

## Tom Clancy's Firing Point

Thirty years ago, Tom Clancy was a Maryland insurance broker with a passion for naval history. Years before, he had been an English major at Baltimore's Loyola College and had always dreamed of writing a novel. His first effort, *The Hunt for Red October*, sold briskly as a result of rave reviews, then catapulted on to the *New York Times* bestseller list after President Reagan pronounced it 'the perfect yarn'. From that day forward, Clancy established himself as an undisputed master at blending exceptional realism and authenticity, intricate plotting and razor-sharp suspense. He passed away in October 2013.

Mike Maden grew up working in the canneries, feed mills and slaughterhouses of California's San Joaquin Valley. A lifelong fascination with history and warfare ultimately led to a PhD in political science focused on conflict and technology in international relations. Like millions of others, he first became a Tom Clancy fan after reading *The Hunt for Red October*, and began his published fiction career in the same techno-thriller genre, starting with *Drone* and the sequels, *Blue Warrior*, *Drone Command* and *Drone Threat*. He's honored to be joining The Campus as a writer in Tom Clancy's Jack Ryan, Jr, series.

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# Principal Characters

## *United States Government*

**Jack Ryan:** President of the United States

**Mary Pat Foley:** Director of national intelligence

**Arnold ‘Arnie’ van Damm:** President Ryan’s chief of staff

**Scott Adler:** Secretary of state

**Admiral John Talbot:** Chief of naval operations

**Dick Dellinger:** U.S. Consulate (Barcelona, Spain), Public  
Diplomacy Section

## *The Campus*

**Jack Ryan, Jr:** Operations officer/senior analyst

**Gavin Biery:** Director of information technology

**Gerry Hendley:** Director of The Campus and Hendley Associates

**John Clark:** Director of operations

**Domingo ‘Ding’ Chavez:** Assistant director of operations

**Dominic ‘Dom’ Caruso:** Operations officer

**Adara Sherman:** Operations officer

**Bartosz ‘Midas’ Jankowski:** Operations officer

## *Other Characters*

### *United States*

**Buck Logan:** President, White Mountain Logistics + Security

**Kate Parsons:** Oak Ridge National Laboratory scientist

### *Spain*

**Laia Brossa:** Centro Nacional de Inteligencia (CNI) agent

**Gaspar Peña:** CNI supervisor

# Prologue

*Pohang, South Korea*

‘Alive, not dead.’

That was the order. Jack got it. Rijk van Delden – if that was his real name – was the only link between the Iron Syndicate and the nameless merc outfit the syndicate hired for their dirtiest hits. The merc outfit was their real target. Find van Delden, find the outfit.

Simple as that.

But van Delden had been hard as hell to find. Impossible, actually. Until a lead, finally, that led them here tonight. Their one and maybe only chance to grab him.

‘Alive, not dead’ meant keeping the big Dutchman alive so they could find and eliminate his murderous organization.

The only problem with that was van Delden was one of his outfit’s heavy hitters. The six-foot-six killer possessed serious combative and tactical skills. The giant Dutchman had put more men in the ground than a gravedigger’s shovel.

‘Don’t even think about taking this monkey on by yourself. Get eyes on him, call for backup, sit tight till the rest of us show up. Savvy?’ Clark said in their brief before The Campus team split up. All hands were on deck for this op: John Clark, Ding Chavez, Dom Caruso, Adara Sherman, Midas Jankowski, and Jack Junior.

They all headed in different directions across the steel mill’s huge complex of buildings. Too much ground to cover

for them to buddy up. They had to go it alone to find the guy. And fast.

Van Delden was in one of a dozen possible places on two hundred acres of property, and scheduled to leave within the hour, according to their source. They couldn't risk missing him here tonight. If he shook loose, he'd be back in the wind the minute he left and they'd lose the only shot they'd ever had at rolling up his crew.

