

## Chapter 1

“What the... !” Weylin hissed, following an enormous explosive boom. The concussive intensity rocked his desk chair and shook every inch of the CEO’s top floor office. “Martha,” he shouted through the open door, while bending to retrieve a fallen desk clock, “What the hell was that?”

“I’m on hold for security,” the secretary replied.

Impatient, he rose from the plush leather chair and approached his office door. At that instant, an electronic security mechanism sealed it shut making entry impossible while allowing one to exit from its interior.

New Jersey situated Condor Laboratories, an international pharmaceutical manufacturer and innovator, had installed the sophisticated security measures in the year nineteen ninety-seven following the deadly adulteration of its revolutionary immunity

producing vaccine by the Armed Islamic Front, a radical terrorist organization sworn to the destruction of western civilization. The A.I.F. might well have succeeded, had it not been for the knowledge, selflessness and ingenuity of Condor's CEO and President, Weylin McCain, M.D.

The handsome, thirty-eight year old sandy haired Texan was raised with a strict family instilled version of right and wrong. Although he loved his family, he longed for the lifestyle that accompanied wealth and success. Perseverance and the help of a wealthy uncle helped him to achieve his goal and, following the untimely disappearance of Condor's prior CEO, Macy Collier, he rose to the pinnacle of his career.

Weylin opened the locked door with a jerk and ran, impeded slightly by a long standing limp, to a corridor window overlooking the building's front entrance. The view was generally invigorating and rather than highlighting the parking lot below, provided a breathtaking vista of the distant New York skyline. What Weylin saw, however, was entirely unexpected. A maze of glass, concrete and automobile parts replaced the well maintained greenery at the building's entrance. A red and blue pulsating glow, from the approaching fire engines and police cars, reflected brilliantly from the building's gleaming white and stainless steel exterior and created an eery incandescence as its rays passed through the billowing smoke.

Damn, he said to himself, as he ran for the elevator, realizing halfway there that it too would be in lockdown status. As he turned for the staircase, the corridor came alive with the palpable and audible fear from the floor's remaining inhabitants. Arriving at the lobby level, panting as he approached the remains of the front entrance, two armed security

guards sprinted in his direction. “Who’s responsible for this?” he barked, through clenched teeth.

“Don’t know sir,” the security guard replied, “but the police and fire chief are outside sifting through the rubble ... I overheard one of them say that they’ve placed a call to the FBI.”

As Weylin attempted to cross the barrier of yellow tape that isolated the remains of the front entrance, he was interrupted by Bob Ryan, Condor’s chief of security and an ex-secret service agent. “I wouldn’t go any further Dr. McCain,” Ryan advised, “might mess up the crime scene.”

“So, we’ve reached that conclusion already?” Weylin snarled, shaking his head in disbelief.

“It was a heavy duty explosive charge ... probably left inside of that Toyota Tercel,” Ryan said, as he pointed beyond the tape to a mass of green metal that hardly resembled an automobile.

“Disgruntled employee?” Weylin asked.

“Don’t think so, but the FBI should be here soon from their local office.”

Seething, Weylin left the lobby and headed for the rear parking lot exit, eventually making his way around to the front of the building. The interior view did not prepare him for the sight he beheld. Aside from the construction carnage visible from the top floor and lobby, it was now apparent that better than half of the structure’s face had been scorched to a horrible brown and black mosaic. The stench of cordite filled the air along with something else that he couldn’t yet place. He consoled himself with the knowledge that there were no apparent casualties; an all important observation made by the fire chief. As he carefully

hopped over the maze of fire hoses, something tapped his shoulder from behind. “You can’t seem to keep your nose clean, can you,” a familiar voice said.

“Vincent, what are you doing here?” Weylin asked, surprised to see his old college buddy far from his desk at the FBI’s Washington office.

“As luck would have it,” special agent Vincent Black replied, “I was visiting the local office when the call came through. With your history I figured you’d need some help.”

Weylin didn’t laugh, instead he turned dead serious. “You don’t really think this had anything to do with the Olera affair?” he asked, hoping for a negative response.

“Anything that goes boom these days is terrorist related until proven otherwise,” Vincent mumbled, while looking towards the ground and kicking a chunk of concrete.

“It’s been more than three years since the end of the Olera debacle and the Sheik’s assassination. I would have imagined that they’ve moved on to more succulent targets.”

The A.I.F., under the leadership of Jamal Tarooob, had genetically altered Condor’s immunity producing vaccine, Olera. In doing so, had unleashed a deadly dementing disease upon the world’s unsuspecting population. With the assistance of an ex-KGB agent turned finder of missing persons and bill collector, Tarooob was captured and subsequently killed by Weylin. He had tried to lock that part of his life away in the deepest depths of his minds archives but the explosion and Vincent’s words removed the veil of concealment.

“It doesn’t have to be them, buddy. There’s an unlimited supply of wackos out there,” Vincent said.

“Well, thanks for coming ... I’d appreciate your help. Can I buy you dinner this evening?”

“Wish I could but I have to return to D.C. The local Feds will handle the investigation and I’ll pass on whatever info I can to you.”

They shook hands and walked off in different directions. Weylin headed back into Condor and was about to begin his journey up the fifteen flights of stairs when the lobby’s elevator door opened and he walked in. Entering his office, he exhaled with a hiss, sat down in his chair and removed a half empty bottle of madeira from a bottom desk drawer.

Pouring two fingers into a nearby water glass, he sipped the sweet liquid while the horror of his past battles threatened to overcome. Here’s to you, Henry Austin, you had a way with words and the ability to read between the lines, he thought to himself, I miss you old friend. I would have imagined that the A.I.F. and I were even. After all, they kidnaped you and gave you the deadly vaccine and I killed Taroob. Hardly a fair trade, you for a piece of garbage.

The pulsating red and blue lights gradually disappeared along with the miles of hose and the last remnants of daylight. Weylin remained in his chair staring out of the window.

He threw the now empty bottle of madeira into the trash can, smashing it into pieces.

“Damn you,” he shouted, “Why won’t you leave us alone?”