

Dead Minus One
Chapter 9
By Thomas Martin
solarpons@mac.com

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“Tell me about him.”

Viktor Anatoly Bukov leaned back slightly in his onyx nappa leather chair. His vodka was slipping between the ice cubes of the glass in his left hand. The suit was a perfect fit, which was no surprise. When you're the wealthiest man in Russia, everything was a perfect fit, or it wasn't at all. And then someone paid for that.

The one who normally paid was Grigori Ivanovich Kornilov, a small wiry man who lived on a family name from the early days of the Revolution, and the generosity of Viktor Bukov. Right now Viktor was in a mood to be generous. If he wasn't, the vodka would have been going down very fast, followed by another and another.

But for now, Kornilov found the file on his laptop computer.

“He had been Spetsnaz for six years. Mustered out in late 2002, and been on as needed basis with us since May of '03. Chechnya, Afghanistan, and that situation in Finland. A number of others. Ribbons as a marksman during his military service. I have detailed records.”

“And he was killed by a woman and an old man.”

“Yes, sir.” Please don't get mad, Grigori prayed. The ice cubes jingled in the glass.

“Our best shooter is killed as he hides in a tree. By a woman and an old man. I underestimated them. This will not happen again, Grigori. Things are moving fast. I know that woman is going to end up in Vladivostok if we don't do something. She has help. The NSA is here. Apparently my partner can not control everything.”

Kornilov nodded. He had files on all of them.

Bukov swung around and looked out the windows of his dacha outside Moscow. The landscape had trees, grass, the required happy children, and that buxom nanny. Bukov smiled as he gazed out at her. Kornilov had a file on that woman as well.

Bukov gazed out.

“I'm doing all this for them, Grigori. All for them and Russia.”

Wonderful, Grigori thought, here comes the sentimental bullshit. Get out the big boots. Blah, blah, Mother Russia, blah blah, return to greatness, blah blah, need weapons, etcetera, going to Vladivostok, and on and what?

“Excuse, me sir. We're going where?”

“You heard me. We need to be at the facility. I need direct control.”

“Sir,” Grigori started, “we've been able to control things just fine from Moscow, releasing the clones as needed. I believe you'll find that -”

He was reaching for his next file when Bukov put down his drink and stood, albeit a little unsteadily.

“You've read your Marx, Grigorii. Historical dialectic. Things are destined. Perhaps not Communism in Russia but definitely glory returned. And I have left this in the hands of subordinates too long. My American partner has been moving quite rapidly, and we must strike too. Russia is paralyzed with the nuclear launch. The President is, well, indisposed, but still helpful from what I understand and the government, aside from Yevtuschenko, that gun toting son of a bitch, I can't wait to kill him myself, has been ineffective. So now I have all the money and power I need and no interference. And Mr. Alpha has not exactly said no.”

My God, he said the name.

“Besides, I should be leaving Moscow immediately. It should be starting soon.” Anton Bukov said, his face beaming. “Yes. We should go.”

Grigori Kornilov wondered if anyone would be around to remember his ancestor when this was all over. For now, he picked up the cell phone and started making calls. Bukov returned to his drink and eyed the nanny on the grass.

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Anya and Melissa climbed the stairs of the apartment building on Tverskaya Street. The elevator was out. Each kept their own counsel, only mumbling about their six story climb.

“I hope there's a lock on the door. I'll kick it in, and then I'll shoot the sofa.”

Melissa couldn't hide her smile.

“You must get invited to a lot of parties.”

Anya opened to door to the sixth floor.

“I don't do parties, isn't that your American expression?”

“What's the Russian version?”

“Fuck it.”

The door was locked. Anya grinned and the door was opened two seconds later, bouncing on its hinges. Anya drew her gun, as if she was really going to shoot the sofa, or maybe only wing it and stepped in.

Empty. No furniture, no clothes, not even mud on the floor. They went room to room, expecting nothing and an answer at the same time. But each room was scrubbed clean, right down to the window sills.

“This is amazing. Are we at the right address?” Melissa said. Anya stood in the bathroom, her arms folded, her gun returned to her holster.

“This is bullshit.”

She pulled out her cell phone, and dialed a number.

“Let me talk to him. I don't care who's in there.”

