

American Storm

by
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based on the original story by
David Aikman

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When men are afraid of heights
and dangers in the streets;
when the almond tree blossoms
and the grasshopper drags himself along
and desire no longer is stirred
Then man goes to his eternal home
and mourners go about the streets.

Ecclesiastes 12:5

INTRODUCTION

Could there be another civil war in the US? The answer is very likely to be yes. "American Storm" is the screen adaptation of the novel "When the Almond Tree Blossoms" by David Aikman, one of the most learned and well-published authors on international politics and future world states. David's genius is being able to accurately forecast sociopolitical outcomes through a thoughtful analysis of nexus points that signal tectonic shifts on the world stage. He brings his experience as a former TIME Magazine Senior Correspondent and Bureau Chief in Berlin, Jerusalem and Beijing. David's reporting ranged across five continents and more than 55 countries. Along the way he developed close relationships with world figures such as Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Pham Van Dong, Mikhail Gorbachev, Boris Yeltsin and Nelson Mandela.

Almond Tree was first published in 1993. Back then Deng Xiaoping's pioneering economic reforms were sowing the seeds of Communist China's emergence as an important economic player on the world scene. The collapse of communism in Russia had ended the Cold War, but the new Russian democracy and the presidency of Boris Yeltsin became a source of extremist ultra nationalism. Few remember that radicals like Vladimir Zhirinovskiy were strongly hinting that Alaska ought to be returned to Russia. Back then, the United States was fearful that Iran might acquire a nuclear weapon, and there was talk in the early 90s of a US preemptive strike against Iranian targets.

Totalitarian regimes arise when the deliberate actions of a few lie unopposed by a fractionalized, self-interested majority. Almond Tree is a story of how a radical totalitarian political system springs from the radical aspirations of left-wing progressives. It is a story about how best intentions can devolve into the loss of freedom and bitter conflict.

Civil war is always ugly. Atrocities occur on both sides. Extraordinary efforts are required from ordinary people to ultimately end the bloodshed.

Doug Richfield is an ordinary man. In Almond Tree he is called upon by chance events to rise up and defend the American Constitution. Richfield lives in a time when Russian forces have defeated the U.S. in a limited war in Iran. A popular "People's Movement" has seized power and is engaged in a topsy-turvy battle with Constitutionalist forces across an East-West divide. A peace agreement with Russia has resulted in aid to the People's forces, but they are held in check by "Project Almond", the Constitutionalist's nuclear trump card.

Almond Tree is a warning to those who view conflict as means of resolving political problems. It is a portrayal of the catastrophic damage to the lives of Americans and the loss of liberty brought by civil war. Nothing today is more important than a change of spirit among Americans that soothes over the bitterness and partisanship and opens the possibilities for a heartfelt co-operation in solving America's many problems.

FADE IN:

EXT. - 2019, AT SEA - NIGHT

Dawn nears as a trawler fights its way through a cold Atlantic chop. On the fantail the name "CAPE PRIDE" out of Providence, RI.

INT. - WHEELHOUSE, CAPE PRIDE - NIGHT

CAPTAIN FRANK RUSSELL is at the helm. Dressed in a dirty turtleneck sweater and aging foul weather gear, he is pushing the old ship hard and fighting to keep her lurching bow on a precise course. Beside him his FIRST MATE is fixated on the NAVIGATION COMPUTER. Behind them NEW YORK TIMES SENIOR CORRESPONDENT JEFF MANKOWITZ and his PHOTOGRAPHER sit ashen-faced and silent. They protect A LARGE WATERPROOF DUFFELBAG on the floor between them.

Russell scans the swells as the trawler moans across the empty ocean. Dawn is minutes away and the sea ahead glistens with the first traces of light. Suddenly a soft ELECTRONIC ALARM and his attention is drawn to a -

COMPUTER DISPLAY - showing the map outline of the New York/New Jersey coast. A white blip indicates their position - about 30 MILES SSE OF CAPE MAY. At the top of the display the words "WAYPOINT REACHED" flash in bright red.

Russell motions and the engine slows to a throbbing idle. Simultaneously he turns the wheel, maneuvering the old hulk into a tight circle.

F/X, EXT. - SUBMERGED SUBMARINE - NIGHT

Out of a veil of blackness the ominous form of a nuclear sub emerges - it's the USS MASSACHUSETTS, one of three remaining TRIDENT II STRATEGIC BALLISTIC MISSILE SUBMARINES. Its hull drifts silently past - the colorless outline of an AMERICAN FLAG emblazoned on the sail.

