

Blind Target

By Brent Ladd

A Codi Sanders Adventure Thriller

October 1955 – Umnak Island – Part of the Aleutian Chain Off Alaska, USA

Engineer Marshal Sergei Popov swallowed the bile that pushed at the back of his larynx. Twenty minutes bobbing in the ocean waiting for the all clear. His moss green face reflected from the weakening moonlight as he tried to concentrate on the bobbing coast line. His round face and large eyes made him look frog-like but his aberrant fear of the water had him clinging to the craft with white knuckles.

A slim, black mottled silhouette in the distance moved up and down with the shadowy sea. It was a land beyond desolate, where few men came and fewer survived, Umnak Island. Popov's vision seemed to cloud with darkness in the peripherals as his head started to spin. He blinked it away and sipped a lung-full of arctic air. Somebody next to him mumbled something and the raft started to move – *Thank God*, he breathed.

The eight-man rubber raft pushed through the choppy water and pointed to a small cove just visible ahead. *America*, Private Andrei Tatter, the youngest of the group, thought to himself. *Doesn't look like much*. He took a nervous swig of water from a canteen off his belt, washing the dried salt from his lips. He glanced back to his commanding officer from his position in the bow. The man sat tall, he looked stoic and determined. He would see them through.

Colonel Tolya Alexeev rubbed the stinging sensation from his piercing blue-grey eyes and replaced the goggles that had protected them from the horizontal air born ice crystals only moments before. Five degrees below zero with a thirty-mile-an-hour wind was no picnic but he had seen worse. And if the reports were correct it was only going to get worse.

Their state-of-the-art raft was made of a new synthetic rubber, giving it twice the strength of any previous design. It had compartmentalized air pockets, that made it ride and skim across the water with ease. But it was susceptible to wind and Tolya struggled to keep it on course. Once back on, his goggles almost immediately started to fog. He absently scratched at an old scar that bordered his strong cleft chin.

Tolya squinted past the clouds as they scraped across the lava-strewn beach ahead in a battle of black versus white, truly inhospitable and not a spec of flora or fauna in sight.

Operation Blind Pig. *It had to be named after one of the politburo's wives*, he thought, as he looked over his squad. It consisted of three well trained men, all alpha group, OBSP formed by Minister Zhukov himself. Each with arctic training from the 379th special purpose detachment.

Corporal Misha Ivanov, a six foot one battle hardened commando, who was under his command during the messy Hungarian Revolution. Misha's kind brown eyes hid the true fighter inside. He was a man Alexeev could trust. Something extremely valuable, considering the current political landscape in Mosco.

Sergeant Kazimir Yegor, or Kaz, as he was called. The true pessimist of the bunch. The man never smiled but he made up for it by always being ready for anything to go wrong, at any time. He was wound tight as a longbow strung with a short string and his no nonsense attitude kept everyone in line. Kaz was probably the most loyal comrade soldier Colonel Alexeev had ever met. And one day, maybe over several shots of vodka, he would see the man laugh and smile.

Private Andrei Tatter a promising cadet from the Suvorov Military School in Saint Petersburg. The boy was from solid Russian stock and even spoke some English. He was sinewy, fast, like a cheetah, with a perfect smile and a biting sarcasm. Something very few Russians seemed to have.

These were the best the soviets had to offer and he'd have no better company on any mission. Even to an island that time and God had forgotten.

The rest of Colonel Alexeev 's team were a mixed bag of the unknown. He looked across the unit, each wore matching snow camouflage outerwear with a large fur-rimmed parka hood, with no identification of any kind. All except one.

Seated on the starboard second seat, looking more like a comedy skit than a squad member was their guide, Chikuk, a Siberian Yupik Eskimo from Inupiaq island off the coast of Siberia. Chikuk had refused the snow camouflaged military clothing in favor of his own winter gear made of sealskin and caribou. And no amount of conversation would change his mind. The man had lived and flourished in some of the harshest winter conditions on the planet. He wore a perpetually disappointed expression, as though everyone around him was doing it wrong. But if anyone was going to guide them through this operation above the arctic circle, in winter, on foot, it was him.

The raft hit a particularly large crest and subzero degree Celsius water breached over the gunwale. Tolya watched as the man next to Chikuk lifted his feet in the air, fearful of the cold.

Zampolit Traktor Yashin, what every special forces squad going to America needed, a political officer. The man was missing most of his hair along with a personality. His beady black eyes seemed to take in everything around him and yet see nothing. Traktor wore a scowl, that he had been nursing since fifty-two.

To Tolya, he was like a 100lb anchor on a 5lb boat, and if he thought he could get away with it, he would have pushed the man over the side an hour ago. Ideology and indoctrination had no place on this mission. But the Deputy Chairman of the MPA in the Ministry of Defense had insisted. Tolya was almost positive Traktor was the man's nephew.

Good old mother Russia, ever fearful of defectors and the bad press it carried, like a terminal disease. Tolya scoffed at the thought. These men were battle hardened soviet soldiers. They bled Russian red no matter where they trod.

The man who looked like he was going to throw up at any second was Engineer Marshal Sergei Popov. A transfer in from the science and engineering corps. Popov was the key to this operation and Tolya's personal responsibility. He clutched in his arms a waterproof canvas package that was the latest in Russian technology. An electrical leach, as he called it. And no matter what lay ahead, Colonel Tolya Alexeev had one responsibility. Make sure it was activated.

Visibility dropped to near zero, as the clouds finally won their battle, covering the world in a billowy cotton. It was a total whiteout with visibility in mere meters. His new generation optics were a joke. Sure they helped block ultraviolet radiation and the 2nd generation polarization cut snow glare significantly, but they were useless in these conditions and the damn things kept fogging up.

The GSS's science division was great at theory, but the lack of practical application often made men like Tolya guinea pigs. *I'd like to see the scientists come out here and give this shit a try.* His chapped lips cracked, as the thought put a smile on his face. This was what he was made for, the apex of extreme. Living on the razors edge with a life and death mission to fulfill.

Chikuk made a soft clicking sound and pointed with a flat vertical palm. Tolya adjusted his course to match the Yupik Eskimo's gesture. Within a moment a dark mass pushed through the low clouds. And a small black rock cove mostly covered in ice appeared.

Tolya cut the engine and coasted towards the hummock lined shore. Misha leaned over the front of the raft and using an oar, broke the hoarfrost, carving a path for the boat. Once they had moved to more substantial ice the team disembarked.

Like a well-practiced drill, all gear and personnel was unloaded and moved across the frozen sea and up to the shore. The sound of crunching rocks and cracking ice under foot was masked by the waves fighting against the perpetual frozen barrier. A mix of stacked ice and frozen sea foam covered the shore, where it transitioned to polished rime covered rocks that gave way to the unforgiving land beyond.

Tolya glanced over as Chikuk knelt briefly and mumbled some sort of prayer or greeting then selected a smooth pebble and scraped the ice from it. He placed it in his pocket and stood for a brief second, unmoving. Then just as quickly, he was back helping the others drag their gear up the beach and into the snow covered landscape beyond the shore.

Traktor tried to stifle a sneeze as he moved empty handed to the high tide mark. He bent at the waist and tried to flick off the slush that had accumulated on his boots. He then stamped his feet back and forth as though the American soil was burning his soles.

Colonel Tolya Alexeev looked around at the near white out conditions and felt confident their actions had gone unseen. Tolya knew he would have approached this mission very differently, even his team selection. But the powers that be, had turned a deaf ear to his plans and dictated terms, a "yes sir" assignment right from the beginning. This new-fangled cold war was not like anything Tolya had experienced before. Colonel Tolya Alexeev would have preferred to face his enemy, rather than steal around in the shadows. But different times called for different strategies. Tolya, however, was not about to step foot on foreign soil without something connecting him to his mother Russia. He fingered his Order of Lenin medal hidden away in his breast pocket. A quick reminder of home and why he was here.

Colonel Tolya Alexeev's mind started to drift to a past mission, death screaming and blood – so much blood. The screams of the innocent blended with the wind, fighting its way up the cove.

"Colonel! We're ready".

Kaz looked at him seriously. Tolya pulled back to the moment and gave him a curt nod. Without hesitation, Kaz ran to the sea.

He spun the raft pointing the bow out to open ocean. He pulled his DV-1 combat knife and cut several small slashes in the raft. He started the motor and released it.