Alive, not dead, was tonight's mission but it seemed like a pretty good idea for him and the rest of the team, too, Jack thought, as he made his way through the cavernous shell of the integrated steel mill. The cold night fog looming over the port outside stopped at the doorway, the air inside tinged with the acrid smells of rust, ozone, and burnt coal.

Jack Ryan, Jr, was a big, blue-eyed white guy striding confidently through the dark, hangar-size structure. He didn't look that out of place beneath his stolen white safety helmet, clipboard, and paper mask. He moved fast like he had something to do, which he did. The steelworkers were too busy flying several hundred tons of molten slag in giant ladles lumbering overhead to pay attention to him.

Jack sweated beneath his shirt. It was an industrial volcano inside the sweltering building. At least the team had Sonitus Molar Mics. Without bone conduction for reception, he wouldn't be able to hear the others calling out their sitreps on his comms. The infernal din of pounding hydraulic hammers, roaring diesel motors, grinding steel, and blaring alarms was a near sensory overload.

'I'm thirty seconds from target,' Dom whispered on his way to the plant manager's office.

'Copy that,' Clark said.

Jack took two steps at a time up the yellow steel staircase to the 'pulpit' – the automated control room for the hot-steel

processing facility, high off the floor. The grated treads led to the landing just outside the control-room door. With his back against the corrugated steel wall, he did a quick check around him. Helmeted workers below were focused on the job, not him.

From the landing, a steel-grating walkway ran parallel along the windowless steel wall of the pulpit where Jack stood. On either end of the east–west walkway was a catwalk. Both catwalks ran north, parallel with the tracks of the huge ladles moving slowly along beneath them. Each ladle brimmed with nearly two hundred tons of molten steel heading toward the vacuum degassers on the far side of the building.

In the middle of the steel control-room door stood a small, face-size observation window.

‘I’m in position,’ Jack whispered.

‘Copy,’ Clark said as a siren wailed overhead.

Jack stepped over to the door’s observation window.

He scanned the room. In front of the big picture windows overlooking the mill floor, five young South Korean technicians sat at their monitors chatting excitedly, pointing at virtual gauges on their screens.

Scanning right, Jack saw Park, the oldest Korean in the room, standing in the corner, round and silver-haired beneath his safety helmet. Jack recognized Park from his file photo. He was the steel firm’s CEO and biggest shareholder, and a man in serious trouble with Japan’s largest yakuza syndicate, the Yamaguchi-gumi. Their source inside the syndicate said Park was reaching out to van Delden for protection tonight.

Jack leaned over to see who Park was talking with.

And there he was.

The giant Dutchman towered over the diminutive Korean, his long, granite face focused on Park in earnest discussion.

The Dutchman's gaze shifted briefly toward the window. His eyes locked with Jack's.

*Shit.*

In the blink of an eye, van Delden's big Glock 17 was in his hand. Jack ducked as the barrel sparked. The door glass shattered just above his head.

'Found him,' Jack barked in his comms as he crouched low and pressed hard against the heavy steel door. He felt more rounds thud against the metal, like someone was pounding the door with their fists.

'Sit tight,' Clark said. 'We're on our way. Five mikes, max.'

'Copy that.' More bullets crashed into the door near Jack's ear.

'Don't hurt him, Jack.'

'Copy that —'

*WHUMP!*

The big man slammed into the door. The steel cracked against Jack's skull and knocked him back a little. But Jack was wedged hard against it. The door only budged open an inch. He slammed it back shut with his shoulder.

Jack heard the last shards of the shattered window glass breaking above him. He glanced up just in time to see the black steel slide of the big Glock wedge through it, then angle down, thick fingers wrapped around the hilt. The Glock fired three earsplitting shots that *chinged* the grated steel floor near Jack's feet before Jack could react. Jack turned and grabbed the hot slide with his left hand and twisted it upward just as van Delden fired another shot into the steel rafters overhead.

The hot barrel burned Jack's hand as he squeezed but he caused the last shot to fail because the slide couldn't fully eject the brass.

