

## **Chapter 15** **Hotwired**

The boat rolled on slowly throughout the day. The air was cold, but Doug stayed out on deck most of the time to sit in the warm sunlight. It was hours before they saw Provincetown, and after that the sands of Cape Cod coursed by for the rest of the day.

As for gasoline, Jonathan had extra cans stored in the bulkhead. Twice he asked Doug to empty one into the tank. He saw only a couple more in storage, which was worrisome. Doug had no idea where his dad got the boat or how it happened to be stocked for a getaway.

Kand stayed on deck most of the day as well. He closed his eyes and sat peacefully with the boat rocking beneath. Where he got this peace, Doug could not tell, but he was envious. Doug spent the time with his heart pounding, searching the horizon for any sign of police or agents. A couple times, he was startled by boats coming toward them, but they turned out to be pleasure craft.

Long before Doug stopped feeling jittery, the cold wind came up and the sky began to grow dim and red. They had turned west, and Doug realized it was going to be another night before they saw New York.

Doug felt the boat rise as Jonathan stepped up the throttle. The swells were bigger and the boat began to rise and

fall down the back of each wave. Doug noticed that the water was a lot glassier, as if the boat shrunk to match the chop.

As Doug stood watching the ocean waves, a feeling he had not been expecting swept over him. His skin turned hot and he began to sweat. His head throbbed and his stomach suddenly felt very empty. Then there was the unmistakable tug in his throat and the taste of bile. He was seasick.

Doug wheeled quickly toward the port rail and started to retch uncontrollably. At first there was nothing. Dry heaves. He hated this, but there was nothing he could do since he had not eaten anything since the fruit at breakfast. Finally, something came up, mostly liquid. The attack stopped and he could sit back and watch the horizon again.

“Look far!” hollered a voice. Doug turned around and saw Dad looking down from the cockpit. He looked back to concentrate on the wheel. Kand walked over to him.

“Are you feeling better?” he asked. Kand kept his eyes on the distant horizon.

Doug looked back at the edge of the sea and the sickness ebbed as he kept his eyes focused on the distant sky.

“Yes. Thank you,” Doug answered. Then Kand squinted at something on the horizon.

Doug turned his head to see what Kand was squinting at. There was a light. Two, actually. They were each blinking at a different pace. As the sea and the sky grew dim enough to blend, he got the notion that the lights were above the horizon. Doug turned to ask Kand if he saw the lights. He wasn't there.

Wordlessly, Kand climbed the ladder to the cockpit. Jonathan turned as Kand pointed at the lights. The boat suddenly turned to starboard, almost ramming Doug into the rail. He heard a slight beeping sound from the bridge.

“Get on the raft!” yelled Jonathan. Kand bounded down the ladder to grab the bellows. He opened a bulkhead to grab two life vests. Doug was surprised that he knew exactly where to find them. The oars were in the raft. Kand had already gotten everything piled on deck as Doug was still getting to his feet.

“Grab this,” Kand yelled, pointing to a rope that was wrapped around the raft pontoons. The boat rose a little more now that Jonathan had kicked up the throttle even more. The boat threw up a high rooster tail of water from the stern.

Doug looked back at the lights, which were dead-on behind them now. He could see that they were clearly above the horizon now, and they were accompanied by lights on the ocean beneath them. There were four lights total, and maybe more. Over the screaming engine, he could hear a faint chop from the lights in the sky. Helicopters. They were found.

With a new understanding of what was going on, Doug took the raft line and picked it up. Kand tied the bow line to the stern rail, and came to the rear of the raft where Doug was. He took one side opposite Doug, and nodded at him to lift the raft. The engine was the heavy part, and they were on both sides of it. Kand motioned toward the stern rail, and they staggered toward the rooster tail and heaved the raft over the edge.

At this speed, the raft was thrown around in the wake like a soda can. Kand leaned over the stern rail to take the line. Even with the heavy engine, Kand had a nearly impossible time controlling it. He motioned to Doug to get into the raft.

“You gotta be kidding!” Doug yelled.

“Get in!” he said, and looked at the helicopters. They were now obviously helicopters, and not a very long way off.