The squad watched as the craft moved past the waves, finally succumbing to the impassionate sea. It sank out of sight with a gurgle and sputter of the drowning motor.

The group took on a brief sallowness, as this was their point of no return.

Tolya looked at Engineer Marshal Sergei Popov "You Ready"?

Popov's pale white face with nervous brown eyes nodded back at him. The squad reconfigured their gear and set off a brisk pace. Chikuk in the lead and Kaz, his bushy eyebrows already frozen and frosted, taking up the rear.

Here at the end of the world. the wind and clouds were a living, breathing entity. They did their part to slow them down always blowing, scouring the ground like a ravenous creature. It was the ultimate hunter: cruel, unceasing, inescapable.

Chikuk looked back and called out, "Stay close. It's not the cold that kills, it's the wind."

The ground was relatively flat but the snow was frozen so hard it was like walking on slippery concrete. The sun had risen to its pinnacle for the day just inches above the horizon. It cast a greenish-orange anemic glow as it played peek-a-boo with the now transient clouds. This time of year the sun was only up for a few hours. Moving low across the horizon and providing almost no warmth. The tundra and rock covered ground gave way to multiple snow drifts that had to be skirted or climbed. And after eighteen miles of dragging gear and coping with the bitter cold their progress had slowed dramatically.

Tolya spied through his binoculars from behind a large volcanic boulder. He could no longer feel his fingers and wondered how the rest of his squad was coping with the vehement temperature. A large steel grey monolith, near completion, stood in the distance. It was a testament to modern man. Here on Umnak Island thousands of miles from well, anything, was the most sophisticated piece of electrical engineering in the world. The DEW Line, as the American's called it, or Distant Early Warning System. *Those paranoid bastards were building an 800 mile chain of these radar tracking and alerting stations. All just on the account of our superior military strength.*

With it they could detect a plane coming across the arctic circle out of Soviet Russia and scramble their jets to intersect. Tolya focused on the base where three men and one guard worked., Tolya turned and headed back to his huddled team. He thought to himself, *Well that all stops today*

Chikuk secured the last post on a black and white camouflaged dome tent. It was a new design that could withstand high winds and rain. They had placed it in a small depression and from fifty feet away, it was invisible. Tolya stepped through the flap and was greeted with a wall of warm of air, smelling of burnt tobacco and fear - And for the first time in nine hours no wind. It was a balmy minus five degrees Celsius inside, but it felt like summer to him.

Popov's color had returned to his face. He was hunched over inspecting and organizing his gear. They were three grey boxes, the size of a loaf of bread with odd connectors attached at both ends. Two for the mission and one as back-up. These were his babies and the entire mission depended on his abilities. Though not a social person by nature, Popov lived in the here and now of electrical science. Capacitors, resistors and circuits were his world.

Traktor was hunched over scribbling something in a little black notebook he kept in his breast pocket. His eyes seemed to dart from person to person, then back to his writing. Traktor's patented dour expression on display, to prevent looky-loos from reading his notes.

Tolya moved to his second in command Sergeant Popov, "How's the radio working?"
"I'm getting a ping from our shadow."

The Tolya nodded as he took off his arctic combat boots and rubbed the circulation back in his toes. They were a new kind of vulcanized rubber with an inflatable bladder to act as a weather barrier. There was little doubt of their effectiveness but sub-arctic cold had a way of getting everywhere, even in your bones.

Chikuk was off to one side eating some kind of dried meat. He seemed unfazed by the day's activities and looked as if he could do it all again right now. Misha moved over and sat next to him drinking from his canteen. He offered Chikuk a drink and in return Chikuk offered him some of his meat. Misha took the dark chunk in his hand and sniffed it. Chikuk smiled at his hesitation.

“Walrus mixed with crowberry, it’s good.”

Misha took a bite and tried to make a pleasant face. Have you ever been to America before, he whispered. He glanced over his shoulder, worried what the political officer might think of this conversation.

“ I have cousins that live a couple of islands to the north from here.”

Chikuk gestured with his hands.

“We have met for hunts in the summer. Good hunting there.”

“I like to hunt,” Misha added.

Chikuk reached over and squeezed his arm.

“Hunting keep you strong.”

Chikuk’s cheeks spread revealing a missing front tooth smile, but genuine care.

October 1955 – 4:12pm - Umnak Island – Alaska, USA

The windshield wiper worked overtime against a losing battle, as a mix of snow and sleet filled the air along the lava rock coast. Four, thousand watt headlamps pierced the dusk as the last rays of the days paltry sun dipped below the horizon.

Private Conrad Jenkins gazed out the fogged-up side window of the Le Toureau Logistical Car VC-22 Sno-Freighter. A unique land train built to cross deep rivers and snow while pulling one hundred and fifty tons of equipment. The cockpit sat fifteen feet in the air and the windshield angled forward with three square side-by-side windows. It gave the appearance of an praying mantis. But it was no insect, with 800 horsepower, powering 24 electric motors, one for each wheel including the five trail cars behind it, truly a train without a track. The Sno-Freighter had high ground clearance, using eight foot-tall tires that allowed it to clear debris up to four feet in height, and all done at sub-arctic temperatures.

Conrad had spent the last four hours wondering how he had gotten to this place in his life. Things used to be good, he was respected in certain circles of Chicago. Now he was a bottom rung private, caught up in some mad race against the Soviets.

The Sno-Freighter jostled though a ravine, banging Conrad back to the present. Up ahead he could see a large partially illuminated structure. It was painted navy grey with a concave surface, towering sixty feet in the air. A smaller column stood to its midpoint pointing a receiver back at the huge reflecting dish.

The tungsten work light rattled as the Sno-Freighter came to a stop next to the load-out area of DEW LRR Site 42. Conrad climbed down the exit ladder from the cockpit and jumped the last two feet to the frozen ground. He stomped his feet and looked back up at the odd vehicle. Written in a mix of yellow cursive and block letters was the company's logo, Alaska FREIGHTLINE Inc. With a practiced motion, he tapped out a single lucky strike from the pack. He ducked behind the large front tire to block the wind from his lighter. The sweet smoke filled his lungs and calmed his frenzied nerves. He had arrived.

Conrad looked around. Men and equipment were unloading the Sno-Freighter. The large metal structure with a concave front towered up into the clouds. It was constructed from individual steel panels that made the surface look like a unchanging puzzle, where all the pieces are rectangles. Off to his right was a wooden unpainted building about the size of a four car garage and beyond that nothing but ice and lava rock. Private Jenkins took another draw on his cigarette and exhaled decisively. He must of really pissed somebody off to deserve this posting.

Inside the wooden building was a common area with a small well stocked bar. The walls were unfinished plywood and the floor was covered with thin grey linoleum. There was a pool table and a reading area. The duty officer's desk was to the left and beyond that several doors. Conrad reported to the commanding officer and was issued a cot and guard duty, two shifts four hours on, four hours off. Nobody stayed out in the cold longer than four hours. This was a standing order based on an incident three months back. His cot was a two tiered affair that was shared with three other workers. Privacy was a thing of the past.

Chikuk leaned against the wind with his nose held high sniffing. Then with a curt hand gesture pointed the squad in an arc around to the left.

The sun had long since gone down and the temperature was continuing to plummet. There were no workers left about the grounds of the DEW LRR Site 42, only one guard.

Corporal Misha Ivanov stayed low in a crouch as he took his time moving silently through the loose rock. His trusted DV-1 combat blade in one hand and a grapefruit sized rock in the other.

The limed figure next to a burning drum was facing away and Misha longed for him to stay just like that. The fifty five gallon steel drum popped and hissed as the fire ate at the wood inside. The wind had died to a constant thirty kilometers per hour.

The plan was simple. Take out the guard, make it look like an accident and get in and out of the facility as quickly as possible.

But plans have a way of falling apart the moment you make contact with the enemy. Whatever the reason, Misha would never know, maybe his back was cold, but the soldier turned from the fire and stared right at him. Misha froze. The soldier seemed not to notice him in the dark, as he continued to puff on his cigarette, staring right in his direction.

Colonel Tolya Alexeev tensed as the squad helplessly watched the machinations play out from a distance. Kaz pulled his Makarov MP-71 and put the bead on the soldier's heart. Tolya raised his hand to stop him. The meaning clear, no unnecessary gun play or noise.

Private Jenkins brushed at a bit of tobacco stuck on his tongue. The cold nearly freezing his open mouth. The roaring fire did little to abate the encroaching chill. He imagined himself a rotisserie chicken slowly turning to the flames. Only in his case it was to keep from freezing.

