

**PRIVACY
WARS:
A CYBERTECH THRILLER**

J O H N D . T R U D E L

DEDICATION

This novel is dedicated to my wife Pat. Without her bright spirit, patience, and untiring support, *Privacy Wars* would not exist. She made this all possible.

Privacy Wars is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My agent, Tony Outhwaite, believed in me. Thank you, Tony. We're getting traction at last.

Ernest Hemingway once said, "There is no such thing as writing, only rewriting." Novels are indeed that way. I would never have made it without my small band of critical readers and editors who assiduously scanned years of drafts with eagle eyes and brutally honest criticism. Each time they touched my words, my novels got better. Kay Jewett deserves special credit.

Two departed friends deserve thanks: Captain Langford C. Metzger, a Vietnam hero who gave me early encouragement, and Gerry Drew who gave me a book about ancient civilizations and mysterious pre-history that inspired this novel.

I've been blessed to live in a culture that values exceptionalism, and to have a life that has touched interesting events and people. It was freedom, innovation, and a career in technology at the peak of "the American Century" that helps give context for my writings, and it is freedom, innovation, and technology that let me break through and get my books published.

A work assignment in Egypt let me visit pyramids and tour closed sections of the Royal Museum in Cairo. Another adventure let me pilot myself into dirt strips at inaccessible ruins in the Yucatan, allowing a unique view of these relics in the context of the local geography.

Over my years in High-Tech, I worked with ELINT (ELECTronic INTelligence) systems. Later, as a consultant, I had assignments for commercial technology firms dealing with computer and network architecture, including trusted/managed networks and the Internet. Michael Crichton's novels were an inspiration. I regret that I never got to meet him in person.

Several inventors and legal experts helped with patent and Intellectual Property issues. Alex Johnson deserves special credit for keeping me true when writing against a complex landscape of high stakes innovation, constrained by technology, law, and global economic policy. Dr. Roger Smith applied his critical eyes to scrutinizing my final drafts for obscure errors.

Many have contributed to the publication and success of this book. Thank you all for your inspiration, friendship, and support. Finally, you, my readers, are most important of all. Meeting you at events, signings and book clubs is a special treat, albeit sometimes an adventure.

Thank you for choosing *Privacy Wars*. If you like it, please post reviews and tell your friends.

TESTIMONIALS FOR *PRIVACY WARS*

“You’re in the first row of a slowly climbing rollercoaster. Behind you, closing fast, are the American President and his enforcers, assisted by UN Peace Forces and a powerful foreign government—all bent on your annihilation and that of your technology. Then prepare for a dizzying plunge into a breathtaking, unexpected conclusion. It’s a ride worth taking with author John D. Trudel whose writing skills will captivate you.”

WR. Park, Author of twelve acclaimed suspense-thrillers

“*Privacy Wars: A Cybertech Thriller* hit me as such a realistic storyline that it could easily be a non-fiction in the not so near future. The loss of privacy and the government intervention into the private and corporate worlds were way too real. I have a hard time focusing on reading, but this read was way too good to put down for very long. The characters were very lifelike and the descriptions were awesome. This is a definite “5-star” read. It is riveting and the action lends it to someday be a movie and definitely one I would love to go see. John Trudel has a winner here.”

G. R. Holton, award winning Author of DEEP SCREAMS

“Trudel has a remarkable talent for maintaining an atmosphere of brittle tension. This, combined with an uncanny instinct for what perplexes most of us in this new tech age and its inherent threats to our privacy and our basic freedoms, makes for a gripping thriller.”

Roger Croft, Author of Spy Thrillers in the le Carré tradition.

“In *Privacy Wars*, John Trudel knows his audience and like a guided missile seeking the target, accurately and explosively delivers in his new book on Cybertech.”

John Zodrow, Author of THE SINS OF WAR

“In *Privacy Wars*, John Trudel pens a Thriller that is a sure bet to grab you, carrying you along on a trip into the darker side of technological intrigue. Trudel’s characters are gritty, genuine, and vulnerable; his plots masterfully crafted. *Privacy Wars* will propel you into another fascinating read in the wake of last year’s *God’s House*.”

David F. DeHart, Author, SHADOW PLOTS

“Remember when you read your first book by an authentically professional author? This is another one of those times. John Trudel’s *Privacy Wars* is a unique work of sheer audacity, and is a certain winner among those who love a mystery that creates a futuristic-but-palpable synergy of international gangsters, brilliant technological acumen, the dynamics of irrational political power, and the essence of free-market societies. Don’t miss this one!”

Ron Ruthfield, Author, THE CAPITAL UNDERGROUND

“John Trudel’s *Privacy Wars* does more than just provide plenty of entertaining reading. It issues a warning to all lovers of freedom that freedom is what we lose when we grant power to others. This thriller has elements of *1984* and *Atlas Shrugged*, but is replete with modern technology and high-tech-based adventure. Highly recommended!”

Joseph Badal, Author of SHELL GAME

“You have zero privacy anyway. Get over it.”

Scott McNealy

CEO, Sun Microsystems, January 1999

PROLOGUE

The overall effect was deliciously subtle.

