

# EYE OF THE CHINOOK

SERIALIZED

A NOVEL

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## Chapter Five

His flight from Jerusalem seemed endless, like that Aeroflot flight from Cairo to Moscow—the bitterness he once felt is gone. He feels as if he has no life within him, and he wonders if the emptiness he feels is caused by the lies he tells, or the lies he lives, or whether by the specks of plutonium deep inside his lungs. Pu239. He knows the designation of his death, that of the isotope residing within him, one speck of which will kill the whole body.

His anger had warred with his sense of duty, and his Jewishness had prevailed, thanks to Itzak Salmon. And that sense of who he is carries the fatalism now producing the emptiness. He would be more alive if he were still angry. He would then have some life dwelling within his decaying flesh. As it is, he is like the dog salmon that filled the streams of Okhotsk Peninsula, growing long teeth as their bodies rotted around their desire to spawn.

He doesn't, now, often think about the Bulgarian courier, or the hardened steel bracelet the Bulgarian had worn on that Cairo to Moscow flight. The Bulgarian was on his way to Moscow with a caseful of PLO dispatches. The flight was three-quarters filled and the plane was beginning its descent. The seat beside the courier was vacant. He changed seats, moving to that empty seat. The courier stirred drowsily as the turbines free-spooled—and before the fat man had awakened enough to protest his presence, he'd pinched the Bulgarian's neck as he snapped the man's head. The Bulgarian's eyes bulged as the courier went into convulsions, gasping for air, puking on himself.

The plane was, by then, angled steeply downward. The stewardesses, both homely girls with hands like men, were seated in their jump seats. Neither immediately noticed the Bulgarian's apparent airsickness. The other passengers were careful not to notice the fat man as he violently puked. So no one saw him grab the courier's briefcase, but he hadn't counted on the hardened steel bracelet being locked. He had to sever the Bulgarian's wrist with his knife.

He returned to his seat where he pried open the briefcase. He passed the dispatches to his contact, an old woman of about seventy, and he ditched the case by exchanging cases with an engineer being recalled from Egypt as rubber tires squealed and the plane touched down. But he hadn't known what to do with the hand that seemed to weigh ten kilograms or more.

The KGB photographed and fingerprinted everyone aboard the flight, and they let him get as far as the center of the city before they arrested him. Blood samples were taken from his knife. And in a mock trial, he was sentenced to five years of hard labor, which he served, but from which the KGB never intended that he return alive.

His assigned labor camp was being built where a nuclear blast had accidentally occurred in the Urals in 1968, shortly before he arrived. The ground was still hot when he helped pour concrete footers. He, like all of the convicts sentenced to that camp, received massive doses of radiation. His hair fell out, and he returned sterile, forever robbed of immortality. But he had smuggled out soil samples from the camp, samples that Israel used to determine the nature of

the blast. And the nature of his death. He has had his latter years stolen from him by specks of plutonium he inadvertently inhaled. He is already dead. He is like the thief on the cross with the Imposter, a dead man who still speaks as if he were alive. But like which thief?

No, he's not bitter any more. Just empty, hollow inside, his heart eaten away by radiation, making his existence a true oxymoron. A person is breath, blood and bones, no more than that. A person is a *nephesh*, a breathing creature, the word used to describe both dogs and man. And he feels like a jackal as, today, he travels in search of the Magician, Itzak Salmon's code name while in Syria. His assignment is to neutralize the Magician before Salmon can damage Israeli-American relations.

When the Prime Minister spoke with Salmon about going to Alaska, no one knew how marginalized the Magician had become in his personal beliefs. Special Services didn't then know that Salmon was studying the work of an American creationist, who argues for the coexistence of men and dinosaurs. They didn't know that he had photographs of aboriginal pictographs showing men riding dinosaurs, or that he had annotated the account of French workers unearthing a live dinosaur in 1851. Nor did they know that Salmon apparently believes America was part of the ancient House of Israel, a position held by no recognized rabbi. It isn't a position held by organized Christianity although it has appeared in the doctrines of Sabbath-observing sects for the past three centuries. It is a policy position whose time has not come, nor will come short of the Messiah's arrival, not anything he expects to happen until after red heifers are again sacrificed on Temple Mount. He has never seen a red heifer, nor does he expect to see one anytime soon.

