

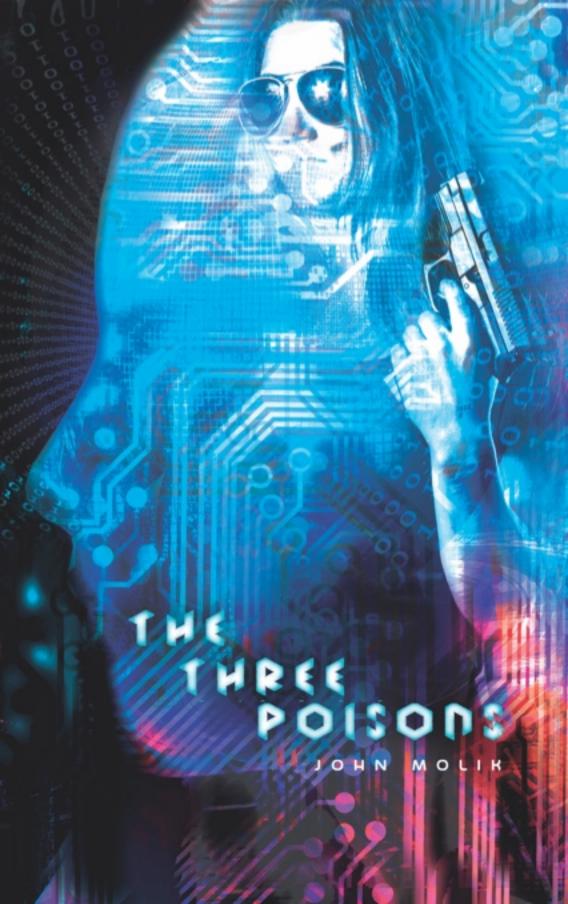
It's 2025. An evil cabal known as the Horsemen are looking to colonize space with advanced technologies that have been kept hidden from humanity. A dark faction wants to destrov life as we know it. An artificially intelligent computer must learn love to save mankind, but is there enough time?

The Three Poisons

by John Molik

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First Edition

Chapter 1

"The ignorant mind, with its infinite afflictions, passions, and evils, is rooted in the three poisons: greed, anger, and delusion"

-Bodhidharma

May 18, 2025

"Sir?" She gently tapped his shoulder. "Sir!"

The man seated in the aisle quickly opened his eyes and stared back at her with a fixed expression.

"I'm sorry, but the captain has turned on the fasten seat belt sign." She pointed to his unsecured lap belt with a quick flick of her hand.

"Oh, jeez. I'm sorry." He quickly pulled the belt across his hips. "I must have dozed off."

The flight attendant smiled, quickly nodded, and continued walking up the aisle, checking the belts of other passengers.

He glanced to his left and past his two seat companions and noticed that the 797's cabin window had grown vacant like the eyes of the dead. An endless dark void, the death of days, bereft of even a glimmer on the horizon. As if on cue, the 797 began bouncing slightly in a pocket of turbulent air. He reached forward into the seat pocket and grabbed his Garmin eTrex portable GPS navigator. Switching the unit on,

he got a bead on their current location over the Pacific Ocean, then promptly determined that he had only about twenty minutes to get the job done. He rebuked himself slightly and was certainly glad that the attendant had awakened him.

Before the plane had departed Acapulco, he had confirmed his targets. They were all there. The four directors of Mingzhen Fortune Capital (or MFC, a front company for Chinese interests whose mission was to buy into every conceivable emerging technology burgeoning in the transhumanism megatrend—mixing man and machine. artificial intelligence, cyborgs, genetic engineering, and antiaging technologies) were running an anti-aging clinic in the Shanghai Free Trade Zone and were sitting just four rows in front in the business section. He had also noticed the two other men traveling with them who appeared to be the muscle. He laughed to himself. Most guys who kill people for a living just don't look right in six-thousand-dollar-Brionidesigner suits. You honestly can't pour a tattooed gorilla with a stolid countenance into a coat with tonal stripes and notch lapels. Blair Reed was confident that these guys would pose no problem whatsoever. Blair was Tiger Team. His superhuman physical genetic enhancements offered normal humans absolutely no chance in winning or even competing with him in anything physical. Brigadier General Jacenek had sent Blair with the utmost confidence that his mission would be accomplished.

But, right now, he had to get in that forward cabin. The intel he had been given was that the SanDisk 64GB memory card was located in Xi's media hub, which was in its small carry-on black nylon bag. Having identified Xi, he knew that he needed a good reason to open the overhead bin right above

that row. Noticing that there was an empty aisle seat directly in front of Xi, he just needed a good reason to get into it.