Keigo Ouchi and his men were dressed in Western business style with dark suits, white shirts, and subdued ties. Their clothes were expensive, the suits of Savile Row “bespoke” quality, and the fit was impeccable. Still, the image projected was subtly wrong, just a notch off.

They all dressed the same and little showed through the facade of genteel civility except slight bulges in their suits and the snake tattoos on their right hands, only partially concealed by Italian Super Fine Herringbone shirts with heavy gold cufflinks. The visitors showed just a little cuff, not too much, and each the exact same amount.

John put their shirts down as custom-tailored, and costing something north of \$300. A person could buy a good dress shirt off the rack for thirty bucks and cover the tattoos if he wanted to. Obviously the lapse was intended. It sent a signal to those paying close attention.

They pretend to be businessmen and we pretend to believe it, John thought. *They look like textbook versions of 1960’s IBM executives, except smaller, Asian, better dressed, with stylized crew cuts, and with an understated, thuggish overtone.*

John Giles might have dropped in from a different planet than his visitors. He was still adapting to civilian life, learning his job. Last year he’d gotten in trouble for being candid in public statements about the investment community and dysfunctional Washington policy. *The Wall Street Journal* called his remarks, “Refreshingly honest,” but *The New York Times* dubbed him, “Brutish,” and on its front-page, no less.

His casual remarks set off a media circus. He was called “Iron John,” and the name stuck. His supporters spoke it with respect, lauding his integrity, but his critics were numerous, organized, and vitriolic with their demagoguery.

John’s investors and directors weren’t amused. The fact that Cybertech was closely held and doing well deflected some of their anger, but he got the message. *Stay under the radar.*

His son Will had been furious. “Jesus, Dad. Get some couth training. We don’t have time for this shit.”

Cybertech didn’t need money, but did require goodwill. Global commerce was perilous. Free markets got the blame for societal problems, and garnered hatred from powerful enemies. So did success and prosperity. A small firm like Cybertech needed all the friends it could get.

Everyone in business did. A weakened America was struggling back from astronomical deficits and a dark period of crony capitalism, corruption, socialism, and frequent national embarrassments. It was a long hard road. Businessmen were no longer demonized, but neither had they regained respect.

This was a time for CEOs to tread softly and deliver results. *Best to keep a low profile, practice humility, create jobs, and regain trust.*

America was relearning how it had once become the shining city on the hill, but it was a slow process. The capitalists who’d created the greatest prosperity in the history of the world were gone, and, with a few exceptions like Bill Gates and Steve Jobs, forgotten.

John now accepted education and negotiation as part of his job, and diplomacy and patience as needed skills. He’d done his homework, but the *Yakuza* didn’t pass out Org Charts or wear rank on their collars. He was watching his visitors politely, trying to assess their roles.

Ouchi was upper management. He was at least a sub-family chief, a brother or *Kyodai*, perhaps even a *Shatei-gashira* who reported directly to the country boss.

John glanced down at the cards arranged carefully in front of him on his dad’s old desk. Engraved, not printed. He touched Ouchi’s, feeling the raised letters and the quality of the fine card stock with his fingertips. It said “Economic Development.”

Yeah, right.

Couth training or not, this meeting with the *Yakuza* was odd. The meeting had been strongly encouraged, but he had no idea why. *Max Banks said to meet with these people, and he’s an undersecretary. Does that mean what they’re doing is officially sanctioned?*

John wondered if even Wall Street stalwarts like Merrill Lynch or Goldman Sachs merited such special consideration from the State Department these days. It seemed unlikely. Someone in Japan’s diplomatic corps must have been owed a favor.

Ouchi had been doing the talking while John kept a polite smile on his face and jotted notes. His mind raced as he tried to assess the man, to discern the true purpose of his visit.

The man on Ouchi’s right was named Iwamoto. His card said “Technology Ventures.” *Why is he here?* He’d not spoken, but his eyes were coldly alert, watching and analyzing.

John tentatively classified Iwamoto as non-operational. Probably one of the staff specialists, an advisor or *komon*.

The two on Ouchi’s left – Kuroda and Kume – were enforcers. They were here ostensibly as bodyguards. That was obvious fiction. It was like keeping savage tigers to give kiddy rides at the zoo. *Intimidation*, John thought, *or is it more?*

Those two probably had their bodies covered from neck to calf with elaborate clan tattoos. Street thugs who’d worked their way up.

Kume was short but massive. John studied his hands, callused from years of martial arts. *His job is to hurt people. He’s the muscle.*

Kuroda was gaunt, almost emaciated, with long slender fingers and dead eyes. *That one’s a stone killer. When you stare into the abyss the abyss stares back at you....*

There was no soul behind those eyes. Kuroda didn’t even blink. Whatever was inside that skull, it was dark and scary.

Ouchi finished talking and looked at him expectantly. John smiled, but said nothing. He’d spent duty time in Japan and knew the protocols. The person who spoke first was at a disadvantage.