INT. - CONN, USS MASSACHUSETTS - RED LIGHT

Low intensity lights bathe the Conn in an eerie red glow. The CREW moves efficiently, but the equipment is worn. Uniforms are not uniform; the men look tired. CAPTAIN MATTHEW ENDICOTT and EXECUTIVE OFFICER (XO) CHRISTOPHER GRESHAM coolly manage the sequence of events. Endicott is meticulously dressed, a fresh white turtleneck under a sharply pressed shirt. Naval precision. Gresham, early-40's, wearing a rumpled khaki uniform and a Purdue University ball cap pushed back on his head, amplifies Endicott's orders almost before they're spoken.

ENDICOTT

Okay, let's go up for a look.

GRESHAM

Make your depth 6-8 feet, COB. 5 degree rise.
Maintain 3-1-Zero.

INT. - MANEUVERING STATION - RED LIGHT

Watching the controls is CHIEF OF THE BOAT (COB) "DIESEL" DONAHUE. His first name is Francis, but one look at old COB and you know that "Diesel" is a wiser choice. The boat's elder statesman, he's the only man aboard to have served on a diesel-powered sub.

DONAHUE

6-8 feet, steering 3-1-Zero, Aye.

The HELMSMAN and PLANESMAN silently work the controls - a slight elevation as the boat rises.

INT. - SONAR STATION - BLUE LIGHT

SENIOR SONAR OPERATOR MANNY "SPIDERMAN" VELEZ hovers over two SONAR TECHS. Wearing T-shirts and communication headgear, three sets of anxious eyes are glued to the BSY SONAR SCREENS - a single contact is seen close to the sub's position. Adjacent to the screen the back of Velez's resting hand reveals an elaborate black-widow tattoo.

ENDICOTT (OVER INTERCOM)

Sonar-Conn, report contacts.

VELEZ

(keyed over intercom)

Conn-Sonar, single surface contact is Sierra 5-7, range 3 miles, bearing 3-2-5 degrees. Slow screws, bearing rate change indicates contact is circling.

INT. - CONN - RED LIGHT

ENDICOTT

(keyed over intercom)

Radio, report traffic.

INT. - COMMUNICATIONS SHACK - RED LIGHT

LT. MARK JAMISON, the boat's COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER emerges from a console of signal-processing equipment. Leaning against an equipment rack, his assistant, LT. JG TONY BONETTA, spins the radio dial. Bonetta listens intently on his headset, purposely ignoring the conversation with the Conn.

JAMISON

(keyed over intercom)
Local radio only, Captain. Standard navigation
beacons, some police frequencies. No significant
military traffic.

ENDICOTT (OVER INTERCOM)

Very well. Run tapes, and keep one ear on the
military UHF.

JAMISON

(keyed over intercom)
Aye, Captain.

BONETTA

Screw him.

Bonetta settles back having located a channel he prefers.

BONETTA

Captain Courageous can listen to static if he
wants. I want to hear some tunes.

Removing his headset he flicks a switch and the cozy Comm Shack is filled
with PROGRESSIVE ROCK, low enough not to be heard in the adjoining Conn.
Jamison looks at Bonetta in disgust then kills the music.

JAMISON

Do what you're told, Bonetta.

BONETTA

Yes, sir; Lieutenant Jamison, sir.

Bonetta delivers a sarcastic bow and returns to monitoring the military
UHF on his headset.

INT. - CONN - RED LIGHT

ENDICOTT

Battle Stations Surface.

Nervous glances are exchanged among the crew - the sub rarely surfaces
and never in enemy waters.

GRESHAM

(grabbing intercom)
Battle Stations, Battle Stations. Prepare for
Surface Action. Deck Party proceed to the AR.
Load tubes 1 and 3, prepare short safeties and
spin up the weapons.

Endicott summons Gresham with a quick nod.

ENDICOTT

The show's yours, Chris. That Russian satellite will be on us in 38 minutes.

GRESHAM

Leave it to me, Captain.

INT. - WHEELHOUSE, TRAWLER CAPE PRIDE - DAWN

Russell opens and latches the wheelhouse door, his right hand still holding the wheel in a tight turn to port. Mankowitz and his Photographer begin to rise, grasping railings to steady their rubbery legs. The four men search the waves in silence.