Jenkins leaned back, watching a spectacle of colored flames dance across the night sky. The collage of colors flowed overhead wavering in an incandescent aura of azures and deep reds. The local Inuit called them spirit lights. But he knew them as the aurora borealis.

He drew the last puff on a spent cigarette and flicked it. As he watched the glowing ember spin through the air, something caught his attention. Something was wrong.

Two human eyes stared back at him in the span between flame and blackness, with a feral look about them. This was no fellow coworker. The man was stock still, staring at him with a large knife in his left hand. Conrad quickly moved to unsling his M-1 rifle and give a call of alarm, but his voice failed him and only an unintelligible squawk came out. The sound was quickly carried away by the wind.

Misha didn't hesitate. Like a cat that just touched fire for the first time, he leaped headlong. But the loose rocks and ice gave way and he lost purchase. The soldier reacted fast pulling the rifle off his parka, taking a quick shot from the hip. Click.

Private Jenkins pulled the trigger but then quickly realized he hadn't chambered a round. In one practiced motion he put his mitten in his mouth bit down and pulled it off. He racked the bolt on his rifle and chambered a round. He scarcely noticed the skin on his hand as it ripped free, sticking to the frozen metal parts of his weapon. But he did notice that he wasn't going to make it. Before he could finish, the man leaped, knife forward, straight for him.

Misha hurled his rock attempting to delay the rifle's firing but the American feinted his head left and it flew past harmlessly. Misha jabbed his blade for the man's ribs, but ended up getting nothing but air. The soldier was quick. That was his last thought before the butt of a rifle

made contact with back of Misha's skull. Stars flashed and darkness grabbed him. Misha battled the impending darkness. He blinked; his head lolled.

Conrad's mind and body instantly switched to autopilot. He dropped his stance, spread his legs and returned to his days fighting in the ring.

As a flyweight fighter Conrad had been the only provider for his family. His mother, Agatha and little sister, Penny had depended on him for everything. Agatha had lost her leg due to type-1 diabetes and found work impossible for a one legged black woman. And as much as she hated Conrad fighting, she knew it was the street for all of them if he failed.

Conrad had excelled for a time becoming a local favorite. That was before a bad decision and trouble with the law left him two choices, jail or the army. Now, every penny he could spare from his private's salary was sent back to his family.

His movements came without thinking, He used his rifle to parry the man and his knife to the side then swept the butt of the rifle around bringing it full force on the back of the intruder's head. Private Jenkins just stared at the unmoving man. Gore and brains clearly visible from the back of the man's head. Unbelievably, Conrad tapped the man with his boot.

Tolya jumped from his hiding place and in a matter of seconds the entire squad swarmed to their fallen comrade.

Conrad looked around still in shock. The world had gone deathly silent and seemed to slowly spin. He placed his now frost bitten hand up to his mouth to call for help. From some primitive place in his brain, there grew a crunching noise, but by the time he turned, the wind was pushed from his lungs as he took flight and landed hard.

Tolya tackled the soldier at full pace and five more of his men followed behind.

Private Jenkins was immediately overwhelmed. They held him tight to the ground and one man covered his mouth and nose.

Conrad struggled against overwhelming odds. *What kind of stupid army drill was this?* Then the reality hit and his eyes went wide. The man to his left said something in Russian. *This was no drill!* It was the last conscience thought he ever had.

Within moments the team had smothered and suffocated the soldier. They quickly rolled Misha over. Andrei held the man's head in his arms. There was no movement. The man that had been loyal to a tee, was no more. Strangely though, he wore a slight smile on his now rapidly cooling face. Corporal Misha Ivanov had died doing what he loved most.

Colonel Tolya Alexeev kicked the ground in anger and loosed a few choice words. It was a unimaginable disaster, but something they had all trained for. He would have to refocus the squad quick, or face losing them. Later he would grieve for his friend and one of the fiercest warriors he had ever met.

Suddenly Chikuk ran off into the stygian night. Tolya hissed, "What is he doing!"

"Taking a piss, I think," came out in an incredulous voice from Tatter.

"Unbelievable. Tell him to fucking hold it, we have a major problem on our hands."

Tolya turned to Engineer Marshal Sergei Popov, "You got five minutes, not a second more. Understand?"

The way the words came out of his mouth left no doubt. Popov dashed off with his case in hand.

"Tatter go with him."

Private Tatter gave a quick nod as he ran off in the engineer's footsteps.

"Colonel."

Chikuk had returned and was motioning to the remaining team.

"What now," the Tolya grouched.

"Bring body."

The team quickly cleaned the site, grabbed the two bodies and moved off with Chikuk. There in the snow was a pool of frozen yellow. It took a second but Tolya understood Chikuk's plan. They unzipped the soldier's parka took off his gloves and lowered his zipper. The next shift would find him frozen while taking a piss too far from the fire. They would claim it a rookie mistake and think nothing more of it. At least that was the hope.

Popov stooped by the metal double doors that held the wiring for the Antenna's receiver. The tall tower pointed a highly tuned receiving unit back at the reflected surface of the dish. It could pick up on even the faintest of distant sounds and then distinguish what they were through a collection of sophisticated electronics stored in the nearby building. This information was then relayed to other stations along the chain and ultimately back to a quick response base, located in Fairbanks. At the bottom of the tower was a pyramid shaped space that housed and connected all the wiring before sending it to the building next door.

Picking a simple padlock was easy, but not at minus ten in the wind. Popov finally heard the click as the hasp gave way. He quickly opened the doors and climbed inside. Tatter kept watch on the surrounding area from just outside.

Popov pulled off his mittens and rubbed his hands together trying to bring them back to functionality. He selected one of his grey boxes from his bag and began the process of installing it between the receiving console and the output cable. He stood on top of the radio box and unscrewed the twenty-eight wire coupling that attached the antenna to the console. He quickly inspected the pin configuration and admired the level of intel they were working from. Satisfied that they were a match, he reattached each end of the connector to the electrical leach. Then hid the whole thing back into the mass of wires that ran back to the receiver.

Popov climbed down to the floor and sat next to a console. He pulled out his portable battery operated oscilloscope, a marvel of modern technology. He connected it to the wires leading to the transmitter and hit the selector knob. The signal coming into the unit showed a strong consistent cycling green wave like a never-ending snake. Popov then flipped a switch on the scope and the same sine wave now had a small but definite spike on the upper arch of each wave. Satisfied that his job here was done, he packed up his equipment and escaped the compartment.

The squad all met back in the domed tent. Misha's body lay wrapped in a tarp off to one side. A sharp reminder to what was at stake for them all. Tolya knelt next to the body. He pulled back the tarp and stone starred back at him. His friend was no longer human. The cold had taken and claimed him. It would probably take them all before this job was done.

Tolya bowed his head in deep respect. *Of all the unlucky...* He paused his train of thought as it would do him no good. He slipped the red and gold medal with the profile of Vladimir Lenin from his pocket and held it in his hand. Whispering,

"You deserve this more than I, Misha."

Colonel Tolya Alexeev then slipped his Order of Lenin Medal into Misha's breast pocket. He then touched the dead soldiers face for a brief moment; finally returning the tarp over his head.

"Comrade Alexeev," the political officer stepped towards Tolya to engage him.

"It's Colonel Alexeev," Tolya put his hand up to stop him from continuing.

"And we can discuss this later," He turned to the whole team.

"Right now, I want everything packed up. We leave in ten. I want to be miles from here when they find that body."

Tolya looked to the now stationary Zampolit Traktor Yashin. His face evident of the challenge he had intended for Tolya.

"You best get a move on – Comrade. This is a bad place to get left behind."

With that, he turned his back on Traktor and went to grab his gear.

"Colonel, what do we do with Misha?"

The young private looked expectantly.

"We bring him Private Tatter. No evidence of any kind gets left behind."

"Understood sir."

The white out was complete; snow, clouds and wind mixed together against the black of night. Tolya reconfigured his parka for the third time in an attempt to block the cold as pushed against the merciless gale. The quick march doing little to maintain his core temperature, and after six hours battling the harsh conditions it was taking its toll. He could no longer feel his extremities.

As a group they had slowed. Moving at about forty percent of their original pace. All except for Chikuk; he looked like he was just getting started. The good news was they had over twenty miles still to go and less than two days to do it in. It was an impossible task. Tolya gave them a thirty percent chance of success. They were good odds and based on their situation and what was at stake, he would take them.