The problem is really philosophical: when does a person's belief in prophecy cause the person to work to fulfill the prophecy, almost the chicken and egg question. All answers are arguable, but Israel can't risk even the argument becoming known, for no other nation has so much endtime prophecy against it as Israel has.

Salmon's beliefs weren't known until his apartment was searched after he rubbed off his tail at Fairbanks. The Magician has become persona non-gratis. Special Services believes that he will harm US-Israeli relations, will do harm that could precipitate into global war, a true Armageddon, if he isn't removed. So somewhere in a sky-blue room twenty hours behind him, he reluctantly accepted this assignment to kill the only father he has ever known. He is Isaac sent to kill Abraham before Ishmael can tell God about the evil he is to do. He left his feelings in a pencil sharpener to the left of and a little above the water cooler. They were as shredded as everything else in the sharpener's tub.

*Itzak, why are you making me do this thing I so hate. You are that bloody hand I carried in my pocket as I stood in line waiting to be photographed and fingerprinted and executed. You are the evidence of Israel's idiotic complicity in this Alaska affair. And if you are found, you will convict Israel of being a godless nation that no longer looks to the Messiah for deliverance. You know, old friend, that the politicians and the rabbis can't allow the people to see themselves as I see myself. Bond servants to spiritual Egypt.*

*You shouldn't have ditched your tail. The young agent didn't know he was following a true magician.*

*Just as I couldn't allow that hand to be found on me, I must now flush you, mighty Magician, as I flushed that hand down the toilet. But this thing, Itzak, I don't want to do. You are my friend, my adopted father. Surface. Let another man come after you, a man who didn't grow to maturity eating from your table.*

He's tired, and his head feels like the day after a binge. His sinuses are plugged; his face is puffy. And as he gets ready for this evening's gala, he sees a face in the mirror he barely recognizes. A face without visible scars. A man with no distinguishing features of any kind. Yet not a bad looking man. Blonde hair. Thin lips. Blue eyes. But he hasn't before seen the wrinkles to the sides of his eyes nor the darkness beneath them. He hasn't before noticed the blankness

of his eyes. It is as if he lost all love, as if the plutonium has, indeed, killed what little of him that remained alive, for his eyes appear empty. If eyes are windows to the soul, he has no soul.

He straightens his tie, its knot asymmetrical and unwilling to reshape itself. He picks at a piece of lint stuck to his shoulder. He is ready, as much so as he will ever be. A dog salmon with teeth and instincts and little else. His assignment is to leave sterile spawn in the belly of a sucker. And he actually hates what he has to do, the first spark of any felt life he has experienced since Jerusalem.

He again stares at the eyes in the mirror. The face surrounding them is tanned. Except for the puffiness, it appears rugged. Only the lack of any sparkle in the eyes prevents the face from being handsome. But what is a diamond without its luster? a lump of coal fit only for the fire. He should burn forever for accepting his assignment. He's not fit for even the garbage fires of Gehenna, where souls of unrepentant Christians will someday roast until there are changed back into the atoms that once gave life.

His telephone rings. The hotel doorman calls to say that the embassy car has arrived. Time for him to go. And he takes one last look at the face in the mirror. *Smile, you're going to meet the Magician.*

*Itzak, you have been a father to me. Yes, I remember wandering the streets of Hafia in rags and hungry. You took me into your home, reared me along with your son, educated me, and you got me this job. And because I know you best, I have been selected to come after you.*

*It was you who make the entries into the computer that say I place loyalty to country ahead of even family sentiments. That is so, Magician, because that is the way you have trained me.*

*Your disappearance has the Prime Minister worried. He knows you want to try your ideas. He is afraid that you are again building a bomb. And Special Services worries about what you will trade for that chance.*

*You know what that means, don't you? You have to be returned home or removed, and I have been chosen to do this terrible deed.*

Surface. Show yourself. If you will, Special Services will send someone else to negotiate with you.

Terminate your work now! Please, Itzak, please. Don't make me persist in this assignment. You know I will otherwise.

*Surface so I can return to Jerusalem.*

He stares at the face in the mirror, a sad face without life.

It's raining in Washington this evening as the budded cherry blossoms threaten to burst; it has been raining every since he arrived. And the rain sings as it's slung from the tires of the embassy car.