Doug took hold of the raft line and stepped into the rubber boat. This was insane. The flying water immediately drenched his clothes. He put one foot in the raft, but kept one leg in the big boat for as long as he could, until I felt the exact right moment to take the plunge. He stepped off the deck and over the rubber pontoon, and was finally in the raft. Doug’s knuckles turned clear white as he grabbed both lines.

Doug’s own weight settled the raft, and Kand motioned for him to take the life vests. He just looked at Kand, who kept the vests held over the raft, and Doug crawled forward to take them. With one hand on the raft, he took the vests. The thought occurred to Doug that they should already have put them on.

Next, Kand handed over the oars. Doug could not suppress the thought that at this speed, one of these oars was going to spin out of control and clock him. He let go with his other hand and dug his feet into the sides of the raft. The raft was filling with freezing water, but the raft was a self bailer, with lacing around the edge of the floor.

Doug took the oars and slid them down the raft. Kand threw the bellows at him, and Doug was glad it was a good throw, because he didn't catch it. They landed in the raft.

Finally, Kand picked up a strap with some tools attached to it and wrapped it around his shoulders. He then took hold of the line and climbed into the raft himself. He did this effortlessly, and Doug thought that this was a guy to have around in a life-or-death situation. It took a minute, but it finally occurred to him that they were in the middle of one. This was his first Nantucket sleigh ride.

As they flew along behind the speeding boat, the engine was screaming right in front of them. Doug could barely hear anything else. Kand motioned toward the engine at the back of the raft. They were being dragged along by the rope and Doug started to wonder why the hell they needed their own engine.

Then Kand pulled a large knife out of the tool belt and reached high above the raft. He swung the knife downward and forcefully, slicing right through the taut rope.

Suddenly, the raft was calm. The boat was racing away, and the darkness suddenly completely enveloped them. Kand slid past Doug and put the engine prop down. He pulled hard on the string. Nothing. He pulled again. Again, the engine choked and sputtered, then died.

"Grab this," Kand said. The ocean now swelled over their heads, and Doug could not see the helicopters. He stood up and took the string from Kand, who bent over the engine and fiddled with something. Then he looked back at Doug.

"Pull it!" he yelled.

Doug pulled the rope and the engine sputtered again, this time with a little more purpose. It coughed a bit more, and then it was running solidly.

"Get down!" hollered Kand. He wheeled around and grabbed the throttle. The raft lurched forward, throwing Doug backward. He was on his ass at the front of the boat, and all he could see was the sky as they raced away. He sat up and saw Dad's boat speeding away to the right, and behind them he could see the helicopters between swells. They were very close now, but he relaxed a little as he realized their path still took them toward his dad and away from them. The other lights, on two large boats, were still well behind them.

Jonathan was the decoy, and it was working. He was far more prepared, and much more in control than Doug had ever seen him. He hoped that he was prepared enough for a visit from these agents. The guys who had thrown Doug and Kand out of a helicopter were ruthless.

His dad had been operating as a private spy! This was completely new. He just hoped that the fishing ruse would work. Somehow, Doug figured his dad knew what to do.

Kand turned the throttle up a little more and the raft threw up its own spray. The little boat rode far up the front of each wave and down the back. On the back side, they got a little push, and the raft went even faster. They were surfing.

Doug looked back and saw the helicopters pass directly behind them. The searchlights started swinging back and forth.

He saw dad's boat slow down as the helicopters finally caught up with him. One of them wheeled around in front of the boat and shone its light directly on the bridge. The boat had stopped.

Kand turned the raft toward the shore. They were a long way out, but once they turned they caught a little more of the current, and the sparse lights on the land ahead started to get closer. Before long, the sky was almost pitch black, and the water was just as dark. Only a dim glow separated the land ahead from the sky above it.

The sea was no longer glassy, as whitecaps formed on the head of each wave. The raft surfed more easily now, and the waves seemed to follow them in. In the wind, Doug suddenly felt how cold and wet his clothes were.

He looked back at the helicopters. They were now only lights in the sky again. There were five of them, so Doug knew that the two vessels had caught up with his Dad. Hopefully, he had bought them some more time.

The beach started to get closer and bigger. It was incredibly dark, but the sand seemed to glow under the starlight. Kand throttled down a tiny bit and the boat started to scrape the bottom. Suddenly, the engine struck the sand and both of them were thrown forward. The raft had run over a sand bar, but had enough speed to get over it. The engine, though, had stopped.