Anya shooed Melissa off, then closed the bathroom door.

“Way to partner.” Melissa said and then turned back to looking around the apartment. Still empty and Anya's Russian cursing could reverberate freely through the rooms. Melissa came back and leaned against the bathroom door, waiting for something. The past two days had been just...

The ring of her cell phone brought her back. She reached for it. Anya was still talking, so it wasn't her. The General?

“You have 1 text message.”

She scrolled through. No number showed on the screen. Not a big surprise as most of the NSA phones were like that. Someone from the office, anyway.

It read: “The clones are in Moscow. The dying will commence. Now.”

“Anya!”

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They got to the first floor before the bomb went off. Whatever had been left of Ivana Turgenev in those rooms, whether it be an eyelash or DNA left in the corner of the bathroom, it was gone now in a flash of heat and flame. Windows exploded with fire, the blaze dancing in its freedom where frames of wood and glass had been.

Melissa and Anya got to the bottom steps and outside. Screams of sirens and spectators mixed together hit them as they took in clean air. Natasha was at the curb immediately. They dashed to the car, making sure not to acknowledge the looks of anyone gaping at two plaster dust covered women coming from a building where a bomb had just gone off.

“I hope everyone will be all right,”Melissa said as the building faded from view, only the trail of smoke as a final clue to its presence in the Moscow sky.

“People die,” Anya said as she returned to her phone.

Natasha made a “chuff” sound as she shot by a Volvo.

Move on, Melissa.

“So where are we going now? Back to the Ministry?”

Anya continued to talk on the phone, mostly with da's and nyet's. Okay, no luck there.

“Natasha?” The driver's eyes flicked to hers in the rear view. Even those hard eyes glistened.

“Best we return. You will need to answer questions.”

Melissa turned to watch the Moscow scenery go by. Okay, let's review, shall we? There's a bomb in a immaculately cleaned room of a woman we're told to find. I get a text message telling me the clones are here and the dying will commence and-

“There have been the same things all over Moscow. Bombs, people murdered. All the same. Shot once through the head.”

Anya closed her phone, and for once, the smug look was gone. Natasha went faster, if that was possible.

“Tell me again,”Melissa said.

Anya swallowed once. She stared ahead.

“Apparently in the last two hours, since we left the Ministry, a number of murders have happened around the city, plus a few bombings of apartments and homes. All the victims, and least what they found, are all about the same age, but both men and women. No one survived the bombings.”

She stopped.

“I can't tell you anymore. Everything else is classified.”

She turned fully to Melissa.

“Why did you call my name back at the apartment? How did you know what would happen?”

“That's classified, too.”

The American and Russian stared down each other in classic Cold War fashion.

“So do we parlay?” Melissa asked, tired of the stare down and the long ride.

“Very well.”

“Pay no attention to driver of car. Am just a bug on life windshield.”

They pulled into the Ministry, which had enough police cars around it with lights of blue and white flashing that might send someone into convulsion. Natasha let them off, and they ran through the checkpoints to the Minster's Office.

XX

Yevtuschenko was just sitting as his desk, his tea stagnant and cold, papers strewn as if a hurricane had just left. On the screen of his computer was a picture of the President of Russia, but it was of a man who had the life nearly beaten out of him, blood strewn, puffy eyed, slack jawed.

“You failed to respond, Minister.” said the voice from the computer. “As we said, we will begin our work.”

The Minister covered his face with his hands.

“I’ve listened to that twenty times. I’ll carry it to my grave.”

His sigh became a moan.

“What have we done?”

“We?” asked Melissa.

He looked up. The agony was present.

“Yes, Miss Trown. We, the Russian and American government, we -”

He received an e-mail. He read it and nodded.

“As I suspected, as I feared. The list is true. Anya, we need hold nothing back from our American friend.”

“We’d determined that, Minister.” said Anya, sounding almost contrite.

“I hoped so. It’s time for the truth, even from a Ministry of Information, yes? Or propaganda as Natasha would call it. I wish I could lie some more, cover it all up again, make this evil go away. But with what’s going on in America, and here, I fear we’ve somehow started something we can’t control. Obviously, we can’t. Millions dead in Saudi Arabia, and now here in Moscow, we’ve got..”

