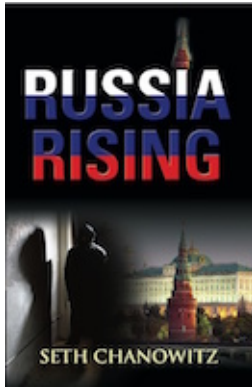




# RUSSIA RISING



SETH CHANOWITZ



*Written by a former intelligence professional, Russia Rising is an international espionage thriller set within the tensions between Russia and the West. It tells the story of a global confrontation that erupts following the “Teddy Bear” bombing of Belarus by Finnish and Estonian-American human rights activists. It takes places in Finland, Estonia, Russia, Belarus, and the United States.*

*David Ivanovich Markoff, a CIA operative and analyst, arrives at the CIA Helsinki Station after falling out of favor at CIA Headquarters under suspicion aroused by his Russian heritage.*

*In Finland, Markoff survives an assassination attempt, becomes entangled in a moral and career crisis when he attempts to assist a Belarus KGB-imprisoned Estonian-American human rights activist, and encounters Finnish SUPO, Belarus KGB, Estonian KaPo, the Israeli Mossad, Russian SVR/FSB, and Helsinki-based criminal motorcycle gangs.*

*With twists involving a United States Ambassador to Finland, the precarious, paranoid world of CIA reality, the authoritarian police state of Belarus, and an impending confrontation between Finland and Russia, Russia Rising provides a thrilling journey as David tries to survive the power, politics and corruption of the United States diplomatic world.*

# Russia Rising

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# Russia Rising

Seth Chanowitz

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# Chapter 1

*May 2014: Flight of Freedom*

*Vantaa, Finland*

At 4:00 a.m., two cars approach an airport hangar situated in an open field within a densely forested tract of land. The automobiles possess a unique Moose logo on the passenger door, along with the words “Outlandish Public Relations Agency” boldly emblazoned in English.

The cars park near the hangar, which contains an airplane with the word “Freedom” printed prominently on it. Harri Bergstrom, a thin, bearded, blond-haired, blue-eyed man in his mid-thirties, exits his automobile. He wears rimless eyeglasses, a light-colored red shirt, and blue jeans. He is the CEO and founder of Outlandish PR, which is an innovative public relations agency that supports numerous nonviolent actions against governments that abuse human rights. Then, Katya Niemi, a twenty-something, red-haired woman, exits the car parked adjacent to Harri’s car. She has spiked red hair, nose and lip piercings, and is wearing a peasant blouse.

“*Hei!*” Katya announces and gives Harri a kiss on the cheek.

“Did you get any sleep last night?” Harri inquires.

“No, I was too nervous about the flight to sleep,” Katya says.

“Don’t worry. I think the movie on this flight will be nice, in any case.” Harri smiles, hoping to diffuse Katya’s nervousness.

“I am more worried about how this flight will end. Hopefully, like in the movies, it will have a happy ending,” Katya remarks.

“Did you bring all the teddy bears and leaflets we prepared with those messages? I just have to fly this crazy contraption low enough in the most secure airspace in Europe to avoid the Belarus military shooting us out of the sky. The teddy bears and leaflets are your responsibility,” Harri says.

“The bears are all here,” Katya says.

Katya takes the thirty bags of teddy bears and leaflets from her truck and loads them into the aircraft. Harri engages in an inspection of the airplane. After he appears satisfied with the aircraft’s condition, he opens the airplane’s door and hops into the pilot seat.

“How is everything going with the bears?” Harri yells.

“Almost completed,” Katya responds while standing in front of her car’s trunk.

Harri starts the plane’s engine, which quickly drowns out all the noise within the cockpit. Katya places the last of the bags of teddy bears behind the two seats of the cockpit.

Harri looks at Katya. “We are either going to be in Warsaw or in jail in several hours. Let’s hope we end up in Poland, as jail is not a comfortable place in Belarus,” Harri remarks.

“*Joo*,” Katya said in typical Finnish style.

Harri turns on the aircraft’s radio and speaks into the microphone. “Is everything in place, Jaanika?”

There is silence for a moment. “Yes, I am ready. I’m located near a beautiful park in Minsk. The weather is great here. I will be in communication with you as you travel to your objective. Good luck with your flight.”

In Minsk, Belarus, Jaanika Olson, a red-haired, green-eyed, five-foot-four, twenty-something woman from Minneapolis, Minnesota is wearing blue jeans and a dark shirt. Jaanika is an Estonian-American, currently living in Finland and attending the law school at Helsinki University. Harri approached her to assist with the flight, and she volunteered on the spot,

as she had known of Harri's involvement promoting human rights globally.

"We will need all the luck we can get. Hope to see you in Poland," Harri remarks.

Harri looks at Katya. "I think it's time. History in the making." He pauses and adds with uncertainty, "Maybe."

