead they targeted a large pen storing chemical agents alongside one wall. In less than a minute Pablo attached a second timed charge to a pallet of drums labeled SULFURIC ACID, then escaped into the darkness.They made their way to a second extraction building a hundred yards away, taking their time as the timers counted down. At the rear of the building, Pablo found the valve for a main water line. Monitoring his watch until just before the detonations, he twisted the valve, shutting off water to the building.A few seconds later, the propane tank ignited with a boom that reverberated off the nearby hills. Night turned into day as a fiery blue glow enveloped the landscape. The top portion of the tank blew off like an Atlas rocket, screaming into the sky before crashing into the nearby open-pit mine in a ball of flame. Burning shrapnel flew in all directions, peppering buildings, cars, and equipment within a hundred yards of the tank.The debris was still falling when the second detonation launched a mountain of barrels filled with sulfuric acid into the first extraction facility. Screaming workers fled the interior as the projectiles shredded the ore-leaching vats, releasing a nasty soup

of toxic chemicals. Smoke billowed as the doors were flung open and the occupants staggered out.Juan and Pablo lay in a ditch near the second building, dodging bits of raining debris as they watched a nearby door. At the sound of the explosions, a few curious workers poked their heads outside to investigate. Seeing the smoke and flames from the extraction facility, they called inside to their coworkers, then sprinted to the other building to help. Pablo counted six people rush out before he rose and moved toward the door.Stay here and cover me.As he reached for the door handle, it twisted from the other side. He jumped back from the opening door as a woman in a lab coat burst out. Her eyes focused on the nearby smoke, she never noticed him behind the door as she nervously followed after her coworkers.Pablo slipped through the door, stepping into a brightly lit bay filled with dozens more extraction tanks. He turned left and moved to the far end of the building, where large storage tanks lined the wall. He studied their labels, then approached one of the larger tanks. KEROSENE. He tore away a bleed hose from its base, then opened its brass drain valve. A torrent of the liquid flooded across the floor and filled the bay with a gassy odor.Pablo grabbed a bundle of lab coats from a rack and scurried through the building, stuffing them into all the floor drains. The thin liquid spread quickly, nearly covering the concrete floor. The arsonist made his way back to the door, then pulled a lighter from his pocket. As kerosene trickled past his feet, he leaned down and ignited it, then jumped from the building.With a low volatility and high flash point, the kerosene didnt explode, instead igniting in a river of flame. As fire detectors erupted throughout the building, ceiling-mounted sprinklers kicked onbut only for a second, as the disrupted water supply ran dry. Unabated, the fire spread.Pablo didnt look back as he ran to his partner in the gully.Juan looked up and shook his head. Eduardo says the front gate sentry is on his way.Across the grounds, sirens and alarms wailed. But no one had yet noticed the swirl of smoke from the roof of the adjacent building. At three in the morning, no one at the facility was prepared to deal with multiple fires, and municipal firefighters were thirty miles away.Pablo wasted no time watching the incineration. He nodded at his partner, then sprang off to the east. Juan had to scramble to catch up. They crossed the dirt road that led to the front gate moments before an approaching vehicle drew near. The terrain beyond the road turned to open rolling desert, and they dove to the ground as the first security vehicle roared by. Another chain-link fence appeared a short distance away. They cut a gap just big enough for one to slip under while the other pulled up the mesh.In forty minutes of steady hiking, they reached the main highway two miles away, draining their supply of bottled water. They paralleled the highway east a short distance until spotting a black four-door pickup truck parked near a culvert, neatly hidden from easy view. Eduardo, the third partner, sat behind the wheel in a worn polo shirt, smoking a cigarette.The two men dropped their packs and pulled off their black hats and sweaters, replacing them with T-shirts and baseball caps.Congratulations, Eduardo said. It appears you have succeeded.For the first time, Pablo looked back at the mine facility. Billowing clouds of smoke hung over the complex, illuminated by streaks of orange flame that leaped from several sources. The mines firefighting equipment was woefully inadequate to deal with the fires. By all appearances, the inferno was still spreading.Pablo allowed himself a half grin. Except for the appearance of the watchman, everything had gone according to plan. The two main extraction facilities, the heart of the complex, would soon be reduced to charred wreckage. Unable to process ore, the entire operation would grind to a standstill for at least a year, maybe two. And if they were lucky, it might all go down as an unfortunate accident.Juan followed his gaze, watching the pyre with satisfaction. Looks like we set the whole state on fire tonight.The distant flames glistened in the big mans eyes as he turned to Juan.No, my friend, he said with a wicked grin. We have set the whole world on fire.2SWEAT TRICKLED DOWN THE PRESIDENTS NECK, dampening the collar of his starched white shirt. The mercury was hovering near triple digits, unusual for June in Connecticut. A slight breeze off