

## Honorbound

**John K. Potter**

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*The questions made him think about his life his homeland his family his mission in fact he became obsessed with the questions. He said them out loud he dreamed about them he wrote them over and over...*

*Honorbound* is a crackerjack story of espionage set in the Maoist China of the early 1960s. A Machiavellian American defects to the People's Republic of China in the wake of the Korean War rising to a position of importance. Alex Hunter a Midwestern real estate broker with close ties to the defector is determined to be the best person to bring him back. Once in hostile territory escape Plan A fails as Plan A must always fail. The adaptable protagonist makes necessary on-the-fly adjustments that are in no way formulaic.

Potter's explanations of Maoism's evolutionary milestones are cogent and well integrated. The three dimensional secondary characters are not interchangeable and tension is generated by slippery balances between sympathy and suspicion. Alex's sense of duty benefits the American intelligence community but it also causes him to take on greater risk when individuals appeal for his help. The official mission turns out to be only one aspect of what must be done. Alex finds himself correcting misconceptions about the United States such as: "...don't you have many concentration camps and aren't the black people slaves?"

The spy games defections and double-agents bring to mind the entertainments of English novelist and spy Graham Greene who was in the MI6 agency under Kim Philby the most infamous British traitor of the modern era. Descriptions of torture and psychological retraining are starkly informative. Those within China who assist Alex do not have to worry about suffering the diseases of old age.

Only a single moment late in the book pulls at the outside edge of believability. How often will any one person decide to put their own safety on the back burner? There is also an indirect suggestion that anti-authoritarian subcultures in the 1960s were fomented by agents of the Chinese and Russian governments. While it is true that *Quotations From Chairman Mao* circulated on American college campuses the student protest movement in the United States did not arise because of decisions made in Beijing or Moscow.

*Honorbound* is Potter's third novel the previous being *The Warehouse* and *The Baker's Vault*. The Air Force trained him in Mandarin; decades of television production and writing provided a firm grounding in dramatics. Thematically the author gets much mileage from examining the variety of reactions possible when the Right Thing and the Smart Thing are widely separated. This book is strongly recommended.

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