The silence lengthened into minutes. Finally Ouchi spoke. “We offer you a substantial sum of money, Colonel Giles. And other considerations of even greater value. With our assistance and backing, you’ll become wealthy beyond your wildest dreams.”

No point antagonizing them, John thought. “Your offer is generous. Would you like more tea?”

Ouchi pinned him with a sharp look. “We’ll help you with export licenses, permits, and distribution. We can triple your sales into Japan by the end of the year.”

I’ll just bet you can. John glanced over to the right at Cybertech’s security chief, Harry Conners. Old Harry wasn’t much to look at. He was bald as a bowling ball and had a face only a mother could love. His nose had been broken numerous times and part of his left ear was somewhere back in Tibet.

Harry was leaning casually against the wall with a short-barreled 12-gauge pump gun cradled like a baby in his massive arms. There was no one better to have covering your back when the fecal matter hit the fan. He shrugged and snuck John a wink.

Iwamoto noticed John’s inattention and muttered something in soft, rapid Japanese.

Something ugly flickered in Ouchi’s eyes. “He says you don’t show us proper respect.”

“I’m sorry he feels that way.” John kept his tone neutral. “You’re my guests. I just offered you tea.”

“Don’t patronize me. You test my patience, Colonel.”

Unusually direct and unmannerly for a top Japanese executive. John frowned politely and said nothing, as if shocked at the outburst.

Embarrassment ghosted across Ouchi’s face, and he dropped his eyes. *Interesting. I think he’s been directed to threaten me. How far does he plan to take it?*

“We’re here to do business,” Ouchi said.

John put on his most attentive look. “I’m listening.”

“You should listen with more care. I just made you an offer you can’t refuse.”

John moved his lips into a faint smile. “Do you watch old gangster movies?”

Ouchi gave a shake of his head.

“It’s not important. Is there anything else you wanted to discuss?”

That prompted rapid words in Japanese from Iwamoto. Ouchi responded and a heated discussion ensued. John waited patiently until

he saw the two goons starting to tense. Kuroda slipped a hand under his jacket.

The group froze as Harry crisply pumped the slide of his scattergun, chambering a round. **Clack-Chunk**. The sound was harsh in the quiet elegance of John’s office. Harry eased to the side where he had a clear field of fire, his weapon leveled and his finger on the trigger.

“Excuse me.” John cleared his throat. “Mr. Ouchi?”

Ouchi raised his hand and Iwamoto instantly fell silent. “Yes?”

“I’ve treated you with respect.” John looked directly into Ouchi’s dark eyes. “You’re my guests. It would be unfortunate if our discussions turned unpleasant.”

Kume spoke for the first time, a sharp question in Japanese.

“We don’t want an accident,” John said softly.

Ouchi looked at him appraisingly. “Do you threaten me?”

“I protect myself. If any of your men shows a weapon, my guard will kill him. His scattergun has seven magnum loads of double-ought buckshot. Each contains nine pellets a third of an inch in size.”

A long moment passed. The room was very still.

“We’re not your enemy,” John said softly.

Ouchi snapped an order in Japanese. No one moved. He repeated his command more harshly, raising his voice and spitting out the words. His men slowly and carefully put their hands on John’s desk in plain sight.

Ouchi took a deep breath. “We’re here to do business, Colonel Giles, not to harm you. Why won’t you take our money?”

“We do take your money. You’re a good customer, and we appreciate your business.”

“You know what I mean. We can offer more than simply being a customer, but you avoid discussion. Is it because we are *Yakuza*?”

John shook his head. *You almost lost control there, didn’t you?* “We’re not seeking investment capital at the present time. Not from anyone.”

“I saw the article in the *Times* last year.” Ouchi smiled, but the smile never touched his eyes.

“The reporter was arrogant.”

“He has that reputation. An asshole, as you Americans say.”

“I’m still learning patience.”

Ouchi glanced left, at Harry’s weapon. “Prudence might be a better

lesson. You don't want me for an enemy."

"I agree. It would serve no purpose."

"We can offer you more than any investment banker, and the best time to raise money is when you don't need it. Surely you know that. You're a smart man."

"I'm sorry," John said. "I'm not in organized crime, nor do I wish to be."

"A limited viewpoint. We have much in common. At the core, you're no different than us. Our nations have both survived bad leadership."

"Barely."

Ouchi almost smiled. "You resist oppressive government. You earn your living by helping normal citizens live their lives without government intrusion and interference. So do we. It's our cause, our heritage."

John gave a hand signal. Harry lowered his shotgun, slowly relaxing and leaning against the wall. The tension in the room dropped slightly.

"Did he get that gun from a museum?"

"Possibly," John lied. "Some prefer vintage weapons." The *Yakuza* favored archaic armaments, especially exotic swords and knives.

The old pump-gun had been Harry's weapon of choice since the Tibetan campaign, and to hell with the Geneva Convention. It had no batteries or microchips to fail, a hot trigger, and a simple mechanism that resisted jamming. Only a fool would stand up to a 12-gauge at close range. He'd seen Harry fire it faster than most people could trigger an automatic.