The plane starts to roll faster and faster as it gathers momentum, traveling down the small, private runway. Harri directs the plane upward. The wheels lift off the ground, and the plane rises in the air above Finland's capital. Harri and Katya look out the window after several minutes and spy the large white and blue Orthodox Church, which is an iconic landmark, located near Helsinki's harbor below. Many buildings on Finland's small islands, located close to Helsinki's harbor, are soon visible, along with ferries sailing across the Baltic Sea to Swedish, Lithuanian, Russian, and Estonian ports.

"That was easy. Now on to Minsk," Harri announces.

Katya smiles. She remarks, "*Niin.*"

The plane flies over the Baltic Sea and south to the Baltic States. At 5:45 a.m., the plane crosses from Lithuania into Belarus at a very low altitude.



Harri looks at Katya. “Let’s hope that the Belarus military was celebrating and drinking all last night. Hopefully, they are still sleeping or hung over.”

“I’m counting on it,” Katya responds, clearly worried.

It’s July fourth, the day following Belarus’s National Day. Huge military parades occurred in central Minsk the previous day. All branches of the Belarus military were in attendance to celebrate Belarus and its all-powerful autocratic leader, Alexander Lukashenko. He is the president forever of the small nation that borders Poland, Russia, the Ukraine, and Lithuania. Lukashenko is pro-Russian and has kept the country in a pre-Soviet Union state, which is securely within Russia’s orbit. Statues of Lenin, Marx, and Stalin remain in Minsk decades after Communism’s collapse. The infamous secret police, known as the KGB, is ruthless and unreformed, and any democratic dissent results in jail, torture, or exile from the country. Harri and his PR agency have embraced the cause of freedom and human rights in Belarus. With this daring flight, Harri hopes to direct the world’s attention to the plight of dissidents in Belarus, who are locked away in its gulag-like prison system.

Harri peers below and views a vast expanse of farmland and forests. There are small houses, dilapidated buildings, and dirt roads that populate

Belarus's countryside. Both Katya's and Harri's nerves are on edge.

"We are in the air, Jaanika," Harri announces into the microphone of the cockpit's radio. This is an agreed-upon code to indicate his plane has entered Belarus airspace.

The radio then cuts off for a second. "Sounds good. Hope you are enjoying the flight," Jaanika says.

"Next stop is Minsk and Lukashenko's presidential palace. Do you think we should land and ask for a tour?" Harri says.

"Not if we ever want to see Finland again. Besides, I have an appointment with my stylist in Warsaw and don't want to leave her waiting. President Lukashenko will have to wait for another day to see me." Katya laughs.

The fuel gauge in the cockpit indicates the plane is using more petrol than expected. Harri's expression reveals he is a little worried, but he still feels confident that there will be enough fuel for the flight to succeed.

The plane begins rocking violently. Katya and Harri both look out the window. Katya attempts to steady herself by placing her hand on the cockpit's wall, as items are tossed about throughout the cockpit.

Harri's head smashes on the controls, and a black, swelling bruise appears on his face.

"Ahh!" Harri yells.

"Are you okay?" Katya asks with fear in her voice.

"No worse for wear. I can still fly the plane." Harri puts his hand on his head to check for any blood.

"Do you think that was an anti-aircraft missile?" Katya remarks, worried. She then looks at Harri's bruise for a second to see if he is harmed.

"No, we would not be alive if it was a missile. I think turbulence is the likely problem." Harri's unease is apparent.

Harri and Katya look out of the cockpit window but see no sign of any airplanes or any other defenses from the Belarus military. After five minutes, the turbulence subsides, though the nerves of the two are on edge.

The outskirts of the capital city of Minsk emerges below. Farmlands and dirt roads are transformed into wide streets and boulevards.

Katya reaches into the compartment in the back of her seat and busily begins arranging the bags of teddy

bears and leaflets in order so that she can easily drop them out of the window situated next to her.

“Is everything in order for the drop? We’re approaching central Minsk.” Harri looks at Katya.

“*Joo!* Let’s do this,” Katya retorts and opens the window next to her.

Harri announces on the cockpit’s radio, “Bears, bears, bears.”

*On the Ground in Central Minsk, Belarus*

“I can see you. I love you Finns,” Jaanika announces into the microphone of her portable radio. On the ground in Gorky Park in central Minsk, Jaanika is intently filming the aircraft with a small video camera.

*In the Plane above Minsk*

Katya begins dropping the bears and the leaflets out the window. One by one, each teddy bear’s parachute opens. Each has a message written in English and Russian attached to the bear stating, “Freedom and Human Rights for Belarus.” Each bear is brown, contains a button nose, is furry, and has a small message attached to it. The white parachutes open, and the bears begin to descend and glide gently

to the ground. The leaflets also fall from the sky with a message of “Democracy for Belarus” written on them.

*On the Ground in Central Minsk*

“Those bears look awesome in the sky,” Jaanika announces in English on the radio microphone. She watches the small plane buzzing above Minsk and spots hundreds of bears gliding to the ground through the viewfinder of her video camera.

Ordinary Minsk residents who are walking on the street in central Minsk stop in their tracks and are suddenly awestruck at the sight of the teddy bears descending in the sky above Belarus on a beautiful, almost cloudless day in Minsk. The bears’ parachutes open, and they begin to drift down to the ground. At first, hundreds of bears appear as white dots that contrast against the sun of the summer day. The bears slowly begin reaching the ground, and the leaflets soon follow.

