

# Confrontation

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## 1. Captain Harrison

Captain Thomas Harrison sits at the desk in the captain's quarters reviewing messages on the big computer screen. He is in his early 50s and in excellent shape with a lean, hard body and jagged face. The face has the weathered features of a face chiseled and earned over the years rather than given at birth.

It is early morning, but he has been up a long time thanks to the call from the Secretary of the Navy at 3:00 am this morning. He has spent half-an-hour on his exercise bike pushing himself as he always does. He wears a grey t-shirt damp with sweat and a pair of blue Navy shorts.

The captain's quarters are neat, clean and efficient with a simple color theme of grey and blue. It is nothing special and might be the room of some motel along an Interstate. Next to the computer screen is a telephone system with a number of lines coming into it. Captain Harrison is multi-tasking, scrolling through messages on the computer screen, listening to messages from the phone system and making notes on a pad of paper. Above the desk, is a shelf with photos of his family: a

young boy and girl and a pretty wife. A few portals on one side of the room let in early morning sunlight that falls in a slant into the room placing a slice of light on the captain's head.

There is a knock on the door and Harrison says come in without looking up from his work. His top assistant Lieutenant Justin Bates enters carrying a breakfast tray with the daily briefing memo on it. He puts the tray on a table in the room and hands the memo to Captain Harrison. This is the way each day officially starts for the Captain.

“The Pentagon wants us to continue toward the Chinese fleet,” Lieutenant Bates says. “But at a reduced speed of 20 knots. Give us more time to plan options.”

“Options are disappearing fast,” the Captain says.

“There's little indication the Chinese will back down,” Bates says. “I've been in contact with our people in DC. They'll have more information later today.”

“What the hell did the Chinese think we'd do when they blocked South Korean trade with us?” Captain Harrison says.

Bates points to the memo.

“You've got a staff meeting and call at ten this morning with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and the Secretary of the Navy.”

“Don't remind me,” the Captain says.

Captain Harrison sits at the table and eats his breakfast while Bates sits in the chair at the Captain's desk pokes at his smartphone, sending text messages, reading emails and listening messages.

"Anything more on the drug bust last night?" Harrison says rising from the table and walking into the bathroom.

"Nothing more to report now," Bates says. "Ten crew members in custody. Our NCIS is on it but I called in the FBI's special psychedelic unit. We can't take a chance with anything like this right now."

There is the sound of the shower in the bathroom and Bates carries the empty tray outside the Captain's quarters and hands it to Ensign Derek Street, a large tough kid from a farm town in Alabama. He likes Street and the two always discuss football.

"The Tide is going to win the playoffs," Street says. "No one can touch them."

"Wait till they meet LSU," Bates responds.

"Your old school doesn't have a chance," Street says.

Bates smiles and shakes his head. He likes their football banter.

"Lots of talk now Lieutenant," Street says.

"The ship's always full of talk," the Lieutenant says. "It wouldn't be the ship if it wasn't full of talk."

“I mean the situation keeps getting more tense,” Street says. “With the Chinese Navy staring us down and all.”

“You just worry about staring down the Captain’s door,” Lieutenant Bates says. “I want you to not let anyone into the Captain’s quarters while he is away from them.”

“Not even the daily cleaning people?” Street asks.

“No one,” Bates says. “That’s a direct order from me. “I want you to report to me any suspicious activity. Anything.”

Street is somewhat surprised that their daily football talk has taken a different turn.

“Anything wrong Lieutenant?” Street asks.

“Nothing for you to worry about sailor,” Bates says as he goes back into the Captain’s quarters, sits at the captain’s desk and scrolls through messages on his cell phone.

In five minutes, the Captain emerges from the bathroom in full uniform.

“You think the drug problem stops with just those in custody?” he asks.

“That’s the big question,” Bates says. “I wish we knew. I’m interviewing them this morning with our own internal investigators and the FBI team that arrived last night. We should know more this morning.”

“We better know soon,” the Captain says. “We’re just a few days from being face-to-face with the Chinese in the East China Sea. All I need is a crew filled with drugs.”

\* \* \*

The two leave the Captain’s quarters and walk quickly down the long hallway with rooms of other top officers on the doors. Here and there, crew members pass and salute the Captain. They enter the elevator that takes them up to the Main Hanger Deck.

“I spoke with the Secretary of the Navy,” the Captain says in the elevator. “He called and got me out of bed at 3:00 am this morning. He is more than a little concerned that the nation’s largest nuclear aircraft carrier has hallucinogenic drugs on board right in the middle of one of the biggest showdowns in navy history.”

The doors of the elevator open into the largest man-made interior ever created. It is the staging area of the carrier, right under the flight. (The opening of the elevator doors should almost have some symbolic significance. Before, we have been living in the small room of the captain of a great warship. Walking with him down a narrow passageway full of officer’s quarters. Then, into a small elevator. When the doors of the elevator open onto the vast space, is like that a cart crashing into a great funhouse. We go from the enclosed, claustrophobic

environment of the inside of the carrier to the grand landscapes of its hanger and flight deck.)

\* \* \*

The Captain and Bates walk across the vast landscape of the great room under the flight deck. It is larger than a convention center. There is much activity going on at seven this morning. Jets are being inspected and worked on. Little trucks are moving things around like those little trucks at airports. The jets sit in a long line a few football fields long. The Captain is saluted a number of times as he walks through the deck.

“So, we still don’t know if we’re dealing with an internal drug problem or some terrorist act?” the Captain asks.

“No,” says Bates. “There’s a lot of people trying to find this out right now.”

“Jesus,” says Captain Harrison. “I’m used to fighting all types of battles but never anything like this.”

“It’s a new situation for sure,” Bates says.

They come to the great open elevator on the side of the ship that lifts the airplanes to the flight deck. The operator crewman salutes the Captain and the elevator slowly rises to the flight deck. There is a jet on the elevator that sparkles from the morning sunlight.

\* \* \*

The elevator stops in alignment with the vast flight deck of the nuclear aircraft carrier. The Captain and Bates step off of it and walk across the flight deck. The carrier is the last to be built and features the latest technology of the nation. Pilots are checking their airplanes on the deck as there is a wave of them off at eight this morning. There are more salutes to the Captain as he walks across the vast flight-deck of the carrier.

They walk in silence for a few seconds across the great flight deck of the carrier. The eastern sun is maybe twenty degrees above the eastern horizon. It has a strong orange and red color to it this morning and puts these colors into the ocean to the east like a wide swath of orange-red rusted junk put into the ocean.

The two men come to the bottom of the great bridge on the aircraft carrier. It rises above them like a miniature skyscraper twenty stories tall. On one side of the structure is the giant block letters "LSD" for President Lyndon Stuart Dodge. The Captain stands looking up at the great letters of LSD a hundred feet above him.

"What an irony," the Captain says to Bates. "I always knew the meaning of these letters but now they're the perfect call letters for my ship."

The Captain briefly thought of all those times in his past years when friends had tempted him to try acid and all those times he had declined. He had smoked marijuana but had experienced no hallucinogenic drugs yet. It had always been an

irony to the Captain to get command of a ship with the call letters LSD. He was simply stating to Bates what he had thought about before.

