

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-73289-5 - The Black Pearls  
Richard MacAndrew  
Excerpt  
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## Chapter 1 *Who is Wolfgang Peters?*

‘This is the man,’ says Janet Hunter, and she puts a photo on the table. Janet Hunter is a police inspector from New Zealand. She’s in the police station on Rarotonga, one of the Cook Islands in the Pacific Ocean.

‘What’s his name?’ asks Tunui Epati. Epati is an inspector in the Cook Islands police.

‘His name is Wolfgang Peters,’ she answers. ‘Some people call him the “Minute Man”.’



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‘Why?’ Epati asks.

‘Because one minute he’s there and the next minute he’s not,’ answers Hunter.

Epati smiles.

‘And why do you want him?’ Epati asks. He looks at the photo.

‘He steals,’ answers Hunter. ‘He takes things – often from museums. People tell him what they want. Then he steals for them. And he gets very good money for his work.’

‘What kind of things does he take?’ asks Epati.

‘Anything,’ answers Hunter. ‘A Fabergé egg from a museum in Virginia in the United States, a Picasso painting from a museum in St Petersburg in Russia. And then this year an old book from a museum in Auckland in New Zealand. It’s the only one in the world. That’s why I’m after him.’



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'I see,' says Epati.

'Peters is very good,' says Hunter. 'But I want him. And I'm going to get him.'

'And he's coming here – to Rarotonga?' asks Epati.

'Yes,' says Hunter. 'We, the New Zealand police, think he's going to steal something here.'

'Ah,' says Epati. 'Then I know what – I think.'

Epati takes down a book and opens it. Hunter watches him. Many Cook Islanders are big people; Epati is big.



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He gives Hunter the book. It's open at a photo of a beautiful necklace of black pearls.

'That is the Manihiki Necklace,' says Epati. 'It's from the island of Manihiki. Manihiki is a thousand kilometres from Rarotonga, but it's one of the Cook Islands too.'

Hunter looks at the necklace.

'It's beautiful,' she says.



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‘Yes,’ says Epati, ‘and over a hundred years old. Those are black pearls. They’re not easy to find. You only get them in Tahiti and here in the Cook Islands.’

Hunter looks up at Epati.

‘The necklace is in the museum here,’ says Epati. ‘People from all over the world come to see it.’ He takes the photo of Peters from the table.

‘Can I have this photo?’ he asks.

‘Of course,’ answers Hunter. Then she says, ‘Peters is coming here this morning on a plane from Tahiti. I want to watch him, and try and get him. But is that OK with you? After all, this is your island.’



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‘That’s OK,’ says Epati. ‘Do you want any help? We have some good people in the Cook Islands police.’

‘Thank you,’ says Hunter, ‘but not now. I can call you.’

‘Of course,’ says Epati. ‘Call me by five o’clock.’

‘OK,’ says Hunter.

They go out of the police station.

‘Which hotel are you in?’ asks Epati.

‘The Waterside Inn,’ answers Hunter.

‘Good hotel,’ says Epati. ‘Is this your first time in the Cook Islands?’

‘Yes,’ says Hunter. ‘It’s very beautiful here. Well, thank you for your help, Inspector. I must get to the airport by eleven o’clock.’