INT. - AIR REGENERATION (AR) ROOM, USS MASSACHUSETTS - RED LIGHT

Gresham leads a no-nonsense team of SIX SAILORS and an ENSIGN making final checks of their M-4'S and SIDEARMS; one is armed with a SHOULDER-LAUNCHED MISSILE. Gresham, dressed in a Navy winter deck jacket, slides the bolt and holsters his BERETTA. A hatch to the sub's sail lies at the right end of the long AR Room. The men stand taut and wordless.

F/X, EXT. - PERISCOPE VIEW - DAWN

Cape Pride is 400 yds from the sub and circling.

INT. - CONN - RED LIGHT

At the Periscope Dais, Endicott slowly backs away from the viewport and rests against the railing.

ENDICOTT

Mark range and bearing, plot a firing solution.
Open outer doors.

WEAPONS OFFICER

Target range 400 yards at 3-1-0. Ready to shoot.

ENDICOTT

Switch to gray. Put us on top.

Donahue's jaw stiffens - after months of hiding the ship is in action.

DONAHUE

Surface the ship. Blow mains, rapid riiiise.

EXT. - AERIAL OF OCEAN - DAWN

Cape Pride in LOWER FRAME as the Massachusetts surfaces in the distance.

INT. - WHEELHOUSE, TRAWLER CAPE PRIDE - DAWN

The First Mate is first to spot the USS Massachusetts.

FIRST MATE

There it is. Holy shit!

Russell quickly reverses his turn and steers toward it.

RUSSELL

Okay everybody, this is it. Let's move.

The First Mate explodes through the starboard door of the Wheelhouse.

RUSSELL

(turning)

You guys all set.

MANKOWITZ

Just peachy,... I have nothing left to throw up.

Mankowitz and Photographer wrestle the duffel bag through the doorway as Russell turns his attention to the sub.

EXT. - OPEN OCEAN - DAWN

From the dinghy the huge length of the sub is evident. Two sailors are crouched at the aft base of the sail, their weapons trained on the incoming craft. Another sailor aims a missile launcher at the Cape Pride. Three sailors are preparing a boarding net. As the dinghy draws near, the Photographer struggles to get some shots, while the First Mate focuses on the sub's sail and the STARS AND STRIPES he hasn't seen in over a year.

EXT. - SUB DECK - DAWN

Gresham and the Sailors haul Mankowitz out of the dinghy. As he transfers the duffel the Photographer slips on the sub's slick side.

GRESHAM

Welcome aboard the Massachusetts. I'm Commander Christopher Gresham, United States Navy.

MANKOWITZ

Jeff Mankowitz, New York Times.

GRESHAM

We need to move very quickly, Mr. Mankowitz. How long will it take you to get ready?

MANKOWITZ

No time.

(to Photographer)

Get set up by the pillar, there.

Mankowitz and the Photographer negotiate the boat's SAFETY TRACK noticing the ominous 24 MISSILE TUBE DOORS. They scramble to set up their equipment near the base of the sail. Gresham and the Ensign stand over them. The sailors have rested their weapons and are standing watch.

A nod from the Ensign and Gresham turns. Spiderman Velez stands in hatchway staring blankly across the waves.

GRESHAM

Velez, are you nuts? Get back to your station.

His NYC home only a few miles away, a tear trickles.

VELEZ

Sorry Mr. Gresham.

(sniffing the air)

Man, can you smell that? That's the Bronx.

GRESHAM

If the Captain spots you, you'll be sailing up the East River with a torpedo up your butt. Get below, now!

MANKOWITZ

We're ready.

Gresham's compassion wearing thin, Velez finally withdraws through the hatch. At the base of the sail Mankowitz opens a waterproof pouch, unfurls a copy of the latest New York Times, and hands it to Gresham. He displays the full front page, as Mankowitz grabs the opposite corner.

MANKOWITZ

Okay, let's go.

Gresham and Mankowitz pose as A CAMERA MOTOR-DRIVE FIRES.

INT. - SONAR STATION - BLUE LIGHT

Velez, back at his station and checking his equipment, is electrified by A WARNING TONE. He grabs the intercom.

VELEZ

(keyed over intercom)

Conn-Sonar. Romeo contact, bearing 0-3-2 degrees.

INT. - CONN - GRAY LIGHT

Endicott, resting on a railing, quickly grabs the intercom.

ENDICOTT

(keyed over intercom)

What's its course?