Tibet was a forgotten war. Except at the Staff College, where it was taught to exemplify the ultimate foul up. They'd sent green troops commanded by an ambitious barracks officer. The mission was spawned by humanitarian concerns and a plan based on bad intelligence. It was implemented with unclear objectives, inadequate support, and no contingency plans.

The result was what you'd expect: disastrous. The chaos was unbelievable.

When the relief force finally made it through to the survivors on the Tibetan Plateau, the Roof of the World, they'd found John and Harry barricaded in a cave. The plain in front of them was marred by large craters and littered with bodies and the wreckage of fighting vehicles, helicopters, and strike aircraft. Sheltered behind them were seventy-four wounded

men, all that was left of a battalion.

John had been a young Captain, and Harry was at his side when the President pinned Congressional Medals of Honor on their chests in a White House ceremony. That seemed a long time ago.

Ouchi looked left again, this time at Harry. "That's a most uncivilized weapon."

"But useful," John said. "You were talking about heritage."

"I was talking about common ground. Shared interests."

"I'm listening."

"We never had your 2nd Amendment. In ancient Japan, the servants of the shogun were the only people allowed weapons. Some were rogue *samurai* who terrorized citizens. They were called *kabuki-mono*, 'the crazy ones.' They'd kill for pleasure. Our forebears were called the *machi-yokki*, the 'servants of the town.' The *Yakuza* was founded by warriors who took up arms to defend the villages and towns from the crazy ones."

"What's that got to do with me and Cybertech?"

"Do you know how Interpol defines organized crime?"

John shook his head.

"The General Assembly of the Interpol member countries defines organized crime as 'Any enterprise or group of persons engaged in a continuing illegal activity which has as its primary purpose the generation of profits irrespective of national boundaries.' That definition fits your firm, Cybertech, perfectly, Colonel."

Ouchi held up one finger. "Cybertech is an enterprise." A second finger: "You generate profits worldwide." A third: "Some, including many in your own government, say your business, selling private encryption and security products, is, or should be, illegal." He spread his hands. "We are the same as you. You are the same as us."

"You play with words," John said. "Cybertech isn't in the same business as the *Yakuza*. We don't do loan sharking or money laundering. We do technology."

"You are naïve, Colonel. The reason the *Yakuza* can operate in the open is that we're not illegal. We're older than your country and we perform useful, even vital, services for our society. The financial practices you criticize are legal in Japan. We loan money when the banks refuse to do so. We help people.

“We keep neighborhoods free of violent crime. Because of *Yakuza*, Japan has one of the lowest crime rates in the world. People can walk around Tokyo with money sticking out of their pockets and not be fearful. The *Yakuza* provides needed professional services to our government. With our help, Japan has few terrorist problems.”

“Except for sarin gas on your subways,” John murmured.

“That was long ago and an isolated domestic incident.” Ouchi waved a hand dismissingly. “*Aum Shinrikyo* lost its status as a religious organization, its top leaders were promptly hanged, and the few surviving members became social outcasts with unhappy lives and no future. We leave them alive as an example. It’s a much better result than what America has achieved with Islamic fanatics, and the cost to Japan’s government has been trivial.”

John nodded. It was true. *Japan had avoided wars since Pearl Harbor, and had accumulated a hell of a lot of international respect over the years. If not for acts of God, like earthquakes and Tsunamis, Japan would be wealthy. Its technology was second to none.*

Ouchi held up his hand and turned it over, displaying the snake tattoo. “The *Yakuza* protects the downtrodden. The *Mamushi* is my clan’s emblem. Are you familiar with it?”

“No.”

“It’s a pit viper, the most deadly creature in Japan. It thrives everywhere because it has adapted to our society. So have we.”

“It’s unfortunate the *Yakuza* is associated with so much violence.”

“I blame it on television.” Ouchi’s expression was deadpan.

“Biased reporting?”

“Yes.”

John suppressed a smile. “What’s your point?”

“My point, Colonel, is that you need us, because Cybertech is small and weak. Powerful forces would like to take you over. You’re an irritation to governments all over the world, and especially your own. All governments want to control their citizens. You know this.”

John nodded.

“Your products get in the way of those in power. Someday a government agency or a crony competitor will take control of your firm. Perhaps the Chinese. It’s just a matter of time.”

“The problem concerns us. Why should it concern the *Yakuza*?”

“Any compromise of our personal privacy concerns us greatly,” Ouchi said. “We have no suitable substitutes for your products. If your government took control of Cybertech, they’d put in trapdoors to monitor us.”

“Just as they did with smart phones and the Internet? Just as China did with personal computers when they replaced IBM?”

“Exactly.”

“They might.”

“We can’t allow that,” Ouchi said. “We seek to invest in your company, to become your partner. Our offer is generous.”

John was shaking his head. “It won’t work. Think of Switzerland.”

“What are you talking about?”

“May I speak openly?”

Ouchi shot his men a cautionary glance. “Yes. Please do.”

“You don’t want to invest. Or help. You want to take us over.”

Ouchi was watching John carefully. “Go on...”