Jaanika continues videotaping and sees many individuals walking in central Minsk stop in their tracks and look up to the sky. Many take out their smartphones and snap pictures. The local police on the ground are amused and miffed. The bears and leaflets begin landing in downtown Minsk.

Some individuals walking on the street in central Minsk pick up the bears and leaflets and cheer as they

read the messages. It's a surreal moment in Belarus. The dictator of Belarus is being attacked by teddy bears with messages of freedom.

*In the Plane above Minsk, Belarus*

Harri looks at Katya. "Are the bears all gone?"

Katya exclaims, "Yes. Freedom for Belarus! Down with the dictator Lukashenko!"

"Let's head to Poland. On my next trip to Belarus, I will enjoy some of the tourist attractions in Minsk," Harri jokes.

Harri changes the plane's direction. The plane can be seen veering away from Minsk and heads west in the direction of Poland. Both Katya and Harri seem elated.

Harri announces on the radio, "Jaanika, see you in Helsinki! *Hei Hei!*"

At 8:00 a.m., the plane finally crosses the Belarus–Poland border. In the cockpit fifteen minutes later, the engine sputters intermittently. Harri looks worriedly at the fuel gauge, which indicates that the plane is almost empty of petrol. Harri looks at Katya. "I have bad news for you, Katya. My estimates of fuel usage on this flight were incorrect. The turbulence we experienced caused us to use much more fuel than I

expected. In other words, we have no more petrol,” Harri says.

“Harri, tell me some good news,” Katya demands.

“I think we are going to land very soon.” Harri smiles but shows an expression of fear.

Harri looks down intently, searching for an open field or runway on the ground in Poland. The plane’s engine emits a sputtering sound as the last amounts of fuel are used.

Harri radios to the Polish air control.

“May day. May day. We have to land as we have run out of fuel. This is Freedom 1. We are traveling from Helsinki, Finland to Warsaw, Poland.”

A voice from the radio responds, “This is the control tower. I see your coordinates on air radar.”

“I am going to put this down,” Harri remarks with worry, looking at Katya.

“No problem. I will call my hairstylist. I will tell her that I can’t make my appointment in Warsaw,” Katya quips.

The engine noise ceases. All is eerily quiet inside the cockpit. Harri looks intently at the ground and slowly glides the plane.

Katya's expression reveals her fear. The plane slowly glides lower and lower. Then, there are moments of terror as the plane passes close to several buildings and narrowly avoids a large tree.

Harri's expression reveals relief. "It's a miracle. I see a farmer's field ahead. We are going to have a chance to make a safe landing."

The plane descends rapidly. Harri's gaze is focused intently on the ground and the cockpit controls as he attempts to glide the aircraft down to the ground to land. Harri and Katya feel a thud as the wheels bounce on the ground. Both Harri and Katya are violently rocked up and down as the plane's velocity rapidly slows. Everything shakes in the cockpit. It feels as if an earthquake has hit. One wing is clipped by a small tree, which rips the right wing in half and causes the plane to veer to the right as it slows. Then, the plane quickly stops with a jarring thud. All is now quiet in the cockpit for a moment.

Harri looks at Katya in amazement. "Mission accomplished. I planned this all along." He smiles.

"*Joo*. Welcome to Poland! We're still alive," Katya exclaims.



*On the Ground in Central Minsk, Belarus*

Jaanika sits on the ground, overjoyed with a feeling of victory. She has taken several minutes of footage of the plane circling Minsk. Her car radio is tuned to Minsk Radio. In Russian, the announcer states, “Terrorist elements dropped teddy bears over Minsk skies today. The perpetrators are Americans and their crony allies.”

Jaanika is elated. “She uploads the video she has filmed of the teddy bears and the plane onto the Finnish server via Minsk’s free Wi-Fi. She starts the car and begins the journey to safety and Poland.”

She travels south to the Belarus town of Hrodna and to her ultimate destination of the Kuznica–Bruzgi border crossing to Poland.

Jaanika’s automobile progresses closer to Belarus’s border control. She observes the line of cars slowing to a crawl.

Jaanika feels apprehensive as she sits in her car waiting for her turn to cross into Poland. As she waits, she sings to herself in Estonian, a language her mother taught her in her youth. Her mother is originally from the small town located outside of Tartu in the south of the country and immigrated to the United States after attending university in Minneapolis.

After twenty minutes, Jaanika's car arrives at the border crossing. A tall man with Slavic features greets her. He is wearing a gray Belarus uniform and carries a gun on his side. "Papers," the guard grunts in badly accented English.

Jaanika presents her passport, which contains her tourist visa. The man scrutinizes her passport along with the visa the Belarus government issued to her in Helsinki.

"Your reason for visiting Belarus?" the guard interrogates.

"Tourism," Jaanika says.

"Where did you go in Belarus?" the guard asks.

"I went to Minsk," Jaanika responds, appearing as innocent as possible.

