

teen miles square with lava rock cliffs that rise steeply up to Mount Mumukai."

"Any inhabitants or settlement?"

"There's a small meteorological and communications station, but it's automated. Scientists only visit it every six months to check and repair the equipment. The only permanent residents are goats and rats."

"Is there a harbor large enough to anchor a small ship?"

"More like a lagoon," replied Cussler, "but it's a safe anchorage for two, maybe three small ships."

"How about foliage for camouflage?"

"Raoul is lush and heavily wooded. They could cover a pair of small ships well enough for someone who wasn't looking real carefully."

Pitt said into the phone, "You heard?"

"I heard," said Sandecker. "I'll ask that the next satellite that passes over that part of the Pacific aim its cameras on the Kermadecs. How do I contact you?"

Pitt was about to ask Cussler for his communications code, but the old man had already written the numbers down and handed them to him on a slip of paper. Pitt informed Sandecker and punched off the connection.

"Is there any possibility you could make a detour by the Kermadecs?" Pitt asked.

The blue-green eyes glistened. "You have something devious in mind?"

"You wouldn't happen to have a bottle of tequila on board?"

Cussler nodded solemnly. "I do. A case of the best. A little touch of the blue agave now and then keeps me quick and nimble."

After the glasses were filled with Porfirio tequila—Misty preferred a margarita—Pitt told the old man what he had in mind, but only as much as he thought was advisable under the circumstances. After all, he thought as he looked around the elegant yacht, no one in his right mind would risk destroying such a beautiful vessel in a desperate scheme.