

## Chapter 1

**N**IKOLA POWSKIT HAD BEEN working for hours on the ocean charts in his private study, and he felt tired. He jotted a few final notes on a chart, satisfied with the course he had plotted. He folded the charts carefully and put them into a black briefcase, which was sitting next to the large table he was working on. He walked across the huge room to his desk and sat down. He took off his glasses and enjoyed the silence around him. After a few minutes, a soft knock on the door interrupted his rest.

“May I come in, sir?”

“Yes, come in and close the door, Igor.”

A tall, robust, well-dressed man with short white hair walked slowly toward Nikola’s desk. For a moment, Igor’s dark green eyes looked at Nikola intensely. Nikola was looking at one of the silver-framed pictures on his desk.

“Would you like your nightcap, sir?” Igor had a mild Scandinavian accent.

“Yes, tonight I’ll have a large brandy.”

Igor crossed the room and poured from an antique crystal decanter.

Nikola had a mouthful from the snifter and leaned back in his chair, savoring the brandy.

“Sit with me awhile, Igor.” Nikola didn’t offer him a drink. “Last night I dreamed about him again, and I believe he’s alive somewhere. I think he needs my help.”

Igor knew the subject well; Nikola was referring to his only son, Jonathan. It had been two years since he was last

seen, in Israel. “I miss him too.” Igor was careful in his response. This was a delicate subject.

“You think I will see him again?”

“Jonathan is a survivor. One of these days he will walk into this house with a great story to tell about where he has been for the last two years.”

“Thanks, friend. You always have something positive to say about Jonathan. You have been like a father to him since the day you met him. I’m in debt to you for all those years I was not around for him. You know, sometimes I think it is easy to govern a great fortune but difficult to rule one’s family.”

“No, sir, I’m in debt to you,” Igor said, referring to the time Nikola had saved his life, thirty-five years before, in Malta.

Nikola finished his drink and asked Igor, “You need anything before I go on vacation tomorrow?”

“No, sir. Everything is under control here.”

“How many times have I asked you to come with me on my trips, but you always claim you have too much to do here? One of these days I will order you to come and enjoy a vacation with me.”

“I appreciate that, sir, but while the family is on vacation, my obligations are here.”

Nikola was well aware of Igor’s sense of duty. Igor was in charge of the staff for the twenty-five-room residence and fifteen acres of grounds of the Dragon’s Gate property in Bel Air, California.

The two men sat quietly. Nikola remembered the day Jonathan had departed for Tel Aviv to join his squadron in the Israeli air force after a short visit at home. Nikola had personally driven him to LAX that night.

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Jonathan realized his father was tense. "Don't worry, Dad, I'll be fine; besides, you will see me a few months from now."

Nikola had tried for months to convince Jonathan to abandon the idea of joining the Israeli air force.

"Son, I have built an empire based on new technologies, and I help Israel plenty. But you're my only son. The future of the business depends on you. I can't spare you." Nikola couldn't conceive of his son giving it all up for the Israeli cause.

"Frank is there for you."

"Frank is not a blood relative."

"Dad, Israel needs good pilots, and I am a good Israeli pilot. You cannot just help with money. They need manpower, Jewish manpower. We are on the edge of annihilation; our enemies have grown strong. Peace in the Middle East depends on the existence of Israel."

"I see you've been talking with some of our past guests at Dragon's Gate."

"Yes, Dad, I had long talks with Yitzhak and the General."

"If I had known, I never would have invited them to stay in our home."

Before boarding the El Al flight, Jonathan put his hand on his father's right shoulder and said, "I love you, Dad. Remember that. You have given me everything a son could dream of. You have given me the most important of all gifts—love, a happy childhood, and wings to fly with in search of my own destiny. I'll be back. You can be sure of that." Those were the last words Nikola ever heard from his son. He disappeared a month later.

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Igor noticed that Nikola was lost in thought. "Would you like another drink, sir?"

Nikola looked at his watch. It was ten-thirty. "No, Igor, it's time for me to go to bed. Anyway, how many times have I asked you to call me by my first name? I mean, it's been thirty-five years, Igor!"

Igor looked him curiously and said, "I'll try, Mr. Powskit."