"Describe for me what places you saw and visited while you were in Minsk," the guard asks.

"Minsk . . . Ah . . . the presidential palace," Jaanika responds hesitantly.

"What did it look like?" the guard asks.

"It was nice and beautiful," Jaanika says.

The guard then returns to his booth and appears to be running Jaanika's name and the license plate of her vehicle in the computer located inside his border patrol station.

Jaanika is overcome with anxiety. She focuses on her mission and calms down.

The border guard returns to the car and gives a nonverbal gesture for her to move her car closer to the border guard station and out of the line to exit Belarus.

She places her foot on the gas pedal, exits the line, and parks the car at the border guard station, which is located several hundred feet away. Jaanika sends a text message to Harri: *I am at the border of Poland and Belarus. I might have some problems leaving the country.*

The border guard walks toward Jaanika's car. He states in Russian, "Please exit the car." He motions with his hand for her to get out of the car.

Fear overcomes Jaanika. She is petrified and can't move. The guard quickly becomes enraged at Jaanika's refusal to leave the car. He swears in Russian. He opens the car door and removes Jaanika from the car by forcefully lifting her arm. He bends her hand to breaking point, picks her up, and drags her to a small detention room located at the back of the guard facility.

Jaanika cries, “I didn’t do anything!”

“You here. You stay. Yes. Okay!” the guard yells in English. He then locks the jail door of the small cell.

“You stay here!” the guard yells in accented English.

Jaanika sits alone in a small detention cell located within the guard station. She spends hours inside her small cell. She goes to sleep and is awoken several hours later by another armed man. He escorts her to a nondescript white police van. The door closes behind her. She sits in the back of the windowless van and is transported for several hours.

The bumps of Belarus’s dilapidated roads are evident as Jaanika is jostled around as the van travels. Everything is dark inside the van. Jaanika can barely see her hands.

After two hours, the van stops. A guard opens the door and motions for Jaanika to exit. She walks out of the van and is escorted by another Slavic-looking man wearing a gray Belarus uniform, who escorts her to a detention facility.

Upon entering the prison, Jaanika walks through the hallways and is escorted into her cell. She looks around and observes a moldy mattress, a toilet, and one light dangling above the bed. A big black rat

momentarily startles Jaanika. It looks her in the eye and slowly walks through the bars of her cell. It seems unfazed by her presence.

Jaanika is alone in a dank, dark, and musty cell in Belarus. Many thoughts race through her mind: *What will happen to me? Will I be tortured, and will I ever see Helsinki and my friends and family?* She then takes a piece of paper out of her pocket, folds it neatly, and puts it in the bottom of her shoe to hide it. She lies on her mattress and stares at the ceiling, hoping to make some sense of a dire situation.

## Chapter 2

*May 2014*

### *A Spy's Summer Home*

The early morning light of the Nordic midsummer sun awakens David from his slumber inside his summerhouse, which is located in a secluded section of the forest outside of Jyväskylä, Finland. David Ivanovich Markoff, a thirty-three-year-old with light blond hair, hazel eyes, and classic Slavic features that betray his Russian background, gets out of bed and appears refreshed from a night of slumber.

“*Huomenta!*” Terhi remarks from the small kitchen two rooms away in the small wooden structure.

“*Houmenta,*” David responds. He gets dressed and walks to the kitchen. Terhi stands next to the window and the sink. She is a petite five-foot-seven, blond-haired, blue-eyed woman. She smiles while preparing the coffee.

“Don’t you love Finland’s nature?” Terhi inquires and flashes a loving smile.

“My roots may be in rural Russian Karelia, but I was raised in New York City. I guess I am a city man at heart. I have to admit it’s beautiful here, though I

could do without the giant mosquitoes biting me right now.” David puts his arms around Terhi and kisses her.

“You’re the one who wanted to move back from the United States. This is our first weekend here, so you better adapt to Finland.” Terhi informs him in a demanding tone.

“Hey, why not come with me for a jog in the woods?” David suggests. David walks to the kitchen drawer, opens it, and takes out a 357 Magnum handgun.

“What is that for?” Terhi looks at him, a little puzzled.

“It is for emergencies. It’s just in case we run into an angry bear of the Russian kind or an angry moose of the Finnish kind, for that matter,” David retorts and smiles slyly.

“You see threats everywhere,” Terhi quips, looking a little annoyed.

Terhi and David are startled by the sounds of glass breaking in the cabin. Numerous projectiles begin penetrating the cabin walls and windows. Terhi drops to the floor. David dives to the ground to take cover. He crawls to Terhi’s body as glass continues to break from piercing bullets raining down on his head. He examines Terhi and spots a small bullet hole near her

forehead. Terhi is unconscious, and her body seems lifeless and cold. The sounds of bullets flying in the air continue unabated around the cabin.

David's heart is racing, and adrenaline continues to rush through his veins like an endless river. He crawls as close to the floor as he can. He plants his right elbow and moves his body forward. Then, he plants his left elbow and drags his feet along as fast as he can. He is carrying his handgun safely in his back pocket, and he slowly heads for the back door of the cabin. The sound of gunfire and the smell of gunpowder permeate the air. He hears the voices of men talking in a foreign language that he can't identify. He soon arrives at his destination. Fear fills his body.