Glancing around to make sure no one was watching, he wrapped the seat belt around his left hand and quickly tugged. The tension was immense, but within seconds a slight tearing noise could be heard, followed by a loud pop. The snoring passenger in the middle seat next to him heard the noise and sucked in a large snort of air, but remained, for the most part, asleep. The belt was completely torn off its mount under the seat and he held it up and over his lap. Blair hit the attendant call button.

A few minutes later she appeared. "Yes, sir, can I help?"

He lifted up the remains of the belt, fake pouted, then giggled. "Wow, I don't know what happened here. Must have been faulty or something."

"Oh my!" she exclaimed while taking the belt from him. "I've never seen that happen before." She looked at the frayed edges with astonishment. "That's not looking good." She surveyed the immediate area, tapping her fingers repeatedly on the back of his seat, scanning around hopelessly for a vacancy. "I'm going to have to ask you to change seats, if that's alright, but—"

He interjected. "There's an empty seat in business, just a few rows up. I know that because I was supposed to get my free airpoints upgrade, but, hey, you know the breaks, I must have drawn the short straw today." He giggled affably. "And then as I'm boarding, I see my seat just sitting there, you know, so lonely." He hammed a grin from ear to ear to enhance his charm.

She shook her head slowly. "Well, I'm not supposed to seat you in a different cabin, but seeing as there is no other option..."

Blair quickly got up and grabbed his overstuffed duffel bag from the overhead and walked it up to seat 12C. Glancing at the four directors, he smiled and proceeded to open the bin right above Xi. There it was—the media hub in its little black bag. Blair hoped that his Plan A would work, as he loathed even thinking about the logistics of Plan B. He quickly sat down and turned on his GPS. It was now or never.

Blair scoped his environment, noticing that the four Chinese men, plus the big, suited bodyguard were all peacefully lying back with their eyes shut trying to get some sleep on the long journey from Mexico. He got up, then unlatched the overhead. Quickly opening his duffel bag, which was completely packed to the gunnels, he dislodged a Ziploc bag full of carry-on liquids, which shifted slightly and fell out and landed on his seat. Much to his dismay, this noise was enough to stir Xi Luo, forcing him awake. He looked at Blair with questioning eyes.

"It's amazing that in 2025 we still have to put all our crap in these," offered Blair as he tried to defuse the situation with affability.

Xi Luo simply stared straight ahead and nodded cautiously.

Blair noticed the suited tattooed gorilla stirring now as well. *This is fucked*. He felt a tinge of nerves, of adrenaline, but his Tiger Team training and engineered instincts kept his

focus on his objectives. He fumbled around in his bag for a while until the Chinese men got comfortable again.

Go for it! He snatched the little media hub bag and sat back down, shoving it into his seat pocket. Quickly leaving his seat, he walked down to the toilet, opened the device, popped the SanDisk memory card out, and put the hub back in the case. He pocketed the card, then made his way back to his seat. The men were still relaxed with their eyes shut. He put the media hub back in the overhead bin exactly where it had been and sat back down. Now if only that director stays asleep and doesn't want to use his hub, I'm in business! He then pulled out his GPS again, noted the plane's exact location, kissed it, then put it back into the seat pocket when he heard it. It was a snort, a grumble. Xi Luo, who was behind him, was pushing on Blair's seat as he got up to get into the overhead.

Shit! Reed's hope for an easy mission was beginning to fade as Xi Luo sat back down holding his media hub. Like a computer program performing Boolean branch prediction logic by examining all if-then conditional possibilities, Blair visualized all possible steps that may have to be taken from this point, whether he liked them or not.

It wasn't long until moans, grumbles and general disappointment was being shouted in Mandarin behind him.

"Tā mā de!" shouted Xi Luo.

Blair recognized that word. It meant *fuck* in Chinese. The men started getting up and looking around on the floor. The big security guy started pointing at Reed and yelling something. Xi Luo then approached Blair and spoke in his best English. "You last one in bin. You take card?"

Blair gave his best wide-eyed expression of disbelief. "Uh, no, sir. I've not seen it."

Xi Luo shook his head and crossed his arms. "You been back forth and only one who can have it. I have it just before you sat here."

Blair raised his hands with open palms. "Sorry. I don't know what you're talking about."

Suddenly the big suited thug got up, walked down the aisle, through the galley and stopped right next to Blair. He was about the same height as Blair, about six foot one, but much wider, like a sumo wrestler. He spoke better English than Xi. "I want you to cooperate."

Blair narrowed his eyes and twisted his mouth. "Are you calling me a liar?"

The thug smirked, then continued. "You either cooperate with me now, or once we get to Shanghai we will search every article of your clothing, bags, and body crevices. We do things differently in China. Are we clear?"