Block Island Sound failed to cut the humidity, leaving the riverside shipyard a sweltering hothouse. Inside a massive green assembly bay known as Building 260, the air-conditioning fought a futile battle with the afternoon heat.The Electric Boat Corporation had begun building diesel marine engines on the site along the Thames River in 1910, but ultimately submarine construction became the companys bread and butter. The Groton shipyard delivered its first submarine to the Navy in 1934, and had since constructed every major class of U.S. underwater warship. Nearing completion inside the green building stood the imposing hull of the North Dakota, the latest fast attack submarine of the Virginia class.From a scaffold stairway that led from the North Dakotas conning tower, the President stepped heavily onto the concrete floor with a grunt. A large-framed man who hated confined spaces, he was thankful the interior tour was over. At least it had been cooler inside the submarine. With the economy a mess and Congress mired in another deadlock, visiting a shipyard seemed like the last priority on his agenda, but he had promised the Secretary of the Navy he would go boost the

morale of the ship workers. As a small entourage flocked to catch up with him, he suppressed his irritation by marveling at the subs dimensions.An amazing feat of construction.Yes, sir, said a blond-haired man in a tailored suit who hung at the Presidents elbow as if attached by a string. Shes an impressive feat of technology. Assistant Chief of Staff Tom Cerny had specialized in defense issues on Capitol Hill before joining the administration.Shes slightly longer than the Seawolf class boats, but downright minuscule compared to a Trident, said the tour guide, a chipper Electric Boat engineering manager. Most people are used to seeing them in the water, where two-thirds of their bulk is hidden from view.The President nodded. As it lay on huge supporting blocks, the three-hundred-and-seventy-seven-foot-long hull towered over them.Shell be a great addition to our arsenal. I thank you for giving me the opportunity to see her up close.A granite-faced admiral named Winters stepped forward.Mr. President, while we were happy to have you preview the North Dakota, she was not the reason we asked you up here.The President took off a white hard hat affixed with the presidential seal, handed it to the admiral, and wiped a bead of sweat from his forehead.If a cold drink and a touch more air-conditioning can be worked into the bargain, then lead on.He was escorted across the building to a small door guarded by a uniformed security man. The door was unlocked, and the presidential group led in one by one, their faces captured by a video camera above the sill.The admiral flicked on a bank of overhead lights, illuminating a narrow bay that stretched nearly four hundred feet. The President saw another submarine in a state of near completion, but this vessel was like nothing he had ever seen before.Roughly half the size of the North Dakota, it sported a radically different design. Its unusually narrow jet-black hull tapered sharply at the bow. A low, egg-shaped conning tower rose just a few feet above its top deck. Two large streamlined pods were affixed close to the stern, almost in the shape of a dolphins tail. But the most unusual feature was a pair of retractable stabilizers, shaped like triangular wings, that stretched from either side. A pack of four large tubular canisters clung to their undersides.The design reminded the President of a giant manta ray hed seen while fishing off Baja California.What on earth is this thing? he asked. I wasnt aware we were building anything other than the Virginia class boats.Sir, this is the Sea Arrow, the admiral said. Its a prototype platform developed under a secret R D program to test highly advanced technologies.Cerny turned on the admiral. Why wasnt the President informed of this program? Id like to know how it was funded.The admiral stared at the aide with the warmth of a starving pit bull. The Sea Arrow was built with Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency and Office of Naval Research funding. The President is presently being informed of its existence.The President ignored them and strode along the vessel, peering at the odd appendages along the hull. He studied a concentric circle of small tubes that sprouted off the bow, then made his way aft, noting the sub had no propellers. He gave Winters a questioning look.All right, Admiral, you have my curiosity. Tell me about the Sea Arrow.Mr. President, Ill pass that task to Joe Eberson, who heads up the project. You met Joe earlier. Hes DARPAs director of Sea Platforms Technology.A bearded man with studious eyes worked his way to the front of the group. He spoke in a measured tone with the hint of a Tennessee accent.Sir, the Sea Arrow was, or is, being built as a multigenerational leap in undersea technology. Were bypassing the traditional development process by integrating a range of cutting-edge technologies and advanced theories directly into the construction. We started with a planned number of technical features that were purely at the conceptual stage. Through the crash efforts of numerous independent engineering teams around the country, Im happy to report we are very close to fielding the most advanced attack submarine in history.The President nodded. So tell me about all these odd appendages. She looks like some flying creature from the Jurassic age.Lets start at the stern. Youll notice she has no propeller. Eberson pointed at the rounded pods. Thats what these two external cases are for. The Sea Arrow will be powered by a shaftless propulsion system. The North Dakota, as you saw, uses a nuclear