Sargent Kazimir Yegor scooted next to Tolya and held up his compass to the small flashlight covered with a red lens.

"It says we need to go in this direction."

Tolya glanced down at the needle pointing off to his left.

"Yes but this far north the declination could be as much as seventy degrees off, Kaz. I recommend continuing up this grade."

He pointed towards what looked like the beginning of a hill where just visible through the gloom was their scout. With visibility at around twenty feet no one could be totally sure.

"Just keep the wind on your left, it's better than a compass up here."

Kaz nodded and returned his compass to his pocket.

Tatter abruptly appeared out of the gloom, his red flashlight just barley illuminating the ground around him. He bent at the waist trying to catch his breath. He was followed by their scout Chikuk, who carried no flashlight. He pulled a small sled with Misha's body and wore a grim expression.

"We need to go around, sludge ice ahead, very dangerous."

Traktor pipped up, "What's sludge ice?"

Tolya looked to the political officer.

“I don’t know and I don’t want to.”

He then turned back to Tatter.

“Do what Chikuk says.”

Tolya looked at his wristwatch and did a quick calculation in his head.

“We have about two hours left before sunrise.” The team moved off to the left in an attempt to skirt the problem that lay ahead, sludge ice.

“And stay together, do not lose sight of the man in front of you!”

Every step was now labored as they now moved against the heartless arctic wind.

“Comrade Alexeev.”

Tolya kept his eyes fixed on young Private Tatter five meters in front of him. He was nothing more than a fuzzy red silhouette set against the impossible conditions. He could no longer feel any of his extremities.

“Comrade Alexeev!” Zampolit Traktor Yashin ran forward, now matching his stride, huffing with desperation. Tolya gave him the briefest of glances.

“What do you need, Political Officer Yashin?”

“This is madness, we need to stop.”

Tolya could tell the man was struggling, but had no sympathy for a government stooge.

“We stop when I say.”

“No mission is worth a man’s life, comrade.”

“Tell that to your uncle.”

Tolya glanced to the man. Traktor fought for every breath.

“He sent us here to get a leg up on the Americans, not to die on their soil and create an international incident.”

Tolya trudged on mechanically. Finally, he stopped and turned to Traktor, freezing him in his steps.

“Comrade, I have no plans to die here, but if you do, I’ll be sure and bring you back to your family.”

Traktor stiffened at the comment.

“You know I have orders to kill anyone that even looks at the Americans with envy.”

Tolya let the comment sit for a second. The wind howled a punctuation mark.

“Is that so, well I have orders to kill anyone that interferes with this mission, and right now that’s you.”

Tolya continued on, then looked back over his shoulder and called.

“Besides, what do the Americans have to envy, freedom, power and more money than sense if they are wasting it on this silly endeavor, surely they will lose in the end?”

The colonel stopped and turned back around as though he just remembered he’d forgot something.

“Zampolit Traktor Yashin, please get back in line, before I put a bullet in your head. Oh and please remember to put all this in your little report.”

Traktor straightened and looked at Tolya with black eyes that could kill. He slowly reached for his pocket.

“Please try it.”

Tolya gave Traktor a furtive glance. Which made Traktor look over. Walking just off to his side was Kaz, and in his hand was a large pistol pointed straight at the Political Officer’s spine.

“Now get your ass back in line... Comrade”

Zampolit Yashin remained defiant and unmoving as he watched Tolya turn his back on him and disappear into the night. Anger flushed Traktor's frost bitten face, focusing him to a single conclusion. This mission was doomed under the command of Colonel Tolya Alexeev. The arrogant ass was going to get them all killed. What this Operation Blind Pig needed was the finesse and cunning of a man like himself. Not some blunt nosed instrument like Tolya.

It was his duty to Mother Russia to remove that swine from command. He pondered at several possibilities, each ending up with the death of Colonel Tolya Alexeev. This made Traktor smile as he savored the feeling, slowly lowering his pulsing blood pressure.

Traktor looked up. There was no one ahead in the gloom. Nothing but the unbroken parade of clouds as they whisked past the meager glow of his red-lensed flashlight. They seemed to be in a hurry to some unknown destination. He blinked the frost from his eyes and spun behind him. Still, nothing. Panic began to crawl up his spine as uncontrollable shivers set in. He tried calling out several times but only the lonely call of a howling breeze returned. It seemed to laugh and mock him with its high-pitched scream. He looked to the frozen ground but the blowing snow had erased any footsteps. How long had he been standing there thinking of Tolya's demise?

Traktor ran forward shouting.

“Comrades’!”

But his words were grabbed and pulled away by the gale. He continued blindly forward as he pulled out his hand compass. It pointed off to his right. He adjusted accordingly and quickly trudged forward. As he moved his feet he noticed a change, the ice had taken on a honey-like consistency. Traktor continued through it. His rubberized boots temporarily holding the wetness at bay.

Then for a brief moment the blowing clouds parted and visibility jumped to nearly a thousand meters. A pool of moonlight speared what looked like the edge of a small shallow inlet in front of him. On the other side of the inlet was the red glow of his teams flashlights. The surface of the inlet was greasy in appearance but not solid. He screamed for all he was worth but the team continued on.

Traktor pulled his pistol out and raised it in the air. Then remembering their strict orders, put it away. He quickly started moving through the slushy water around the shallow inlet to catch his team. It was only about twelve inches deep and his boots were holding up fine. Plus the political officer was saving significant distance by going this way. All he had to do was catch back up before the white out returned, blinding him from the team.

But just as quickly as the team appeared they were once again swallowed up by the indifferent clouds. Traktor sloshed though the Slurpee-like conditions as fast as his legs would carry him. The surge of sudden adrenaline briefly warmed his core as he redoubled his efforts. He would not be left behind.

A sound like cracking ice came from behind him spurring him on. Then suddenly the sound came from all around him. The slush was freezing at an alarming rate. Zampolit Traktor Yashin felt bile and fear stab at his guts. He panicked and sprinted for the shoreline. Then like a shadow of a bird passing overhead, the slush transitioned from a liquid to a solid. In an instant Traktor was snared mid-calf down, both legs frozen in the ice. He tried to move, but he was caught like a fly in amber.

Traktor thrashed wildly but his lower legs held firm in the grasp of the freeze. The cold fought through the layers of his clothing seeking warm skin. He screamed and pulled his Tokarev

TT-30 from its holster with swollen, numb fingers. Traktor emptied the magazine in the direction he had last seen the squad, secrecy be damned.

Tolya put his hand and gave a quick whistle. The squad came to a stop and started to gathered together.

“Do you hear that?”

In the distance a faint clap of thunder popped off. Sargent Yegor lifted his head.

“Is that gunfire?”

“Colonel!”

Engineer Marshal Sergei Popov stepped to the group looking around.

“Political Leader Traktor Yashin is missing.”

“How is that possible!”

“I was just following the man in front of me and...”

Being new to Tolya’s team Engineer Popov didn’t know his commanders dislike for excuses. In his squad you owned up to your mistakes. Before he could finish, Tolya cracked him across the face. Dropping the man like a bag of rotted meat.

“Form a search grid from right here two by two. Tatter, Chikuk, grid one.”

He pointed in the direction they should search.

“Kaz, Popov, grid two.”

“Back here in ten minutes, then we’ll move to the next sections.”

The men ran off side by side searching their quadrant. Tolya being the anchor person could only pace and wait. He looked down at the tarp that held Misha’s body. The cost of this mission was already too high.

Traktor sat down on the now hard surface of the inlet. He processed his predicament. Luckily he was actually feeling warm so he didn’t have to worry about the cold anymore. He took out his knife and started chipping away at the ice that held his feet. As he worked, he felt his body get hot. So Traktor took off his parka so he could move more feely.

One leg was almost free, he could see the top of his shoe. Traktor stifled a yawn, he was tired. This had been an arduous journey. Maybe a short rest, then he could start back up. He laid back on the ice and rested his eyes for just a moment. His hands felt warm and he took off his gloves. *Ah, better.*

He thought of his summers back in Dzhubga, along the Black Sea. It was a small town formed by Cossacks in the 1860’s and it was his families favorite get away. They had a small birch cabin on a hill that had the most incredible sunset views. He could picture the orange glow across the dark water as his mother and father sat side by side on a carved bench sharing tea as black as the ocean at midnight. He would run through the woods and pick wild flowers for the table. His mother was always so proud of him. Then Traktor had a final strange thought... *Sludge ice very dangerous.* Then, he drifted off.