He indicated they should sit down. Bring it on, Minister. Aliens? Loch Ness Monster?

“Ms. Trown, what do you know about cloning?”

Melissa Trown had been an agent of the United States National Security Agency for thirteen years. She had investigated hijackings, terrorist attacks around the world, and at home. She had listened to hours of phone calls, hoping for Al-Queda connection, e-mails, codes.

For the second time in two days, someone in authority had asked her about clones. Add in strange text messages and e-mails, bombs, and now a murder spree....

“What if my answer was Vladivostok?”

Yevtuschenko and Anya shared a look.

“Kilroy 2.0” Anya said.

The Minister shook his head.

“No, Comrade Kilroy, to coin a phrase, may not be able to help now. But I’m sure we’ve just confused Ms. Trown again. Yes, Melissa, Vladivostok may very well be the place. But back to that question I asked. Please take a look at this.”

He printed out the e-mail he had received and pushed it across the desk.

Melissa looked at the list of names.

“These people were either murdered or had their homes bombed today.” Yevtuschenko said, hands folded before him “ You see Ivana's name there. Fortunately, I would call it, she was not there, but obviously someone is very interested in making sure she disappeared. That they all disappeared.”

“The names don't really mean anything to me, Minister,” Melissa said, “ but as to Ivana, I can suggest that she may have been ticketed to disappear, but -”

“- she disappeared the wrong way,” finished the Minister. “ Quite so. Everyone involved in it had to be eliminated, even though many of them were nothing but bureaucrats, paper pushers, clerks, not scientists.”

“Involved in what, Minister?” Melissa asked, ready to start squeezing someone's neck in some answers weren't forthcoming. But Yevtuschenko sighed, smiled shyly and Anya, and then said:

“Seventh Son, Miss Trown. The Soviet and American effort to develop the perfect man, the perfect fighting machine.”

Now she really wanted to start squeezing something, like that old man's neck.

“The US and Russia were making clones? That's Seventh Son?”

“Attempted to make clones, Ms. Trown. We both captured German scientists at the end of the war. These scientists were working on Hitler's Master Race, his pure Aryan blond haired Supermen, using volunteered, and, well, unvolunteered soldiers, with death camp slaves, many of them doctors, doing the work. They were making progress, but our Red Army and our Allies stopped them. Some of the scientists ran West and worked for the Americans. Others, chose to remain and work for Comrade Stalin.”

Melissa and Anya sat enraptured. Yevtuschenko continued after a sip of cold tea.

“Both sides were scrambling for an edge after the war, while still rebuilding Europe and their own economies. But defense spending allowed for diverging of funds, and if the government in power didn't ask questions, things went along fine. A headquarters was established in Russia in Chernobyl, and I believe the American one was in Virginia, somewhere. And to answer your possible question, even the United Nations sanctioned this, perhaps not to the extent...”

Melissa nodded. Some complex in Virginia? Was that where General Hill and the others disappeared to?

The Minister continued.

“Time went by. Stalin died. Leaders came and went, as with America. I do believe that no American President was to know about this program, except one may have found out, and he died in Dallas.”

“How do you know that?” Melissa said through teeth grinding so hard her molars pleaded for mercy. “How do you know that President Kennedy was killed because he knew of some story about clones?”

"I never said he died because of clones. I just said he died in Dallas. Though you may want to check when you go home on the whereabouts of certain Generals that day. Generals who spent a lot of time in Virginia. They may all be dead now, but to continue..."

"Yes, please," begged Anya, sounding bored, "No more Kennedy crap. Tell the rest."

Yevtuschenko looked at his computer for any more threats, found none, and then continued.

"Time went on, as I said. There were failures, but there were successes. While believe it or not, Ms. Trown, we in intelligence do not necessarily know everything, and not every part of your Seventh Son was known to us, and apparently our Seventh Son was not known to you."

"I'm just a worker in the National Security Agency, sir. Seventh Son was, is, classified at some amazing level. Believe me, I've tried."

