

Chapter 1

Chicago, Illinois...Months later

BOOM! In one shattering moment, the explosion rocked the entire city block and changed the lives forever of those within its walls. Sid's Delicatessen, once a local legend in Jewish cuisine, was now blown-out bits of rubble and smoke. Worst of all were the sounds of agonizing pain, the cries for help by those injured and burned by the explosion, in contrast to the eerie quiet of death. As the cloud of smoke and airborne particles settled, a tortured landscape revealed the injured, conscious and unconscious, covered with a flour-like layer of dust and larger debris. Body parts were strewn about, lying in pools of blood with human tissue sprayed against the remaining pieces of brick, wood, and plaster walls.

Within minutes of the explosion, sirens could be heard at a distance. Fire trucks, police cars, and emergency medical vehicles all sped to the restaurant's site on E. 59th Street. The sirens shrilled as they approached, silent to survivors of the blast. Blown out ear drums and shock had obliterated their hearing and created a miasma of confusion and fear as those who were able, moved from the site of destruction towards the light of day. Survivors were seen assisting others, giving care to friends and loved ones, and crawling or limping towards the safety of daylight.

On that day in Chicago, at what was once Sid's Delicatessen, survival was the only goal. Questions about the cause or extent of the damage would come later, and those who lived would be deeply scarred by the trauma for the rest of their lives.

Tel Aviv, Israel ...One month prior to the explosion

The Director of Covert Operations, a special division of the Israeli Mossad, sat patiently waiting for his requested conference with the Prime Minister and other high-ranking political officials. His identification badge read Alon Levy, with a grade four security clearance. It meant Levy could go almost anywhere in Israel and talk to high-ranking officials without seeking special permission. His fellow Mossad agents referred to him as Alon to his face, but always saw him as a hard-ass in the operative field. When trouble arose, and it often did, you thanked God if Alon Levy was with you.

An attractive young woman in her early 40s stepped out of the conference door and announced it was time for Alon to join the meeting. Upon entering, Alon nodded at several of the attendees; he knew most of everyone there and joined them at the conference table.

The Prime Minister spoke first. "Alon," he said, "how are you and the children? Again, I want to offer my

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condolence for the loss of your wife. She was a good woman and a loss to all of us.”

“Thank you, sir,”

“Alon,” the Prime Minister said, “we are interested in your present assessment of Middle Eastern planned, subsidized, and/or anticipated terrorist acts. We are particularly interested in activities that target Jewish population groups both in and outside of Israel.”

Alon opened a plastic briefcase and removed a chart marked “confidential” in red letters. He scanned the contents though he knew the information it held. “First of all, sir,” he began, “our field sources indicate there are greater political pressures to push for an increase in international Jewish terrorist activities in the very near future. The consensus of opinions seems to be that these anti-Jewish strikes are not supported financially, militarily, or verbally by any particular government. Rather, they are being subsidized by smaller but powerful radicalized factions behind the scenes. Now, understand me when I say, our neighboring countries, although not publicly supporting this movement, will do nothing to stop it. And that pretty much sums up what we have thus far.”

The Minister of Defense spoke. “Alon, I’d like your opinion. How do you envision the magnitude of the terrorist strikes? Will they be large events, political

assassinations, missile attacks? How do you think the attacks will take place?”

“Gentlemen, I have no data or evidence from any reliable source to even offer an educated guess. Our only viable indication is that these preemptive attacks will soon be on the increase and will target Jewish and non-Jewish groups on an international level. Their main objective appears to be to destabilize American-Israeli relations and in particular, the political and financial support of the Jewish state by the Western powers. A second objective would be to use random terrorist attacks to create fear as a deterrent against utilizing governmental sanctions and/or military actions against the Middle Eastern countries.”

The Prime Minister responded, “Alon, how do you think these attacks will occur? Don’t tell us about a lack of credible evidence. Give us your damn opinion and forget the politically correct answers. We are family, friends, and colleagues, so say what you mean, what you believe. All of us here respect your opinion.”

“Okay. First of all, I believe the terrorist attacks will be small-scale random actions with suicide bombings at the head of the list. Larger attacks would more likely require governmental support, and retaliatory actions would be too costly, so I don’t see that route as viable. Terrorist groups do not favor surviving activists. Suicide missions are more likely.”

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One of the other seated leaders at the table interjected, “Assuming your assessment is accurate, what can we do about it?”

Alon Levy, who had thus far responded with confidence, hesitated. “Gentlemen, I am not sure my response will satisfy anyone. How do we stop someone wearing a jacket lined with explosives from walking into a restaurant, theatre, or coffee shop and setting it off? The worst part is that he or she believes the act is not only justified, but a mark of valor. Such an enemy is nearly impossible to defeat. The only answer that makes sense to me is to identify and target the source of the act. Cut off a tentacle from the octopus and it still moves about, but you destroy the head, and the beast dies.”

The Prime Minister looked at Alon and replied, “Set up a task force. Make it your mission to locate and/or identify the supporting groups. Then, when we have the information we need, let's kill the beast!”