On the second grid search Chikuk and Tatter returned with the news. They had found their political officer.

Tolya looked down at their missing team member, laying on his back frozen solid. His feet still trapped in the ice, his parka, gloves and hat laying off to the side. Kaz mumbled, "Paradoxical undressing, one of the last signs of hyperthermia."

Tatter looked confused but he couldn't take his eyes off of the frozen man on the ice. Kaz looked up at the boy and continued.

"You think your warm so you take off your clothes."

An awkward silence hung on the mourning wind. Tolya broke it.

"Get him out of there."

Kaz looked at the Traktor's trapped legs.

"What about his feet?"

"Cut em off. We've wasted enough time here."

Tolya turned and walked away. He should have pushed the man overboard when he had the chance. Now they would have to drag two bodies with them.

Chikuk took out an ice saw and started on Traktor's left leg.

Two frozen corpses now rested in the edge of the domed tent. They spoke volumes of the morale inside. Tolya sat with his hands to his head trying to relieve a headache that started back in fifty four. The flap on the tent popped open and Chikuk and Popov entered.

They had made camp just before dawn and managed to navigate within a mile of the next installation. All they had left to do was to insert the second electrical leach and evacuate off the island. The never ending storm had taken its toll on the team but had also made them invisible to the enemy. Each member was suffering from frostbite and exposure. The black skin and appendages told of a future without these body parts but they all knew what was at stake.

The T-55 battle tank rolled over bodies lying in the street as if they were stacked cord wood. Colonel Tolya Alexeev kept his men in tight cover behind the metal beast as it crunched along, pressing its advantage against the poorly armed resistance. His boots made a sucking noise as they slogged through the masticated gore left in the tank's tracks.

Moscow had changed its mind and in an onslaught of overwhelming superiority had invaded Budapest to crush the Hungarian revolution. Nearly twenty thousand people had been killed so far and the number was rising.

Soviet soldiers were killing wounded civilians and the atrocities were growing as many commanders turned a blind eye to their soldiers actions. Some tanks were dragging the dead behind them as warnings to those still protesting. But Colonel Tolya Alexeev had other thoughts on his mind. His OBSP team had been tasked with a very specific mission. Get to Prime Minister Irme Nagy and capture him alive if at all possible. Tolya knew that the powers back in Moscow wanted to make his demise a very public event.

Tolya tapped on the back of the tank's heavy armor plating with the hilt of his dagger three times. The tank turret spun to the command as bullets hopelessly pinged off the its steel shell. The eighty millimeter canon fired a shell at the heavily fortified entrance to the capital. In an instant twelve armed men and a mountain of sand bags blocking the entrance to the building were gone. Tolya and his men dashed through the blood spattered doors hanging loosely on shattered hinges. Bodies and parts were everywhere as poorly armed civilians had tried to protect the building. Inside it was worse. Secretaries and paper pushers were willing to die, often times with nothing but a coat rack or file drawer as a weapon.

Tolya's men made quick work of the hurdle as they moved room to room on their way to the top office. The lopsided battle finally coming to an end with a very brave but stupid charge of eight men in suits wielding pistols. Tolya could take no more. He paused as his men and their Rexim-Favor submachine guns quickly shredded the force, leaving nothing but carnage and moans.

Tolya sat up in a sweat, his eyes blinking the sight away. Breathing heavily, he remembered the moment he was forced to stand proud as he received his medal, The Order of Lenin, from Defense Minister Marshal Zhukov for delivering the Hungarian Prime Minister. That was nearly a year ago.

He glanced at his Smersh watch. The radium hands ticking with a carefree precision. It was time.

On the back side of Umnak Island, basalt gives way to large sections of snow covered tundra and a small glacier that calves into the sea beyond. The plan was to exfil across the glacier and rendezvous with an old steel trawler that had been busy fishing and shadowing their movements from beyond five miles out to sea.

Kaz had tried to reach their shadow over the radio but so far no reply. It made little difference to Tolya as he had a job to do irrespective.

The next infiltration into the American's station went much smoother. Popov had installed the electrical leach, with the same exacting results. A specific spike in an otherwise perfect sine wave. They regathered at the dome tent to make one last push to the coast. All evidence to be taken along, leaving only footprints behind to dissolve away in the snow flurries.

The wind subsided and the temperature rose to just below freezing as the beleaguered squad reached the coast five miles south east of station DEW LRR Site 42. They had trekked a remarkable seventy eight miles over the course of three days in some of the most brutal conditions on the planet. Truly a remarkable feat. Now if they could just finish.

Kaz, while holding his headphones close to his ears, reached up with his other hand and snapped his fingers in the air. The radio had made contact. The remaining team leaned over to hear the one-sided conversation.

"Roger that, rendezvous oh fourteen hundred Walrus Bay."

Popov tried and failed to hear the next part.

"That's a little tight for us..."

"Understood"

Kaz put down the transmitter.

"Another storm is coming it's now or never."

Tolya glanced at his watch and calculated the remaining time; three hours. The arctic dash to the leeward side of the Island was taking too long. With the gear and the two bodies it was a struggle and there was no way to bury and leave some of it behind as the ground was rock hard. They were out of time.

Chikuk guided them at a brisk pace while pulling Misha's corpse. The man seemed impervious to the conditions or the weight of his load. Across a glacier was the fastest way to meet their objective but it was wrought with danger.

Tolya placed his hands on his knees as he huffed to catch his breath. The men were spent. The quick march to the coast had cost them all their remaining energy. The team would have to dig deep if any of them were to escape this god forsaken land.

Chikuk gestured for them to go around the five mile-long glacier but that option died with their ticking clock.

"There's no time left, we go straight through."

Everyone knew the risks of crossing a glacier but doing it in a hurry was madness. It was the Arctic's version of Russian Roulette.

Glaciers were constantly moving creatures that had a way of cracking open to deep chasms hundreds of feet deep and then closing back up just as fast. And when surface was covered with snow, there was no way of spotting the dangers below without taking extra time and using extreme caution.

Tolya didn't wait. After catching his breath, he jogged with his heavy load out on to the moving ice field. The rest of the team hesitated then followed behind. Tolya called behind him, "follow my tracks!" He figured that if something happened, at least they could learn from his error. The cove just six hundred yards on the other side was their destination.

A scream died in the wind as a crack and rumble shook the ground. Tolya looked back and did a quick head count. Sergeant Kazimir Yegor was missing. He ran back to investigate.

One hundred feet below in a narrow ice chasm lay the crushed body of Kaz. His folded remains were illuminated by impossibly blue ice that lived at the heart of the glacier.

Kaz had followed Tolya's footsteps but the snow that had covered the chasm had given way under his load.

With no possibility to get down to him Tolya made the only choice he could to save the rest.

"Everything over the side."

The men starred numbly.

"Move it!"

They pushed all that they were carrying over the ledge and down into the ice crevasse. Tolya moved to Tatter and put his gloved hand on his shoulder.

"Even them."

He gestured to the corpses.

"Hurry now, private."

The men, as reverently as possible dropped the two wrapped bodies into the crack. The wind singing a sad hymn as they starred at the jumble of bodies and gear, lying in the bottom of the gap.

"Now run!"

Chikuk watched as the small group of men ran recklessly across the uneven surface. He removed his glove and reached into his pocket. He pulled out the small pebble he has collected when they first came ashore.

"Thank you for keeping us all safe."

He bent to the ground and carefully placed it.

"It is finished."

Three desperate men sprinted across the rest of the glacier without incident. Once on the other side Tolya paused to take in his crew. They were a mess. Tatter's nose was black with frostbite and Popov was running stiff legged. He was probably going to lose his feet to the cold.

He waited, but there was no Chikuk.

Tolya called to Tatter, "where's Chikuk?"

"He wandered off."

Tolya looked confused.

"What do you mean!"

"I mean, he waved at me, turned and disappeared into the storm... I guess he decided to move to America after all, the last part he mumbled to himself."

Tolya stared off into the distance. A view that included every shade of white possible.

"We're done with him anyway, come on."

The three men climbed down the embankment and towards the cove. From out of the grey gloom came a black rubber raft pattering to the shore. Tolya took a shallow breath of the arctic air. This mission, though critical to his superiors, was costly. In the end, he could only hope that the evidence they had left behind would never come to light. Three of them, against all odds, had made it and honestly, he was surprised.