"There are reasons to keep it classified, Ms. Trown, as you'll hear. During the 1960s and 1970s we, that is, Soviet intelligence, and you know I was there, or you will know it, so why deny it?, psionics, mental telepathy, extra sensory perception. Yes. What your CIA, NSA, and other agencies thought as foolish was true, but no more foolish than what your own military was doing. We were developing soldiers who thought alike, received orders immediately, and could move as one. The Red Army as an unconquerable force. Nothing could stand in our way, and no one would ever bother us again."

He nodded slowly to himself, his breath slow and measured.

"We made such progress, and our crowning achievement was Ivana Turgenev. She had worked in intelligence.."

He opened a drawer and pulled out a manila folder, and slid the folder across the desk. Both agents reached for the file, then opted to pull chairs together, and look over the papers. First was the picture of a dark haired beauty with eyes that locked you like a jail cell.

"That's Ivana in the 1960s. Other papers for your perusal, and I do apologize that the forms are all in Russian, Ms. Trown, but you no doubt have translated versions somewhere in Washington, and you can easily see that from there what Ivana could do."

What was there was evidence that one human being could at least read the thoughts of other human beings, the emotions of another human being and, with concentration, place herself within another's mind. Reams of evidence.

"There are others, of course. Or were. But the names on that list, all are dead. Except Ivana, now."

"So there's one woman out there who can read minds. She must be in her fifties or sixties by now. What's she been doing?"

Yevtuschenko smiled .

"Patience, Ms. Trown. Americans are always in rush. As I was saying, she was our greatest success and she did help us during the Cold War era. She spoke with defectors and those who were less than enthusiastic in their support of the Soviet cause. What torture could not give us, Ivana could. Psionics, the ability to communicate between minds in new levels, to read, understand, suggest, imagine the possibilities. But as we know, some times God laughs."

“God laughs?”

“We don't have time for Russian parables, Minister,” Anya sighed.

“You do for mine. Yes. We were making excellent progress, perhaps not in cloning, although we we're not above borrowing concepts and seeing results, but in other areas at the compound. At Chernobyl. April 26 1986. We were expanding our production, trying to show Gorbachev and his glasnost group that we were still relevant. But we pushed too hard. The Generals. I did. You know what happened. Meltdown. The compound was destroyed. Much of our work,-”

You mean people, Melissa thought. People you made.

“much of it gone. Many more died than you know of. Gorbachev shut it down.”

Yevtuschenko's lips became a fine pencil line as he pushed them together, trying to stop the flow of horror.

“We lost control of things then. I'm not sure, we we're . We kept the facility locked down, but somehow things were lost. Equipment disappeared. People who had miraculously survived Chernobyl, some of them, including our best German scientist, completely vanished. What surprised me was when Ivana disappeared, just for a short time, in the 1990s. She reappeared a few months later, but said nothing further about it, said it was an extended vacation. How do you get true answers from someone who knows your question before you ask it? Perhaps it was an extended vacation. Perhaps not. She may be on another one now, for all I know.”

He sat and pondered the picture of the President. Anya rubbed her eyes.

“Minister, who is doing this? Who is randomly killing people, setting off bombs, and nuking the Saudis?”

He nodded at the question.

“There is no intelligence for this. I have no proof. Perhaps Ms. Trown does.”

Has he seen what's on my laptop? Melissa wondered. She just shook her head.

“No intelligence. But Seventh Son has returned. I know it. The disappearance of the machinery, the staff, the killings. The nuclear madness I don't know. Just that rogue officer perhaps. It will be the story we put out.”

“You've seen the pictures of the dead soldiers, Minister,” Melissa said. “Something awful happened to them, each had the same wild look, as if they were the exact same person living in different bodies.”

The Minister nodded.

“Yes, I know. I've seen the pictures. Which gives me all the more reason to believe that some failed version of cloning occurred. Our scientists have not found much to work with, but yes, Ms. Trown, Anya, this is Seventh Son. I am sure.”

“So what do we do now?” Anya demanded. “Turgenev is missing. You said find her. Save her.”

Save the clones. Kill the clones. There are more people in this conversation than are in the room, Melissa thought. She could picture her laptop sitting on Yevtuschenko's desk, with those words on the screen. Save the clones. Kill the clones. And the cursor just flashing. Waiting...