With terror permeating his being, he decides to flee the cabin and make a break for his car. With his gun firmly gripped within his right hand, he flings the door open with his left hand and springs up in a desperate race to save his life and to reach his parked car, which is located only fifteen yards from the house.

He runs and rapidly fires the gun in the direction of the cabin with his left hand, where the snipers appear to be firing at him. The pops of numerous shots from the barrel of David's weapon echo in the distance. David's arms pump rapidly, sweat drips down his forehead, and he feels breathless as he exhales and inhales rapidly. He reaches the car and



quickly opens the car door. He jumps inside and closes the door. From inside the car, bullets can be heard hitting the car in rapid succession, making a ringing sound within the car as they penetrate the aluminum body.

David's hands are shaking as he nervously puts the key inside the ignition and turns it. The engine starts. He quickly presses on the accelerator and drives away from the cabin as rapidly as he can. The car swiftly accelerates from forty to eighty miles an hour. He drives down a dirt road, which turns up a trail of dust and rocks in his wake. The sound of sporadic gunfire continues well down the road. David thinks he has lost the gunmen tailing him, but he continues to drive on the dirt road at a fast pace.

David turns onto the highway and stops at a small gasoline station. With his shaking hand, he takes his spare cell phone out of the glove compartment of the car and makes a call.

Several rings can be heard. "United States Embassy. Jake McMillian speaking."

"This is David. Call an ambulance for me. Terhi has been shot, and my cabin is riddled with bullet holes!" David yells with worry.

"Are you okay? What happened?" Jake questions.

“Someone is out to eliminate me. I am unhurt. Get someone out to my cabin quickly! I don’t think Terhi has much time,” David announces.

“I will call the police. Let me know your location. Did you see anything?” Jake questions.

“No, I just ran out of the cabin and fired in the opposite direction. I am not sure who did it. It could have been Russian SVR or the Chinese, as they are the only agencies with the capability to launch an operation in Finland.”

“I will get help. I will call Langley, too. Sit tight for a moment. As a CIA employee, you should know the drill,” Jake informs him.

“Terhi is not in good condition,” David says. His voice reeks of an inner agony.

David sits in his car. He is somber and silent as he contemplates what happened. Thoughts race through his mind: *Was it my position that put Terhi in danger? Should I have run? Who could have caused this?*

## Chapter 3

### *CIA's Helsinki Station*

The alarm of David's clock rings at 6:00 a.m. A month has elapsed since the shooting incident at his summer cabin. The nightly replay of Terhi's death within David's dreams has subsided, though the feeling of guilt for letting it happen has not. The "white nights" are evident in Helsinki as David rises out of bed and is shocked out of his semi-awake, groggy state into consciousness by the bright light of the sun shining into his apartment at such an early hour.

David gets out of bed and showers. He dresses in his diplomatic business attire and walks out of his new apartment located in the Kallio section of Helsinki. He heads to another day of work at the United States embassy. He walks in the direction of central Kallio's Bear Park. Once in the park, David waits for his tram to arrive and transport him south to Helsinki's city center, which is near the United States embassy.

The tram arrives, and David boards it. He walks to the middle of the vehicle and takes a seat. He hopes that his position on the tram will provide a good view of all individuals who board and exit and ensure no one is watching or following him undetected. David is especially wary since no one has been caught in

connection with the attack at his summer home. He is diligent to evade detection by using the good intelligence tradecraft he learned at the CIA. David knows to avoid using all compromised technology, which includes unsecured phone calls, the Internet, and all social media. When using a false name, passport, or identity, he plays the part at all times. This means no phone calls home, few friends outside of the CIA, and only answering to his false name.

David conducts a visual survey of the tram to spot signs of surveillance. He looks in back of the tram and sees nothing out of the ordinary. He sees a businessman wearing a suit and tie who is reading email on his smartphone, a young woman sitting with a small child, and a university student possessing dark hair who is reading her smartphone and listening to music. He looks in front of the tram and sees no sign that anyone has followed him on to the train. He checks outside the tram and notices no one is watching or could be recording him. He then looks under his seat and sees no sign of unusual electronic devices. David concludes that all seems normal, though his paranoia continues unabated. David knows that surveillance can be in electronic form, which is harder to detect. David is aware that an intelligence officer's life can be a precarious existence filled with paranoia and constant doubt. He has become innately skeptical of everyone's motivations and all information provided to him as a result of his intelligence work.

The tram moves forward and progresses in the direction of central Helsinki. David takes out his Department of State-issued cell phone from his briefcase. He turns on the device and quickly opens an email sent from his Department of State supervisor, Edith, which is marked urgent. He reads it: *You are now scheduled for an interview with a man who has a United States citizen-related issue. See me when you arrive at work, as this is a high-interest case.*

The tram approaches Stockmann's, a well-known department store in Helsinki. David reaches for the button and presses it, which signals to the driver that he wants to leave the tram at the next stop. The tram proceeds to stop. David exits and walks a mile in the direction of the Baltic Sea and the United States embassy. As a rule, David always changes his route to avoid detection from surveillance conducted by the Finnish Security Intelligence Service, Russian intelligence, or anyone who might want to do him harm. The sail-like edifice of the embassy complex comes into view. David reaches the building's entrance, shows his identification to the guard, walks into the embassy, and heads in the direction of his office.