With his left hand still gripped around the Glock, Jack pulled his SIG P229 Legion Compact SAO with his right



hand and smashed the steel butt against the Dutchman's thick wrist, breaking it with a sickening crack.

The massive paw dropped the Glock and yanked back through the shattered glass. Jack kicked the Dutchman's gun over the edge.

'Status?' Clark asked. 'Still got eyes on?'

'He ain't going nowhere –'

*WHUMP!*

Van Delden crashed against the door again before Jack could brace himself. The steel door blew open, tossing Jack backward, dropping him to the grated landing.

Jack raised his weapon to put a bullet in the Dutchman's knee but the man's giant steel-toed boot kicked the gun out of Jack's hand, and sent the SIG sailing over the edge, clattering onto the cement floor far below.

Jack's hand exploded in pain, as if it had been smashed with a sledgehammer. His momentary focus on his aching hand cost him dearly as the same big boot raised high and smashed down into Jack's gut, knocking the wind out of him. Jack gasped for air and clutched at his belly as the boot raised up a third time, aimed squarely at his skull. Jack rolled away at the last second, the sole of the massive boot clanging against the steel near his ear.

Jack rolled again just as the Dutchman launched a kick at his skull and missed. Van Delden lunged forward for a final, fatal steel-toed shot to Jack's temple, not seeing Jack's three-inch Kershaw spring-assisted blade until it plunged into his inner thigh.

Van Delden screamed and grabbed his leg to stanch the blood. He stumbled away past Jack before The Campus operative could strike him again, limping west along the walkway as Jack struggled to stand.

'Jack, we're close. Stay put,' Clark ordered. Jack shook the

pain out of his hand as he grabbed a couple of deep breaths, his stomach aching like he'd been gut shot.

'Jack? You copy?'

Jack glanced up just in time to see van Delden turn the corner north, heading away from the pulpit.

'Copy,' was all Jack said.

He sure as hell wasn't staying put.

He had his orders. 'Alive, not dead.'

But Jack knew there was a long, nasty road of hurt between the two, and he was happy to take the big man along for the ride.

Jack thundered along the steel grate, racing after the giant operator. Even wounded, the big man was fast as a feral cat.

Jack turned the corner, running past the giant ladle of molten steel crawling along on its track ten feet below him. Even from here, the searing heat made his skin tingle, like standing too close to a campfire on a cold night.

'Van Delden! Halt!' Jack shouted over the noise of the giant ladle motors grinding overhead.

Van Delden limped farther along, leaning heavily on the rail, one bloody, massive hand gripping his thigh. He finally stopped as Jack charged up behind him.

'Turn around, asshole,' Jack said, finally able to pull his backup gun, a striker-fired SIG P365 SAS micro-compact nine-millimeter.

The thick shoulders turned. On the dimly lit platform, the Dutchman's rugged features glowed in the seething light of the lava-like steel approaching them. The backs of Jack's legs itched with the heat through his trousers.

Jack pointed his pistol at the big man's chest.

The Dutchman grinned.

'Afraid to pull the trigger, little man?'

'Oh, hell no. But I've got my orders.'

'Tough guy, huh?' The grin disappeared as he winced in

pain, his trouser leg soaked in blood. He raised himself up to his full height – five inches taller than Jack. His broad chest was like an oak barrel, and his tree-trunk arms bulged beneath his shirtsleeves.

Jack's finger tightened on the trigger. 'I won't kill you, but if you make a move, you're gonna be pissing through a straw for the rest of your life.'

The Dutchman's eyes searched Jack up and down, calculating speed and distance to target.

'Clark, you copy?'

'I copy. You have the tango in sight?'

'I'm sitting on him. Hurry the hell up.'

'Almost there. You good?'

The air roared with the noise of the automated crane hauling the giant ladle just below them. Jack caught the glow of the white-hot steel in the corner of his eye.

'I'm good. But van Asshat is in a world of hurt.'

'Who sent you?' van Delden asked.

'Nobody you'd know.'

'What do you want with me?'

'You're the link to an outfit we're interested in.'