Chersky, Siberia – 7:31pm - Two Weeks Later

The Tupolev TU-16 Badger accelerated down the unmarked runway outside Chersky, Siberia. It was a cold but clear night with nothing but good news for the weather that lay ahead.

Radioman 1st class, Vaughn Pankiv, but everyone called him Panky, warmed his hands with the heat generated by the vacuum tube radio in the aft cabin. He was a scruffy man in appearance and attitude, with large ears and a squared chin. He scratched absently at the nap of his neck, as he buried his face into the green glow of the radar screen in front of him. Its extended port matching the contour of his eyes and the bridge of his nose. The scope's perpetual light saber swept the grid patterned screen with mechanical repetition. The tiny room buzzed with an electrical hum competing in volume with the two large Mikulin AM-3 turbojets roar.

Sitting in the forward cabin in two nylon meshed seats were Doctor Grigory Nepein and his demure, nervous assistant, Shura Mosin.

Grigory was the genius behind Operation Blind Pig. He had spent the last three years developing a counter to the American's defensive string of early warning radar stations across the arctic. And the result was the GN01. A transmitter capable of sending out a very specific signal. He was one of the Soviets best and most guarded secrets. His heavy brows and accented obsidian eyes were so intense that the average person often found themselves looking away rather than at the man during a conversation.

With the apparent success of the ground mission, all that was left, was for him to test the GN01. Grigory had spent most of his at his well-stocked lab and little contact with the outside world. That current lifestyle suited Grigory well. Five years ago he had lost his wife during childbirth and now his work was all he had to keep him warm at night.

As with most governments, the Soviets demanded progress from their science divisions. They had been patient with Grigory but it was now time for him to prove his worth. He was personally going to show them what a true mastermind could do. It would mean unlimited resources and possibly a little more freedom to pursue his other passion projects.

His assistant, Shura Mosin was busy with three boxes of electrical equipment stacked nearly to the ceiling. Red and green lights blinked in a systematized array, as he went through a precise checklist mounted to his clipboard.

Shura was the son of Polish parents, who early on, found a place for their son's intellect and had used it to better their station in life. His round coke bottle glasses and perfectly parted hair complimented his expected nerdish looks. The flight suit they had assigned to Shura looked as though he had borrowed it from a big brother, as it hung loosely on his small frame. But the man was so detail oriented he didn't even notice. He leaned to his left trying to get more comfortable due to the Makarov in his back pocket. It was loaded with specialty ammunition, deemed safe for use aboard airplanes.

The minister had personally given it to him with explicit instructions to shoot Grigory in the head should anything go wrong. There was no way they could risk him being captured, should the plane go down on American soil. He had taken the task on like he did everything in his life, with a scientific coolness.

The skies remained clear and the first taste of dusk was still two hours away. The TU-16 was a cigar-shaped long range bomber that could reach speeds of 990kph. It flew propelled by two massive turbo-jet engines with a range of 58,000 kilometers. The pride of soviet bombers.

It had a large cockpit and three cabins, each the size of a small shed, running in parallel. The bomb bay could hold two nuclear weapons and deploy them all at once or one at a time, depending on the requirements of the mission. The cockpit sat on top of a bulbous nose that gave the plane it's unique look and nickname, Badger.

Captain Yana Shchavelsky leveled off and set their course for ninety degrees due east.

"Ok, radio silence from here on out. We have approximately," he looked at his watch and calculated speed, distance and headwinds in his mind.

"Three and a half hours to target."

The captain was a large man with even larger hands. He double-checked all the gauges. Yana's natural instinct to always plan for the worst had served him well on over fifty sorties of this type. To him this mission was nothing more than business as usual. But to the higher ups they seemed unusually paranoid. Calling it off twice, before giving the final go ahead.

Yana looked over at his 1st officer, a man named Toma Fukin. He was busy at his station and certainly competent enough. "Toma, take the controls." As he turned the controls over to the co-pilot, he whipped out a dog-eared book that he had been working through and picked up where he had left off. Toma smiled at his captain, this was a regular occurrence.

"So did she kill him or was she framed?"

Without looking up, "I will happily loan you the book when I'm done."

"Who has the time to read these days."

Yana gave his co-pilot a sideways glance and shook his head. *Oh the youth of today.*

This particular Tupolev had been modified. The standard, somewhat prominent nose cone had been replaced with a concave transmitting dish covered with a Plexiglas cone to preserve the bomber's aerodynamics. Attached to the dish was a thick braid of wires leading back to the forward cabin.

Doctor Grigory Nepein wiped the sweat from his face and readjusted the wispy blond hairs that occupied some of his scalp. In spite of the outside temperature being well below freezing, the electronics in the cabin radiated heat like a furnace.

All systems had checked-out and there was nothing left to do but wait. But this was not the doctor's way. So he did a double check for the third time. Running through every possible scenario, just to be sure. He knew failure would most likely result in his death and possibly a global war. It had to be perfect and so did he and every crewman onboard.

"Shura lets run the sequence again."

Fifteen minutes to target was broadcast throughout the cabin in an impassive female voice. The navigator, Natasha Zykin, was a highly decorated officer, with the most flights of anyone on the jet.

She had proven herself extremely competent and that information had leaked up the chain of command. It had won her a place on captain Shchavelsky's crew. The captain, though a bit protective of her, was always impressed at how dead-on her navigating skills were. She never faltered.

Natasha was a short woman with a curvaceous figure and an ever-present smile. Her curly auburn hair was kept short and a smattering of freckles was the source of a nickname she had very slowly come to accept, Nushki.

Two years previously she had kept a mission on course in spite of a hurricane level storm and a lightning strike creating a complete electrical failure on the plane. The crew had panicked and assumed the worst. But when the clouds parted to reveal the runway, she was touted as a hero. Nushki picked up the mic and spoke without looking. "Bishop to queen three." She concentrated on a small metal checkerboard attached to the wall next to her. It had magnetic chess pieces strategically placed.

Panky looked at an identical board in aft radio room. He moved the white bishop to the new location and pondered. *Nushki what are you up to?* He then tentatively moved his black castle.

"Castle to pawn three."

Captain Shchavelsky put his book away and grabbed the stick.

"Toma, I'll take her from here."

1st officer, Toma Fukin, relinquished control. He was starting to feel the tension in the air as they drew closer to their primary target.

"Yes sir, you have control."

The captain looked out at the vast sky beyond.

"American air space... Well this is a first."

Toma swallowed hard and then squeaked out, "yes sir."

He noticed his hands felt sweaty in his gloves. *Get ahold of yourself*, he mouthed with mock bravery.

Panky reached over and flicked several switches.

"Powering down the radio and radar," he announced.

"Roger that, radio and radar powering down." Came as a reply from the Co-pilot.

"Resetting speed and altitude, Doc. it's all in your hands now."

Panky looked back at the board and concentrated.

"Pawn to castle four," was called from the cabin next to his.

He nodded at Nushki's play and moved the white piece with the castle symbol on it to match her called out move.

The captain pulled the throttle lever and adjusted the flaps as he spoke to the copilot directly.

"I sure hope they know what the hell their doing." He gestured with his head to the two Brainiac's in the cabin behind them.

"Or this is going to be a real short trip that ends in a ball of fire."

They shared a concerned look but moved past it, focusing on their duties.

The TU-16 decreased its altitude to 10,000 meters and slowed to 750kph. There was more turbulence at this altitude but the height and speed were critical for the success of the

mission. Yana had flown this route many times, but had always turned around at the 190th parallel while still over international waters.

This operation was as black as they got and he only hoped they would live through it. The pride and brilliance of the Soviet Union was at stake and he would make damn sure to fulfill his role.

“Five minutes to American air space.”

Nushki was feeling the tension grow with every mile forward.

“Disconnect Transponder.”

Panky followed the captain’s orders. There was no going back now.

“Queen to bishop four. Queen takes knight”

Panky smiled as he took Nushki’s knight. Nushki moved the corresponding pieces and called out over her shoulder.

“You’re getting reckless Panky!”

Panky rubbed his fingers together in an anxious fashion. Even the plane seemed nervous as it bucked and trembled trying to shove through the subzero air.

Grigory pushed a small green button on a metal console and glanced to his assistant for reassurance. A signal travelled at light speed to the dish in the nose of the jet. The dish amplified the signal and broadcast a very specific high power frequency to the world ahead.