“As you say, Cybertech is small and weak. We’re important only because we provide something needed by those who are powerful. History has seen analogous situations and gives clues for how to handle this one. During all the bloody centuries of European warfare, tiny Switzerland was left alone as an independent nation, even during times when the entire world was engulfed in conflict.”

“I read history,” Ouchi said. “How is this relevant?”

“Why do you think that was? Partially because Switzerland threatened no one. Mostly because everyone agreed it was best for all parties if Switzerland stayed neutral. It served as an honest banker for all. To a lesser extent Sweden did the same, acting as an arms merchant.”

“What’s your point?”

“Do you think you’re the first group who wanted to control us, the first to pressure us or offer us wealth? Hardly. There have been many: telecommunications cartels, government agencies, foreign governments, entertainment firms, and others. In each case we’ve refused.”

“Entertainment?”

“It was inevitable,” John said. “Hard core pornography is a large market with many easily targeted segments. One half of one percent of men are pedophiles, a number which has included Hollywood Executives and

Members of Congress. It's an available market of 1.5 million customers in the U.S. and 34 million worldwide. That's just one market segment. There are many others.

"Pornography for pedophiles carries severe penalties, but is hugely profitable. Adult performers do it for fun and the young stars aren't paid. I'm told the profit margins exceed seventy percent."

"You're not involved in anything like that," Ouchi said. "We've checked."

"We're not, but some in the entertainment industry are. The main thing is customers will risk everything to get the pornographic product. Police stings are common and it's easy for the authorities to search people's computers, but pedophiles persist."

"They are compelled. Compulsion overwhelms them. The consequences of being caught will totally destroy them, but they still risk it. I'm told if their needs can be fulfilled safely, their appetite becomes insatiable."

"I begin to understand," Ouchi said. "Some interests wanted to adapt your technology to allow hiding such photographic evidence from sight. But you refused?"

John nodded.

"Digital porn can have a better profit margin than drugs," Ouchi said musingly.

"Possibly true, but it's not a business we want any part of. We don't make moral judgments about what others do. That's their business. But part of *our* business is to avoid being compromised. We work hard to be completely neutral and incorruptible, partially because it's our personal preference, but also because we dare not act otherwise."

Ouchi was watching him intently. "You *dare* not act otherwise...?"

"My government considers our technology to be, ah, rather sensitive."

"Very sensitive indeed...."

"If the *Yakuza* gained control of Cybertech, there would be repercussions. Someone would discover the connection. No matter how many bribes you paid there would be consequences. America has strong child-pornography, racketeering, and technology export laws. Most likely, Cybertech would be nationalized or shut down. Where would that leave you?"

Ouchi blinked.

"It would leave you with nothing. Haven't your strategists considered that? If not, they're fools or traitors."

Ouchi frowned at Iwamoto, who cringed visibly.

So much for Asian inscrutability.

Ouchi turned his gaze back to John. "There is another problem. Regardless of what we do, Cybertech may not survive as an independent company much longer. A group of large Chinese and U.S. firms is lobbying your government to allow a hostile takeover."

John laughed and shook his head. "Including Hollywood, no doubt...."

"Yes, among others. You knew that?"

He believes me. Good. "We're used to it. The threat has been hanging over our heads ever since the day we started the company. We've beaten back several takeover attempts."

"The risk troubles my superiors."

"Then here's what they should keep in mind: The main thing is we're neutral, like Switzerland. In addition, we are patriotic Americans. You, Sir, are not. If you try to possess us, you'll damage yourselves in the process. And if you destroy us, you *will* lose access to our products."

"I'm instructed to make you accept our offer."

"Then those who sent you are confused or mistaken," John said. "You can save money and accomplish what you want by simply using the *Yakuza's* influence to discourage those who seek to take us over. Use your strength against them, not us. We're not your enemy."

"You'll continue to sell us your products?"

"Our government favors trade with Japan. We value you as a customer."

"You don't sell outright. You license your products with restrictions on use."

"Of course. So does Microsoft. So does Apple. So does Sony. Licensing is a common practice in the industry. It is how we keep ownership of our intellectual property."

"If your use restrictions are violated, you drop customers and terminate support."

"It's a policy for your protection as well as our own. We make our use restrictions clear before we take on new customers. And we review them with our customers each year when we renew our contracts."

“What if we don’t want to be protected?”

“I’m sorry. Allowing customers to use our products improperly would create too many problems.”

“You don’t sell to the Islamists at all. We’ve checked.”

“Your information is incomplete.”

“Explain,” Ouchi said.

“We keep our customer lists private unless the customer chooses to make them public. I am allowed to say Turkey is a customer, as is the Saudi Royal Family.”

“It was in the press that you refused Iran as a customer.”

“So they said. We didn’t comment.”

“It’s legal to sell to Arab countries.”

“Sometimes. Some countries. It’s hard to know. The Mideast is still a big problem.”

Ouchi said, “I worry that one day you may see us as a problem too.”

“Not if you use our products responsibly. Do you know the parable of the golden goose? It’s a cautionary tale about the consequences of excessive greed.”