Two enlisted men stand at both sides of the elevator to the bridge of the carrier. They salute the Captain and Bates as they get on the elevator that goes up the side of the bridge. It slowly rises. Out the window they can see the surrounding ocean on both sides of the carrier. On both sides of it are the back a few miles, are the battleships and destroyers and guided-missile cruisers and support ships. The Lyndon Stuart Dodge is leading the fleet Northwest across the Pacific towards the Chinese Navy in the East China Sea.

The door of the bridge elevator opens to a vast semi-circular space with a long, curving window and two men at two great wheels. The room is busy with personnel. On the sides of the room, crew members look at radar screens. A machine continues to download printed materials. Small monitors are everywhere. A view of the vast Pacific Ocean in front of the ship as the carrier pushes east towards South Korea.

Captain Harrison has that feeling of being home when he enters the bridge. Since his divorce it is really the only home he has known.

## 2. The Spiked Coffee

As soon as the Captain is on the bridge, he receives his daily large cup of coffee prepared with his special requirements by his kitchen staff and brought to him the past week (since they left Pearl Harbor heading for the East China Sea) by Ensign Billy Rogers. The captain and Billy have gotten to be good friends in the past week. They will chat a few moments after Billy brings the captain that important cup of coffee. It has even gotten the name (in the folklore of the carrier) as Bridge Sludge.

But this morning, Billy Rogers is not serving the coffee but another ensign.

“Where’s Billy?” the Captain says as he takes the coffee off the plate.

“In sickbay sir,” the server says.

“I hope he’s OK,” the Captain says but the server is already disappearing into a door off the bridge.

The captain watches him go as he sips his coffee. Strange little guy, the captain thinks.

\* \* \*

With his large coffee cup in hand, Captain Harrison huddles with his top officers. None of them are aware of the drug problem on the ship. It is not the time to tell them about this new situation. There is more than enough to worry about with the Chinese Navy not more than a thousand miles away. There is speculation as to what the Secretary and Joint Chief will say on the call coming at ten this morning. Who will back down? Will there even be a backdown?

Lieutenant Bates pulls the captain aside from the huddle.

“I’m off to meet the FBI people and interview the crew members we have in custody,” he tells the captain.

“You need to get to the bottom of this and quick,” the captain says.

“Don’t think I don’t know,” Bates says, leaving the bridge.

\* \* \*

Captain Harrison is next to his second in command, Executive Officer Captain William Benjamin. They both stand directly behind the crewman steering the great carrier. The two have known each other since their days at the Naval Academy where they played on the Navy football team. They have been best friends all their lives, but they are very different from each other. In some ways,

almost symbolic opposites. Tom Harrison was always the straight shooter who never strays far from boundaries, but Bill Benjamin hardly ever stays within boundaries.

On both sides of the carrier are the destroyer escorts and behind them the other ships in the fleet fading into the eastern horizon of the new day.

“Want to tell me more about the drug bust last night?” Benjamin says.

“Impossible to keep anything from you,” Harrison says. “It’s just a small matter.”

“That’s why that FBI plane landed last night?” Benjamin asks.

“We’ll have everything taken care of this morning and the FBI people will be gone,” Harrison says. “In case you haven’t noticed, we’ve got bigger fish to fry.”

He walks away from Benjamin. The fact he knows about the FBI plane and the drug bust is upsetting to Harrison. Somewhere, there has been another breach of his orders to keep this whole thing as quiet as possible, even from his XO.

\* \* \*

In a few minutes, Captain Harrison finds himself looking out at the Pacific in front of them through the massive 180-degree semi-circular bridge window of the carrier, twenty stories above the activity on the flight deck and the 7,345 crewmembers in the ocean city below. Images of this life of his ship briefly begin

to flash before him as pictures on the great curved window of the ship's bridge. He can see the various duties his crewmembers are performing now. The huge lunch being prepared in the massive kitchen of the ship. The communications room with everyone bent over various scopes watching green blips on screens. The orangish-green color of their faces reflected from the radar scopes. The engine room and the engineers in their white uniforms with clipboards. So much different from the dirty, coal-filled boiler room on the Titanic. The Titanic was one of his favorite books. He had read *A Night to Remember* maybe five times. It was one of those first things that put more and more of his mind on the ocean rather than land as a career for him. For there was that special sea-going captain that Joseph Conrad talked about in his books. Of course, this sea captain was Joseph Conrad. He had read most of the Conrad books when he was young. Such a strange kid he was. He always envisioned a life in some place like a desert or an ocean. Either one, offering that blank slate environment where a new life might always be created away from all the toxic noise, images and distractions of contemporary culture and society. This was another one of those things that turned his mind towards the sea. Like the Titanic book. Things and images came fast to his mind now without any attempt at making them do this. They moved quickly and assuredly as if there was little need for conscious intervention in the moment.

The next thing the captain realizes is that he is sitting in the captain's quarters and having a discussion with his son about a life in the navy. The photo of his son above his desk have escaped from its frame and turned into a real person and now this person is in his room and he was having a discussion with him and trying to tell him about the life of a captain at sea. He is trying to tell his son the great things about choosing the sea over land. But suddenly he has forgotten the benefits of this and memories of Conrad and the Titanic become more faded, distant and elusive from capture.

\* \* \*

There is the sound of a breaking coffee cup as it hits the Titanium floor or the bridge. A few officers immediately run over and clean it up.

Benjamin has been watching Harrison for a few minutes and comes over to him.

The Captain seems unaware he has dropped his coffee cup. He is in another place. Benjamin sees the strange look on the face of his old friend. It is a look he has seldom seen. He knows the LSD from the coffee is taking effect. He grabs the Captain's head between his hands and shakes it.

“Are you OK Captain?” Benjamin says.

Captain Harrison looks at Benjamin with a slight smile on his face. His eyes are glassy, not present in the moment. He is in another place right now. Explaining something to his son in his quarters below.

\* \* \*

Benjamin helps Captain Harrison to a side area of the bridge. He motions to the same two officers who cleaned up the broken coffee cup.

“Take him to his quarters and stay with him,” Benjamin says. “Make sure he doesn’t leave his quarters. No one is to see him. No one is to speak with him.”

The two officers help the Captain off the bridge through a side door out of sight from those on the bridge.

“Your first acid trip Captain,” Benjamin says. “It’ll do you good, show you there’s another world out there, a world without killing and war. A world of peace.”

Benjamin knows about acid trips. He had his first trip when his life went off the rail after the Naval Academy and he became a hippie in California experimenting with all types of drugs. But, a type of rebirth led him back to a career in the Navy. Yet he never saw things in the same way after this rebirth. He rose fast within the ranks, one of the fastest rising young people in the navy during his time. It was during this time that he connected up with another rising star in the Navy, his old friend from the Academy, Thomas Harrison.

There are so many moments together with his old friend when Benjamin came to the Navy. A number of assignments where the two of them worked together and pulled off impossible missions. Tommy was right - Benjamin thought - when he said there was some special magic when both of them worked together on some common mission. Benjamin wanted this mission to be one of those magic times.

The plan Benjamin worked on for so many years is finally coming to fruition. A takeover of the greatest weapons in the world via soft powers of particular drugs rather than the hardened reality of nuclear war. For XO Benjamin and many others, it seemed the only way out of the mess the modern world has gotten itself into. The path towards peace and harmony rather than war and killing.