reactor to power a traditional steam turbine, which in turn drives a shaft-mounted screw. On the Sea Arrow, weve gone to an external drive system, which will be powered directly from the reactor. Each of these two flared pods will contain a permanent high-intensity magnetic motor that drives a pump jet propulsion system. Eberson smiled. Aside from drastically reducing noise, the design frees up a tremendous amount of interior space, which has allowed us to shrink the vessels overall size.What are these permanent magnet motors?Theyre an evolutionary, if not revolutionary, advance in the electric motor, made possible by recent breakthroughs in material sciences. A mix of rare mineral elements is synthesized to create extremely powerful magnets, which are then wound into high-performance, direct-current motors. Weve invested a great deal of research in perfecting these motorsand believe they will revolutionize the way our future warships are powered.The President peered through a baffle on one of the pods and saw light shine through from above.It looks empty

inside.We havent actually received and installed the motors yet. The first is due in next week from the Navys research lab in Chesapeake, Maryland.You sure theyre going to work?While we havent fielded motors of this size, we are confident from our lab tests that they will provide the predicted levels of performance.The President ducked beneath one of the extended stabilizers, then glanced up at a pair of barrel-shaped protrusions fore and aft of the conning tower.Eberson followed in his steps, narrating as he walked.The wing-shaped extensions are retractable stabilizers for high-speed operations. They automatically withdraw into the hull when speeds drop below ten knots. The tube-shaped box is a torpedo canister, capable of holding four fish on each stabilizer. The canisters can be reloaded quickly when the stabilizer is retracted into the hull.Eberson pointed to the two barrel-shaped objects above them. Those are subsurface Gatling guns. Theyre similar to those used on surface ships, which shoot depleted uranium pellets at rapid fire for last-ditch missile protection. Ours have been developed to fire underwater, using compressed air, for last-ditch torpedo suppression. Of course, were banking that most enemy torpedoes will never come near us.He followed the President as he stepped toward the hull.The conning tower, youll note, is of a slipstream design to accommodate high speed.Doesnt look like shell allow for much of a periscope.The Sea Arrow doesnt actually have a periscope, at least not in the traditional sense, Eberson said. She utilizes an ROV-type video camera that is deployed on a tethered fiber-optic cable. It can be released from a depth of eight hundred feet to give the crew a high-definition picture of whats going on on the surface.The President continued on to the tapered bow and reached up to stroke one of the small tubes that jutted forward like a thin lance. And this?Thats the key link that will really make her go, Eberson said. Its a secondary upgrade we hope to implement, based on a technological breakthrough from one of our contractors in CaliforniaAdmiral Winters cut him off. Mr. President, why dont we take a quick tour aboard, then we have a short presentation to show you that should answer all your questions.Very well, Admiral. Though Im still waiting for my drink.The admiral hustled the group through a quick tour of the interior, where they found a streamlined interior that contrasted with the North Dakota in its sleek modernity and scale of automated systems. The Commander in Chief remained silent as he viewed the high-tech command center, the small number of plush crews quarters, and the odd assortment of padded seats with full safety harnesses that were positioned about the vessel.After the tour, the President was led to a secure conference room, where he was finally given a cold drink. His normally jovial demeanor had turned hard, echoed by his aide Cerny.All right, gentlemen, the President bellowed. What exactly is going on here? I see much more than some test platform for new technologies. Thats a seaworthy vessel on the verge of launch.Sir, the admiral said, clearing his throat. What we possess with the Sea Arrow is a complete game changer. As you know, there has been a recent surge in the threat to our naval forces. The Iranians have acquired a host of new subsea technologies from the Russians and are working feverishly to add to their fleet of Kilo class subs. The Russians themselves have dramatically kicked up their shipbuilding efforts, with the help of oil revenues, to replace their aging fleet. And, of course, we have the Chinese. While they continue to claim their military expansion is strictly for defensive purposes, its no secret that theyve been rapidly expanding their blue-water fleet. Sources expect their Type 097 nuclear sub to go operational any day. That all makes for growing threats in the Pacific, the Atlantic, and the Persian Gulf.The admiral looked the President in the eye and gave him a grim smile. On our side of the ledger, we have a continually shrinking fleet as the cost of each new deployed vessel skyrockets. At a cost of over two billion dollars each, we all know theres just a limited number of Virginia class subs that can be squeezed out of an ever-tightening budget.The national debt is still out of control, the President said, so the Navy will have to take its medicine, just like everybody else.Precisely, sir. Which brings us to the Sea Arrow. Eliminating the lengthy research-to-production cycle and piggybacking on some economies of scale with the Virginia program allowed us to construct her at a fraction of the North Dakotas cost. As you can