'Interested how? You are police?'

'Not exactly.'

'Do you know who I work for?'

'Your outfit contracted for the Iron Syndicate.'

'The syndicate is dead.'

'I know. We're the ones that rolled them up. It's your organization we're going to take apart next, thanks to you.'

'Ha! You *really* don't know anything about us, do you?'

'No. But I promise you, within the hour you'll tell me.'

Van Delden gritted his teeth, grimacing with a strange *fuck-you* smile at Jack.

'Something strike you as funny?' Jack asked.

The big Dutchman suddenly frowned, confused. He punched himself in the jaw. One, two, three times. Jack heard his teeth crack even above the noise.

‘What the hell is wrong with you?’

Van Delden’s desperate eyes darted around – searching for some kind of a weapon or another way out. The Dutchman’s bloodied fingers tightened around the steel railing.

Jack suddenly realized that the much larger man could use the railing as leverage to throw his bulk at him, even on that bad leg. If one of those meaty fists clocked his jaw, he’d be lights out.

Jack stepped back. ‘Don’t move.’

Van Delden inched closer.

‘Afraid, little man?’

Jack shook his head. ‘No one’s pointing a gun at *my* nutsack.’

The Dutchman smiled again, a sliver of sunlight in a storm cloud. But then it faded.

‘What are you willing to die for, little man?’

‘What kind of a stupid –’

In a single, vaulting leap, van Delden threw himself over the railing.

Jack lunged at the man to grab him, but he was too late.

The big Dutchman plunged feet first into the glowing ladle ten feet below. His massive frame barely rippled the blistering surface, the white-hot liquid swallowing his last, sharp cry.

Jack stood at the railing staring at the bucket of molten steel inching relentlessly forward as Clark, Dom, and Adara came racing up behind him.

‘Where the hell’s van Delden?’ Clark asked, leaning over the railing. ‘I told you we needed him alive.’

‘I know,’ Jack said, holstering his pistol. ‘But he had different plans.’

October 18

# I

## *Aboard the container ship Jade Star*

Second Officer Luis Loyola stood outside on the starboard bridge wing, vaping a sweet menthol Juulpod. He admired the blanket of stars shimmering across the black velvet sky.

His seaman's eye suddenly caught the breaking wake of what was probably a dolphin's fin racing toward the hull far down below, then watched it dip beneath the blue-black water, night feeding. He smiled. Amazing animals. And always a good luck charm.

The ship's bow surged toward a waxing moon blazing like a searchlight, illuminating the dark Pacific waters in every direction, all the way to the horizon, or so it seemed. Out here in the South Pacific, he couldn't see the lights of any nearby ships of any size; his radar had indicated the nearest fishing vessel was some 140 kilometers away. He might as well have been on the surface of Mars for the solitude he craved tonight.

The ship was sailing on a smooth sea at fifteen knots – a little more than half its rated speed – to save expensive bunker fuel. The 102,000-ton (deadweight) vessel was powered by a 93,000-horsepower, two-stroke diesel engine thrumming far belowdecks. It was burning 90 tons of fuel a day at current speed as it drove the ship's thirty-foot-diameter copper alloy, six-bladed propeller.

He cast a quick glance at the deck, stacked with red, blue, and green shipping containers. In fact, the *Jade Star* was fully

loaded with 8,465 twenty- and forty-foot shipping containers, including South Korean industrial pipe and fittings, washing machines, refrigerators, car parts, rubber tires, X-ray machines, and, strangely, seven hundred liters of human blood.

The ship was also illegally carrying three hundred tons of ethylene and other combustible chemicals, used in a variety of manufacturing applications. The legal restrictions for recommended storage and transportation precautions were ridiculous and prohibitively expensive relative to the cost of the chemicals themselves. He wasn't worried about their safety. As the ship's administrative officer, he was duty bound to be aware of such things. But if stopped and searched, he alone would be the person charged with the crime.