On his way, David spots his CIA supervisor, Jake, who is six feet two inches tall, possesses blond hair and blue eyes, and appears slightly overweight. He is wearing a blue suit and tie and is accompanied by another bald, athletic-looking man. "Good morning,

Jake. How is it going?” David remarks. David shakes hands with Jake.

“Very good. Again, I want to offer my condolences on the death of your wife,” Jake says.

“Thank you for your thoughts,” David states.

“Are you enjoying the white nights of Finland? It can be very hard to sleep during this time of year when the sun does not set until 1:00 a.m.,” Jake questions.

“I can’t complain,” David says.

“I want you to meet Ambassador Cliff Armstrong. This is David Markoff. He just arrived recently from Washington DC.” The ambassador puts out his hand to shake. He is six feet tall, bald, with brown eyes, a thick, muscular neck, and a huge bodybuilder-like appearance.

“Good to meet you, Mr. Ambassador. I hear many compliments about your athletic abilities,” Dave remarks. David is aware that the ambassador is a former professional boxer and that his primary credentials for his job were bundling checks for the president’s campaign.

“I think my abilities are very overrated, but thank you,” the United States ambassador reaches his hand

out to shake. David shakes the ambassador's hand firmly.

"I hear your family is from Russia originally. Is that true?" the ambassador inquires.

"Yes, that is correct. My family is from a small town located near the Finnish-Russian border called Vyborg. It is located in the Russian province of Karelia," David remarks. He smiles politely.

"We need to talk at some point. Russian culture is of great interest to me," Ambassador Armstrong says. He flashes a big grin.

"We have to attend a meeting, but I hope to see you around the embassy," Jake remarks. Jake and the US ambassador proceed to walk down the stairs toward the ambassador's office.

David walks into the Consular Office and meets Edith in her office. The office possesses several windows that provide a strategic view of the Baltic Sea. There are pictures of her family placed on her desk, along with scenic areas of Washington DC. Placed on the walls, Edith has several pictures of Manila, which was her last Department of State assignment.

"Good morning, Edith," David remarks with a smile.

“Hope your morning was good, too,” Edith states.

“Not bad. I just saw Ambassador Armstrong walk by our coffee shop this morning. He seems to be a nice guy.”

Edith motions for David to sit down. “He is a very pleasant person to work with. Listen, Jake has recommended that you should be in charge of interviewing a Finnish man who is the Outlandish PR CEO. Have you heard of him?” Edith questions.

“No.” David appears a little puzzled.

“He is Harri Bergstrom, a well-known activist for human rights and left-wing causes. He has been very critical of the United States in the past. It seems he is reporting an issue related to an American citizen living in Helsinki who is now located in Belarus and is associated with the teddy bear bombing incident. I want you to obtain all the information you can about Harri and the woman. We don’t have a United States embassy operating in Belarus, so we are in charge of this political hot potato.”

“Thanks for your confidence in me. Did anyone get hurt in the teddy bear bombing of Minsk?” David asks.

“Just Belarus’s dictator President Lukashenka’s ego. Several of his intelligence officials and military



were demoted for letting a small aircraft fly over Minsk unimpeded. I hear it has encouraged the opposition, as the government is looking like a laughing stock now. This really angered the Russians. It made Belarus look as though it was unable to control its borders. You may not be aware that Russia has a close alliance with Belarus and views the country as part of its military security plan,” Edith informs him.

“I will do my best,” David retorts. He gets up from his seat and walks out of Edith’s office. David then walks down to the embassy’s Foggy Bottom Café, which is named for Department of State’s Washington DC headquarters’ nickname, “Foggy Bottom.” He purchases a medium coffee and curses himself for his coffee addiction, which he only picked up from working long hours at CIA headquarters and visiting the coffee shop too often.

Dave brings his coffee to his desk. He logs on to his computer and checks his email. The phone rings. He picks up the phone.

“Hello,” David answers.

“Hey, this is Jake. Bergstrom is going to meet you in the conference room. Get back to me after you interview him. Thanks.”

“No problem,” David responds.

David walks to the main conference room, sits down, sets up his laptop to type notes, and waits for Bergstrom to be escorted up to his floor.

The room possesses pictures of Washington DC, an American flag standing in the corner, and a window with a view of the Baltic Sea and Helsinki Harbor. The wooden desk is stark and minimalist in design.

Harri Bergstrom saunters into the room. He is wearing a polo shirt and jeans, has a small goatee, possesses a laptop computer, and carries a smartphone strapped to his waist. His manner denotes a hip, Nordic startup.

David stands up and puts out his hand to shake. “Welcome to the United States embassy, Helsinki. I hear you are here to report a problem associated with a United States citizen.”