see, she has been built in utmost secrecy. We intentionally built her alongside the Dakota to divert attention and allow for delivery of components without suspicion. We hope to secretly launch her for sea trials when the North Dakota is publicly commissioned.The President frowned. Youve done a splendid job of keeping her under wraps so far.Thank you, sir. As Dr. Eberson mentioned, what we have before you is the most technically advanced submarine ever built. The shaftless propulsion drive, the external torpedo tubes, and the torpedo suppression system are all state-of-the-art technologies. But theres an additional element to her design that truly sets her apart.Eberson had already loaded a disk into a projection player.On a whiteboard, video footage appeared of the open stern of a small boat bobbing about a mountain lake. Two men lifted a bright yellow torpedo-shaped device from the deck and placed it over the side. The President could see by its winged appendages that it was a mock-up of the Sea Arrow, operated by remote control.That is a scale

model, Eberson said. She was built to the exact configuration and uses the same type of propulsion system.As the model was launched, the image switched to an onboard camera view. A row of tracking meters superimposed at the bottom of the screen indicated the models speed, depth, pitch, and roll.The model submerged a short depth into sage green waters and began accelerating. A flurry of lake sediments rushed past the camera as the tiny submersible gained speed. Suddenly, a surge of small bubbles filled the screen, obscuring the image. The video remained a snowy blur as the model continued to accelerate. The Presidents mouth dropped as he watched the speed gauge roll into triple digits. Eventually the model slowed and returned to the surface, where it was retrieved before the video clip ended.Silence filled the room for a moment before the President spoke in a low voice. Am I to understand that this model attained an underwater speed of one hundred and fifty miles per hour?No, sir, Eberson replied with a smile. She attained a speed of one hundred and fifty knots, which would be on the order of one hundred and seventy-two miles per hour.Thats impossible. Ive been told naval propulsion technologies cant get past seventy or eighty knots. Even the North Dakota only manages thirty-five.Didnt the Russians develop some kind of torpedo that can run over a hundred knots? Cerny asked.Yes, they have the Shkval, Eberson said, which is a high-speed, rocket-powered torpedo. A similar principle is in play with the Sea Arrow. Its not the propulsion that allows the high rate of speed but rather supercavitation.Forgive my lack of engineering know-how, the President said, but doesnt supercavitation have to do with disturbances in the water?Yes. In the case here, it involves creating a gas bubble around the object traveling underwater. The bubble frees up the waters drag, allowing for much higher speeds. The array of tubes on the Sea Arrows prow will be part of the supercavitation system we hope to deploy. Combined with the high-power magnetic motors, we fully expect to match those kinds of speedswithout the range limitations the Russians have with their rocket torpedoes.Perhaps, Cerny said, but theres a substantial difference between a torpedo and a two-hundred-foot submarine.The differences mostly come in the way of control at high speeds, Eberson said. The Sea Arrows Jurassic wings, as the President described them, will aid in providing stability. The supercavitation system itself will more directly affect control by manipulating the size and shape of the gas bubble. Its an untested theory on a vessel this size, but our supplier of the system is confident in its capability. I will actually be monitoring a final sea trial of their model next week.The President sat, rubbing his chin. Finally, he looked at the admiral with a knowing gaze. Admiral, if she works as advertised, what exactly does it mean?The Sea Arrow will put us twenty years ahead of our nearest adversary. The Chinese, Russian, and Iranian buildup will be effectively neutralized. Well have a weapon at our disposal that is nearly invulnerable. And with just a handful of Sea Arrows, well be able to defend every corner of the globe on almost immediate notice. What it really means, sir, is that we wont have to worry about the safety of the seas for the balance of our lifetimes.The President nodded. The heat and humidity seemed to disappear from the room, and, for the first time all day, he smiled.3THE CUSTOMARY SOUTHERN CALIFORNIAN EARLY-MORNING gloom hung over the marina, the air damp with a misty drizzle. Joe Eberson hoisted himself from behind the wheel of a rental car and eyed the parking lot, then moved to the trunk, retrieving a tackle box and fishing rod. Both had been purchased the night before, shortly after his flight from the East Coast landed at San Diegos Lindbergh Field. Flipping on a battered bucket hat, he ambled into the sprawling marina at Shelter Island.Eberson ignored the buzz of an E-2 Hawkeye surveillance plane taking off from the Coronado Naval Air Station across the harbor as he made his way past dozens of small sailboats and powerboats. The playthings of weekend hobbyists, Eberson rightly suspected, most of these pleasure boats seldom left their slips. Spotting a forty-foot cabin cruiser with a large open rear deck, he stepped alongside. The boat was pushing its fifth decade, but its gleaming white hull and polished brightwork revealed an owner who had long provided it loving care. A gurgle from the stern indicated the engine was already warming at idle.Joe, there you are, said a man who stepped from the cabin. We were almost ready to leave without