But all of that was of little concern at the moment. He was off the clock now, and couldn't give a damn about what they were hauling. His only concern was that his son's birthday was yesterday, and as far as he knew, his *puta* ex-wife hadn't bothered to give the boy the quadcopter drone he had sent him last week.

Loyola loved his life at sea, but he loved his six-year-old son even more. He was torn. It was the sea that had cost him his marriage, or so his wife said, blaming her whoring with every swinging dick in Lima on him not being around to satisfy her womanly desires.

*¡Hija de puta!*

He took a long drag on his Juul, then watched the breeze sweep the vapor cloud away into the darkness. If he didn't quit the sea, he might lose his son altogether. Besides, he hadn't had a pay raise in three years, let alone a promotion, and neither was on the horizon. He had thought about quitting many times, but as shitty as the non-union wages were, they were still better than anything else he could manage

from a desk job back home in Peru. At least this way he could save up money for his son's future, even if he missed his son growing up.

He felt a dark despair falling back over him again and thought about the bottle of Golden Blue Korean whiskey he had stowed away in his cabin. His drinking had gotten worse this trip, and it was probably time to back off. His last fitness report by that *maricón* captain had warned him about his drinking but that asshole didn't understand the pain he was feeling.

Loyola took another deep breath of salt air, and forced his mind to forget his troubles. For all of the pain of being a sailor, there was nothing like standing out on the bridge on a night like this. He'd sailed around the world a dozen times, and seen things on land and at sea that no civilian would ever see. Not bad for a street kid who used to hustle cigarettes and lottery tickets in the filthy Lima slums.

Loyola took another long, thoughtful pull. Yes, perhaps he would try to find some kind of job at the port, nearer the boy. Maybe even teach him how to play *fútbol*, as his father had taught him. And with the money he'd already saved up, perhaps a house out in the country where the boy –

A thundering blast deep beneath the vessel threw Loyola to the deck, slamming his skull against the steel bulkhead. Stunned, Loyola crawled to his knees as the breaking hull tore apart with a scream of shattering metal. He was tossed against the rails of the bridge wing, cracking his ribs, but his desperate hands wrapped around the nearest post to keep from falling several stories into the ocean. The air filled with the wail of alarms and klaxons.

He tried to blink away the blood pouring into his eyes from the wound in his broken scalp. He watched in horror as the bow and six hundred feet of ship behind it broke away



and plunged headlong into the sea. The rear section where he lay surged ahead, still under power, and crashed into the upended hull in front. Steel containers spilled out of their holds and into the water, and a dozen screaming crewmen along with them.

Secondary explosions ignited the incendiary chemicals, enveloping the shuddering wreckage in unquenchable fire. Within minutes the entire ship and its cargo were lost, sent plunging into the depths of the warm Pacific.

There were no survivors.

October 24

*Barcelona, Spain*

Jack stood at the bar of L'avi, his favorite restaurant in Barcelona. It was located in the El Born district of the old city, called the Ciutat Vella in Català, the language of Catalonia, the semi-autonomous region of Spain. It was also a locals' favorite, which was saying something, because *catalanes* really knew how to eat and drink, and did so quite often, late into the night.

Jack took another sip of sweet, red Spanish *vermut*. Van Delden's suicide was a distant memory, thanks to his time in Spain. It had been a week since Jack woke up in a cold sweat in the middle of the night reliving it. Now numbed to the horror of the Dutchman's excruciating death, Jack still couldn't help but wonder what kind of organization inspired that kind of fearsome loyalty.

Jack had loved his time in Madrid but he was utterly captivated by Barcelona. He could see himself living in this city, despite recent events. Spontaneous mass protests of hundreds of thousands of people had shut Barcelona down several times in the days before he arrived but lately all was quiet. Jack sensed there was still something in the air.