Shura nodded timidly while readjusting his glasses on his sweaty face.

“CCI is broadcasting,” he croaked.

CCI was the Russian acronym for Focused Frequency Emitter. Grigory pushed the intercom and announced, “captain maintain this heading and airspeed. We are broadcasting.”

The captain confirmed the information and then snapped his oxygen mask into place. Toma followed his lead.

The Tupolev bounced, then settled, as it held its new bearing. Nushki, while keeping her head buried in a magnified view of the ground below, began the count down.

“Two minutes to target. Signal strong and steady.”

Doc rubbed his hands against his pants in an unconscious circle. He stared at the lights on his console; all green. The frequency in concert with the planted electrical leaches placed on the radar installations on the ground below, would blind the facility to their approach.

Grigory had built a full scale replica of the radar station, based on plans smuggled out of General Electric, the company that had won the contract to build the DEW Line radar stations across the arctic. The replica had been tested and retested against his CCI unit until Moscow was satisfied and had given the green light.

“Sir I see the target now,” Nushki announced.

Everyone held their collective breath as the bomber passed overhead. Through her field of view the Nushki watched as the shadowy silhouette of Umnak Island passed underneath. She could just make out the American’s grey radar installation against the snow below.

“Passing target now.”

The building fled from her view.

“Target passed.”

She looked up from her scope and tried to swallow but her throat was dry. They were through, but had they been detected?

Doctor Grigory Nepein allowed the breath he had been holding to release.

“Captain, you can return to our normal altitude and speed.”

He flicked off the green button and sat back in his seat, barely hearing the words the captain spoke.

“Copy that Doc. Let’s hope your little gadget worked.

“Nushki, set a course for our next target and Panky you can turn the radio back on. I want to know if you hear anything.”

The navigator consulted her chart and worked out their next bearing.

“Roger that sir; course nine eight degrees, Seattle.”

Panky returned the power to the units and buried his face in the green glow of the scope.

“No contacts sir.”

Let’s hope it stays that way, the captain prayed.

“Let me know if you see so much as a gnat coming our way.”

Grigory leaned back and put his hands behind his head. If he had done everything right they should be completely unseen within the American’s airspace. Grigory allowed a rare smile to form, it had been a long time coming. And with this successful test he would be a household name in the Kremlin. Good things were to come, perhaps even a summer cottage on the Black Sea.

“Target distance, ten miles.”

The captain repeated the information and squinted ahead through the hazy atmosphere as the skyline of Seattle slowly grew. A sequence of events started to unfold as the crew went through the final preparations to drop their bomb.

“Ready for final bomb check.”

“Final bomb check.”

“Bomb fusing master safety on.”

“Fusing master safety on.”

“Target distance, seven miles.”

The sequence continued like a well-choreographed dance. Each playing their part in time with the other. At the same time the chess game between navigator Nushki and radio/bombardier Panky ensued.

Shura Mosin removed his glasses and rubbed the lenses on his sleeve, no longer involved in the current mission.

“Professor, I was thinking we might be able to use the CCI technology for other applications.”

“I see you have been reading my book, Shura,”

Grigory focused on his assistant.

“What did you have in mind?”

Shura broke eye contact with his boss, now unsure of his idea.

“If there was a way to remotely implant the filter without actually being there.”

Grigory wrinkled his forehead at his assistant’s idea. The voice over the speaker interrupting his thoughts.

“Target distance five miles.”

“Open bomb doors”

Grigory held up his hand to pause Shura’s words. His interest piqued but not above the current action now happening.

“Perhaps, we can talk about it after we have a successful test here.”

Shura fingered the gun in his pocket while he nodded.

“I have visual on the scope,” Nushki announced as she began a count down.

The TU-16 buffed slightly then smoothed out. Everyone was at the ready. This was what the months of training was all about, right now, this instant.

The time seemed to slow for the crew as they neared the drop point. Even the sound of the roaring turbines seemed to fade off.

Then in a clear and precise voice Nushki called, "release bomb."

Panky answered. "Bomb away."

As Captain Yana Shchavelsky heard those last words, he put the bomber into a hard one hundred and eighty degree turn.

"Let's get the suka blyad out of here!"

Panky watched on the aiming scope as a large metal cased bomb dropped. Ultimately making contact with the sea some quarter mile from the city. And then harmlessly sinking from sight. Seconds ticked by and still nothing happened.

"Well Doc, looks like you have your proof of concept. Radar screen evaded and test bomb run successful"

"Thanks Captain, excellent crew you have here."

Yana had to agree with him. They had all done a great job, so far.

"Now get us back home safely so we can tell someone about it."

"Roger that."

Everyone stayed alert and at the top of their game as the TU-16 reversed its course and moved back through the radar gap they had created in the DEW Line. Once again the CCI had performed perfectly and they left US airspace without consequence.

Once over international waters, Nushki worked her way to the cockpit and popped the cork on a bottle of champagne she had brought along.

"Captain do we have time for a little celebration?"

"I don't think one bottle divided by six will hurt, please do the honors, Nushki."

Nushki made the rounds for all to share, even the doctor was in a celebratory mood. The morale was high and they were all feeling invincible. After all, they had duped the American's radar defenses and even dropped a practice nuclear bomb on their doorstep. All, without the capitalist pigs even knowing. It was a good day for the Soviet Union.

Nushki made her way to the aft cabin and handed Panky the almost empty bottle.

"All yours"

He grabbed it and pointed to the chess board on his wall.

"Castle to king five."

Panky guzzled the remainder of the bottle. Nushki looked at his move and then a broad smile spread across her face.

"Bishop to rook six, checkmate."

Panky spit out the remaining champagne in his mouth and stared at the board agape. Nushki smiled and returned to her seat in the next cabin. She looked down at the simple red star with the crossed gold hammer and sickle on her uniform. Had she made the right decision? It was too late now.

Within five minutes the plane seemed to wander. She glanced in the aft cabin at Panky doubled over in his chair motionless. She quickly moved past Doctor Grigory Nepein and his assistant, both unmoving in their chairs. Once in the cockpit she struggled to remove Captain Yana Shchavelsky from his seat. His dead weight making it a real chore. She ended up grabbing his hair to get a good purchase and heaved. Once finished, she sat in the seat and belted herself

in. The freckle faced navigator would no longer suffer the stupidity of man. She said goodbye to her long hated nickname and spoke softly to herself.

“Captain Natasha Zykin.”

She looked around one last time then pushed the control stick forward and dropped the bomber into a steep dive straight for the Bering Sea.

Washington D.C. – 12:57pm – FBI Adjunct Facility – 5th Floor

Special Agent Collette Sanders, Codi, flowed with a sea of bodies out of the large meeting room's glass doors and away from the stale air and bad cologne. Her insipid expression clung to her like a sloth on a wobbly branch. She glanced down at the pamphlet in her hands. FBI Rules and Regulations – The Do's & Don'ts of Social Media. It was three painful long hours she would never get back. For Codi, social media was easy. Don't say anything about your work unless it is positive and benign.

And when it came to her personal life, don't post anything while drinking or that your mom wouldn't approve of, well most moms anyway. The fact that some idiot agents had recently posted a picture of themselves next to a mutilated body on an ongoing investigation had the entire FBI in panicked damage control. Now every agent and employee was required to take this course. It was always that way, she thought. *A few imbeciles always ruin it for the rest of us.* She deposited the pamphlet in the nearest circular file and headed for the exit. She checked the time on her phone, *perfect*, just enough time to eat and change.

At five foot eight Codi, could hold her own with most men. She was an avid swimmer and took her fitness seriously. She had even competed in college, in both relay and as an individual.

After several career side trips, Codi accepted a position at the General Services Administration, or GSA, as a federal agent. She handled cold cases involving fraud and tax evasion, effectively a paper pushing cop.

Codi had embraced the job with fervor and quickly got the attention of her superior, Director Ruth Anne Gables, a politically connected, strong leader who took Codi under her wing. She pushed Codi when needed and supported her when there was trouble.

She was assigned to work with Agent Joel Strickman, a computer savvy agent with a heart of gold. His wiry frame and unkept blond hair framed his normally positive curiosity for life. They had found success bringing to justice several individuals that were defrauding the US government.

But it took a cold case from the forties to really test them. It started benign enough but quickly escalated to international implications and ultimately global terror. It pushed Codi to her breaking point and that had unleashed her full potential. She fought through the impossible to stop a mad man bent on destruction.