VELEZ (OVER INTERCOM)
 Intercept course. Speed 1-5-0 knots, looks like
 a chopper.

ENDICOTT
 Emergency deep!

EXT. - DECK - DAY

The Photographer is just packing his equipment as the DIVE KLAXON sounds.

MANKOWITZ
 What's going on?

GRESHAM
 We've been spotted, we're goin' down. Get the
 hell outta here.

MANKOWITZ
 You don't have to ask twice.

Mankowitz and his Photographer find their way astern like experts, throw their duffel into the dinghy, and then launch themselves off the deck. The First Mate revs the motor and the dinghy speeds away.

EXT. - OPEN OCEAN - DAY

Gaining distance, the dinghy's passengers watch the huge sub slip beneath the ocean.

EXT. - OCEAN SURFACE - DAY

The front page of the New York Times floats on the water.
 INSERT: MAGNIFICATION of the DATE - "MONDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 2019".

EXT. - NEW YORK CITY, 5TH AVENUE AND 58TH STREET - DAY

A blustery wind chills marchers and spectators alike as the annual Thanksgiving Day Parade prepares to get underway. The scene is familiar, yet odd. The crowd is unusually thin. Outnumbering the NYPD beatcops are the NATIONAL MILITIA (NM) - the army of the new American government. They dress in black camouflage fatigues, wear blue berets and armbands, and carry the arrogance of newfound power.

Each new image destroys the air of familiarity. A FLAG snaps to our attention, resplendent with the traditional stripes, but only a single large white star - the symbol of a new unity. The Reviewing Stand is surrounded by POSTERS bearing the slogans of the new government: "PEACE THROUGH SOLIDARITY" and "A BRIGHT TODAY, A BRILLIANT TOMORROW". Boosted by an 80 proof breakfast, a contingent of SENIOR RUSSIAN ARMY OFFICERS, dressed in turquoise greatcoats, laugh and mingle with American officials.

At 20 FOOT INTERVALS along the parade route HEAVILY ARMED MILITIAMEN face the crowd. Additional SECURITY TEAMS, composed of two militiamen, patrol the parade route. One team pauses to examine A BABY STROLLER. The MOTHER protests and is roughly restrained.

Across the street a TV STAGE sits atop A BROADCAST TRUCK overlooking 5th Avenue, the Reviewing Stand in the BG. Anchors SALLY GIORDINO and PHIL ROWAN greet the viewers. Giordino's perfect pink coat and impeccable makeup complement the thrice-lifted angles of her face.

ROWAN

For those of you just joining us, we're just minutes away from the beginning of this 92nd Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. Sally you've been coming to this event since you were a child.

GIORDINO

That's right, Phil. My family always started the holiday season right here.

ROWAN

Security today is tight in the wake of the Stock Exchange bombing. Do you think this will dampen the spirits of the marchers?

In the upper right corner of the frame a PICTURE-IN-PICTURE appears of REPORTER EARL VANCE, at the Exchange.

GIORDINO

I don't think so, New Yorkers need some relief from civil war news. They want to get into a more festive mood.

ROWAN

Earl Vance is joining us at the Stock Exchange. Earl, what's the latest?

The PIP of Vance becomes a full-screen image of the reporter standing amidst the rubble of the New York Stock Exchange as a MILITIA OFFICER steps in to prevent the further advance of the camera crew.

VANCE

Phil, Sally: police and militia forces continue to sift through the wreckage here. As you can see behind me, the Constitutionalist bomb that exploded early yesterday morning caused severe damage. But beyond what you see here, the blast released a huge surge of radiation destroying the computers and communication systems inside the Exchange. Officials have called a news conference for later today and an announcement is expected on plans for reopening the Exchange. Sally.

GIORDINO

Thank you, Earl. Militia forces are continuing a search for Constitutionalist leaders operating in the city. There is widespread fear of a new round of attacks to further destabilize the Administration of President Rutledge.

ROWAN

The President has recently hinted at peace talks leading to the re-establishment of the elected government in Washington. He will be speaking shortly. Stay tuned for that and more of the 93rd Macy's Thanksgiving Parade.

Behind the newsbooth and above the crowd - the parade approaches. The peel of drums and a procession of large flags - moments away.

On an elevated platform in front of the GENERAL MOTORS BUILDING, a frigid DOUGLAS RICHFIELD huddles. A Senior Analyst with the Protocol Department, he has to be here. Protected by only a zippered jacket, the tall, well-built Richfield is impatient for the parade to start,...and finish!