"Here," said Kand, handing Doug an oar. The beach was now only a few dozen yards away. They paddled the boat across the relatively calm channel behind the sandbar.

Actually, Kand poled the boat, because the channel was only a few feet deep. They struck the bottom again, and this time, the only option was to walk up the beach in ankle deep water.

Kand and Doug stepped out of the boat and dragged it across the shallows until they were finally on dry sand. He turned and looked back at the lights. Without them, Doug would have no idea where the sea and sky met.

"Grab this," said Kand. He handed Doug a line from the raft. They dragged it further up onto the beach. Kand went to the rear to look at the engine, and shook his head. Doug joined him. The prop was bent upward at a weird angle. It was done.

"That's okay. This was a one-time trip," said Kand. He walked to the side of the raft and pointed at the other side.

"Pick it up," he said. "We don't want to leave a scar across the sand."

Doug picked up the raft. It was heavy at the rear with the engine. He and Kand carried the raft up to the dunes where tall grass and dunes could conceal it.

"Leave it here," Kand said, and they put the boat down in a large ditch behind a sand dune, well hidden by tall grass.

Doug picked up one of the unused life vests and put it on. Kand raised his eyebrows at him. "They're warm," Doug said. He had done this on whitewater trips. Even when soaking wet, the extra bulk could help block the breeze.

Kand picked up a life vest and felt it. It was soaking wet, but he put it on and grinned at Doug.

They left the raft in the depression in the dune and walked up to the peak. They saw no sign of life anywhere, just a lone streetlight a hundred yards off, and Kand looked at Doug and shrugged. They walked down the dune.

Doug had no idea where they were. Cape Cod somewhere, perhaps. He had been to Cape Cod, but had never seen much of a blank area like this on the shore. He was only there a couple times, but he didn't like the Cape very much. On most summer weekends, the roads were clogged with giant SUVs. To Doug, it was mostly vacation mansions and miniature golf courses. There were also some lobster shacks, motels, and lots of touristy village shops selling wicker junk.

All Doug saw was darkness, except for the streetlight. Even in late fall, there was no way this was the Cape.

"Where do you think we are?" he asked Kand.

"This is probably Long Island," Kand said. "Very eastern Long Island."

"Are you sure?"

"Only by our pace and by the time we were traveling," Kand said. "It's a guess."

Doug looked at the toolbelt Kand had grabbed right before they left his dad's boat. He was still wearing it under the life vest. Kand looked down at it.

"This," he said. "Your dad showed me where this was before you got up this morning. It was with these life vests."

"He had an awful lot of stuff stashed on that boat," Doug mentioned.

"Yes. I became aware of that when he picked us up. I thought it was his."

"No way. We never had a boat like that."

"I am not aware of cabin cruisers with that kind of speed, either," Kand said.

"I guess there's more to him than I knew."

Kand stopped to look at Doug. "You've found out a lot you did not know today," he said. Then he turned to continue his trudge through the sand.

Doug had never been to Long Island. Apparently there were resort communities and mansions there, like the Cape, but he did not see any. They might have been in the middle of a nature preserve or something like that. They kept walking toward the streetlight. A couple of times Doug turned to look back at the lights on the ocean. But now, even those were gone.

After a few minutes' walk, they came to a barren circle of asphalt lit by the streetlight. Though the area under it was brightly lit, the shadows it threw made it impossible to see very well. The road ended here, in this lonely circle. There were no markings anywhere. No signs, and no paint. Even the light pole was bare of any mark. It was a wooden utility pole that looked like it had been weathered for decades.

"What do we do?" Doug asked Kand.

Kand stood for a minute, looking around. He looked at the ground as if studying the sand grains collected in the asphalt. Then he looked up at Doug.

"You said your friends were in New York?" he asked.

“Right.”

“How do you know?”

“I received a call last night. It was Rich. He bought the watch from you.”

“I know Rich well,” said Kand.

“It was garbled, like it was in his pocket. He was probably walking, or being dragged somewhere. I don’t know, but one of the voices asked about something, and Rich answered in a way that told me where they were.”

“What do you mean?”

“He said ‘it’s a replica, the original is from 1358.’ He meant the suit of armor from Copley Square. That exhibit was moved to New York.”

“The antique exhibit,” Kand said. “I remember that. Oh, no.”

