



The Persian Project

Prologue

Dawn, early September, 1978

The Caspian Sea, off the coast of the Soviet Union

Through the murky waves, the snub bow of a miniature submarine emerged. Moments later, fully surfaced, she pitched silently in the saline swells like a whale at rest, her black skin absorbing the first faint rays of the rising sun.

Within the cramped confines of the narrow hull, the lone occupant peered intently at an electronic console, his face bathed in a series of pulsating red, green and amber lights. U.S. Navy Lt. Commander Jake Jameson glanced at his watch. Twenty minutes earlier he had switched on an experimental device while near the floor of the earth's largest inland sea. Now, the steady line moving across the monitor's screen told him the apparatus registered

the distinctive signatures of other ships in the area. Jameson manipulated a knob on the console. On the screen a series of blips left a tell-tale trail of a unique vessel.

"Hot damn! There she is!"

James flipped another switch to transmit the data to an American listening station in nearby Iran. From there the data would be transmitted to the National Security Agency outside Washington, D.C. for analysis by a team of specialists monitoring Soviet nuclear activities at sea. Satisfied that his mission was over, he headed south toward the hidden cove on the northern coast of Iran, from where the tiny sub was launched.

From his jacket pocket, Jameson pulled out a photograph of his family. His wife, Amanda, had been a freckle-faced freshman at Kansas State when he first met her. She was a senior, and he'd fallen hard the first time she smiled at him. Their daughter, Jill, was now fourteen and beginning to grow her own set of freckles. And little Luke was celebrating his eleventh birthday today. Jameson studied the picture, feeling the same sense of regret he felt every time he missed an important date in the lives of any member his family. He wished he could be with them at this moment.

An alarm shattered the cabin's stillness.

"Shit!" Jameson muttered between compressed lips, aware that his craft's presence had been detected and a surface-skimming missile now streaked toward him. He lunged at the steering control in a desperate attempt to change course.

It was the last thing he saw before he and his vessel disappeared in a brilliant flash of color.