Near him TWO MILITIAMEN 'maintain order' and 'assist' with crowd control by badgering a crowd of rowdy TEENS who are partially blocking the sidewalk.

MILITIAMAN #1

Stop blockin', people need to get past.

TEEN #1

Okay, General.

MILITIAMAN #1

Once more man, and you and my boots are gonna dance.

Snickering, the Teens return to the parade, satisfied by a few last hand gestures of futile defiance. Richfield's face curls with distaste for the Militia's heavy-handedness.

A poke startles him - his sanguine officemate ESTHER GARCIA has found him. A Hispanic woman, she is forty-two and still cute; a seasoned New Yorker. She smiles genuine warmth at a friend who is happy to see her.

GARCIA

Nice spot you picked out for us.

RICHFIELD

You helped organize this. Why aren't we in the Stands?

GARCIA

Would you really want to be in the stands?

RICHFIELD

Who else is stuck out here?

GARCIA

Don't worry, no one that'll care if you duck out.

RICHFIELD

There are more militia here than spectators?

GARCIA

Man, you're telling me. They're searching everyone looking for spies.

Richfield nods and turns as his attention is drawn to the reviewing stand.

A delegation of CHINESE OFFICIALS is seating itself. In the aisle beside them SEVERAL SENIOR MILITIAMEN are preparing the way for PRESIDENT RUTLEDGE, leader of the new government, and his WIFE. Esther's cheerfulness withers.

GARCIA

Here he comes, President Rootless and his pals.

RICHFIELD

They're members of Premier Chen's "Education" Council. I gave them a tour of the city last week.

GARCIA

Educational Council? What's really going on?

Two prominent members of the Chinese delegation are in the middle of being introduced to President Rutledge.

RICHFIELD (O.S.)

The chubby one is General Ma, head of their Army.

Esther's face is glows with admiration for her savvy co-worker.

GARCIA

And the debonair fellow?

RICHFIELD

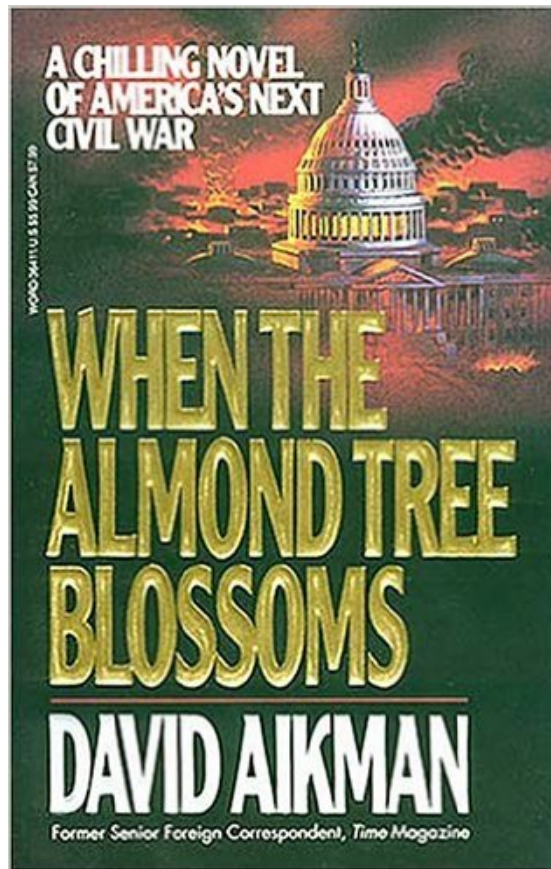
Faxian Chen, Premier Chen's son and confidant. Educated at CalTech in Nuclear Engineering and Physics.

GARCIA

How come you're always one step ahead of me?

THE REST OF AMERICAN STORM" IS AVAILABLE TO REGISTERED AGENTS AND PUBLICISTS ONLY - PLEASE CONTACT ME THROUGH MY WEBPAGE TO RECEIVE A COMPLETE COPY OF THIS OR ANY OF MY OTHER SCREENPLAYS.

Due to growing demand, "When the Almond Tree Blossoms" is scheduled to be re-released Summer of 2016.



"The terror of this book stays with you AFTER you put it down."

"An excellent, albeit overlooked, post-coldwar adventure novel!"

"This is a marvelous novel, a thinking man's story that is far more chilling than the works of his less-informed contemporaries."