

1945

ROBERT CONROY



BALLANTINE BOOKS

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BALLANTINE BOOKS

NEW YORK

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INTRODUCTION

By the summer of 1945, the Japanese were thoroughly and utterly defeated. Their cities were rubble, their navy nonexistent, their economy destroyed, and their people near starvation. By all rights, they should have surrendered.

But surrender wasn't in the vocabulary of the militarists who ran the nation. They lived by the code of Bushido, which condemned surrender. Instead, they wished to fight until an honorable peace was achieved and felt they had good reasons for doing so.

First, they considered the recent agreement among the Allies, the Potsdam Declaration, to be a plan to destroy both Japan and her culture. This was intolerable to them.

Second, they considered any possible occupation of Japan and any subsequent war crimes trials to be mortal insults. So too were any thoughts of making the powers of the emperor subject to the will of the people. After all, didn't the emperor own the people?

Third, a few were pragmatic and felt that defeat would mean their personal doom.

Many in the military felt otherwise, and a great number of the civilian government and population wanted peace, but these people were powerless to do anything about it. In the naïve and racist hatreds of the day, many Japanese thought that the Americans would rape, murder, and then cannibalize Japanese dead.

It took the shocks of the nuclear assaults on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, along with the Soviet attack into Manchuria and elsewhere, to give the Japanese peace movement the motivation and the rationale to seek peace. Even then, the governing Japanese hierarchy was sharply divided. The military, led by the army, wished to continue

fighting. The army was largely intact and had several million armed and trained men ready to defend the home islands against invasion.

When Emperor Hirohito required that they sue for peace, the army bent to his will.

Yet peace was still far from certain. That night, a handful of rebellious officers led several hundred enlisted men on a rampage throughout the Imperial palace in search of Hirohito and the recordings of a peace message he'd made to be broadcast to the world the next day.

The rebels begged the war minister, army general Korechika Anami, for support. Anami was torn between his desire to continue the war and his loyalty to his emperor and, as a result, did nothing. If the coup succeeded, he would support it. If not, he would not oppose the surrender.

The rebels then confronted the commander of the Imperial Guards at the palace. When he refused to support them, the rebels shot him. This infuriated the guards, who then began to fight the rebels, thus dooming the coup. By morning the coup was over and most of the rebel leaders had committed suicide.

But what if Anami, who had all the armies of Japan at his disposal, had decided to support the coup? The Imperial Guards would have aided the rebels, Hirohito would have been captured or killed, and the war would not have ended on August 14, 1945. Instead, it would have required an invasion of the Japanese home islands by the armed forces of the United States of America. Instead of peace, the United States would have been forced into Operation Downfall, the bloodiest campaign in its history.

The first phase, Olympic, would have been the invasion of Kyushu on or about November 1, 1945, while the second phase, Coronet, would have been the invasion of Honshu about six months later. Most American planners agreed that a bloody American victory would have been won by the end of 1946. The soldiers, sailors, and marines who would have constituted the invading force were nowhere near as optimistic.

Additional atomic weapons would have been used against Japan. Cities such as Kokura and Niigata were already on the short list of targets, and more would have been added.

This novel tells what could have occurred if the coup had succeeded, and the United States been required to invade Japan.

TO SIMPLIFY MATTERS, I have given all Japanese names and relevant terms in the American manner and have ignored any references to dates that might be different because of the international date line.

My major sources for the planned invasion were *The Invasion of Japan* by John Ray Skates, *Downfall* by Richard Frank, and *Code-Name Downfall* by Norman Polmar and Thomas B. Allen, all of which give great detail and were invaluable resources. Also, *Mr. Truman's War* by J. Robert Moskin provided marvelous insights into the issues, personalities, and motives of the people involved, while *The Fall of Japan* by William Craig detailed the attempted coup.

—**Robert Conroy**

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PROLOGUE

The Son of Heaven sat cross-legged and stoic on the simple bamboo mat that covered the stark concrete floor of the shelter. His head and shoulders were covered by a fine layer of dust, and his nostrils recoiled at the smell of smoke that carried the sickly sweet stench of burning flesh. He felt as if he were suffocating, but he willed himself to remain calm. This squalid room was almost all that remained of an empire that, only a few short years earlier, had encompassed half the world.