Most protesters favored Catalanian independence from Madrid, but not all. Independence wasn't the only issue. The rage that had driven freedom-loving people into the streets was the recent sentencing of Catalanian independence politicians to long prison terms by Madrid. Spain still lived under

the long shadow of Franco's Fascist dictatorship. Though Spain was now a democratic republic, heavily armed riot police battling barricades of unarmed Catalanian civilians elicited hard memories from the earlier times. It was an emotional response, not a rational one, Jack thought, but modern politics was only about emotions in the Western world these days, including here.

The protests changed nothing. Madrid still held all the cards because it held the monopoly of force. Barcelona was a city on the edge of another eruption, which made it all the more interesting as a place to be.

At six-one, Jack's broad-shouldered frame towered over most of the locals who crowded the place at lunchtime, which throughout Spain lasted until at least three o'clock. The energy level in here was somewhere between a late-night disco and a rock concert.

Jack could hardly hear himself think above the din of excited diners jabbering away in a half-dozen languages, particularly Català – its own unique mix of Spanish, Italian, and French. Català was one of the many things that made Catalonia separate and distinct, which was why Franco had outlawed the language during his regime.

Jack had little more of the language than *si us plau* or *gràcies* in his vocabulary, but even using those few words was enough to elicit a smile from appreciative locals, particularly those favoring independence from Madrid. If all else failed, Jack knew the words for the tapas he loved best – especially *bombas* and *pa amb tomàquet*. In a worst-case scenario, a finger jabbed onto a menu item along with a smile would always do the trick.

Today was Jack's last day in Spain. Despite the highly social atmosphere, he was by himself. The life he lived as a covert operative wasn't amenable to long-term relationships, at least, not for him.

He'd seen the pretty blonde at the other end of the bar when he first came in, and saw her check him out. She wore no wedding ring and appeared to be by herself. She had a Bluetooth stuck in her ear and engaged in a very occasional conversation with someone on the other end of the call. Between shots of bubbly cava and bites of crispy *croquetas de jamón*, she tossed subtle, sidelong glances at him in the mirror that stood behind the counter.

Even if she was interested in him, he was already packed for his American Airlines flight back home tomorrow. He only traveled with a laptop and a buffalo leather satchel crammed with a few days' worth of clothes. He preferred washing his things to throwing them out and buying new ones, unlike a famous fictional character he admired.

The only thing he needed to remember to grab in the morning was his dog-eared copy of George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*, which was the reason for his stop in Barcelona. He'd first read the book in college and its last, prophetic pages had haunted him for years. When Gerry Hendley told him to take a few weeks off after his last mission with The Campus in South Korea, he decided to revisit the idea of Spain, and in particular, the Spanish Civil War. He loved being an off-the-books operator for The Campus – the 'black side' operations of the financial firm Hendley Associates, carrying out missions for the American government that otherwise couldn't be handled through normal channels.

But lately, Jack had been considering the words of an old Jesuit professor he'd bumped into in London a few years back. His subconscious was nibbling on the edges of an idea to go back to school and get his doctorate in history, just like his dad.

Maybe.

Nothing on this trip persuaded him to quit The Campus.

The work was too important and too damned exciting. But he also had to admit he had been utterly captivated by his time in Spain and experiencing it through a historian's eyes, rather than through the green glow of night-vision optics while chasing tangos. It was one thing to read about a great historical city like Barcelona but something else altogether to stand inside a nine-hundred-year-old church with the bones of Crusader knights entombed beneath the stones at your feet.

He plopped the last of the glistening *pimientos de Padrón* into his mouth. The small green peppers fried in olive oil and dusted with sea salt practically melted on his tongue. He seriously considered ordering another *vermut* but decided to just finish the one he had and pay the bill. The clock was ticking and he had a timed entrance ticket to the Picasso Museum, which was just up the narrow, medieval street of Carrer de Montcada. It was the last item on his list before leaving tomorrow.

He raised a finger to the passing server who set his check on the bar in front of him. Jack counted out the bills he needed to cover the tab along with a generous tip. He noticed he still had a few euros left in his wallet and decided to toss those into the tray as well. He didn't need euros in Virginia and the young server was working her ass off. God bless her.

*Adéu, Barcelona.*