Blair's adrenaline streamed into his bloodstream. His pupils dilated and his head began shaking. With one quick motion, Blair's head cannoned forward, striking the bodyguard on the bridge of his nose with devastating force, exploding the man's snout in a burst of red. The impact was so forceful that the bodyguard's neck whiplashed back, sending a spray of sanguine fluid in a wide arc and up onto the ceiling as if he had been turned into a human Rain Bird blood sprinkler. He fell back into the aisle completely unconscious.

A male flight attendant ran to the scene and tried to pull Blair back.

"Leave me the fuck alone," shouted Blair. "I'm warning you."

The attendant was pulling at Blair, trying to get him back. Xi Luo and the three others simply stared at their fallen comrade, who was showing no signs of movement.

A big male passenger ran down and grabbed Blair, trying to put him into a reverse headlock.

"I'm an off-duty police officer. Put your hands behind your back!" he yelled. Noticing a male flight attendant with his mouth open and impassive like a statue behind them, he shouted to him. "Go get something to tie his hands! Anything! Rope, cable—anything!"

The male flight attendant, now accompanied by several other passengers, ran off toward the galley. The off-duty cop was struggling to get a good hold.

"Off me, you fucking asshole!" shouted Blair as he grabbed the man's wrist, squeezing with the immense force that only a small hydraulic press could achieve. The sound was distinctive, like several corn kernels popping in succession. The man's ulna and radius splintered into several pieces just below the wrist joint as he mercifully let go, screaming in agonizing pain. He stooped forward, and Blair grabbed him around the neck, getting him into a rear naked choke hold. Squeezing slightly, Reed snapped the cop's neck like a dried twig. The cop fell lifelessly to the floor.

Blair had to quickly finish the job or he would not make it. The implant he had received a few years ago on his eighteenth birthday prevented him from having any real empathy. Yet, though he could easily kill the over 280 passengers as if they were all just collateral damage, logic dictated otherwise, and logic for an artificially intelligent suplia like him was king.

First, he eliminated Xi Luo, then immediately the rest of the MFC directors followed. So that no one would dare challenge him (as he had very little time to mess about) he yelled his intentions. "Don't anyone try to stop me! Or else!"

The passengers and crew all looked like frightened animals with their squirrel-in-a-cage-style movements. He then punched a hole through the overhead bin with his fist and ripped the lid off its hinges in one quick motion, spilling the contents out onto the floor. Taking his duffel bag with him, he proceeded to the cockpit door. Although security had been strengthened, it was no match for his running kick, which busted it wide open. The pilot turned quickly, only to find his neck in the vise grip of Blair Reed, which in seconds, only left the copilot.

"You have two options," Blair directed him. "Either you descend this plane to one thousand feet immediately, or everyone on this plane gets a crash course in nosedive water landings, am I clear?"

The copilot looked as white as a ghost, as if he had evacuated the contents of his bladder. He simply nodded and began the descent.

Blair Reed pulled the parachute out of the duffel bag. The altitude indicator tumbled toward five thousand feet. "I'd put the fasten seat belt sign on if I were you."

The copilot, like an automaton, leaned forward and flipped a switch.

"Oh, and another thing, de-pressurize the cabin when you get this puppy to that altitude and keep her under two hundred knots."

The copilot rolled his eyes and let out an exasperated sigh. "Or what?"

With lightning speed, Blair placed both of his palms either side of the copilot's head, leaned forward and lightly squeezed. The copilot screamed in pain as his skull felt as if it was about to pop like a ripe cantaloupe. Blair quickly stopped. The copilot shook his head slowly and swayed back and forth, holding his precious, fully intact skull in his hands. "Or we all die. Got that?"

He nodded.

"Now!" yelled Reed as the altitude indicator approached one thousand feet.

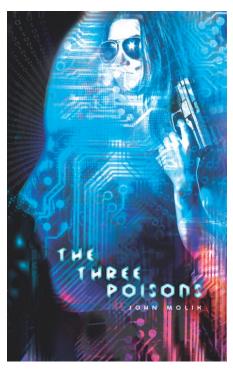
The pilot shook his head, sighed, then set the cabin altitude to one thousand feet. Instantly, all their ears popped and the oxygen masks dropped as passengers screamed and scrambled to put them on.

"Have a safe flight," said Reed with a grin as he ran toward the exit door at the rear of the plane, placing the memory card into his little water proof container, and shoving it deep into a pocket on his parachute pack.

He slammed the rear exit door's handle up and over. As the pressure was not yet perfectly equalized, the door required about a few hundred pounds of force to open, but that was no problem. Grabbing the handle with one hand and bracing himself against the cabin wall with the other, he easily swung it inward then out against the howling, two-hundred-knot wind.

He surveyed the horizon. The sun was coming up over a land mass that according to his GPS calculations was supposed to be (and thankfully was) there, but that still wouldn't help him avoid the sharks. *I hate fucking sharks*.

He jumped.



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