The bomb shelter had been constructed to provide him and a select handful of others in the government and the Imperial family with a degree of safety from the incessant rain of American bombs. Although the B-29s and other bombers appeared to have been ordered not to aim for the Imperial palace grounds, mistakes occurred and the sacred buildings in central Tokyo had sustained damage, enough to set up protection of the mortal body of the frail and near-sighted emperor from the death that fell from the skies.

Someone explained to the incredulous emperor that a demonic gust of wind could send a bomb far off its intended course. He thought it amazing that mere air could alter the course of a falling bomb and change the fate of those beneath it. Some would live and some would die, all because of an errant zephyr.

But now, Hirohito thought bitterly, the concrete and steel shelter that had cost such great manpower and material was likely to be his tomb, not his refuge. Above him, Japanese soldiers fought and died to change Japan's future. Tragically, these were not Japanese fighting the Americans, but Japanese fighting other Japanese over the right to die for him and for Japan. Like the wind on the bomb's descent, uncertainty of his and his nation's fates pervaded his thoughts.

Hirohito had fully understood the determination of the military, particularly the army, to prolong the uneven struggle against the hated Americans beyond all reason. Their fanatic devotion to the code of the warrior, Bushido, screamed their defiance of an implacable enemy who had the power to destroy all life on the home islands of Japan. Hirohito decided on a course of action that would preserve life, not destroy it.

The first atomic bomb used in warfare had destroyed Hiroshima in a ball of fire that consumed many tens of thousands of men, women, and children and left many thousands more to live their lives in unspeakable horror. Three days later, a second bomb had incinerated Nagasaki with the same results, although Hirohito's experts had informed him that the death toll was somewhat lower than Hiroshima's. Why, they did not know.

This, coupled with the continuing nonnuclear fire bombings and bombardments of cities and towns throughout Japan, convinced Hirohito that there was no sense in further struggles against the inevitable. Most of Japan's cities were scorched rubble, and there was no way of stopping the Americans from inflicting more pain on his beloved nation.

At a meeting with his war cabinet, he shocked them by doing something never before done in such a meeting. He had spoken directly to them. The emperor, always present, maintained a regal silence regarding the issues under discussion. It was, in fact, against the Japanese constitution for him to voice an opinion.

There were eight on the council: Hirohito and the seven others who debated and voted. Five of the seven were militarists, and even he had been shocked when they'd acquiesced with his demand that they surrender.

This time, however, he told his cabinet that it was time to think the unthinkable and endure the unendurable: to surrender the nation unconditionally to the Americans. If they did not, no Japanese child would grow to adulthood and thus preserve the exquisite and priceless culture that was uniquely Japanese. Of that Hirohito was convinced. He was also convinced that the only alternative to unconditional surrender was death. Several in the group had broken down in tears, but they had agreed to comply with his wishes. For his

part, he now bitterly regretted his earlier enthusiasm for the war, which had cost the people of Japan so much and which even threatened the continuation of his throne. How could he have been so foolish? Now he had to salvage what he could of his honor, his country, and his throne.

The meeting took place in this same shelter, where now, alone but for his hopes, Hirohito awaited his fate. The emperor knew that the radicals in the military would rebel with a maniacal fury to prevent Japan's surrender. All of Japan should die and become a scorched cinder rather than a degraded vassal of the hated and despised Americans.

Hirohito had recorded a message to the Japanese people, then gone into hiding. The message was to be broadcast by radio to the steadily shrinking empire, and the war would come to a swift end.

Hirohito cocked his head. Again he heard the chatter of machine gun fire as it echoed down the corridors of the upper levels. A grenade exploded nearby, causing another rain of fine dust to fall upon his head and onto the lenses of his thick glasses. He took a handkerchief and tried to wipe them off and wondered, had War Minister General Anami found the will and support within the army to defy him, or was this uprising spontaneous, the actions of a few score of misguided young zealots?

General Anami believed in fate and would likely let the efforts of others decide his destiny. There was much precedent in current Japanese history for such an uprising by angry young officers. In recent years, other such young warriors had developed the unpleasant habit of murdering their political enemies and often did so without fear of retribution. They had learned it in the 1930s when they had set the nation on a course of conquest through the simple expedient of assassinating their more peaceful and reasonable opposition. That course of conquest, initially so glorious and successful, had now nearly brought an end to Japan.