“Oh, no what?”

“That suit has this on it,” he said, pointing to his grid icon, still tied onto his leather necklace.

“Yes, it does, but-“

“He is in more danger than you realized. They all are.”

“They all?”

“Those fools. It is not a plaything. It is not for their little game.” Kand stormed off away from the streetlight. He started to walk quickly along the road. Doug ran to catch up.

“What is not a plaything? The grid?”

Kand did not slow down. Doug was pretty sure he stepped it up.

“We do have to get to them, but not for the reason you think.”

“Are the Free Majority people going to do something to them?” Doug asked, with barely enough breath left to walk.

“No, well, not purposely. They need your friends to help them.”

“So they are probably okay.”

“No. The Free Majority have set themselves up in a trap, and your friends with them.”

Kand started jogging. There were more lights ahead. He wanted to ask him more but the jogging was taking all the breath he had. The chill air was making itself known now, as his lungs took in large gulps of it. He could feel his chest contracting, and it felt like it might burst. Kand pulled ahead, and he looked like he had no problem with the cold.

They approached another lit area, and this time there was a small building standing between the dunes. Kand slowed to let Doug catch up, and they started walking slowly toward the building. They veered toward the tall dunes on one side of the road to allow them to hide if they saw anything.

Doug could not exactly figure out why they needed to stay in the shadows, but he did know it felt like the right thing to do. The building looked very simple; cinder block construction with an aluminum roof. The building was unpainted, but the roof looked like it was green. The stark light from the two streetlights above made it hard to tell.

The door to the building faced them, and it also appeared to be dark green. The only windows were high, almost under the roof overhang. There was one to each side of the door, and they were not lit.

A large yellow sign was bolted to the wall next to the door. It looked like it held a set of instructions, as if it was the rules for a public beach. If the building was a shower facility for a beach, it didn't make much sense being a twenty-minute walk from the water. Maybe they were on an island.

They were not close enough to read the building sign yet, but they were suddenly aware of other small fixtures around. Besides the utility poles, there were tall metal fenceposts running along the top of the dunes on both sides. Doug did not see any fencing, but it looked as if somebody was in the middle of installing one. One of the posts had a small piece of equipment on top. He went cold with the thought that it might be a camera.

They stayed on the road. The row of fenceposts dropped down toward the building. Doug saw a few more of the camera-like attachments on posts up ahead. Then they saw the Jeep. Kand and Doug stopped in their tracks.

There was a Jeep parked next to one of the buildings. It was not one of the 30-year old models Doug had seen in war movies, but a very up-to-date vehicle. It had a hard top, and just happened to be painted military green.

Kand and Doug ducked further beside the dune. They realized that anybody who had wanted to look through a

window and see them had already gotten a few minutes' worth of opportunity. Their real fear was that somebody was in the Jeep. They could drive to them in about 20 seconds.

Kand and Doug climbed the dune to the top. It was the tallest dune they had seen so far, and once they got to the top, Doug looked around and saw lights in the distance. There was a town not too far away, but between them and that town was a huge expanse of darkness. It could have been dunes, marsh, or open water. There was no way to tell.

He looked back down at the building. Beyond it was more darkness, then a row of streetlights that left the building and continued until they blended with the town far away. They ducked into a pit in the side of the dune.

"What do you think it is?" Doug asked Kand. He had no idea why he thought Kand might know.

"This is a military reservation. An outpost," Kand said.

Doug was not very surprised. "Great," he huffed.

"No, no. It's okay. Some of these places are unmanned. They are a listening post more than anything. It's likely that whoever comes here only checks instruments, and then leaves."

"By our luck, it looks like someone is here right now," Doug fretted. They both looked down at the Jeep.

"Yes," Kand said. "That is good." Then he turned his attention to the tall pole next to them.

"What is good?" Doug asked.

Kand did not answer, but was using the Global Grid icon to pry a cover off of the base of the pole. He finally did,

and there were wires inside the pole. Kand reached in and took hold of the wires.

“What are you doing?”

“Putting some earplugs in.”

“Huh?” Doug asked as he saw some sparks fly out of the compartment. Kand quickly pulled his hands back. He looked at Doug and smiled. Then he stood up and started running down the dune toward the buildings.

