

# ***Dead Minus One***

## ***Chapter 2***

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Russia. Present Day

“Where am I?”

She stood stock still, feeling the room. I hate this game, she mumbled, even as she stood in the dark, feeling it caress her as the only lover she ever had. Still. Wait

Step. Another step, no, the table, to the left, three more steps. Arms extended. Feel of cloth.

“You’re here.”

“Yes”, he said. “You’re magnificent.”

She had to smile at that, even though the dark hid her own pleasure.

“Yes, I know. My ability is quite good.”

The man laughed.

“Ivana, I have many people who are quite good. You are incredibly powerful. You’ve shown in distance and obvious in touch that you communicate, that you can read minds, hear thoughts. You are the best ever.”

He took a few steps.

“Lights.”

The room became bright. The furniture, old, but still workable if you could make your way around it. She lived her for twelve years, of course she knew where the table was.

Leonid stood by the light switch. His suit was designer cut, the new Russia, but his finger was held before his lips as in other days. She nodded. “Walk” he mouthed, and indicated her apartment door.

They stepped out into a late Moscow spring. The streets were filled with shoppers. Old babushka women still shuffled here and there carrying their bags of potatoes. She could have them, if she wanted to.

“Ivana, I’m not sure things are all right now.”

She nodded. Just the news of the last day? The strike against Saudi Arabia?

“The information you got from the old man,” Leonid continued, “it has helped us to start over, made us start over, and we are making progress. Progress.”

They crossed into Red Square. Soldiers still stood before Lenin’s tomb, but with little enthusiasm.

“Not enough progress.” she said.

“No, “ Leonid sighed. His handsome face was ill suited for the sadness.

“Ivana, you must come with me, come back to Vladivostok. We need your knowledge.”

“You need his knowledge, the old man’s. He just lives in me. He’ll tell you how to clone, I ripped it from his mind and then you took it from me.”

Leonid stopped and turned to her.

“Ivana, those years past you gave us all you could. All you could get from his memory. But we’re not making the progress the Americans did.”

The car turned the corner.

“We need more. Russia needs more. There are more levels. You must come.”

She shook her head.

“Leonid, I’m too old. Yes I can hear thoughts from across a room. The Ministry has made me one of their parlor tricks, all right. And yes. I can hold another’s thoughts, even the old man’s, but - ”

The car stopped next to them. A BMW. An average young man, about 30, dirty black hair stepped out of the passenger side directly on to the sidewalk. Conservative suit. The driver side stayed closed. The young man came up in front of the couple.

“Good evening.”

Ivana looked at Leonid. The man started to reach for, well, something, but the bullet

ripping into his chest stopped any further action, except for him to tumble to the ground. The young man turned to Ivana, the gun raising again.

“Run”.

She stepped back her mouth forming the words “What”

“I mean it,” said the man. Around them both, people in the square began noticing the fallen man, and the tall one with the gun. People started to move away. Soldiers were woken from their stupor to respond.

Then he raised the gun, and put a bullet in his own brain. He fell. She ran. The car turned around and sped away.

Through Red Square, past the church, past Lenin’s tomb, running through crowds who were choosing their own ways to run, and then out and to Nikoskaya street. Then she stopped. She’d heard their panic. Too much. With preparation, she could tune everyone out. But everyone had a trace. Leonid included. Leonid...

But that man from the car, the one with the gun. There was nothing, as if he was a mindless robot. He had no thoughts. No thoughts. That’s why she could not tell what he was going to do.

She watched the traffic. Sirens in the distance, and someone was going to be coming for her. Was it better to wait? Take a moment, concentrate, get rid of them, get them out of your head.

“No, it’s, I can’t. I -.” She steeled herself to turn down the humanity pounding thoughts and get away from the crowd and go home via the Metro. Thank about this. She made it about 20 meters before a hand touched her elbow.

“Ivana Touranev?” She looked at a man with dark brown hair, quiet features, jet black eyes.

“Who are you?” No thoughts.

The man held up his hands as if in surrender.

“You must come with me. There are people who wish you dead, and there are people like your friend Leonid who want you to live to serve the nation.”

She could not believe the conversation.

“And what do you want.” she said.

“My job is to keep you alive. You will be dead before the day is out. The Defense

Minister has placed his mark on you. Trust me, I know.”

“How do you know?”

“I work for him, or did. After the strike on Saudi Arabia, I absented myself. There are many who did. A new government is forming, a new way. A new leader. I was chosen to find you. I have. You must be protected.”

The sirens were now inundating Red Square with their wailing.

“Who sent you?”

The doors slammed on the cars. The man sighed, exasperated.

“Soon. Right now, it would be best for you to leave.”

“And go where?”

“For you, Ivana, anyplace but here would be wonderful. Let’s go.”

He took her by the shoulder and led her to the Metro. They melted into the crowds.

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They sat next to each other on the Metro. It was foolish to talk about anything, so Ivana took the time to reflect, which seemed like a luxury suddenly granted, so she kept her sensory load down, and listenend to heself. Since the man next to her, he of the kind touch on the arm, was tough to read, oh, he was there, unlike the one with the gun, but he had been trained like her. He was toned down.

So Ivana thought back over the years, through those years in schooll, the professor who sponsored her, the years at the ministry, and those nights with the old man. She learned much. She had no idea what it meant, her German was poor and there were many nights, weeks, months, of being asked the same question but she could repeat it.

Trouble was now, and she wondered if the young man next to her knew this, she was over fifty years old, and sometimes, well, sometimes...

The train jostled as it switched tracks.

“Our stop is coming up soon,” said the man, a smile, almost handsome, upon his face. “Are you ready.” He adjusted in the seat. He had a gun.

She had little time to decide if she was ready, as the train had stopped and whatever her life was now, she was getting up from her seat to face it. And whoever this man

was. With the gun.