Night clouds hide the stars and the moon, but the Capitol Dome is lit so the absence of the stars is hardly noticed except by him, who must track the man who taught how to locate himself on land or at sea. He feels a welling anger at being lost here among the streets of nouvelle Israel, where the sandy descendants of Abraham have multiplied and prospered.

Traffic has begun to thin though on I-95, headlights are still linked to taillights as the embassy car crosses the Potomac. Finally, the car turns off the Interstate to slowly drive through the rich Virginia countryside where rows of mansions have replaced tobacco as the preferred crop on this fertile bottomland, with concrete statuary replacing both deer and doorman, the castings two-thirds size as if by turning life into limestone both shrank in the rain and sun.

He has little interest in tonight's mission: he's to contact and charm Peggy Sax, and he feels like a butcher packaging meat. Ms. Sax has been identified as a link to the President, a chance for Special Services to short circuit usual intelligence channels. But his thoughts are of Itzak

Salmon, a man who in a different country would be a legend. However, one wheel on an axle can only roll in a circle. He knows how Salmon thinks; he knows his ways, his methods. He knows the track Salmon will follow.

The embassy car stops to pickup the president of Hebrew University, tonight's guest of honor at the reception being given by the foreign language department of William & Mary. The president arrived in Washington on the same flight he flew, but the president appears refreshed. Smelling of spice blossoms and wearing a white carnation on his lapel, the president's mannerisms seem unusually jaunty as he enters the car.

"Benjamin Levi, we meet again. I'm pleased you could make tonight's dinner."

"Assigned duty, and most pleasant."

"I thought that might be the case. To whom am I to introduce you?"

"A human rights analyst, Peggy Sax."

"And whose rights are being violated?"

"One of our agents is missing. She might be helpful in locating him."

"I see. This is on a need to know basis."

"Yes"

"And I don't need to know more?"

"Correct."

"Very well. I'll make certain the contact is made."

The embassy car weaves between rows of residential hutches, each hutch swollen as a goiter, each hutch a mansion without an estate, as Levi hugs the far side door. The side streets are poorly lit. What little light there is causes the rows of trees to cast shadows more naked than the trees themselves.

The embassy car parks a half block away from the three-story brick home of the reception's host. For security reasons they wait until all other automobiles have pulled away before they pull forward. Their driver stops, and quickly, he and the driver hustle the president across the yard and into the home's entryway where hats and topcoats are taken by a uniformed doorman. A second uniformed attendant then announces each new arrival to the milling throng. The attendant doesn't know his name and he doesn't give it as he steps into the mansion's living room. The name under which he, Levi, travels momentarily slips his mind.

The driver returns to the car, and the president is presented to gathered guests. Beautifully coiffured ladies with long strings of glistening stones wrapped like yokes around their necks immediately surround the president. Each woman clambers to be noticed or remembered, each a contributor to the university. And he, Levi, suspects this is the way it should be.

One of their moles burrowed deep inside the National Security building reported today's long meeting of the taskforce.

Peggy Sax is here somewhere.

The muscles of his arms and shoulders yearn for exercise as he circulates with an untouched glass of champagne in his right hand. He feels like a fool, a court jester with a wand.

He doesn't know much about Peggy Sax, thirty-nine, single, never married. Ten years ago she was badly hurt in an affair with an undergraduate. Since then, she has avoided personal entanglements with both sexes. He knows from this afternoon's briefing that she will not jump headlong into the arms of the first man who coos softly into her ear. He has his work cut out.

He catches bits and pieces of conversations as he seeps through the room as if spilt wine. He needs to know if anything is being said about Israel having an interest in Alaska, which the nation doesn't have. The Special Section, though, determined that Itzak's activities might effect the endtime prophecies foretelling a schism between the ancient House of Judah and the

usually-believed lost House of Israel. If Salmon were to effect a schism between Israel and the U.S., everyone loses. The only hope for humanity will then be the coming of the Messiah; for Israel will defend herself against everyone even if that means initiating a nuclear exchange. Israel will not be driven into the sea. Never again.

He knows the nature of his death, and knowing isn't so awful. Israel will die in a nuclear exchange; the nation realizes that ahead of time. But that realization is better than living scattered or returning to Egypt, especially so when it includes plans for everyone else's destruction.

That is correct: for everyone else's destruction, including the United States, her only friend. And he cannot help thinking about *the Protocols*. How wrong can the anti-Zionists be? They should receive some sort of a prize for believing the lies attributed to *the Learned Elders*.

