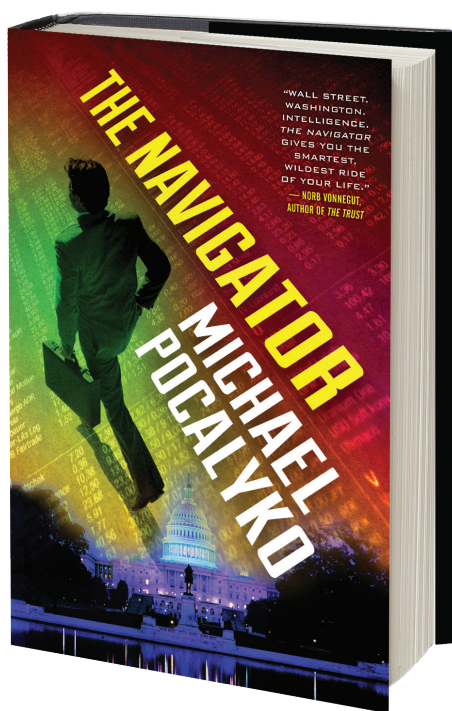


READER'S GUIDE

MICHAEL POCALYKO

The Navigator



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“What a ride! Wall Street crashes into Washington, D.C. in *The Navigator*. Who better to tell this story than Michael Pocalyko—Beltway insider, veteran of finance, and stirring new voice in the world of thrillers.”

—NORB VONNEGUT, AUTHOR OF
THE GODS OF GREENWICH AND *THE TRUST*

“Michael Pocalyko knows Wall Street and Washington, and it shows in *The Navigator*. He skillfully weaves a web of intrigue that brings together both of those fascinating worlds in a neat, fast-paced package.”

—STEPHEN FREY, *NEW YORK TIMES*
BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *HEAVEN'S FURY*

“A powerful first novel and the debut of an exciting new talent.”

—HARLAN COBEN,
#1 *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *SIX YEARS*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photo: © 2013 Carl Cox

MICHAEL POCALYKO is CEO of Monticello Capital, a boutique investment bank. He's been a combat aviator, Navy commander, political candidate, venture capitalist, and global corporate chair. He has degrees from Muhlenberg, Harvard, and Wharton, and lives in northern Virginia and the Shenandoah Valley.

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ABOUT THE BOOK

The most timely and important financially-themed novel in a generation

On the darkest night of 1945, a 20-year-old B-24 navigator assists in the liberation of a German concentration camp. His haunting trauma is prologue to destiny.

Flash forward to present-day Manhattan. Warren Hunter, reigning master of the financial universe, is poised to close the world's first trillion dollar deal. ViroSat is the Street's biggest-ever technology play—an entirely new worldwide communication system. It will catapult his investment bank and the global economy into a bright future...if the deal goes through.

In Washington, ViroSat captures the attention of Senate political aide Julia Toussaint. Meanwhile, battered tech start-up veteran Rick Yeager has just landed his dream job at a mysterious but well-connected financial firm whose partners want a piece of the action.

Warren, Julia, and Rick are caught in a web of intrigue, money, power, and dangerous secrets. Coincidences are not what they seem as the past collides with the present in a way that will change their lives forever.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

* There are no “spoilers” here, but these questions will only be meaningful to you after you’ve finished reading the book.

1. We meet the eponymous navigator in the prologue, in the book’s first sentence. A very dark story unfolds during the chaos of a famous historical moment. Because the opening is narrated with a single-character point of view, we don’t immediately know what has happened. We do understand that the navigator comes apart and that his resulting post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) undergirds the action throughout the rest of the novel. How can an intensely traumatic experience in one person’s life continue to influence others so much, the way that this event affects Warren Hunter? *The Navigator* also probes the deeper question: Can any of us really be free of the past, even if it’s not our own past?

2. In the *Booklist* review of *The Navigator*, the reviewer commented that “the real star of the story is ViroSat, the technological behemoth start-up at the center of everything.” ViroSat is called “Internet Next,” a “gated neighborhood” of computer systems and telecommunications with a “global life and power beyond governments.” What are some of the implications and unintended consequences of a corporate-controlled international private network set up to operate without any government regulation or interference? Senator Tenley Harbison says, “When we the people pay for ViroSat, we will also own, control, regulate, and run ViroSat. We made the mistake in the banking crisis of investing without managing our investment. As a nation we simply won’t do that again.” Is she right? Is the outcome of the ViroSat deal satisfying to you?