Hirohito winced in surprise at another sharp burst of gunfire, this one close by. Whatever his and Japan's future would be was going to be determined in a short time.

The shelter's door flung open and an army colonel stood silhouetted by the smoke and light behind him. He wore the uniform of

the Imperial Guards, but with a white sash about his waist. He looked young for his rank, probably in his early thirties, but he carried himself like a grim-faced veteran. He was covered with dust, and blood from a cut on his forehead had carved a path down his face. Hirohito did not know him and did not speak.

The officer entered and bowed deeply. "Your Excellency, I am here to take you to a place of safety."

"Do you have a name, Colonel?"

The colonel flushed. In his haste he had forgotten the courtesy and respect due his emperor. "Forgive me, Your Excellency. I am Col. Tadashi Sakei and I am on the staff of the Twelfth Area Army, which is responsible for the safety of the city of Tokyo."

Hirohito declined to look directly on Sakei. "And this place of safety, where is it and why should I accompany you? Am I your prisoner or your emperor, and what is the significance of the white sash you wear?"

"Your refuge will be away from Tokyo, Excellency. Here we fear that your life is in danger from more than just American bombs. More I am not at liberty to say. As to your other questions, you are my emperor. The sash signifies that I am one of those who are your protectors. Your enemies wear no sash." Sakei again bowed deeply, reverently.

"And what does General Anami know of your actions?" The man still had not said which side he was on. The term *protector* meant nothing. Protection from whom? Would there be blessed peace or the continuation of death?

The colonel raised himself proudly to full height. He was quite tall for a Japanese, and the blood drying on his face made him look barbarically fierce. "General Anami," he said with a glint of satisfaction in his eyes, "has finally condoned the actions of men of honor who wish to preserve Japan and keep her safe from her enemies. He now supports us and honors us with his leadership."

Hirohito began to grieve inside for his beloved nation, but did not let his disappointment show. General Anami, once his friend, had betrayed him.

"It does not matter that you have me. My message will go forth without me," Hirohito said proudly.

Colonel Sakei smiled tightly. He left the room for a moment and returned with two small packages wrapped with string and brown paper. "Do you mean these? The treasonous message your traitorous advisers forced you to make and record for broadcast to the world?"

Now it was all Hirohito could do to keep from sobbing in his dismay and frustration. His enemies had both himself and the recordings of the royal rescript. His voice calling for peace would not go forth to the people of Japan. There would be no end to the war. The killing would go on. And on. And on.

"Do you have any idea what you are doing?" Hirohito gasped.

"Saving Japan," Sakei snapped.

"By destroying her? Why don't you kill me?" Hirohito asked sadly. "The shame of your foolishness is too much to endure. Get it over with and then depart and return to your misguided comrades." Hirohito shook his head in dismissal. Colonel Sakei was now beneath his contempt.

Sakei reacted as if slapped. A couple of white-sashed soldiers who had peered into the room gasped and darted away. If the angry colonel had seen them in his shame, he would have had them beaten to a pulp, perhaps killed. That was the way discipline was maintained in the Japanese army.

"Excellency," Sakei said in a strained voice, "you are a living symbol of Japan, her living god. Your presence and your pronouncements will add credence to our efforts to defend the home islands from invasion by the Americans."

Proclamations would be issued in his name, but by the hand of Anami and officers like Sakei. On the other hand it seemed obvious that he was the only member of the royal family who had been taken, and that the twelve-year-old Crown Prince Akihito was elsewhere and safe, as were the emperor's two younger brothers. If he, Hirohito, was assassinated, then Akihito would become emperor. With Hirohito alive, any comments that might be made on behalf of or by Prince Akihito would have no weight. It was a small ray of hope, but he grasped it. Most important, his only and well-loved son was alive and apparently safe, if only for the moment.

"Why would you extend this battle?" Hirohito asked. "The Amer-

icans will drop more atomic bombs on our cities and then invade our few islands. Our lands are already surrounded by their warships, and their planes fly overhead without opposition. If you persist, all Japan will be destroyed because of your misguided stubbornness.”

Sakei gestured for the emperor to rise and follow him. Reluctantly, Hirohito did as he was told and emerged into the hallways that connected the palace to the shelter. He was dismayed to see several bodies lying in bloody disarray. Some wore sashes and some did not. It grieved him to realize that loyal soldiers had died on his behalf. Sakei, however, did not share his feelings. Instead, he pointed to a dead soldier who also wore a sash.