Harri smiles. “I have never met a United States bureaucrat before.”

“We are human also. Why not sit down and we can talk.” David smiles and gives a nonverbal gesture for Harri to sit. He pauses. “I hope you don’t mind, but I will be typing the notes of our meeting as we talk. I want to make sure I get all the details correct.”

Harri sits down. “Let me see those notes in the end. I am suspicious of the United States government. You know, all those NSA revelations.”

David queries, “I can let you look at them if you would like. What brings you to the embassy today?”

“Well, I am here to discuss Jaanika Olson. She is a United States citizen who was living in Finland and attending the University of Helsinki. I think she is also a citizen of Estonia,” Harri says.

“Was she registered with the embassy? Many Americans who live outside the United States register with the local United States embassy so that their family members may be alerted if there is an emergency or they need assistance from the United States government,” David informs.

“I’m not sure, but I doubt she would,” Harri asserts. “I think she probably demonstrated against United States policies and tries to stay away from the United States government if she can help it,” Harri adds.

“It seems that Jaanika has been arrested in Belarus and is now in the custody of its notorious security service, the KGB. I’m hoping that you can assist us in obtaining her release from prison,” Harri says as David types his notes on his laptop.

“Can you provide the details of what happened to her?” David inquires.

“Sure. She was at the border of Poland and Belarus and disappeared,” Harri remarks.

“When was your last communication with her?” David asks. He intently types Harri’s response on his laptop.

“It was on July fourth. I received a text from her indicating that she was having problems crossing the border from Belarus into Poland,” Harri says.

“Do you know what was she doing in Belarus?” David questions. He continues to type furiously on his laptop.

“Jaanika was assisting us in our efforts to publicize the country’s lack of respect for human rights,” Harri remarked, looking serious.

“Have you informed her relatives?” David asks. He looks up from his laptop.

“Not yet. I am attempting to obtain the names now,” Harri adds.

“Can you describe what she was doing exactly?” David asks. He returns to looking at his laptop and typing.

“She was helping with the logistics, which were related to our flight,” Harri adds.

“Was she doing anything else?” David asks.

“No,” Harri retorts. His expression indicates he is a little upset.

“Who else was involved with your efforts to illegally enter Belarus airspace and drop teddy bears from a plane?” David questions.

“I don’t think this is any of the United States government’s business.” Harri’s expression reveals he is annoyed.

“Listen. I am just trying to assist in obtaining information to help a United States citizen. I’m not the CIA . . . or the FBI, for that matter.” David looks up from his laptop and flashes a sincere smile.

“You’re all CIA as far as I am concerned. Do you have a way to contact your office in Belarus?” Harri asks. He sits back in his chair with his arms folded and an angry expression.

“We only have an interest section open at the Swiss embassy in Belarus currently. As you probably know, Lukashenko has broken relations with the United States. We will do all we can,” David says.

“Can you tell me anything else about the incident?” David questions.

“She was stopped at the border. I know the Belarus authorities, which control the country, are not happy about us embarrassing them by dropping teddy bears and flyers stating ‘Freedom.’ I’m not sure if they know she was involved,” Harri says.

“Listen, I’m pretty ignorant about what happened. What did you do in Belarus exactly?” David asks. He knows playing dumb never hurts when attempting to gain the most information possible from a source.

“We flew a plane and dropped teddy bears and flyers over central Minsk,” Harri says.

“Was this funded by your company?” David asks. He flashes an inquisitive expression.

“I am not going into detail. This is a sensitive subject in Finland and internationally. I will provide you with Jaanika’s address in Finland and that of her relatives in the United States. I’m fed up with your inquiry at this point. I need help for Jaanika!” Harri says.

“Here is my card. Please forward the information to my address. At the Department of State, we are here to help you.” David takes his card out and hands it to Harri.

Both Harri and David walk out of the room, and David escorts him to the United States embassy's exit. Harri walks outside the embassy and gets into a black BMW.

*United States Embassy, Helsinki, Finland*

David then walks to the security officer's office. He puts his card in the card-reader slot. After a few seconds' delay, the door opens. He makes sure no one in the Consular Office has seen him, as he does not want his CIA cover to be blown by United States diplomats, who are known to speak too much after consuming a few glasses of wine.

He sees Jake, the undercover CIA chief of station and David's boss. "Hey, busy time with the ambassador?" David quips.

"Just giving the daily brief. It's one of my many duties here at the embassy," Jake reports.

"Have you heard anything from the Finnish police about the murder investigation?" Jake inquires.

"Nothing yet, unfortunately. I passed a polygraph to prove it was not me," David says.

"Anything from CIA headquarters about how long this assignment will last?" David inquires.

“No, you have been detailed indefinitely at our Helsinki station. This is your permanent home now, so I hope you like the dark Nordic winters and the rainy, cold, and depressing weather. What exactly happened at CIA headquarters? It’s pretty odd having an analyst on duty in Helsinki. We are a small, unimportant regional CIA office in Helsinki,” Jake questions.