As he passes one knot of five men discussing nuclear disarmament, he pauses to listen. But he continues on when he realizes that these experts have no comprehension of what they discuss.

A young man notices him, comes over and introduces himself, saying, "Al Gayford," while extending his hand.

He grips the young man's hand and for a moment doesn't know whether he shakes a hand or a limp penis. He finds it difficult to mask his contempt as he says, "Ben Levi."

The president rescues him by motioning for him to come over: "Ben, I want you to meet Peggy Sax and Professor Mandl. Ben spent time in the Soviet Union and can answer questions about radiation plumes in their ground water aquifers."

Peggy appears interested as she asks, "How long were you behind the Iron Curtain?"

"Five years."

Professor Mandl politely excuses himself from the conversation as the president turns to greet another well-wisher.

Peggy is taller than she is wide, but not by a large ratio. However, she doesn't appear flabby. Instead, she seems like a kibbutz girl who can sling, all day, forty kilo sacks of beans onto the bed of a truck.

The frames of her glasses are twenty years out of date. She is plain. Dark hair cut moderately short. A discernible moustache. But her eyes possess the sparkle that his lack.

He sees that Peggy would like to continue their discussion, but a richly jeweled hen cackles about how wonderful it is that the temple at Jerusalem is finally being excavated under the supervision of Hebrew University. The cackling distracts both of their attention, and before he can say more to Peggy, she has drifted away.

He catches up with her, waits until she notices him, then asks, "Will you give me a tour of the house? You have been here before."

Politely but curtly, she says, "I'm sorry, but I'm really not familiar with Herr Mandl's home. I'm sure, though, he would be pleased to show you around."

"Professor Mandl, I'm sure, isn't as interesting as you are."

She blushes, but her voice would harden ice when she says, "Vera, there," she nods towards a cluster of women, "will be happy to show you around."

"It's not Vera nor the house that interests me. It's you."

In words too brittle to carry all of her intent, she says, "Your interest is wasted."

He wishes he were certain about their intelligence: in deference to the United States, the Mossad has restricted its activities in Washington to the placing of usually inactive moles in sensitive positions within the democracy. Equal representation. The thought amuses him as he feels the urge to cry out, *Itzak, my father, look what you are doing to me, to Israel.*

"My interest isn't wasted. We're both concerned about the same piece of frozen northland." She cants her head as she says, "Oh, we are? I don't think so."

He figuratively shows the card he has intended to play from the beginning: "You would be interested to know that a sometime nuclear physicist is in Alaska to meet with a group of ragtag dissidents calling themselves the Committee of Twelve."

Color suddenly leaving her face, she glances around as she says, "Not here." She again looks around to see who might have overheard what was said. "Meet me at the door in a couple of minutes. Tell Charles that I'll be taking you to your hotel."

Outside, the rain has stopped. The night has turned nippy.

The doorman fetches her coat, a full-length mink that makes her appear even older than before.

Her car is neither a Lincoln, nor a Porche. Rather, she drives an older Chevrolet. She unlocks the passenger side door for him, then before he can offer to get her door, she crosses behind the vehicle to unlock her own door. And from habit, he checks the backseat and the tailpipe before he enters the vehicle. Meanwhile, she has fastened her seatbelt and has readjusted her rearview mirror, twisting it around until she returns it to its original position.

He wants to say something, but he doesn't know what so he sits where passengers should. As soon as he closes his door, she pulls from between parked cars, and turns south, away from Capitol Hill. He wonders where she intends to take him. Definitely not to his hotel. And he wishes he'd brought a gun.

She drives for several miles on side streets, going more or less south. He tries to remember some of the street names, but his mind is imagining making love to someone who might be able to beat Itzak Salmon at chess.

Miles slip by as neither of them speak. Her Chevrolet rolls silently along darkened streets as the fertile riverbottom flatland yields to the poorer soil of gentle hills which sprouts hybrid tract housing, treeless and usually tasteless. She slows for a stop sign, turns another corner, then pulls into the driveway of a single-story, brick veneered hutch. The garage door opens automatically, then closes automatically behind them. She twists the ignition key. The engine dies. And she announces, "This is where I live. I don't know how you got my name, but I intend to find out."

