

## EXCERPT

### Prologue

#### Strait of Hormuz–IRAN

After burying their lethal cargo in the island of Qeshm they moved away from the other boats and sailed the 55-foot Ferretti past the smaller barren island of Hormuz at a steady thirty knots.

Hormuz and Qeshm stood like bodyguards around Bandar Abbas, one of Iran's major cities and its biggest port. The crew intended to dock there and make their way to the next target, the 232,000 barrel-a-day refinery at the outskirts of town.

The deep blue waters, so tranquil beneath the surface, were swarming with military vessels. Iran was preparing to block the Strait of Hormuz, which would cut off the export route of most of the oil from Kuwait, the Emirates, and Saudi Arabia.

The Israeli cocked his head and scanned the horizon. There was the only leisure boat in the area. "You'd better be sure about our security clearance," he said, straining to be heard against the pulsating drone of the boat's engine.

"I'm sure. Relax," the Frenchman answered, his deeply wrinkled face contrasting sharply with a youthful smile. "How are you doing there?" "Almost ready," the Israeli replied, testing the remote-controlled detonator. Its LED lights were flashing red.

#### New York City

He smiles as he enters the toy store with his wife and daughter. As always, FAO Schwarz on Fifth Avenue and 58th Street is crowded with shoppers and children. A doll catches little Claire's eye. She dashes across the slippery floor to look closer, a single brick in a looming wall of pink and lavender.

It is then that he sees the clean-shaven man with the bulky trench coat descending the escalator and striding purposefully toward the middle of the store, past pyramids of stuffed animals and action figures in cardboard-and-cellophane boxes.

He grabs his wife and daughter, tries to protect them by pulling them deeper into the store. A small clown with huge red lips mouths the crazy cute FAO Schwarz theme-song: Welcome to the world of . . .

He registers the flash, then the oddly metallic roar, as he and Stephanie and Claire are sent flying, pushed through the air as if by huge hands.

A brief silence. Then the shriek and rumble of the escalator's slow collapse. The musical tinkling of broken glass. The bite of cordite in the nostrils. Broken toys are everywhere—he will never forget the image of the gigantic Steiff giraffe, its neck torn in two—amid the smoke and dust and unidentifiable building materials.

And blood. Everywhere.

His wife's motionless eyes are open. She lies to his right, looks almost natural. It's her head, resting against a pillar at an impossible angle, that gives her away. Then, amidst the cries and moans of the hundreds injured in the blast, he hears a soft gurgling behind him. He turns and finds his daughter. Her chest is covered with blood, which is spurting rhythmically from her mouth. Her eyes are on him, crying, "Daddy it hurts get me out of here Daddy please it hurts I can't breathe Daddy please Daddy Daddy."

Only then does he release the howl he had choked back when he had first sensed the danger, when doing what he'd always done. Handled things. Solved problems. Stayed cool.

He can do nothing now, pinned under a collapsed beam. During the eternity until he faints, he cries out to God as he totters between despair and madness.