“I received operational training and was ready to become an operations officer who engages in real spy work, like recruiting sources and designing operations, but ended up being assigned to the Counter Terrorism Center as a South Asia analyst at CIA headquarters writing reports. You know the United States government can be illogical at times. All I can say is that my Russian background is not popular at the CIA now. I guess I have been exiled,” David says. He flashes an unhappy expression.

“How did you get into the CIA by the way? You don’t seem like the typical employee here. Who recruited you?” Jake asks.

“Actually, I found the [cia.gov](http://cia.gov) site and sent my application in. I was interviewed and, a year later, entered on as an employee. I guess I wanted adventure and to prove I was a real American. I discovered this was more of a job for bureaucratic types, and my past seems to be more important than my ability to do the job,” David says. His expression reveals he is quite frustrated.



“Interesting. Let’s not dwell on your assignment or on your past. Let’s get back to our person of interest, Harri Berg. What other details were you able to extract?” Jake asks.

“Well, Harri carried out the operation with two other people. The American involved was caught at the border. There were no indications that other organizations or groups were involved, from his statements he gave to me today,” David says.

“Did you know that the Belarus authorities have issued an international Interpol arrest warrant for all those involved in this plane flight?” Jake informs.

“Actually, I was not aware of this. This is the first I heard about the event. Will Finland extradite those involved with the Belarus teddy bear incident to Belarus?” David questions.

“It does not appear it will happen. Belarus and Finland do not have good diplomatic relations due to Alexander Lukashenko’s poor human rights record. This is likely causing Russia to become really angry, as Belarus is their satellite now. They are blaming Finland for this proactive act,” Jake adds.

“What else is being reported on the high side? You know . . . at the top-secret level?” David questions.

“Nothing really. I know that Belarus is pretty upset about the incident, and several high-ranking individuals in Lukashenko’s upper ranks have been demoted. I get the feeling that the Finnish government knew something about it beforehand. Harri is connected to the high-ranking members of the Social Democratic Party and Finland’s prime minister, who is a Center Party member,” Jake says.

“That is an interesting link,” David adds.

“Do you know any details about who funded the operation?” Jake questions.

“I attempted to obtain all the details with several questions I posed to him, but he shut me down,” David briefs.

“Thanks. I know you have to brief Consular Affairs about your interview. Please say nothing about our meeting, of course, as we don’t want to compromise your cover in Finland working as a CIA officer. No one in the Department of State should know,” Jake warns.

“No problem. I know all the operational procedures for covered positions,” David says.

David walks out of the security office and heads to see Edith in Consular Affairs. He arrives at Edith’s office door and knocks.

“May I enter?” David asks.

“Sure. Come in and sit down,” Edith responds. She smiles politely and points to the seat in front of her desk.

David takes a seat in front of Edith’s desk.

“Edith, I just wanted to inform you that I met with Harri. I will provide you with all the details of my interview. He is going to send me an email with Jaanika Olson’s relatives’ names.”

“Thanks for getting on top of the issue.” Edith smiles approvingly.

“So much for a slow diplomatic post in the Nordic countries,” David quips. He then rises from his chair, walks out of Edith’s office, returns to his cube, and logs back onto his computer.

David checks his email and discovers that George at CIA headquarters has sent another email. David opens the email using encryption software: *The CIA has uncovered several Russian spies working in its headquarters in Langley. They may think you are connected to them.* Worry and paranoia grips David suddenly, despite his having done nothing. He feels a little nervous.

David quickly opens another email that was sent from Jake. The email states, *Here is a picture of Jaanika*. David downloads the attachment and views Jaanika Olson's profile. David is shocked and his eyes open wide, which reveals his disbelief. He recognizes the picture. She is his cousin, whom he saw in Minneapolis over a decade ago at a wedding.

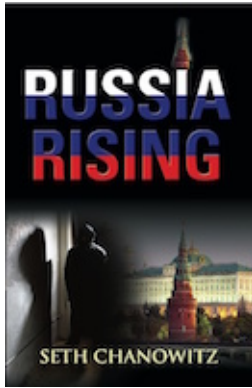
*Helsinki, Finland*

Harri is sitting in his BMW, driving north from the Koviposti section of Helsinki. The radio in his car is blaring techno music as Harri drives at an excessive speed to his next destination.

Harri makes a call while driving. He presses a button on his phone, and several rings can be heard on the speaker. A person picks up. "Hey, Katya. I just talked with the consular officer at the United States embassy. I am not sure if they are going to be able to assist us much. By the way, is all the money ready?"

Harri's car stops at the traffic light. In a moment, the car is rocked by a huge explosion and consumed with heat and fire. The windows of the car blow out. The hood of the car blows off its hinges as a huge fireball envelops the car. Harri quickly loses consciousness as life slips from his body.

"Harri! Are you okay?" Katya cries in Finnish as she hears the explosion on the other end of the phone.



*Written by a former intelligence professional, Russia Rising is an international espionage thriller set within the tensions between Russia and the West. It tells the story of a global confrontation that erupts following the “Teddy Bear” bombing of Belarus by Finnish and Estonian-American human rights activists. It takes places in Finland, Estonia, Russia, Belarus, and the United States.*

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