Benjamin's top assistant Lieutenant Eric Johnson approaches him. Johnson has been an assistant of Benjamin for many years.

"Everything's going as planned," he says as he salutes Benjamin.

"So far," Benjamin says. "Bates is with the FBI now questioning the crew members in custody. They've got their story to tell them. It's enough of a distraction for us to set the big plan into operation."

He watches the flight deck below where a jet is readied for take-off and then shot down the short runway and out over the Pacific. He watches the white light of its exhaust get smaller and smaller until it disappears into the western Pacific.

\* \* \*

Benjamin comes back and takes his place behind the young ensign at the huge wheel of the great carrier. A few officers come up and ask where Captain Harrison is.

“The Captain has a little food poisoning,” he says. “He’s retired to his quarters with his doctor. I’m in command for now.”

The plan went haywire last night when the ten were taken into custody. But it seems to be back on target again. The FBI was an unexpected intervention in the whole thing but hopefully they would focus just on the ten caught. They were trained not to say anything but that they brought the LSD aboard for themselves. The Captain has been taken out and now the investigation of the ten crew members is underway and lunch is quickly approaching.

Captain Benjamin believes with the fervor of a religious conviction that war is a thing of the past. He knew this somehow after his first trip on LSD. Now, his old friend Thomas Harrison might begin to realize this also. He certainly wants this realization for his old friend, wants him to finally see the other world as he sees it. It is his hope and the hope of the people in his group that war might become a thing of the past, that the world might be seen in a new way. The hard power of war and killing might finally give way to the soft power of drugs.

### 3. The FBI Meeting

Bates makes his way down to the brig of the great aircraft carrier. It is in the low rent section. The brig area of the carrier is on one of the lower levels towards the aft section and is only reached through an incredible labyrinth of passageways, halls and tunnels. He has only ventured down here a few times since being on the carrier. It always gives him a strange sensation when he goes down here like some ground animal, burrowing deeper and deeper into the earth.

He wonders why he thinks of all of this on his way to the brig this morning. None of this claustrophobic environment inside an aircraft carrier should surprise him. It is the way it is on all the modern aircraft carriers, always a shiny new outward appearance covering the old insides. The outside like a great brand. The most expensive piece of equipment humanity has ever made. Outwardly, a billboard for the world's greatest nuclear carrier Bates thinks.

But even in the narrow, dim passageways of the carrier leading to the brig, Bates believes this carrier has some ultimate mission. He feels this with the fervor of a religious zealot. He has believed this ever since he followed the Captain and

his command of the carrier. There seemed to be some special destiny for them and the great carrier.

\* \* \*

Bates reaches the brig area of the ship and signs in with a salute from the guard on duty. He passes the ten crew members behind bars in the brig. Nothing about them that would suggest all the LSD found in their rooms last night during the raid. Five men and five women, all in their mid-twenties, clean cut. It would be impossible to suspect them of LSD use in the general population. Bates recognizes a few of them as he passes them behind the bars of the brig. Another crewman stands at attention at another door Bates passes through. Bates and the ship's top NCIS officer on the ship, Lieutenant Clarence Brown, a huge black man who played tackle at Bates' alma mater LSU, sit across a table from three FBI agents from Quantico. Bates thinks they have arrived on board the ship in probably the fastest time possible by technology today.

The agents and investigators introduce themselves. There are two men and a woman in the FBI group. All are attractive. As the old saying goes, they might have been sent by central casting. They are all millennials, somewhere in their mid-thirties. All with college and law degrees from top universities. Probably they also were top sports stars in their high schools and colleges. The cream of America's crop of young people one might say. Bates has always envied them

since he was interested in joining the FBI after graduate business school. However, the FBI required a law degree and not a business degree and Bates didn't want to go to law school for three years to get into the FBI.

There are short introductions. The lead agent is the woman. Her name is Mandy McKay.

"I appreciate your work Lieutenant Brown and Bates for your ongoing investigation into LSD on the carrier," she says. "As you're all aware, there are a lot of drug problems in the modern military. The Navy has its share of problems, a reflection of the drug problems in our culture. In case you haven't noticed, there's an epidemic of mass hysteria through society. It affects everything: our politics, our education, our leaders, our culture. Our mental perceptions and states. There is great change now in the state of the nation and the use of LSD is on the leading edge of challenges in modern drugs."

The FBI agent named Max continues.

"The Navy is part of our modern culture today," he says. "It is not separate from these problems and challenges. There have been a number of incidences of marijuana use on ships we've been monitoring but it is something to be expected. What we're interested in is the increased use of LSD aboard our major ships, like this one."

"But why an aircraft carrier?" Bates asks.

“Why not?” Mandy McKay says. “You live in an incredibly stressful environment. We’ve found the greatest LSD use on our highest stress warships, our carriers and nuclear submarines. Your drug bust last night was not that unusual. It matches other LSD busts on other key ships like this. The confrontation with the Chinese possesses some of the greatest stress in the world at this moment on this carrier. Especially on this carrier and its present mission of leading the Pacific fleet. It makes young people – even top navy people – look for ways out of the stress. You know the mission was not kept secret. All crew members knew the mission. It was the biggest thing in the news. Not like those other missions where goals are usually vague. They knew the stress they were headed for. At least ten of them decided to use LSD to break the stress. Maybe will find more in our investigation.”

\* \* \*

“You think it’s a coordinated effort?” Lieutenant Brown asks. “More than just individual users but something coming from some high level.”

“And interesting question Lieutenant,” McKay says. “I’m not at liberty to say much about this right now but we believe there is an effort to introduce LSD in mass to navy personnel. We think top people in the navy are involved. The ten crew members might be part of this larger group. Or, they might be just a bunch of young ensigns caught with their own LSD.”

“So, the ten in custody might be part of something larger?” Brown asks.

“There’s good reason to suspect they are,” says Mandy McKay.

“I just received the text message on the way down here that your team interviewed the crewmembers in the brig for two hours this morning,” Lieutenant Brown says.

“We considered waiting for you,” McKay says. “But time is of the essence in all of this as you can understand.”

“What did you find out?” Brown asks.

“All of them are incredibly well-trained for interview sessions,” she says. “The FBI couldn’t do any better. They all tell the same story. They are all sole users, only for themselves to blame. They have received the LSD not from someone on board ship but rather took the LSD onto the ship.”

“We’ve had an on-going investigation on the ship since we left Pearl Harbor,” Brown says. “This is what we’ve come up with so far, just sole users.”

“There is reason to believe they are associated with something much larger,” McKay says. “We ran all of their files through the FBI files. Much more information than you have Lieutenant Brown. Found out some unusual things in their past. All of them have backgrounds associated with psychedelics and a particular group called New Vision. It advocates a different type of psychedelics today. Not your old 60s spaced-out psychedelics but a well thought out idea to use

psychedelics for a new vision. Stuff like micro-dosing that's an epidemic in Silicon Valley and New York and DC and LA. Professional psychedelics you might say. Many members of the millennial generation are members of this New Vision group in some way or not. It is almost like a political party today."

"Of course, they're a danger to others on the ship," Brown says. "Having the crew-members in the brig getting other crew members to try LSD."