He has been briefed about what lies he should tell her, tell Itzak: he and she are cogs in a lying system that stretches from the past to the future. But he has already violated his instructions. For the most part, he shall tell her the truth. If this woman is as mentally alive as Itzak, she, like Itzak, will hear the falseness of a lie.

Before he reaches for his door latch, he says, "We have a problem, and we want to solve our problem."

"Who's we?"

"The Israeli government."

"You say that like this is not a problem."

"Oh, this is a problem. We sent in a man to look at some uranium and we have lost contact with him. We lost contact when he entered your country."

"You sent him in to look?"

"Look and possibly divert."

"I see and what do you intend to do about this man?"

"My instructions are to kill him, and anyone to whom he might have passed certain information."

"What information?"

"You don't need to know. At least not yet."

He feels her eyes crawl across his face, around his neck, down the front of his shirt as they sit in the Chevrolet's darkened interior in the dark garage. Finally, she says, "If your intentions are to seduce me, I'd rather be laid in my own bed."

Her bluntness steals his words as much so as if she had wiped his mouth dry with a towel.

"Well, isn't that your intention? I'll be damned if I'll make a fool of myself all across the City. There'll be no clandestine midnight meetings in hotel rooms. That's not for me. If what I know or might know is worth me being seduced to obtain, then I shall enjoy the seduction."

*Itzak, you never told me that I'd become a gigolo. Where does duty end and common sense begin? Where? In whose bed?*

In a soft voice, he asks, "Shall we go in?"

"First, tell me. Where did you get my name?"

He dances with the truth when he says, "We know of your concern for human rights, and of your advisory relationship with your President. It is logical that you would be included in discussions of what to do with Alaskan dissidents to ensure that their human rights are protected.

"Itzak was stopped by Customs officials. They had his name. They knew he was to meet with these dissidents. But he is a magician. He slipped past your roadblock.

"We suspect you know where Itzak is and what he's doing. If he has access to enriched uranium, heC"

"He-l, what? He knows how to build a bomb?"

"Yes."

"Then this could be very serious."

"Because he is one of ours, we intend to stop himCbefore he embarrasses us."

"I'll have to report this."

"I know, but give me as much time as you can before you do."

"Time is all you want?"

"No, you know it isn't."

"Tell me, why are you," she points to him, "doing this?"

"Long story, one about what it means to be JewishYlife would be easier if all of us could pretend to be Gentiles."

"You really think so?"

"Yes."

"Then you really don't understand what it is to be an Israelite." She turns towards her door as she says, "I'm ready."

\*

When he awakens, the world beyond her bedroom window is gray. He turns onto his left side, touches herC

*Yes, Peggy, you smell like a woman, soap and perfume and gentleness. Your body is as white and sweet as fresh milk, your skin softer and smoother than silk. Even the soles of your feet are more tender than the breasts of Israeli girls who lie in the sun until their skin becomes tanned leather. But it is your body that betrays you. The strong muscles beneath that softness come from work. You were conceived in darkness and delivered in blood. You have labored before knowledge became your lonesome companion, your limp lover. Though your mind is full, but your body yearns to work, to be touched, loved.*

*But I saw you rise during the night, and with a tube of lipstick, slash to pieces the face in the mirror. Your face, your eyes pleading for understanding, and you not willing to forgive yourself. Yes, I saw your hand tremble as the face in the mirror puckered her lips. Kissed, is that all you wanted? Or is it that we are characters in an unlikely political novel being written by the Magician? Well, Love, don't be angry with yourself. You've fallen*

*for an illusion, an image of a man, a fleshy shell inside of which no one lives. I died seven years ago in the Urals. Soon, even my reflection will disappear. Your life will then return to normal for we both know that the Mossad exists only in the scribblings of novelists.*

*What is it, Love, that can't you forgive? Do you feel that your intellect has robbed you of your womanhood, of the work you once did, of childbirth and full breasts? Are you envious of twitty secretaries who will someday be wives and mothers? Well, there was once a time when I had dreams of having children seated around the dinner table when the Sabbath arrives, of a future and of growing old. But the Soviets stole the endings of my dreams. Now I wish I never had them for they grate against my enduring the daily drudgery of dying.*

*So yes, Love, I'll be gentle though I'll make you whimper. I'll show you tenderness, but you'll again moan as if you're in pain. And may the God of Abraham have mercy on both of us for this thing we do.*

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