you.With his slight build, thick glasses, and white hair worn in a flattop, Dr. Carl Heiland looked every bit the electrical engineer. His eyes danced and he grinned easily, exhibiting a near-constant state of high energy even at six in the morning.Short on sleep and exhausted from his cross-country flight, Eberson oozed the opposite sentiment. He gingerly climbed aboard and shook hands.Sorry Im late, doctor, Eberson said, suppressing a yawn. I took a wrong turn out of the hotel and didnt realize it until I pulled up to SeaWorld. I think even Shamu was still asleep.It gave me time to get everything aboard. Heiland nodded toward a mixed box of crates strapped to the bulwarks. Here, lets stow your tackle next to our gear. He reached for Ebersons fishing rod, then caught a glimpse of his hat. He burst out laughing.You angling for brook trout today?Eberson pulled off his hat and examined the worn crown. A scattered band of brightly colored freshwater fishing flies

encircled it. You did say fishing attire.I doubt anybody else noticed, Heiland snorted, then called into the cabin, Manny, go ahead and take us out.A dark-skinned man in cutoffs appeared and untied the deck lines. Moments later, he was behind the wheel, piloting the boat into horseshoe-shaped San Diego Harbor. They dodged an incoming Navy amphibious ship before clearing the channel and entering the Pacific. Manny kicked up the throttle and set a course to the southwest, rolling through a light swell stirred by an onshore breeze. Soon Eberson begin to feel queasy, and he ducked past Manny to grab a seat in the main cabin.Heiland poured him a mug of coffee and joined him at the galley table. So tell me, Joe, how are things back in Arlington?As you know, we just spilled the beans to the President. Nevertheless, were under the usual squeeze of trying to accomplish more with fewer resources. Well be lucky to avoid a big budget reduction next year, Im afraid.I figured it was only a matter of time before the ax fell in our direction. Glad Ive got five years worth of work under contract.You neednt worry, Carl. Your firms work is of utmost importance. As a matter of fact, Ive got approval to proceed with the Block Two retroactive upgradeif you can prove operational ability. I assume thats why you called me out here on short notice?Heiland gave him a cagey look. Thats some riverboat gambling on your part. You havent even field-tested the Block One system yet.Eberson shook off a bout of nausea to return Heilands smile. Carl, we both know its going to work.Did you source the propulsion components?Yes, though there are some material issues going forward. He looked at Heiland with an expectant gaze. But were more interested in the Block Two mods.Weve had some similar materials issues, but I think weve made the breakthrough that weve been chasing after.Eberson smiled broadly. Thats why I jumped on the first plane from Washington. I know you like to keep things light and tight.Given the secure nature of the project, I dont like to draw attention to our field tests. Seemed to work for Block One, so thats why were just keeping it to a little fishing trip today. He looked again at Ebersons hat and smiled.Weve done our best to keep a lid on things at our end. Of course, you havent exactly given us much in the way of specs.The fewer eyes around, the better.Eberson took a swallow of coffee, then leaned across the table.Do you think we can really get to the theoretically predicted levels?Heiland nodded, his eyes sparkling. Well find out shortly.A few minutes later, Manny cut the motor, signaling they had arrived at their test site. They had crossed into Mexican waters, almost twenty miles from shore and well off the path of the average San Diego day sailor. The water was too deep to anchor, so the boat drifted while Heiland went to work.Ignoring a long rectangular case strapped to the bulwarks, he opened several smaller cases that contained a pair of laptops, some cabling, and connectors. Setting the computers on a low bench, he knelt and began configuring them.Manny poked his head out from the wheelhouse. Doc, theres a freighter coming up on us.Heiland glanced over his shoulder. Shell be well past us by the time were ready to go. He returned his attention to the computers.Eberson took a seat on the large crate and watched the ship approach. A midsized freighter, it seemed of recent build, by its streamlined design and lack of rust. Dark gray in color, the ship almost had a Navy look about it. The bridge windows caught Ebersons attention. Tinted black, they gave off an odd, almost menacing look.A few crewmen in coveralls on the main deck worked behind a large container. As the ship drew closer, he could see they were adjusting a large dish-shaped object mounted on a platform amidships. The dish was painted a drab green and turned toward the sea, rising several feet into the air like a hardened sail. The men on deck soon disappeared, and Eberson noted the ship seemed to be slowing.Carl, Im not sure about this ship. He rose uncomfortably to his feet.Weve got nothing for them to see, Heiland said. Why dont you pick up a rod and make like youre here to catch a tuna.Eberson grabbed one of the boats rods from a rack and cast a weighted hook over the side, not bothering with any bait lest he actually have to fight a beast from the deep. As the freighter pulled alongside a short distance away, he tossed a friendly wave toward the blacked-out bridge.A burning pain shot through his hand, quickly tracking down his arm to his torso. He dropped his arm and shook it, but the sensation was already spreading across his body. In seconds, it felt like a thousand red ants were biting his flesh. The fire shot to his head, where his eyes