Iwamoto said something in soft Japanese. Ouchi didn’t look at him or reply. His full attention was on John. “We need to trust you and your products. This is essential.”

“That’s the nature of our business.”

“If we can’t trust your products, you’ll be dead. You need to understand this.”

“We do, absolutely. If we betrayed our customers, you’d have to stand in line.”

“There’s another issue. We must deal with you as a normal company if you don’t become our partners. Do you agree to pay protection money?”

“I’m sorry,” John said. “I can’t do that.”

Ouchi scowled. “Can’t or won’t?”

“We don’t pay anyone protection except for our legal taxes. Why should we pay for what you can’t deliver? You may be able to destroy us, but I doubt even the *Yakuza* can protect us if we fail to stay neutral.”

Besides, if we paid you, we’d have to pay everyone. There’d be no end to it.

Ouchi’s men tensed. In Japan, the only ones who refused to pay were those who couldn’t. The first warning was a brutal beating and only rarely

was a second warning given. Most chose suicide rather than face the *Yakuza*’s wrath.

Ouchi stared at John, taking his measure. The office was still, devoid of all movement and sound. The silence hung heavy. This was the key moment, and it could go either way. A word from either man and the room would explode in gunfire.

Kuroda and Kume kept their hands on the desk as ordered, pictures of frozen rage. Could Harry take out Ouchi and his killers before they reached their weapons? He couldn’t get them all.

Or could he?

The tableau was frozen in time, a hairsbreadth from raw red violence.

John was calmly looking into Ouchi’s eyes, waiting for a decision. He flicked his gaze to the right, then back, softly reminding him of Harry’s weapon. “You know what buckshot does at close range. Think about it. Your men might get me, but you won’t live to see it.”

Harry was in a combat crouch, holding his scattergun in both hands, his finger on the trigger. It wasn’t pointed at Ouchi and his men. Not quite.

Good. Let Ouchi think about it as long as he wants. No one needs to die. He has options.

The room was totally still, and a long moment passed. Finally, Ouchi nodded. “Under the circumstances, I think your independence is acceptable, Colonel.”

Ouchi spoke in rapid Japanese and his men slowly relaxed. Iwamoto’s hands were shaking and beads of sweat were running down his face.

John could smell the man’s fear. Combat always sharpened his senses. Colors were sharper and sounds were more intense.

Ouchi took a deep breath. “I’m inclined to believe you. I think you’re a man of honor.”

“As are you, Sir. You lead your men well.”

“One tries.” Ouchi flashed his teeth, acknowledging the compliment. “I’ve taken courses at your Harvard University and from your military exchange program.

“Be careful not to assume too much, Colonel. You’re fortunate, but this is not the end of it. I have considerable autonomy in this matter, for now. We’re divided about how to deal with your company. I was chosen because you’re in my territory, and I’m known to be more open-minded

than some of my brothers. Your words make sense to me.”

John nodded. Unseen, he quietly slipped his service .45 automatic from his lap into the soft briefcase on the floor.

“I’ll argue your case. Still, I may be overruled, and I need not tell you that direct orders must be followed. The next time we meet, it might be as enemies.”

There’s such a deep abyss under this tightrope we walk, John thought. Our friends are as dangerous as our enemies. Despite what I said, we’re not a sovereign nation like Switzerland. Despite what you said, there is too much blood on your hands. “I get the message. You’d kill me in a second if you had to.”

“With regret, I would. I’d drink a toast to you afterwards.”

John sighed, letting out his breath slowly. “We’re not a threat to you. We treat everyone even-handedly in our business dealings. Now may I offer you tea?”

This time Ouchi’s smile was genuine. “Perhaps another time. Our business is finished for the present. I’ll do what I can to discourage your enemies.”

“Thank you.” *We could damn sure use the help.*



In the lobby, Ouchi paused, turned and extended his hand to John. “It was a good meeting, Colonel. It’s a pleasure doing business with you.”

John smiled and shook his hand. Ouchi’s grasp was firm. “I’m glad we could reach an understanding.”

John and Harry watched Ouchi and his men walk to a waiting limousine and enter. John waved, and they watched in silence until the limo was out of sight.

Harry heaved a sigh of relief and clicked the safety on his shotgun. “That could have gotten ugly. I’m not as quick as I used to be.”

“You had them convinced,” John said. “That’s what counts. Besides, Ouchi is too smart to let things get out of control. He needs our products, and he knows it. We were as safe as being in church.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “What happened to the peaceful retirement you told me about?”

“Nothing is more valuable than personal privacy in today’s world.

Even a saint has something she wants to keep secret.”

“I don’t know any saints. What are you saying?”

“How well do you know my son, Will? Cybertech is his company, at the core. He invented the things we sell. Do you know what motivates him?”

“I don’t have a clue, Colonel. I’ve never really thought about it.”

“Will’s dream is freedom. He thinks people should be able to talk with friends in private without becoming targets. He’s right, but he didn’t realize how big all this was.”

“What’s that got to do with Ouchi?”