"Yes, perhaps a danger of the one-on-one interaction," McKay says. "But this is not the way they operate. The New Vision group has teamed up with a group in the military called the New Patriots who are trying to bring about a new vision for the navy. They believe in introducing LSD in mass to large populations at one time. The FBI has a name for them. We call them Spikers because they spike things in the world with LSD so that it is ingested without knowing it. There have been instances where huge crowds were put under LSD at one time. It is a growing phenomenon in culture. They don't want to wait for people to sample LSD one by one. Rather give it to them all at once."

"So, we have ten members of the New Patriots in custody right now," Brown says.

"Yes," McKay says. "But more than this. "Besides they're membership in New Patriots, they have something else in common that is very interesting."

"And that is?" asks Lieutenant Brown.

“They all work in the kitchen area of the ship where seven thousand are served three meals a day.”

“I know this and wanted to hear what you think,” Brown says.

“I have already ordered my agents to investigate the food and beverages being prepared for lunch today. “I have thirty agents going through the kitchen with our instruments as I speak. We might have to seize the food. I assume I have the assistance of your NCIS people on the ship Lieutenant?”

“Of course,” Brown says.

“Good,” McKay says. “I have agents watching all ways into the ship’s kitchen and mess hall. I am having another team inspect all the personal belongings of crewmembers with the help of our contacts on ship. They’ll report to me any updates. All of this is being done as quickly and quietly as we can. I’m putting my top agent in touch with you.”

Agent McKay rises and extends her hand to Brown and Bates.

“We’re setting up our command post right now,” she says. “We’ll know something soon.”

She scurries off with the other agents down the dim passageway that comes into the brig.

Brown makes a phone call and then heads down the passageway with Bates.

“An education Lieutenant,” Bates says to Brown.

“I wish to hell we had this much information when I played at LSU,” Brown says.

“We’d be able to beat Alabama,” Bates says.

“We don’t need no damned information to beat ‘Bama,” Brown says angrily.

#### 4. The Quiet Coup

Bates and Brown are best of friends on the ship. In the touch football games on deck, Bates is always a halfback and Brown was his blocker. No one hardly ever touched Bates in the games. Both were in rock bands in high school and share an interest in music. Brown still fronts the leading rap group on the carrier. They hang out a lot at the officer's Fantail Club on the aft of the carrier when they are off duty.

"What the hell is going on?" Bates asks Brown as they move through the passageways of the carrier, working their way upward towards light and openness and the smell of seawater."

Bates' cellphone rings.

It's ensign Derek Street calling, the guard outside the Captain's quarters.

"I thought I should tell you the Captain was taken into his quarters by two officers fifteen minutes ago," Street says. "They're still in there with him. I've knocked on the door a few times and went in and checked on him. The captain seems in good spirits. I can't see that anything is wrong. He is rambling on and on

about a lot of things. The two officers are polite. I know one of them. They order me not to say anything about this to anyone. So, here I am telling you this. Not even a fan of the Tide.”

A number of things suddenly rumble around Bates’ head.

“Stay where you are,” Bates says. “I’m there in ten minutes with Brown.”

“Jesus,” he says to Clarence Brown. “Things are a lot worse than we suspect. I think the Captain has been given LSD. The captain quarters ensign just called saying the Captain was taken to his cabin by two officers. He appears to be under the influence of LSD.”

Bates calls McKay as the two continue upward to the hanger of the ship.

“I think they’ve given the captain LSD,” he says. “He seems OK, but Lieutenant Brown and I are on our way to his room to check on him.”

“No, don’t do this,” agent McKay says. “We don’t want to show our hand.”

“I want to see both of you right now,” McKay says. “I have something to show you I think will be of interest.”

\* \* \*

A few minutes later, Bates and Brown sit across from agent McKay in the command center the FBI has set up. It is in area in the aft section of the carrier for visitors to the ship. There are a number of bedrooms and a large common work-

room. McKay sits in a corner area directing things on her cellphone. Bates and Brown sit down at her desk.

“This all makes sense,” Bates tells McKay. “I think they got to him by spiking his morning coffee. I left right after he got it, but it was unusual in that it was served to him by a new person. This never happens. It is always the same ensign serving him his coffee each morning. The Captain knows him and they talk and joke about things for a few minutes. This morning, a new guy brought the coffee and went off. I left right after that for our meeting, so I don’t know what happened after this.”

“That puts the Captain’s XO, William Benjamin, in command of the ship,” she says.

“Yes,” says Bates.

Mandy McKay extracts a file from a number of files on the table. The name William Benjamin is in large block letters is on it.

“It’s not surprising,” she says. “We’ve had him under investigation for some time now. Harrison and Benjamin are an odd couple. Old friends who have gone different ways in life. I suppose you know about Benjamin’s checkered past with drugs.”

“Yes,” Bates says. “There’s definitely a love-hate relationship between them. I’ve never trusted anything about Benjamin.”

“Benjamin can’t know we suspect him,” McKay says. “Our story is that the LSD was confined to just the ten and we’re heading back soon. You’ve gotta’ convince him of this. Go to the bridge and tell Benjamin everything is fine with the FBI. Tell him we’re satisfied we got all involved with the LSD ring on the ship. Say nothing about their connection to the kitchen. He can’t suspect anything.”

“It’s going to be hard playing up to that bastard for you,” Brown says.

## 5. The Bridge & New Commander

Brown heads back for a meeting in his office to apprise his NCIS officers what is happening and Bates jogs down the long passageway and up a set of stairs onto the big elevator that goes up to the flight deck. He walks slowly across the flight deck. He knows Benjamin might be watching him from the bridge and he doesn't want to appear anxious or excited about anything.

It's amazing Bates thinks as he walks across the deck of the carrier. A coup has happened, but everything is still exactly the same as before. The postmodern coup for sure he thinks, based on invisibility. The morning flights are still taking off on their daily missions. The same two crewmen are standing at the foot of the bridge elevator. The trip up to the bridge elevator and again all the fleet off to both sides, moving towards the East China Sea at 20 knots.

When they are moving at all. There have been some periods where the fleet has slowed to an almost idle speed as the brass in DC continued their negotiations with the Chinese. This is the kind of thing the Navy has seen all through its history on the build-up to naval confrontations. A number of games being played. More so than the usual number of games being played.

When the elevator arrives on the bridge Bates immediately walks over to Benjamin and salutes.

“Sir, I heard the news about Captain Harrison at the meeting this morning,” he says.

“Nothing more than a little food poisoning,” Benjamin says. “I sent him back to his room with the ship’s doctor. He gave him a sedative and he’s sleeping peacefully now. No need to wake him up.”

“Good,” Bates says. “It sounds like you have everything under control.”

“How did your meeting with the FBI agents go?” Benjamin asks.

“They interviewed the ten in the brig early this morning,” Bates says.

“They’re satisfied they’ve got the only ten on the ship. They’ve suspected this ten for a long time. They’re off this afternoon.”

“Good,” Benjamin says. “The problem is taken care of.”

He looked out the great window of the bridge.

“Now all we have to worry about is the Chinese Navy a thousand miles Northwest of us,” Benjamin says.

“Yes,” Bates says. “A fun thing to worry about.”

But there were other “fun” things to worry about.

## 6. A Foiled Scheme

By mid-morning, things in the huge kitchen area of the carrier are full of hectic activity as the lunch for 7,000 is prepared. The crewmember that served the spiked coffee to the Captain is Manchow Knoa and he works in the ships' kitchen as one of the key assistants to the head chef. He walks down long aisles supervising the preparation of lunch. There is a worried look on his face.