It seemed the more one pushed against Codi, the more she pushed back. It wasn't stubbornness, but determination born of a confidence her father had instilled in her at a young age. In the end she was credited with saving thousands of lives.

The case got her noticed at the FBI and now she found herself working for the special projects division, as a special agent. Her career was back on track but her personal life was still a mixed bag.

She looked at her phone hoping for a text from Matt. Dr. Matt Campbell, a man whom Codi had become involved with on her last case.

Twice, they had nearly died but it had formed a bond and a love that was stronger than either was willing to admit.

Codi and Matt had spent nearly a month together, after the dust settled. They had time to heal and find love in a way that almost made them feel normal.

Finally, work inadvertently pulled them in different directions and the time apart became the norm. Stunting their growing relationship and leaving little time for its maintenance.

Matt was away in some remote lab up near Boston to finish his work. At first, that had limited his ability to reach out but later his compulsion to finish what he had started became all consuming, taking over his life. They were having a hard time connecting, with voice mails and texts slow to return. With each passing week the fire had dimmed. Codi bit back on her emotions as she pushed her phone back in its hip holder. She knew Matt loved her, but careers and relationships always seemed to be at odds and this was no different.

Codi took one last look at her old office as she turned out the lights for the final time. The General Services Administration had been the place Codi had found her moxie again. After a bout with depression and a downward spiral in her life, she had found her strength again right here on the second floor.

She would never forget her boss, Ruth Anne Gables, the woman who had pushed her and encouraged Codi to be her best.

She flicked her shoulder-length brown hair and turned her trim figure out of the office door. She moved down the narrow hallway with a languid stride, just in time to see her partner, Agent Joel Strickman, come out of his former office. He was holding three cardboard boxes precariously. He had his phone in his mouth and he was trying to close the door with his foot.

“Need some help?”

“Codi! Hi, sure,” he mumbled through lips pressed around his cell.

Codi reached up and took the phone from Joel’s mouth then continued down the hallway. Joel looked over his stack of boxes, at her receding form. She wore black patterned fitness leggings and a casual white tee-shirt that read, *Bloody Difficult Woman*. But her movement is what he noticed most, athletic, like a cat on the prowl. A beautiful cat. One that intimidated the hell out of Joel.

“Thanks... I guess.”

She glanced back with a smirk.

“Hey, somebody’s gotta hold the door open. Come on.”

Joel hurried to catch up to her, his black wingtip’s tapping loudly on the marble floor. He used the corner of the top box to push his black-framed glasses back in place. Joel was very computer savvy but socially inept, topped with a healthy dash of germaphobia. Though his expertise fell more to the technological side of their partnership, he had proven himself a solid performer; even in the field, where germs seemed to always seek him out, or so he thought.

They loaded the boxes into the trunk of Joel’s Prius. Codi plopped into the passenger seat and looked over at Joel’s new Dunhill suit and tie combo as he clicked his seatbelt in place.

“It’s moving day, what’s with the getup?”

Joel smoothed out the seatbelt across his suit.

“Just wanted to make a good impression.”

Codi lips turned up. Joel’s die hard loyalty would never win a man of the year contest, but he was still the perfect partner. Eighty percent brains, twenty percent brawn and zero percent social skills. Joel was also a completely by-the-book agent, but Codi was working on that.

Their last mission had put them both in mortal danger and at odds with an FBI special task-force. But after one-upping the FBI, they eventually found a way to all work together. The

group excelled and ultimately stopped a major international terrorist attack from happening. But not before both had been shot and in Codi's case, also nearly drowned.

Since then she had been offered a chance to join the special projects team as a full-fledged FBI agent, along with her partner Joel.

Some may have said that her rise a position with the FBI had been meteoric, but she believed it was more of a wrong place at the wrong time sort of thing.

Codi jumped at the opportunity, but Joel had taken some convincing. His overactive sense of low self-worth was not ready for the big time. But as usual, Codi had gotten her way.

The Prius pulled away from the loading zone and Codi's phone started to buzz. She glanced at the text screen. *My office in 10 please.* Codi showed the screen to Joel.

"Better step on it."

Joel tightened.

"But this is a thirty-five zone."

Codi's eyes narrowed."

"Seriously? We're FBI agents now."

Joel looked a bit flummoxed.

"But that means setting an example."

"Right, by kicking the bad guys asses!"

Codi flicked her eyes forward and Joel reluctantly stomped on the accelerator.

"I was hoping to stop for a coffee."

"I know a good drive though on the way."

Joel made a face at the thought of drive through coffee, but held his tongue.

Twelve minutes later.

Agent Brian Fescue stepped around the desk to greet Codi and Joel.

"Sorry to interrupt your moving day, but cases rarely take a day off. Nice suit by the way Joel."

Joel let out a big smile and shot his eyes over at Codi with an I-told-you-so gesture.

"So spill Brian, what is it," Codi blurted in an attempt to change the subject.

Brian was their boss and head of the special projects task force. Officially, Special Agent in Charge Brian Fescue, but to his team he was just Brian. The casualness was born of too many times in the trenches together. He was a highly decorated agent with a long list of convictions to his record. He had said goodbye to field work when his wife, Leila, became pregnant with their second child and subsequently gave birth to a beautiful little girl named Abigale. Brian spent as much time as possible trying to be an active parent and took his time at the office just as serious as he did at home.

Brian's island roots were only evident in his slight Jamaican accent and cappuccino colored skin. It was set against piecing dark amber eyes that made him stand out in a crowd. He was about an inch shorter than Joel but he was built like a tank. His no nonsense approach to management had made him a rising star at the FBI. The rumor mill had him in line for a directorship.

Brian scratched at his close cropped hair as he sat back at his desk.

"What do you two know about the Aleutian islands?"

Joel, a wealth of knowledge piped up.

“It’s a chain of islands extending from mainland Alaska separating the Bering Sea from the Pacific Ocean. Oh, and it’s cold there”

“Well thanks to global warming we have a curiosity that’s been pushed in our direction.”

Codi and Joel shared a common glance.

“I need the two of you to pop up there and do your thing.”

He opened his drawer and grabbed a flash drive.

“Everything we know is on this file, I’m sorry, it’s not much.”

He handed it to Joel.

“See Mindy for your travel arrangements. Oh and before you ask, the family’s fine.”

Codi and Joel sniggered and Brian loosed a smile that covered his whole face. It was a running joke that the three shared.

“Wasn’t gonna ask,” Codi besmirched as she left his office.

“Sure, Tristian scored a goal on Saturday.” Brian called after her.

Codi stopped in the doorway.

“Tell him good job, from me.”

The main room for the special projects division was small by FBI standards. It was a square bullpen style room with nine desks set within tall office cubicles forming a rectangle. There was a hallway down the middle and Codi’s office was straight across from Joel’s. Daylight glowed from windows on one side wall that housed a small glass conference room.

Joel dumped his boxes on the frosted glass surface of his desk just in time to answer a call from transportation.

Now boarding group “D”. Joel listened to the airport speaker call his group, but he was in no hurry. The last minute arrangements had got them tickets in the very back row of Alaska flight one out of DC’s Reagan International Airport. Gate C18 was a zoo, as they push through a sea of bodies to access the jetway. Joel kept his hand on his wallet pocket, always careful in a crowd.

Codi had been right to check as much luggage as possible, because by the time they got to their seat there was no more overhead space. Joel had the window seat and Codi the middle. They sat and tried to get comfortable for the long flight with multiple layovers.

Joel opened his computer, once the jet reached the required ten thousand feet.

“What do you know about the DEW Line.”

“As in I do, the words spoken in a marriage proposal?”

Codi had her eyes closed and peeked over to see Joel had opened up the digital files on his laptop.

“No, D E W, Distant Early Warning System. It was an integrated chain of early warning radar and communication stations constructed across northern Canada and Alaska between 1953 into the early sixties.”

Codi looked bored. The man sitting next to her was just big enough that he was hanging over the invisible separating line between seats. She was trying to ignore him and to be honest, Joel too.

“It was specifically designed to pick up soviet bombers coming out of Russia in time for us to scramble fighters to intercept. It was a huge deal during the cold war and probably saved us

on some level from getting a nuclear bomb dropped on our heads. General Electric was hired to build it and the Air Force ran it.”

“What’s it got to do with our John Doe?”

“Doe’s... There are three bodies.”