“Cybertech is a target. Will’s encryption is covert and impenetrable. Our customers who use it can stay hidden, but we can’t. We can’t run, nor can we hide.”

Harry thought for a time. “Shit.”

“Ouchi wasn’t here to invest. Not really. He came to check us out, to see us firsthand.”

“To see if we could protect ourselves.”

John nodded. “And if he could trust us.”

“Our customers don’t attract attention, but *we* do and it worries them.”

“I’m afraid so,” John said. “There’s more. Think about it: Why’d he back down?”

“Because I would have blown his fucking head off and he knew it. I could have nailed him and his skinny-assed little gunman with the same pattern.”

“I know.” John suddenly felt very tired. “But we can’t get them all, Harry. We’re vulnerable. He who defends everything, defends nothing.

“Ouchi backed down, because he knows privacy is no better than the people who sell it to you. Cybertech is successful, because everyone knows we keep the faith. Our products do what they’re supposed to, and we don’t put trapdoors into them for anyone.”

“Even crooks like the *Yakuza*?”

“Ouchi knows the rules. We follow the law, but we don’t betray our customers. If one of them is indicted on criminal charges, we put their product orders and updates on hold. If they are convicted, we blacklist them and comply with whatever a U.S. court lawfully instructs us to do. Ouchi mentioned Iran, but we’ve also blacklisted the ATF and the UN. We

don't talk about it, but the word gets out."

Harry blinked. "The UN?"

"They got nailed for raping the survivors in one of those squalid African conflicts. What we're selling is precious, like ice water in the desert. There are some we won't sell to, but none that we'll betray. It's a fine line, and the buck stops with me. If our customers think we can't be trusted, if they fear the water is tainted...."

Harry glanced down at the gun in his hands, frowning, then back at John. "We get hit from both sides?"

"All sides. Will's inventions tilt things a bit more toward freedom. That's going to stir things up. We're going to be a target. If people can't break Will's codes, someone, sooner or later, will try to break us."

"They should have made you a General."

John smiled. "Not much chance of that."

"I'm sixty-one years old," he continued in a soft voice. "I won't be around forever. My son is a genius at technology, but Cybertech is going to attract a lot of attention of the wrong kind. This was just the beginning. It's going to get worse."

"Will's never fired a shot in anger. Sharks like Ouchi would eat Will alive if he didn't have people like us to back him up. If anything happens to me, take care of Will. Find him some help."

"I'll do what I can, Colonel."

John punched his friend gently on the shoulder. "Thanks, Harry."

Side by side the two old warriors gazed out the glass doors across the parking lot. The clouds on the hills were dark, and the wind seemed to be picking up.

"I think it's going to rain," John said.

BOOK ONE: THE STORM GATHERS

"A Nation of Sheep will beget a Government of Wolves."

Edward R. Murrow

CHAPTER ONE

CYBERTECH PLANT, 3 YEARS LATER....

William Patton Giles took a deep breath. He let it out slowly and pressed his back into the contoured Aeron chair. He closed his eyes and tilted his head back, letting the chair do its work and comfort him. Mentally he counted to ten, by thousands, willing his muscles to relax.

One thousand and one, one thousand and two... I wish Dad was still around, he thought.

He opened his eyes and looked down at the gouges and grain patterns in the beautiful rosewood desk. He remembered the dreams that led him and his father to start the firm. *We were going to do some good, make money, and have fun.* It hadn't been much fun recently, and it was getting worse.

The desk had been his father's, one of the first extravagances they'd bought when Cybertech started making serious money. Will touched it gently with his fingers, remembering the past. The old desk had gotten a little beat up over the years.

The desk didn't match the bird's-eye maple on the walls or the tan and gold industrial carpet on the floor, but what the hell. John had picked the décor, and said he wanted contrast. He liked Brazilian Rosewood, but declared it too dark for the walls. His office once made the cover of *Forbes*: the writer called it "eclectic." Will smiled. Those were good times.

He remembered one of his father's favorite ways to relax from the stress of running a business: field stripping and reassembling his M1911A1 Colt .45 with his eyes tightly shut. The scars and gouges on the desk held those memories.

After Will became CEO, he'd had the holes in the ceiling repaired. After all, they were really his fault. Will once mentioned to his dad that Bill Lear had sometimes fired into the ceiling of his office for psychological effect. John liked the story, and thereafter was known to bring rowdy meetings to order by capping off a round or two. It added to his mystique.

The desk was special. Will would never dream of having it refinished, and, fortunately, John had limited his fire to the vertical. The maple paneling was untouched, and beautiful.

Will glanced at the photograph on the wall in front of him. Iron John, not in scruffy fatigues or desert cammo, but wearing expensive microfiber slacks and a silk shirt that accented his ice blue eyes. His eyes held just a tinge of amusement. That was John's "genteel CEO" persona, one forced on him by the family.

Not a day went by without Will missing his father and blaming himself. The FBI would not declare that John was dead. They insisted on keeping the file open and investigations active. It was like a wound that never healed. Until all that was resolved, Will was responsible, and alone. *So very alone.*

He sighed and turned his gaze back to the small group seated in front of his desk. They were all but snarling at each other. He slapped his hand on the desk to get their attention and waited for silence. It took a few seconds, and then he spoke as softly and politely as he could under the circumstances.