There are some suspicious people all over the place with instruments checking the food.

He finds an isolated area and makes a call on his cellphone.

"I told you never to call me directly," Benjamin says answering the call.

"We've got some serious trouble," Knoa says. "The FBI is all over the kitchen. There's no way they're not going to find something."

"I'll handle it," Benjamin says. "Just proceed towards lunch as usual."

"I thought you said the FBI was leaving," Benjamin says to Bates.

"This afternoon," Bates says.

“They’re investigating the ship’s kitchen right now,” Benjamin says. “They don’t look like they’re ready to leave.”

“News to me,” Bates says. “It’s hard to keep up with them.”

There is a worried look on Benjamin’s face.

He walks away, and Bates can see he is meeting with a few of his top aides. Bates stays on the bridge for a while. It seems the best place to keep an eye on Benjamin. In half an hour, Bates gets a call from agent McKay.

“We found a massive amount of LSD in the lunch food today,” she says. “This was the big plan of Benjamin, to spike the lunch food after taking Harrison out of commission. By afternoon, the plan was that this carrier would have thousands on LSD. Are you near Benjamin?”

“Yes,” says Bates. “Maybe thirty feet from him. He has been making calls and has had some quick huddles with officers.”

“I’m going to give him a call now and tell him we found LSD all over the lunch food and we’re confiscating the ship’s lunch,” agent McKay says. “I’m ordering fresh food to the ship from the FBI’s own kitchen and it’ll be here in a few hours. Just stay where you are. We don’t want Benjamin to know we suspect him. I want to convince him we are still searching for the ringleaders of this whole thing.”

A few minutes later, Bates sees Benjamin answer his cellphone. Bates can see that Benjamin is greatly disturbed by the call and immediately conferences

with a small group of officers. Bates sees him call a few officers over to him and give them commands.

Benjamin then walks over to Bates.

“The FBI has found LSD in the kitchen and are destroying the lunch food,” he says. “They’re sending in a fresh supply and will monitor the serving of it.”

“Lucky they caught this,” Bates says.

Benjamin just looks at Bates trying to gauge what he knows. Is Bates playing him for a fool?

“Yes lucky,” he says but he says this under his breathe to no one in particular.

\* \* \*

Twenty minutes later, Bates is at agent McKay’s command post. A number of communication devices have been set up and agents scurry in and out with updates on their investigation.

“We have a transport on its way with clean food for the crew,” she says. “It is packed and supervised by the FBI. It’ll arrive in two hours.”

“Have enough to arrest Benjamin?” Bates asks.

“More than enough,” McKay says. “He’s connected to Manchow Knoa who we’ve been watching for some time now. Knoa is one of the top assistants to the ship’s chef. The ten crew members caught in the bust last night all work for Knoa.”

“The plan was to take Captain Harrison out and then spike the food on the ship,” Bates says.

“Yes,” says McKay. “Your drug bust came at the right time. A few hours later and this would be a ship full of psychedelics. Benjamin is being arrested now. I’ve sent agents to arrest the officers watching Captain Harrison and see that Captain Harrison is Ok. We’re giving him some drugs to counter-act the effects of the LSD. Special FBI stuff.”

## 7. Harrison Regains Command

The arrest of Benjamin is not meant to look like an arrest. The FBI and Clarence Brown with a few of his NCIS agents surround him on the bridge and quietly walk him off the bridge and take him down to the brig where he joins Manchow Knoa (who has just been arrested) and five others. Also taken to the brig are a number of officers reporting directly to Benjamin.

Captain Harrison is brought back onto the bridge with the help of two FBI agents. They put him in the large captain's chair right behind the main wheel on the bridge and stay by his side. He is still drowsy and coming down from the LSD, but he is slowly becoming coherent. The special stimulates they've given him have helped bring him back to reality. For all outward appearances, Captain Harrison is back in control after the brief command of his XO. The clean food from the FBI as well as FBI chefs and kitchen staff would be arriving soon. The FBI would monitor all the food on the ship in the next few days.

Bates goes up to the bridge from the FBI command post and heads directly for Captain Harrison. He bends over and hugs the Captain. The Captain is still groggy and glassy-eyed and speaks with a slur.

“Good to have you back,” Bates says.

“Worst cup of coffee I’ve ever had,” he says slurring his words together like someone drunk.

“It won’t happen again,” Bates says.

“A close call,” Captain Harrison says. “Good thing you and Brown decided to bring in the FBI.”

“We had no idea it was so bad,” says Bates, “We just found out that Benjamin’s people were going to spike lunch today with LSD.”

“Jesus,” says Harrison.

\* \* \*

The bridge elevator door opens and Mandy McKay comes out followed by some agents. They walk over to Captain Harrison.

“I’m agent McKay,” she says extending her hand to Captain Harrison.

The Captain extends his hand to agent McKay from his chair.

She can see his strong, rugged face. But it is a face that is still flushed and fragile from the LSD experience. She knows that it is not something that simply comes and goes, quickly forgotten.

“Welcome aboard,” says the Captain.

“It’s an honor to be on board,” she says. “I’ve heard much about you.”

“I usually don’t take LSD with my morning coffee,” Harrison says.

McKay smiles.

“It was good Lieutenant Bates and Brown called us in last night,” she says.

“It was much bigger than we originally suspected. The ten crewmen we interviewed claimed they were acting alone but they were all on the kitchen staff working for someone we’ve been looking at for some time now. I suspected something was going on with the food supply and had my people sweep the kitchen. It was lucky we closed the kitchen before lunch or this ship would have been a mess.”

“You think this takes care of the LSD problem?” Captain Harrison asks.

Agent McKay smiles and shakes her head.

“Nothing is ever going to really take care of the LSD problem,” McKay says. “In our culture, or on a navy ship. We stopped the problem on your ship this time but there will be other times. This is something you need to learn to live with these days.”

“What went wrong with Benjamin?” the Captain asks. “I’ve known him for so many years.”

“Nothing went wrong with Benjamin in his own mind,” McKay says. “He never believed he was doing anything wrong but offering something new to the Navy. After all, LSD created a new life for him when he was at a low point in his life. I’ve read his file more than a few times. In his mind, he is the definition of an American Patriot, the ultimate Navy hero. Certainly, he is not someone who feels he’s a traitor to his nation. As I’ve told Lieutenant Bates, we’ve seen a lot of use on other high stress naval ships like yours. Mostly it’s the incredible stress associated with the job. But sometimes there are those on a mission to change the world like Benjamin.”

“Do you think Benjamin is a major player in this LSD stuff?” Bates asks.

“Benjamin is one of the leaders of a group the FBI had been watching for a while called the New Patriots (NP). They are like a secret club of military leaders who have taken psychedelic drugs and believe there has to be a new direction in the military. They do not believe in the single dose introduction of LSD into members of the military. Rather, the NP is spreading LSD to the massive audiences at one time by spiking food and drinks. There is a special concentration of the NP on ships because of the isolated nature of them. We’ve found the effects of psychedelics increase at sea, away from culture and the bounds of logic.”

“What’s their purpose?” Harrison asks.