“What?” Doug whispered loudly. Kand only looked back and waved him on. Doug chased him carefully down the dune. “Then what are you doing?” he hissed at him.

“Would you rather walk out of here?” Kand asked.

“You are stealing that truck?”

“Yes,” he said, and started jogging slowly as they reached flat ground again.

Doug could say nothing else. They were too close to the building. Kand got to the driver’s side of the Jeep and ducked. He peeked into the windows. Doug ducked right next to him.

“It is military,” whispered Kand.

“Great,” Doug sighed. “Try the door.”

Kand opened the door as soon as Doug said it. Of course, his meaning was sarcastic. Doug’s mind began to fill with the entire catalog of Bad Things That Happen To You When You Steal Military Equipment. Still, without hesitation, he skulked around the back of the Jeep and opened the passenger door, which Kand had unlocked.

As Doug got in, Kand whispered, “Don’t shut the door.” Doug understood. They had not been heard yet.

“You’re going to hotwire it?” Doug asked.

Kand looked at him with a pause. “Yes,” he said as he took the grid icon in his cut hand, then reached underneath the steering column and pulled out a wire harness. Without taking his eyes off of Doug, he scraped the coating off of a couple of wires with the icon, and touched two of the wires together.

The Jeep started. It was a standard shift, and Doug suddenly felt the truck roar into reverse. A light came on inside the building. Kand shifted into drive and peeled out. The Jeep had pretty impressive pickup.

“You can shut the door now,” Kand said. He quickly pulled his door shut.

The Jeep barreled around the corner away from the buildings. Doug did not see a door open nor anybody coming out. Kand was following the lit road that looked like it led to the town. Doug looked at him in horror as they drove.

“What did you do to the light pole?” Doug asked.

“Oh, that,” said Kand. “That was the master satellite linkup. That’s what all those poles were for. I took out the communications array.”

“What about cell phones? Radio?”

Kand was relaxed. “Not to worry. Radio is not secure, and the only cell available was the array. These poles only carry one cable, see?” Kand pointed up at the poles overhead.

“Power only. A shortsighted idea. But they probably wanted to avoid using the public utility system.”

“How the fuck do you...? Never mind,” Doug said. He figured Kand was probably not through completely blowing his mind.

The Jeep was pretty stable even speeding across the rough, cracked pavement. The road had probably not been repaved in decades. They lurched from side to side as the Jeep skidded around each hard corner. Doug could never get used to a Jeep. The few times he had been in one he was always sure it was about to flip over. This trip was no different.

They drove for miles without seeing any more buildings or vehicles. The road was dark for long stretches between light poles. The last stretch was a long straightaway, and Doug started to see a gate across an intersection up ahead. It was just a dim silhouette.

“Kand,”

“Yes, yes. I see it.”

The Jeep skidded to a stop right in front of the metal gate. It was one of those security gates made of heavy pipe that would most likely have stopped a little thing like a Jeep. Doug hopped out and ran over to the latch pole. As he guessed, the gate was locked shut with a padlock.

Doug shook his head at Kand. He saw Kand instantly look to each side of the gate to see if he could drive around it. The right shoulder, right behind Doug, was barely wide enough

to walk around, but the left shoulder looked just wide enough to fit the Jeep, but it was on a steep slope down into the marsh.

As Doug stood by the padlocked gate, Kand threw the Jeep into reverse and backed up a short way. Then he pulled forward toward the edge. As he hit the shoulder, the Jeep banged against the pole hard. Kand then cut the wheel and skidded the rear tires partially into the water. Kand gunned the engine, and the front tires spun and pulled the Jeep back up the bank on the other side of the gate. Kand spun the Jeep back around and swung the back end toward where Doug stood.

“C’mon!”

Doug ran to the door and hopped in. He shook his head. There was more going on with Kand than he had said.

They sped into the town, passing beach houses and finally pulling into a small downtown area. There was little traffic, and Kand kept the pedal down. They raced through town until they started to see signs that promised to lead them to the highway. By now, whoever was in the building had found the communications down, and was probably walking toward the gate. Whoever it was had a much longer way to go before they would reach any telephone.

As to where they washed up, Kand was right. Doug saw that they were driving through Montauk, Long Island. New York City was now just 3 hours away. He felt relief knowing that Doug and Vanessa were probably okay, he knew where they were, and they were likely catching up to them.