seemed to boil in their sockets.Carl he cried. The words came out in a raspy gurgle.Heiland felt the same burning sensation on his back. Spinning around, he processed two scenes at once. One was the dying Joe Eberson, still clutching the fishing rod as he fell to the deck, his skin glowing scarlet. The other was the freighters shield-like device, directed at him from a few dozen yards away.Ignoring the burning that seared through his body, he staggered to the cabin. Manny was already on the deck, gasping a last breath as blood dribbled from his nose and ears. Heiland stepped past his longtime friend as his own pain became amplified. His entire body felt inflamed. Somewhere in his consciousness, he wondered why his skin wasnt falling off in chunks. A single urge drove him forward as he lurched to the pilots seat. His head felt like it was going to explode as he reached under the console, his burning fingers grasping a pair of hidden toggles. He tripped

them both, then took his last breath.4ARE YOU GOING TO GET WET WITH ME?Loren Smith-Pitt stared at her husband. Just seconds ago, it seemed, he had risen from the pilots seat and tossed an anchor over the side of their rented speedboat. Yet now he sat on the transom, clad in wet suit and dive tank, anxious to explore the depths below. Loren could only marvel at how the sea acted like a magnet to the man, drawing him in with an unseen force.I think Ill stay here and enjoy the sunshine and the clear Chilean sky, she said. With Congress back in session on Monday, I could use a healthy dose of fresh air.For Capitol Hill, earplugs might be a better choice.Loren ignored her husbands quip. A congresswoman from Colorado, Loren was only too happy to escape the partisan bickering of Washington, if only for a few days. Free from the pressures of work and an intrusive media, she felt more relaxed in another country. Dressed in a skimpy two-piece bathing suit she would never wear at home, she flaunted her curvaceous but firm body, kept trim through yoga and daily runs on a treadmill.Stretching across the boats bench seat, she hung a leg over the side and dipped her toes in the water. Yikes! That water is cold. Im going to stay warm and dry up here, thank you very much.I wont be gone long. Her husband stuck a regulator between his teeth, stared admiringly at his wife for a moment, then fell backward into the blue Pacific. He playfully kicked a spray of water onto his wife with a fin before he disappeared under the surface.Toweling herself off, Loren tracked her husbands air bubbles for a few minutes, then gazed across the horizon. The afternoon air was crystal clear, the sapphire sky nearly matching the color of the ocean. Theyd anchored the red speedboat a half mile off the Chilean coast, opposite a small beach called Playa Caleta Abarca.A towering Sheraton Hotel stood on a rock cliff nearby, its outdoor pool crowded with sun-worshiping tourists. A short distance to the south lay Valparaiso, Chiles colorful and historic seaport long known by sailors as the Jewel of the Pacific. Ancient buildings climbed the steep hills ringing the city, reminding Loren of San Francisco. She noted a large white cruise ship, the Sea Splendour, anchored in the bay, shuttling passengers ashore to visit the beaches of Via del Mar or to trek to Chiles capital city of Santiago, sixty miles southeast.A gentle swell rocked the speedboat as Loren turned her gaze to sea. A small yellow sailboat passed by, then tacked north toward an approaching freighter, its triangular sail fluttering. She leaned back on the padded seat, closed her eyes, and luxuriated in the warmth of the sun.Sixty feet beneath her, Dirk Pitt had just shaken the oceans chill that permeated the countrys coastal waters due to the Humboldt Current. His breath rate eased as he slowed his descent. The visibility was good, about forty feet, allowing him clear view of a rocky bottom anchored with thick seaweed. Kicking his fins lazily, he glided over a coral-strewn ledge crowded with brightly colored urchins and starfish. A small school of jack mackerel eyed him for a minute or two, then darted away.The sea relaxed Pitt in a way nothing else could. To some it was confining, but Pitt found the ocean depths produced in him an odd feeling of release that seemed to heighten his senses. It was an experience born decades ago, when he spent the better part of his youth exploring the coves along the Southern Californian coastline, free diving and bodysurfing. The allure was like that of flying, which had led him to the Air Force Academy and flight school as a young officer.But the draw of the sea enticed him to leave the flight line and a promising military career to join a newly created federal organization, the National Underwater and Marine Agency. Created to study and protect the worlds oceans, NUMA was the perfect home for Pitt, allowing him to work on and beneath the sea, all over the world. After years as its Special Projects Director, he now found himself heading the agency, which only fortified his sense of stewardship of the worlds oceans. Loren often joked that she still competed with Pitts first love, his mistress called the sea.Pitts quest for underwater discovery, along with a love of history, had led him to discover dozens of shipwrecks. But this afternoon, the object of his search was considerably smaller. Eyeing a thick ridge of jagged rocks that stretched into deeper water, he swam over and surveyed its crevices. After several minutes, he found what he was looking for. He plunged an arm between two boulders and pulled out a spirited brown spiny lobster that weighed almost five pounds. He eyed its long, waving antennas for a moment and then stuffed the crustacean into a mesh