“To give as many possible the experience of LSD,” McKay says. “They feel few will take LSD just for the sake of trying it. It has a bad rap from the 60s as you know. By spiking food and drinks with LSD at large events, the NP gives large groups the experience of LSD. Many have religious experiences they never thought possible. The experience changes their perspectives. They can go back to their jobs and careers, but they have been changed in some way. We’ve found that there is less belief in war and more in peace. The NP has in effect ‘recruited’ new members.”

“A dangerous mishmash of fantasy and New Age thinking,” Bates says.

“Yes,” McKay says. “But it’s impossible to deny that many given the LSD have undergone some fundamental changes in their perceptions of the world. It’s something we’ve studied for quite some time now.”

“What happens now?” Captain Harrison asks.

“We leave in a few hours for DC with Benjamin and the others in custody,” she says. “We’ll be interrogating them in a few days. We’ll have more information soon. I’ll let you know if any of this relates to your ship.”

Captain Harrison extends his hand upward from his chair to shake McKay’s hand.

“I appreciate your work,” Harrison says.

McKay shakes the Captain’s hand.

“Lieutenant Bates and Brown have been very helpful,” McKay says. “They coordinated the incredible cooperation we had from your crew.”

Harrison looks at Bates.

“He’s my wingman,” Harrison says.

McKay looks at Bates.

“A good one,” she says. “Everyone needs a wingman like Lieutenant Bates.”

McKay grabs Bates’ arm and pulls him with her as she walks towards the bridge elevator with her agents.

“You need to keep a close eye on the Captain,” she says as they stand next to the elevator. “Effects of LSD have a number of lingering effects and we’re not sure exactly what he was given. There are some new strains of LSD we are just learning about. He’s not out of the woods yet.”

“I understand,” Bates says. “I won’t let him out of my sight.”

“Call me if you see anything unusual,” she says.

“I will,” Bates says.

“You and Brown would make decent FBI agents,” she says as the elevator door opens and she is gone.

## 8. The Confrontation is Avoided

The FBI medications to counter-act the effect of the LSD have helped Harrison get back to his normal state in just a few hours. He can feel reality coming back to him but there is something a little different in the world he comes back to. Something ever so slight has changed. He finds himself having quick flashbacks to the experiences under the psychedelics.

He spends the next few hours in meetings with the other captains of the fleet in the bridge meeting room. Everyone is hopeful something will be worked out with the Chinese. The President is currently meeting with the Chinese President in Washington and there are positive reports of their meeting. There is a renewed hope the confrontation will be called off and the Chinese will reopen the East China Sea.

A little after one, the big cargo plane lands with food for the carrier and FBI personnel to work the kitchen and mess area on the ship. The FBI is controlling all food on the ship during its mission. Things are much more under control than this morning. Not long after the cargo plane arrives, the FBI plane takes off carrying

the agents and Benjamin's group back to DC. Besides Benjamin, a number of his officers have been charged in the plan to spike the food.

The Captain sits in the captain's chair on the bridge with Bates standing behind him. They watch McKay's FBI plane take off heading east to Washington DC.

"It's interesting what McKay said about how the New Patriot group recruits new members," Captain Harrison says. "Not by convincing people to try LSD but simply secretly giving them LSD."

"Like spiking it in coffee," Bates says.

The captain looks at him but doesn't say anything.

\* \* \*

An aid for Harrison comes quickly across the bridge of the ship holding the "Red Phone." The Red Phone always means the President is calling.

"The president is patched into all captains and commanders in the fleet," the aid says as he hands the phone to Captain Harrison.

"I'm sitting here with President Hoi of China," says the President. "I am happy to tell our fleet commanders that a settlement has been negotiated and I'm giving orders for the fleet to turn around and head back to Pearl."

Harrison pumps his fist in the air.

"Yes!" he says.

He can hear cheers from the other captains and commanders on the phone call.

“I want to thank all of you for your incredible bravery in being part of this mission against the Chinese navy. It’s been the most serious incident in most of our lifetimes. Thank you all. And, god bless America.”

Harrison repeats the words “God bless America” and he can hear it repeated by the other captains in the background.

The bridge is getting excited and beginning to cheer as they watch Captain Harrison.

“It’s off!” Harrison shouts after he gets off the phone.

There is wild cheering on the bridge and soon the news spills over from the bridge onto the flight deck and the other parts of the carrier. That’s the way news sometimes gets disseminated on the carrier, even with all the expensive communications equipment they have – like water flowing from the bridge to the lower parts of the ship. On the flight deck crew members are dancing in joy and hugging each other. Horns and whistles and bells are going off. Out over the Pacific there is a good-sized fireworks display.

\* \* \*

Within an hour, the new course for the carrier and fleet is sent from DC. The Secretary of Navy comes on in a joint conference call and wishes everyone smooth

sailing for home. The great carrier begins its turn starboard until it has turned 180 degrees and is heading back to Pearl Harbor. Fifty ships of the mission fleet are behind it.

“This is time for celebration,” Captain Harrison says to Bates. “I want you to organize the biggest celebration this ship has ever seen. You know all about this. You’ve planned some great events before. Call the kitchen and tell them we want a barbecue out on the flight deck tonight. Cancel all flights from the carrier tonight. Nothing lands or takes off tonight. I’m going to get a lot of crap from the brass for all of this but the hell with it. Call up that band the crew has put together. Get them on the flight deck. I want this to be a big celebration.”

“A celebration of turning around from the Chinese,” Bates says.

“No,” Harrison corrects. “A celebration of being alive. And being in the navy to boot.”

## 9. A Celebration

Bates coordinates the entire event with his contacts on the ship. Everyone liked Bates with his sly cynicism and humor and easy-going manner. Besides, he had once played in a rock band and knew his music. The party on the deck of the nuclear aircraft carrier Lyndon Stuart Dodson that night was one that crew members swear will be talked about for years. The entire flight deck was decorated in red, white and blue and there were a number of stages with bands formed from crew members. You could find some pretty good musicians in a population of seven thousand young people. The FBI created a fantastic barbeque and dinner. No one had eaten this good for a long time.

Alcohol is allowed that night by order of Harrison, but he has his officers make sure it was consumed in moderation. There were no problems that night as the recent announcement by the President to call off the Chinese confrontation had created a true spirit of community within all the crew members no matter what gender, race, religion or social or economic group they were in.

Captain Harrison has never seen such unity of spirit on his ship. He and Bates stroll around the flight deck, the Captain wearing informal clothing and Bates dressed in a t-shirt and jeans. Harrison had never seen such a sense of unity in his crew. They are always so divided up with their specified functions and duties and their cubbyholes of life on the carrier. It was good to have most everyone on flight deck and celebrating together without any knowledge of rank. This is one of the orders Harrison has issued. No one was to be in uniform. Yes, there were some navy rules violated by this order, but the Captain would face the consequences later.

It was a sight neither Harrison or Bates had never seen before, the entire flight deck shut down and the crew in the best spirits they've ever been in. Crewmembers are constantly coming up to Captain Harrison and thanking him.

“Thank the President,” he says to them.

\* \* \*

Harrison and Bates walk towards the fantail of the carrier and down a set of metal steps to a small ledge with a railing overlooking the Pacific as it rolls under the ship and into the west. They lean on the railing holding two bottles of beer. There is the strong smell of the sea. Lashes of saltwater hit them now and then.