"Would everyone *please* shut up long enough that I can get a clear thought in my head?" He scanned their faces. "Thank you."

He glanced at his Research and Development manager. "We spent over twenty-five million dollars to develop the Andromeda platform so we could move up into high-end privacy servers. It is the most expensive product launch we've ever had. Now we have a problem?"

Clive Stuart was short, introverted, and unkempt. He removed his wire-rimmed glasses and cleaned them carefully. Bill Gates used to rock in his chair, but Clive cleaned his glasses.

Mostly. When stressed, he rocked too.

Clive looked the *ubergeek*, right down to the ponytail and sandals. It fooled people who didn't know him well, which was to say, just about everyone. In reality, he was a superb project manager, a paradoxical cross between a slave driver and a mother bear with cubs.

"We're about to have our ass handed to us on a plate," Clive said. "Two large multinationals have copied our parallel processor system assemblies and cloned the product. They're selling them in Europe for half what we charge. *Half*. And I had to find out about it from my engineers instead of from sales."

Will glanced at his sales manager. Olivia was in her mid-30s and was beautiful in a thin, dark, fashion model sense. Her dress was soft silk, her shoes were Ferragamo, and she wore no jewelry. Someone who looked into her eyes saw intelligence and alertness.

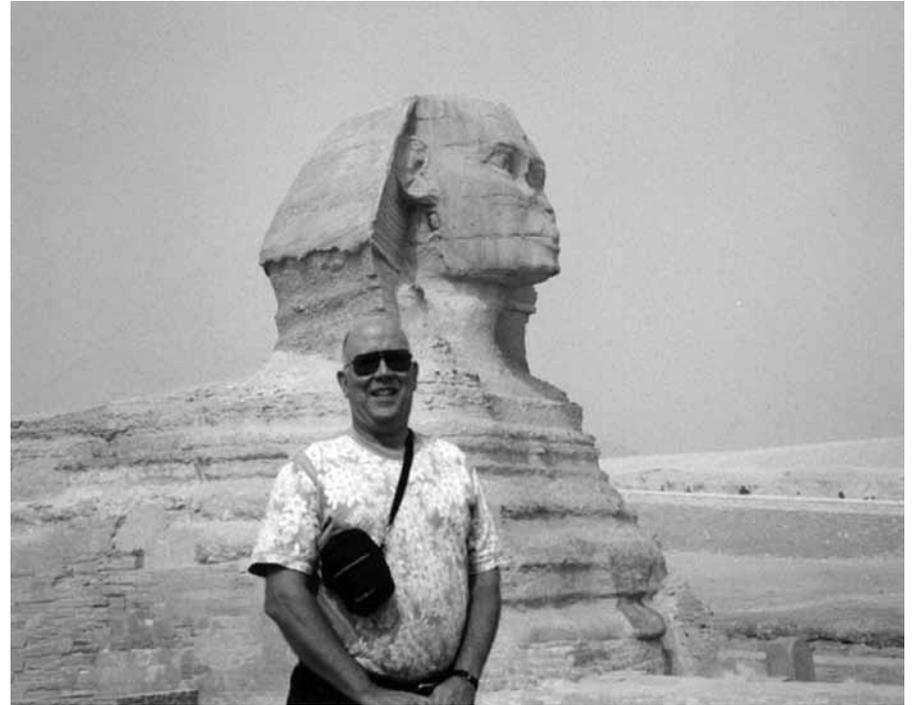
If that person looked deeper, he saw festering anger. She'd apparently nurtured it from her childhood. He didn't know why. Her parents were dead, and she never discussed her family. In addition to her anger issues, she was obsessive-compulsive, a condition which, at times, created problems that spilled over into the business.

Will once had to get Olivia out of jail for starting a riot in a fashionable nightclub. She'd hit a man in the face with a glass. The settlement, and keeping it out of the papers, had cost the firm six figures. Will told her it was an investment, that he'd keep her secret if she'd avoid alcohol and get her shit together. That had been almost six months ago.

He suspected she was lesbian, but no one dared ask Olivia about her personal life. She'd made it clear such discussions were unwelcome. She seemed grateful to him, but told him to mind his own damn business when he suggested counseling.

Whatever her issues, Olivia did her job. She kept the engineers honest. They liked her focus. The ones he'd spoken with privately said it was better than working with the gregarious, shoot-from-the-hip, disorganized schmoozers that were typically selected for sales managers. The sales force liked her too.

To catch her unprepared was rare, though she did tend to take criticism personally. Her anger, rage actually, was something else. Since their talk, she'd not thrown anything. He supposed he should take comfort from



About the Author

John Trudel has authored two nonfiction books and two Thriller novels, *God's House* and *Privacy Wars*. He graduated from Georgia Tech and Kansas State, had a long career in high-technology, wrote columns for several national magazines, and lives in Oregon and Arizona. Visit <http://www.johntrudel.com>.