dive bag and began a search for its twin.Above the noisy rhythm of his regulated breathing, a faint tapping rippled through the water.He held his breath to hear better. The metallic rapping repeated a familiar cadencetwo short raps, two long raps, then two short raps. It wasnt exactly the Morse code distress call of SOS, which used three dots and dashes, but Pitt guessed the intent was the same. He could not determine its direction, only that the source was nearby. It had to be Loren.He kicked toward the surface, angling for the position of the speedboat. He spotted the anchor line and approached it, swimming hard, surfacing a few yards behind the boat. Loren was leaning over the transom, pounding a spare divers lead weight on the stern drive housing. Engrossed in her signaling, she didnt notice him emerge.Whats wrong? he shouted.She looked up, and Pitt saw a desperate fear in her eyes. Lost for words, she simply

pointed behind him. He spun his head aroundand was engulfed in a massive shadow.It was a ship, a massive bulk carrier, bearing down on them barely a hundred feet away. The speedboat bobbed in the direct path of the ships broad, high bow, which pushed an ominous mountain of white foamy water in front of it. Pitt cursed the fools on the bridge, who were either blind or asleep.Without hesitation, he kicked and stroked furiously to the boat until he could reach an arm over the side.Should I start the motor? Lorens face was drawn. I was afraid to try while you were underwater.Pitt saw the anchor line was still set, running up into a small locker on the bow. Behind him, he heard the deep rumble of the ships engines as its towering hulk advanced. It was too close. Any slip in cutting the anchor line or a delay in starting the motor and their boat would be smashed to bits, with them in it.With the regulator back between his teeth, he shook his head at Loren and waved for her to come closer.She hurried to the side and reached to help him aboard.Instead he reached past her hand and hooked his arm around her waist.Before she could react, she felt herself being jerked over the side. She yelped as her body hit the cold water. Kicking and floundering, she gasped for a last breath of air. The towering mountain of steel was now just yards away.Then she was snatched like a rag doll and disappeared beneath the rippling surface.5THE FREIGHTER NEITHER SLOWED NOR TURNED. Its broad steel hull smacked into the speedboat, severing the anchor line before burying the tiny vessel in the bows wake. The small boat bounced along the ships hull and then remarkably popped to the surface, where it bobbed in the freighters receding wake, its port beam only slightly mangled.Somewhere beneath the surface, Loren found herself clinging to her husband in a desperate plunge to the seafloor. Startled by the cold-water immersion, she nearly panicked when she felt Pitt yank her to the depths without air. Then she felt him force his regulator into her mouth while wedging her arm around his buoyancy compensator harness. Despite the cold, her nerves began to settle. She began to assist their progress by kicking as well, remembering to clear her ears as they descended deeper.The shimmering light of the surface water grew dark as the black hull passed over them. Loren glanced up, feeling like she could reach out and touch the barnacle-encrusted plates only a few feet away.Though they had escaped the mass of the hull, Pitt continued driving deeper with frantic kicks of his fins. His lungs felt like they would burst, which only made him push harder until they finally reached the seabed. Seeing a bus-sized rise of coral, he pulled Loren along its curved side. As their knees touched the hard bottom, he grabbed a nodule for leverage.Loren realized her husband had not taken a breath of air for almost the entire descent. She quickly passed the regulator to his lips. Her pulse racing and her eyes wide, she peered into Pitts face mask. He gazed back at her calmly and winked, as if cheating death was a daily occurrence.Pitt gratefully inhaled several deep breaths, then passed the regulator back to Loren and gazed upward. The hull was still sweeping past, while the main source of his fear, its churning bronze propeller, glinted as it drew near. Pitt threw his arms around Loren and gripped the coral mound with his gloved hands as the stern passed overhead. Even from thirty feet away, Pitt felt the suction from the enormous blades as they cut through the water. Sand swirled about them as they were tugged from the bottom. Then the ship passed, and a wash of sediment rained down upon them. Pitt released his grasp on the coral and kicked to the surface with Loren entwined around him. Their heads popped into the bright sunlight, and they eagerly inhaled the warm, fresh air.I thought for a second, Loren said between gasps, that you were going to kill me before the ship had the chance.Ducking under seemed the more prudent tack. Pitt gazed at the stern of the receding freighter noting its name, Tasmanian Star.Loren pivoted in the opposite direction and scanned the sea as she treaded water beside him.They ran right over a sailboat, she said, scanning the water for survivors. It looked like an older couple. I could tell we were next in its path.Quick thinking on your part saved us both, though your Morse code could use a little improvement. Pitt joined her in searching the nearby waters, but neither spotted any debris.We can report it to the police once we get ashore, Loren said. Theyll catch up with the crew in Valparaiso.Pitt turned toward the coastline and was surprised to see their red speedboat bobbing a short distance away. A section of the port hull hung loose, and the boat sat low in the water, but it