“How do you feel?” Bates asks.

The captain is quiet for a few moments.

“I’m really not sure,” he says.

“What do you mean by that?” Bates asks.

“I mean it’s a new feeling for me,” Harrison says. “Something I haven’t experienced before.”

Bates laughs and takes a long drink of his beer.

“I hope you haven’t become a recruit for the New Patriots,” he says.

The captain doesn’t acknowledge this but continues looking at the ocean.

“There were things about my experience with LSD that weren’t all that bad,” the captain says. “It’s one of the few experiences I’ve had I simply can’t get my arms around.”

“I’m not all that surprised,” Bates says. “I saw you in your room when you were on your trip. Of course, I was worried about your safety when I pushed my way through the officers into your room. My hand was close to my revolver. I said hello to you but you were totally engaged in writing at your desk and not aware of too much of anything else. I sat on your bed for five minutes as two officers stood by the bed. You had a happy expression on your face. I saw the photo of your son on the desk in front of you, I saw his birthday card to you. You had taken both of them off the shelf and you seemed to be writing something in the journal to your son.”

“It was an amazing feeling,” Harrison says. “It’s hard to describe but the ship was far away and I was far away from the ship. In different places at once. I was with my son back in one of those summers I was in port. It was such a good summer. Then, I was back in freshman year at the Naval Academy. It’s funny how the LSD can put you in all of these directions and places at once.”

“So, you can better understand someone like Bill Benjamin?” Bates asks.

“Better understand Benjamin,” Captain Harrison say, “and maybe, better understand myself.”

Bates looks at Captain Harrison for a few moments after he says this. But the Captain is looking out at the sea behind them. In the light of the full moon, Bates can see there is a look of contentment and peace on the Captain’s face. It was a look he had never seen before as the Captain never seemed contented with anything but always pushing for something more. Now, he seemed to be in some place of rest. It is that same look he saw on the captain’s face when he went to check on him in the captain’s quarters when he was under the LSD. It concerns Bates. The captain is a strong man. The strongest man Bates has ever known. But his strength now seemed locked in some type of battle with this new part of his personality.

The two stand in silence against the fantail rail taking sips of their beer. Tonight is clear and the ink black night sky is full of the sharp pricks of stars.

After a few moments, Bates raises his bottle of beer.

“A toast,” he says. “The confrontation is over.”

The captain raises his bottle and clicks it against Bates’ bottle.

“Yes,” he says. “But maybe it’s only beginning.”

## 10. Captain's Quarters

Captain Harrison and Bates leave the aft railing on the fantail and walk up the ladder to the flight deck and Bates leaves to hang out with a group of old officer friends. Captain Harrison makes his way down to the captain's quarters. The inside of the ship is abandoned tonight with everyone on the flight deck and hanger, celebrating. The only person in sight is ensign Street who sits outside the Captain's Quarters.

“Are you feeling better Captain?” Street asks.

“Much better,” Harrison says. “Thanks for asking.”

The captain goes into his room and sits on his bed and punches it. He thinks about how strange the room seemed to him a few hours ago. It was no longer the dull blue and gray of navy color but had exploded into all sorts of colors. He walks over to the desk and picks up the journal he was madly making notes in a few hours ago. wrote in. The words make little sense to him now, but they were the most important words in the world when he was writing them.

In front of him on the desk, he spots an official navy envelope addressed to “Captain Harrison” and opens it and reads the note inside.

“Hope the experience was worthwhile,” it reads. “My first trip was a worthwhile experience for me. Here’s another tab if you’re so inclined. Bill.”

Captain Harrison lays down in his bed thinking about the envelop Benjamin’s people had left on the desk. In a second, he catches himself thinking about this. What a stupid thing to think about. But his mind drifts back to thinking about it as if pulled to it by a perpetual magnetic force. What was it about those hours after taking the LSD that were so powerful? So powerful he could not get the visions and images and thoughts out of his mind. They continued to swirl around his mind like some force from the heavens that refuses to land.

The news about the negotiated peace in the China-U.S. stand-off is good news. The best news. But somehow it comes with another piece of good news that might be even more important news. What was this news? Captain Harrison could not quite place it yet. It seemed to be something in continual development inside his mind like the oil blobs in one of those old lava lamps of the 60s. It seemed to present a new possibility in life to him. What was this possibility? It seemed related to the possibility of discovering a new perspective in life. Harrison never considered he needed a new perspective on life. Maybe he did? Damn it, he told

himself. It wasn't the type of question the captain of a nuclear carrier was supposed to be asking. But he couldn't stop himself from asking the questions.

## 11. The New Patriots

As the celebration continues on the flight deck and hanger area of the carrier, a small group of officers meet in a small room in one of the lowest places of the ship, even lower than the brig area. It is a room that few on the ship knew about but it was where members of the New Patriots met. There were a lot more of them onboard than just the ten that were caught today by being stupid.

The group sits around a metal table. The light is dim. It is not light meant for meetings. The faces of the officers around the table float in the dimness like the orange faces of people around a campfire. There is a female officer and two male officers. The female officer is the leader of the group. She is a woman in her late-twenties named Lieutenant Engle. The male officers are Lieutenant Mallek and Haroldson.

“It was close with the FBI,” Engle says. “Luckily they didn’t look beyond our food people. If they were on board any longer they might have discovered our group. I just talked to the Commander. The plan is still on. He thinks it’s the

perfect night for it with the confrontation called off and the crew full of alcohol and passed out in their quarters. I assume Captain Harrison is in his quarters?”

“My people saw him leave the flight deck an hour ago and go to his quarters,” Lieutenant Haroldson says.

“Good,” Lieutenant Engle says. “He’ll be out like the rest of them.”

Lieutenant Engle pulls out a map of the ship and unrolls it on the table.

Flashlights come out and point at the map.

“We move out with our teams at two hundred hours,” Engle says. “Everyone takes the anti-LSD pills at this time. We hit all four of the ship’s ventilation areas at 2:15 am. By three hundred hours, the ship will be full of LSD. That’s when I want Lieutenant Mallek’s team in place running the ship.”

“We’re ready to go,” says Mallek. “I’ve got our navigation and communications team ready to take over. We shut down all flights until tomorrow at noon. We’re telling the others in the fleet we are making repairs on our flight deck. My people will be running the bridge.”

“Good,” says Engle. “All our safety procedures will be in full operation. Our people will close down access to the nuclear weapons. Everything must be as safe as possible under the circumstances. The New Patriots are visionaries for a new type of peace not terrorists.”

“Good luck,” Engle says as they get up from the table. “All of realize we’ll be caught by NCIS and court-marshaled. This is the price for introducing a new vision into the world.”

Lieutenant Engle raises her hand in a fist. Mallek and Haroldson also raise their hands with fists and all three knock their fists together.

“To a new vision,” they all say in unison.

## 12. The Air Plan

It is one thirty in the morning and everyone is gone from the deck of the carrier except for Clarence Brown and his full team of fifty NCIS agents on the ship. It is Brown's birthday today and they have thrown a party for him. The party is still going strong, but the rest of the crew have retreated below the flight deck to their quarters.

