

The Novaya Zemlya Archipelago
Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)

October 30, 1961

A vast fireball raged upward, already climbing tens of thousands of feet into the air in the brief seconds after the detonation of “Tsar Bomba” (roughly “King Bomb”), the largest man-made explosive device in history. This 58-megaton leviathan had just released over three thousand times the energy of the bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki or ten times the total combined power of all the conventional explosives used in World War Two. Khrushchev had made good his boast of the previous year at the 1960 United Nations General Assembly. Khrushchev would; he had proclaimed, show the United States he could build the biggest hydrogen bomb in the world and he had done it.

The titanic blast wave unleashed would obliterate the city of Severny, located fifty-five kilometers from the blast center and in brief moments following would destroy buildings for hundreds of kilometers in all directions. In the days and months to come, the nuclear fall-out would sicken or kill thousands of unsuspecting citizens living downwind from the blast.

And the nightmare posed by this infernal device had a threatened sequel, for there was a second, an identical bomb whose existence was never acknowledged, waiting for its future use against enemies of the Kremlin. It sat hidden in an underground nuclear storage facility in the community of Mozhaysk, one hundred and forty-three kilometers west of Moscow. There it was destined to remain for decades, while Russia and its confederate nations endured regime changes, *Glasnost*, *Perestroika*, Eastern European revolts, the putative end of the Cold War, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and eventually, the resurrection of its former might under the ruthless and treacherous Vladimir Putin.

As all the years and the turmoil slipped by knowledge of the potentially cataclysmic device existence would slip from restricted need-to-know status to an ambiguous, vague, information doldrums as it languished in its secure bunker in Mozhaysk. There it would slumber undisturbed, now forgotten by most, except for a fateful period when soldiers of the Russian army, conscripted from their native Ukraine and bearing no love for their Russian masters devised a different appalling plan.