was still afloat. Pitt stroked over with Loren close behind. He bellied over the side, then pulled her aboard.Our clothes and lunch are gone, she noted, shivering as the sun began to dry her body.My lobster, too, Pitt said.He stripped off his tank and wet suit, then stepped to the boats console. The key was still in the ignition, so he tried pushing the starter. The motor ground over several times, then sputtered to life, as the inboard compartment had remained mostly dry during the boats immersion. Easing the throttle forward, he glanced ahead at the fleeing freighter.The Tasmanian Star was still proceeding on its same heading and apparent speed. Another mile or two ahead lay the harbor of Valparaiso, which curved to the west in the shape of an open bowl. The commercial port facilities were at the west end, yet the freighter was sailing toward the east. Pitt tensed as he tracked the ships path, then

jammed the throttle to its stops.With its bilge and cockpit filled with water, the speedboat faltered as it tried to accelerate, but it gradually surged forward, gaining speed.Loren abandoned her efforts to bail water with a seat cushion and approached her husband. She saw a heightened intensity in his deep green eyes.Why arent we headed to shore?Pitt pointed at the freighter. Look whats ahead of her.Loren peered past the bulk carrier. The large white cruise ship was still anchored in the harborand lay exactly perpendicular to the oncoming freighter. If the Tasmanian Star didnt change course, she would barrel right into the Sea Splendour.Dirk, theres probably a thousand people aboard that ship.If theres something more than just a nearsighted helmsman driving the Tasmanian Star, hundreds could die.Loren grabbed Pitts shoulder as the speedboat lurched over a wave. The damaged boat surged and wallowed before finding its legs. The bilge pump caught up with the accumulated water, allowing the boat to rise higher as it gained speed. The damage was all above the waterline, so Pitt had no trouble controlling the boat as it bulled its way past twenty knots, quickly gaining on the freighter.Can we alert the cruise ship? Loren yelled to be heard over the straining engine.Pitt shook his head. We have no radio. And the ship is anchored. Theres no way they can move in time.At least we could warn the passengers.Pitt simply nodded. That would be a tall order in the scant time available.As they drew near the freighters stern, he considered his few options. There were no other boats nearby, so a radio warning was impossible. Pitts immediate thought was to try to board the moving ship. But as he pulled closer, he discarded the notion. There was no easy access, and even if he could somehow find a way aboard, he probably wouldnt make it to the bridge in time. The sparkling white cruise ship lay dead ahead, barely a half mile away.Pitt held down the button on the speedboats air horn as they ran past the ships port flank and shot past its bow. Loren jumped and waved at the forecastle, but there was no response. The Tasmanian Star neither slowed nor altered course, simply plodding ahead on its catastrophic heading. Pitt glanced at the bridge, but could see no moving figures behind the glass windows. By all appearances, it was a ghost ship out of control.Pitt urgently scanned the surrounding waters for assistance, but there was none to be had. A handful of vessels clustered about the commercial port, a mile or so southwest, but the waters ahead were empty all the way to the curling beachfront. Empty but for the towering mass of the anchored Sea Splendour.Crowding together on its upper deck, passengers pointed and waved at the approaching freighter. No doubt the helm watch had reported the approaching vessel, and the liners captain was furiously hailing the Tasmanian Star by radio. But the rogue vessel responded with silence.On the speedboat, Pitt surveyed the length of the bulk carrier. At its stern it rode strangely high in the water.A look of determination was etched on his lean, rugged face. In times of crisis, his mind seemed to work in overdrive, processing all facets at play before calmly pursuing a course of action. With few options, Pitts response came quickly.Spinning the wheel hard over, he cut across the freighters bow and held the turn until he was running alongside the ships starboard side.Loren, put on my wet suit.What are we going to do?Try and nudge this behemoth out of the way.In this little boat? Thats impossible.Pitt squinted at the ship in resolve. Not if we hit her where it counts.6PANIC HAD BROKEN OUT ON THE SEA SPLENDOUR as screaming passengers alerted one another of the impending collision. Parents grabbed their children and ran to the opposite side of the ship, while others scrambled up companionways to reach the upper decks. Even the crew joined the passengers in fleeing the anticipated point of impact.By chance or design, the Tasmanian Star was aimed toward the heart of the cruise liner. At roughly the same size, the blunt-nosed freighter churned with sufficient momentum to split the passenger ship in two.On the Sea Splendours bridge, Captain Alphonse Franco had few options. He desperately tried to finesse the vessel aside but had only auxiliary power available, as its main engines sat cold. He slipped the anchor line and engaged the ships side thrusters in hope of pivoting the ship clear.Revue de presseJust about the best storyteller in the business.New York PostCussler is a master at building suspense and tension.Richmond Times-DispatchA new Clive Cussler novel is like a visit from your best friend.Tom ClancyWhen the going gets tough, I read Clive Cussler, for no one can spin a yarn thats so thoroughly spellbinding and entertaining as he can.Harold Coyle