Lieutenant Bates is standing next to Brown having a beer. At 6'7" the huge Brown towers over Bates. The big celebration has ended and the deck is being cleaned by a number of people on the ship's cleaning crew. Brown and Bates are discussing plans for their upcoming shore leave in Hawaii. Colored lights have been strung around the flight deck and now sway in the wind. Bates and Brown talk LSU football. There is anticipation about the LSU v. Alabama game in a few weeks. Both feel the Tigers can take the Crimson Tide, but it will be a close game.

One of Brown's NCIS officers comes running towards and hands him a notebook.

“We searched Benjamin’s special locker area on the outside of the bridge just as you ordered Lieutenant Brown,” says the NCIS officer. “The area the FBI didn’t inspect before they left. We found this.”

Bates and Brown look at the notebook. The words “Air Systems” are written on the cover of the notebook. They move over to a light on the flight deck and begin leafing through it under the cone of yellow light. There are diagrams of the ship’s key air ventilation systems on the pages of the notebook. All of the internal air systems for the ship. On one page, there are four Xs marking various places on the ship.

“Jesus Christ,” Brown says. “All the major air systems on the ship and the major areas where they’re accessed.”

The two men look at each other.

“What do you think it means?” Bates asks.

“I think we’ve just found another plan to spread LSD on the ship,” Brown says.

Brown calls all of his agents together and tells them about his suspicions.

“I want everyone to take the anecdote for LSD that the FBI left with us,” he says. “It should be working immediately when you take it.”

He turns to his top officer Lieutenant Bob Henry.

“Lieutenant Henry, once you take the anecdote, I want you to lead teams to the four major air intake areas in the ship’s system,” Brown says. “We’ve practiced the drill before, you know where they are. I suspect you’ll find some people by them with canisters. Do anything you need to do to disable them and seal the canisters. Report back to me immediately.”

Henry salutes and sends some agents to get the anecdote from the locker on the flight deck.

Clarence Brown stands in the center of a huddle of his agents, Bates next to him.

“I suspect that they’ve taken over the critical functions on the ship,” Brown says. “They might be crazy but they’re not going to let anything happen to the ship. They want to have a lot of people experience LSD but they don’t want to do any damage to the ship. This is not the style of this group.”

Brown calls out another of his top agents Lieutenant John Renfro.

“I want you to form groups and police the major parts of the ship,” Brown says. “The nuclear reactors, the engine room, the electric system. You know the drill. I want you to place your people in charge and arrest those who are currently running this stuff. I’m sure that they will not be under the influence of LSD as they’ve probably taken an anecdote. Maybe, they’ll be wearing air masks. I want

them all arrested, and I want you to place your men in place until the regular crew comes off their LSD trips. For the next hours, the NCIS is running this ship.”

Renfro calls out names and a large group assembles around him.

Brown gathers his additional agents around him.

“I need five agents to go with me to the bridge to find out who’s driving the ship,” Brown says.

He hands out the anecdote pills and they head off to the bridge. Bates takes a pill and follows them.

It is as Brown suspected. The bridge is full of composed crew members and things seem under control. His agents surround all exits to the bridge. There is no use arresting everyone on the bridge right now. They will be arrested when the regular crew is ready to regain control of the ship. An ensign that Brown knows is steering the carrier.

“It’s not surprising Ensign Jones,” he says. “I’ve had you under investigation for a while now.”

\* \* \*

In ten minutes, the NCIS team has taken their anecdotes and are heading to the four areas of the ship listed where the air intake systems are located. It is 2:30 am and the NCIS team finds crew members wandering the halls with dazed and confused looks on their faces. Some crew members lay in the passageways, some

seem to be sitting in circles having discussions. Some crew members are sprawled out in the passageways of the ship. It is a very strange sight which the NCIS has never seen on the carrier.

The four areas where the air intake systems are located have some crew members that appear sharp. They are immediately arrested and large canisters are removed from the air intake systems and the systems closed up. It is too late, though, the LSD has been put into the air system of the carrier.

Lieutenant Henry goes to the bridge of the ship to tell Brown about the raid.

“We didn’t get to them fast enough,” he says to Brown. “We pulled the canisters and shut off the LSD air, but they had already done their damage. We arrested fifteen crew men. I suspect the stuff’s been flowing through the ship for some time now.”

“Who is the ships commander now?” Brown asks Bates. “Captain Harrison is in no capacity to run the ship.”

### 13. A New Vision

At that moment, Captain Harrison enters the bridge.

Brown and Bates are startled to see him as he looks unaffected by the LSD. Brown rushes over to pull him out of the bridge room to the fresh air by the railing on the outside of the bridge. Bates follows. Brown gives him one of the pills.

“What the hell is going on?” Harrison asks.

“Where have you been Captain?” Bates asks.

“I couldn’t sleep,” Harrison says. “So, I left my quarters and walked back to the aft of the ship and just listened to the party on the flight deck. I had a lot of thinking to do.”

“They got into the air filtration system,” Lieutenant Brown says. “We found a notebook of Benjamin in his special area off his room. It listed the key entrances to the air system on the ship. I sent my team to stop things, but we were too late. I figure the LSD went into the air system a little after two hundred hours today. We stopped some of it, but it’s reached most of the ship.”

Captain Harrison is quiet for a moment.

“That son-of-a-bitch Benjamin,” he says. “He wins in the end and he’s half a world away.”

“I suspect this is something pulled by the New Patriots,” Clarence Brown say. “They have their own people controlling the ship right now. They’ve all been given the same LSD anecdote we’ve all taken so they are not affected by the LSD. I have my agents watching them until the regular crew gets back to normal. I’ve given them orders to arrest all of them when this happens.”

Captain Harrison goes back into the bridge and Bates and Brown follow. Inside, Harrison immediately goes over to Ensign Jones at the wheel of the carrier and pushes him away from it.

“This is my ship he says,” taking the wheel.

Lieutenant Bates comes up and stands next to him.

“I was worried about you,” he says.

Captain Harrison takes a piece of paper out of his pocket and hands it to Bates. It is the note with the LSD that Benjamin left in his room. Bates reads the note:

“Hope the experience was worthwhile. My first trip was a worthwhile experience for me. Here’s another tab if you’re so inclined. Bill.”

“That bastard,” Bates says.

“I did a lot of thinking tonight,” Harrison says. “I tossed the LSD tab over the railing. It’s a battle, still a confrontation for me. But I’m up to fight it.”

Bates pats the Captain on the shoulder.

“It’s good to have you back Captain,” Bates says.

“Tomorrow we’re going to have thousands on the ship facing this confrontation,” Harrison says. “It will not be an easy thing to confront. Maybe even tougher than the Chinese navy. But maybe it is good that I was given the LSD and can better understand the confrontation they face. We’ll get through it.”

For the next few hours, the carrier moves east as the light of a new day forms over the eastern horizon. Brown comes and goes from the bridge giving Captain Harrison updates on the condition of the crew. The ones who were not affected as much as others are moving back into their regular positions but there are still thousands of dazed crew members wondering around the ship, out of touch with where they are.

Captain Harrison has given the great wheel of the ship to one of his trusted Lieutenants who escaped the drugs last night. He stands outside on the slim deck of the bridge and leans against the railing. Bates is next to him.

“Now there is the best vision I’ve seen in a long time,” Captain Harrison says.

On the horizon is the first sign of the jagged Hawaiian Islands.