3. An overarching literary theme in *The Navigator* is “fathers and sons.” In thematic unity Michael Pocalyko dedicated the novel to his father, brother, and son. Three fathers in the story are powerfully motivated not only by their personal history and connection to each other, but by what they intend to do for their sons. All three of the fathers are old men. Their sons are grown men. Yet the influence of the fathers is significant. Their actions have extraordinary consequences for their sons. How is this motif an allegory for overall generational influences in American society? Where are the present-day influences and effects of Dutch’s GI generation? Of Boomers like Sanford Tuttle? Of Rick Yeager’s and Warren Hunter’s Gen X?

4. *The Navigator* is written in the third person with an omniscient narrator. But on a few occasions the narrative is turned over to characters who tell their own stories

that then become crucial to the plot. One example is in Chapter 19 when the talkative Lauren Barr tells Rick Yeager all about Meier Seckendorf Böhmer GmbH. Another is in Chapter 28 when Warren Hunter learns about a clandestine intelligence operation. When these internal narratives occur, how credible are the characters? How do they compare to classic unreliable narrators? Can there be an unreliable narrative within an omniscient narrative? Do the characters always tell the truth or all of the truth?

5. A small scene in *The Navigator* is set at St. Peter’s Church in Citigroup Center, an actual Lutheran church in the heart of Manhattan. Its real pastor Amandus Derr commented that this is a “profoundly Lutheran novel,” even though it’s not at all a religious book. Why would Pastor Derr say that? Where do Lutheran themes like grace, redemption, and the freedom of a Christian occur in this story? The German language epigraph to the novel, a stanza from Theodor Storm’s poem “Oktoberleid” (1848) is best known for being quoted by Dietrich Bonhoeffer in a letter from prison written on October 13, 1943. Bonhoeffer, a famous Lutheran pastor, theologian, and one of the most influential Christian thinkers of all time, founded the underground Confessing Church in Germany. He was hung by the Nazis on April 9, 1945, for his role in a plot to kill Hitler. The epigraph does not translate easily into English. One fairly accurate rendering is: “If outside it’s all gone mad / in Christian ways or not / still is the world, this gorgeous world / entirely resilient.” What does that mean for this story? Why did Michael Pocalyko use it here?

6. When we meet Rick Yeager, he has just arrived at Carneccio & Dice in Washington, polished and eager to start his new job, only to be immediately caught up in unusual circumstances. We find Wall Street giant Warren Hunter on the pinnacle of the financial world at Compton Sizemore, where he proceeds to devastate a Japanese investment banker remorselessly. When we’re introduced to Julia Toussaint she is on her way to a secret Capitol office for a meeting with Tenley Harbison, where the senator’s ambition and her aide’s loyalty and competence all become increasingly evident. What do the settings, dialogue, and occurrences in each of these initial appearances signal about the three main characters? How do these people change during the month in which *The Navigator*’s action takes place? Is the narrative arc a slow-reveal of each of their innate characters? Or does what happens during the course of the ViroSat deal change them in fundamental ways?

7. Readers of thrillers—and perhaps especially readers of literary thrillers—always have fun considering the question: How likely is that? So, how likely is...a trillion dollar international tech deal... a four-to-one leverage ratio on ViroSat...someone like Horvath...an enduring relationship like the two “gorgeous Jersey girls” have... that deal team at Compton Sizemore...the event at the US Capitol visitors center entrance...the Mafia subplot... the psychiatrist’s advice to Dutch...Rick and Julia’s relationship... Warren and Julia’s relationship...the Meier Seckendorf Böhmer backstory...the role of the Hasab family then and now...a guy like Jonas Barr...an entity like FSSC...a tech titan like Sanford Tuttle...?

8. Julia Toussaint is the youngest person in the book, clearly its most important woman, and the only African American major character. Early on we learn that she moves with “evident confidence” and “self-awareness” in “white Washington.” Is that a fair assessment of Julia? Is it accurate to call Washington white? Is Julia representative of African American women in general, or is she more of an “everywoman” of her generation, black or white?

9. Lois Carneccio is pretty blunt and outspoken. In one conversation she pointedly references her own Italian ethnicity and then sneers that “the boys” in the Mafia of old are today “the boys” on Wall Street, asserting that “those guys are the new mob—that thing of theirs is all legit, all very legal, and more dangerous to all of us.” Is Lois right?

10. *The Navigator* is the kind of novel that builds reveal upon reveal as it unfolds. Were you surprised to find a “final reveal” in the very last paragraphs of the author’s Acknowledgements, after the novel ended? How much do you think that a writer’s own life experience and influences matter in fiction?

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