“Minister, let me see if I get this. The Seventh Son project was about the US and Soviet attempts to make clones, to develop armies of them. The Soviets worked mainly on psionics, and parapsychology. And whatever success you had was stopped by Chernobyl. Now you, we, think that the American version continued but has been kept so secret that not even the President knew. The Soviet and later Russian version has been reborn someplace else in the country.”

“Correct,” said the Minister. “Probably Vladivostok, per that message you said you received.”

“And Vladivostok is where the Russian Pacific fleet is anchored,” Anya added. “There are battleships, carriers, and submarines. Nuclear powered vessels.”

“But vessels that just sit there,” added the Minister. “We just don't have the money to keep the fleet up, and now with our oil reserves being considered taboo by the world...”

“So they could be fair game.”

“To a number of people, a number of very bad people.”

“Strange that there seems no reason to attack Saudi Arabia,” mused Anya, “except to destroy the world's largest oil reserve, and then realize that the world will now consider the attacking nation a pariah and not want to deal with it, effectively destroying the economy of that nation.”

The Minister managed a weak smile, as if life was being drained from his very being, and he almost welcomed it.

“Ms. Trown, where are the world's other large oil reserves? Not being touched?”

“Alask-”

“Yes,” said the Minister in a prayerful whisper. “The United States, now the only fully functional oil producer of any size with large reserves, maybe culpable in this. Just a consideration. We need to know more, and even if the nuclear strike was about oil, perhaps by Russian oil interests, there are the deaths in Moscow, the bombings and killings, the kidnapping of the President and I don't know how much more we can cover that, fortunately the Prime Minister will attend the United Nations. But Ms. Trown, someone is talking to you, even to the extent that they tell you to get out of that building. I think we should use that, don't you?”

“Agreed. Now who is this Kilroy?”

The Minister and Anya shared a look. She doesn't know?

“Anya, tell her.”

She nodded more to herself than anyone else.

A half hour later they were leaving Melissa's hotel as she had checked out. This time the Minister's chauffeur had been the driver and he waited calmly for them. Melissa stepped out into the Russian sun

and just got a glimpse of him. A turn of her head and he was gone.

“What?”, said Anya.

“Mr. al-Hazzan is, was, at the coffee shop across the street.”

“Let's go kill him.”

They walked across the street, and the tattooed and body pierced barista said the man had been there since they'd arrived, and then he'd sat at a table and sipped tea, and watched the door of the hotel until they stepped outside

“Strange, when you came out, he cursed under his breath and left.”

The ride to the airport left both women with their thoughts. They were issued through security and drove at breakneck speed to the hangar at the distant end of Sheremetyevo airport. The airfield is separated into two distinct fields, one for domestic flights, one for international. Melissa had flown into Sheremetyevo II what seemed like minutes and also days ago. Now the car she and Anya held on to the hand rests of was slowing before a building with a maw of blackness in its core.

“Have a pleasant flight”, said the chauffeur as he got out and then opened the door for Melissa. Anya mumbled under her breath and slammed the door on her own side. The two women looked into the blackness of the ramshackle hangar that was probably in bad shape when Joe Stalin died. The chauffeur sped off. It had turned cool.

They looked around. The only movement were jets flying and landing at a distant strip. Here the wind whipped and the grass that poked through most of the tarmac danced like they were being tickled. There were no other sounds.

Melissa was about to ask “Okay, now what?” and Anya had started speaking also when the ca-lick-ca-lick-ca-lick of booted feet came from out of the darkness of the hangar.

Both women found the guns in easy reach. The figure, dressed in a flat black flight suit, came out of the darkness and stood at the entrance. She smiled.

“All aboard for Vladivostok express.” said Natasha. “No tipping, please.”

She turned to the left and flipped a switch. The jet was a modified MiG-29 Fulcrum, sleek with swept back wings, a plane length of 60 feet, and wingspan of 36. Engines with over 20000 pounds of thrust hung blow the wings in tight sacs.

“Balls of thunder,” Natasha said.

She brought the women to a changing area.

“Get into flight suits. We leave in ten minutes.”

“The MiG-29 is a one seater,” Anya said. Melissa probably knew that from someplace, but she was having enough trouble squeezing into the suit.

“This one modified in case of emergency, and need to move VIPs. You are VIPs, and you must be