“Then we die with honor, not as prisoners!” Sakei said proudly. “Let the Americans bomb our cities. We will live in the countryside. Let them destroy our homes and we will live in caves in the hills. Let them invade our shores and we will fall upon them with every weapon we have. If we must, we will tear at them and destroy them with our hands and teeth. We have millions of soldiers and tens of millions of civilians willing to die to preserve our sacred culture. We will gnaw at their throats, and eyes, and testicles, and bleed the Americans until they come to their senses and negotiate an honorable end to this war.”

It was all Hirohito could do to keep from laughing at Sakei’s pompous and irrational speech. How could the deaths of all those people preserve anything Japanese? He had been told that the Americans thought of December 7, 1941, as the Day of Infamy. Now he had his own Day of Shame—August 14, 1945. God help the people of Japan.

Part One

***THE WAR
UNENDING***

CHAPTER 1

▪

GERMANY

The muffled sounds of the nearby explosions cut through his sleep-fog and Lt. Paul Morrell leaped from his cot. A surge of fear ruined his warm and pleasant dream about his girlfriend, Debbie Winston. He grabbed his carbine and ran outside the tent and looked for the source, all the while trying to ignore the nausea and splitting headache that assailed him.

Another explosion came from behind the low hill just to the rear of the camp.

Morrell looked about for help as he ran up the hill. No one was around. They were probably still out celebrating the end of the war, although it sounded as if someone didn't believe it. Could they be under attack from some Nazi fanatics? It sure as hell sounded like it.

Another blast jarred him. He breasted the hill on the run and looked down below him. Then he started swearing softly. Two of his soldiers, Sgt. Cecil Wiles and Cpl. Tommy Nevins, were standing by the stream that ran through the gentle valley. Wiles, staggering ever so slightly, pulled the pin on a grenade and lofted it into the center of a wider section of the stream that formed a nice little pond.

Water geysered up from the pond and so did a number of dead fish. Wiles and Nevins whooped loudly at the sight.

"What the hell are you men doing?" Morrell snapped as he approached. He was furious at their stupidity and enormously relieved that he was not again at war. The two NCOs looked at him dumbly, then Wiles made a waving motion with his arm that might have been a drunken attempt at a salute.

"Fishing," Wiles said, then after a long pause, "sir. We are fucking

fishing.” Nevins giggled at the witticism and almost fell into the water.

Morrell looked about. The banks of the stream were littered with dead fish. Some had been blown to pieces by the grenades, while others had had their lives snuffed out by the concussion.

“All right,” Morrell snarled, “this is enough.” His anger was growing. Not only had they scared the crap out of him, but they were endangering themselves along with anyone else in the vicinity. They were destroying government equipment as well as blowing up someone’s private property. Worse, his headache was throbbing and he felt as if he would heave.

It wasn’t the first time the duo of Nevins and Wiles had gotten into trouble, usually alcohol-related. Even when sober they were only marginally efficient. He wondered just how they had gotten their stripes.

“Why is it enough, Lieutenant?” Wiles asked with mock innocence.

Morrell iterated the reasons and added a last one. “Because I’m ordering you to, that’s why.”

Nevins hiccuped. “Lieutenant, why don’t you fuck off.”

Morrell was stunned and took a deep breath to calm himself. “Tell you what. You’re both drunk, and so’s probably half the army. Now I’m gonna be a real nice guy and pretend I didn’t hear that. You two get back to camp right now.”

Nevins’s face flushed in anger and he looked as if he might take a swing at Morrell. However, he quickly thought better of it. Along with being an officer and someone you just didn’t hit, Morrell was sober and fit-looking. At five-eleven, he weighed a compact 180, and despite his curly blond hair and innocent-looking blue eyes, Morrell looked as if he could take care of himself, especially in a fight with two staggering drunks.

“No,” said Sergeant Wiles. “Let’s not forget about it. What the hell’s the matter with you, Lieutenant? You know you got a reputation around here as being the choirboy officer. You’re a pain in the ass, Lieutenant. Look, the war’s over and we got a right to celebrate, and if you don’t like it, why don’t you get the fuck back to your tent and stay there.”

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