

Dead Minus One
Chapter 7
By Thomas Martin
solarpons@mac.com

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Plane travel. She never liked it, especially in the semi-stampede for the nice seats, even though this airline specified where you were going to sit, everyone wanted theirs first. So came the dance of the passengers in and out of the aisle, the pirouettes of luggage from the aisle to the bins above, the loud talking to drown out the engines, the person on the cell phone, and the never leaving silent fear.

Melissa squeezed into her seat, and the travel began. The trip was from Reagan to JFK and then to Moscow Sheremetyevo Airport. 12 hours. She had a book, her iPod, and time to review.

When she got on her flight in New York, she also saw she had a fellow spy on board. Rashad al-Hazzan had been on the flight from Washington. Now he sat one row over, and two back. Perfect to be able to watch her. Not that she could do much. The question was, what would an agent for Saudi intelligence be doing going to Moscow? She got up excused herself passed the dozing computer executive in the seat to her right, and moved down the aisle to the rear bathroom.

Rashad was dressed in a dark business suit, satin brown tie that matched his eyes. Since he was looking right at her, there was no need to feign surprise. She slowed, then stopped.

“Rashad.”

“Miss Trown. A pleasure.”

“Business in Moscow?”

He smiled, his teeth what as polar snow.

“I definitely have business there. As do you.”

That was the end of the conversation as Rashad lowered his head back to the magazine on his lap. This is going to be trouble, Melissa thought. As the people on both sides of Rashad looked at Melissa in a silent plea for a judgement of this guy as a possible nut job, she continued down the aisle to the bathroom, wasted some time there, and got back to her seat, without acknowledging Rashad, or his pleading travelmates.

Rashad al-Hazzan had been part of Saudi intelligence since before the first Gulf War. There was some evidence at the NSA that Rashad knew Saddam was marching on Kuwait two weeks before a soldier moved. But either the Saudi or Americans didn't believe him or didn't care. Still, his reputation was made. Melissa had worked with him on a few projects over the years, listening for terrorists and in a few cases actually finding them. Rashad's organization would then stepped in, and the accusations of torture and death in Saudi prisons were more than true. Abu Graib had been kindergarten, in comparison.

But that was before. If there was a Saudi Arabia left, it was held together by tribes of nomads and a few cities along the coast. The government in Riyadh was gone. Rashad had no employer.

So why was he going to Moscow? After an hour of pondering, she finally asked for some wine. She leaned her chair back, put her iPod on and relaxed, at least outwardly. Inside there were more thoughts of that strange meeting between herself and the generals, and that message about the clones. Save them. Kill them.

What the hell was that about?

Rashad had returned to staring at her.

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She landed at Sheremetyevo 2 airport near Moscow and began the routine shuffle off the plane. Rashad followed her off. She moved quickly through the terminal, going with the fast moving business crowd, and then turned into the TGI Fridays stuck in among the souvenir and grocery stores. She went to the bar, stood among the laughing Russians and watched the Saudi spy walk by. In the corner, the television was playing a football game between the Czech Republic and Poland. No news coverage.

“You ordering something?” asked the bartender. Melissa got out of there and headed toward customs.

“Not thirsty?”

Rashad walked next to her.

“Why are you here?”

She moved faster. He moved faster.

“I’m here to help. Just like you, Melissa.”

He took her arm and guided her to the left, out of the perpetual run of travelers. They were in a grocery store. She could have disabled him with a swing of her arm, but he could have crushed her elbow just before. Spy v. Spy.

“Shop with me.” Rashad said. “Let’s see what this mighty superpower, a superpower that just killed perhaps 15 million of my people, has for a snack.”

He looked at her with eyes that reflected all the dead.

“They will pay, Melissa.”

“Rashad, I-”

“They will pay. You’ll try to stop me. And so will they. But payment is due. It will be a mighty vengeance. God’s vengeance. Now would you like a soft drink?”

She took two steps back, and bolted. She moved through groups of people, excusing herself until she reached the general cacophony of customs. Rashad had disappeared.

“Passport.” said the overweight and bored official across the customs table from her.

She was actually glad to see him.

The questions were commonplace, and she lied very well. She was awaiting her luggage at the carousel when she noticed a tall woman with long black hair approach her. As Melissa debated

how to handle this, (move into the crowd, start a conversation with that gentleman in the leather jacket) the dark haired woman spoke.

"We have your luggage, Ms. Trown, " the woman said in slightly accented English, "and a car waiting. Now please, come with me. There is much to do."

With that she turned and walked, almost marched, toward the exit. Another decision. But before anything could work in her brain, the woman was back. Close.

"I'm sorry. My name is Anya Kolyatov, and I work for the, well, right now directly for the Minister of Information. He's expecting you, us. Please. We know Rashad al-Hazzan is here, or at least was on the plane. We'll find him. Now we must go."

This time they left together. They said nothing until the car, a car like Yevtuschenko's, waiting at the curb for departing passengers. A younger, muscular woman with streaked shoulder length hair, designer jeans, and a tight fitting t-shirt that had Lenin on the front was tossing Melissa's luggage in the trunk. She slammed down the lid, looked at the other two women and moved to the driver's door.

"Ve must go."

Anya smiled and indicated they should get in.

"Melissa, this is Natasha. Our driver."

The driver had put on a old Lenin cap.

"American?"

Melissa nodded and held on as the car jerked into traffic.

"Capitalist. Ve should have won. And ve vill. There-."

"Natasha, just drive," Anya said. They were answered by another jerk into another lane.

The two women exchanged "is it safe – yes it is" looks, and relaxed.

"We'll be seeing the Minister first. We have further information on the President."

Melissa knew that the President Salgutov had been considered "out of the loop" in this crisis, that the Information Minister, and, if you believed the all news networks, now the Prime Minister, was in total control, if anyone was.

"When did this happen?" she asked.

"While we were on our way to the airport." Anya said. "The Minister will have more to say."

"The car may be bugged." Natasha said "Used to be common in old days."

Anya just shook her head.

"Natasha is a true believer." Melissa said.

"You bet your American bourgeois ass. Communism not dead, not on your Reagan ash heap of history. We are waiting for the proper time. For now I serve Mother Russia. Ve are here."

The limo pulled toward the Kremlin. Every security stop was quick, some the soldiers merely saw Natsha, and moved the car along. As Melissa got out of the car, her driver tugged on sleeve.

"Listen, this is Russia. Mystery in enigma like Churchill said. Expect what you don't see. Natasha knows. We will meet again. Dos Vadanya."

With that she turned, and walked to a nearby parking garage disappearing into the gloom of the inside. Wow. Melissa just added it to an interesting day so far.

Minister Yevtuschenko was waiting with a samovar of tea in the middle of an oak table.

"So I ask America for assistance, and they send me a little girl?"

He stood and offered his hand.

"And a beautiful one at that. Ms. Trown, you come well recommended. I hope you'll forgive an old man."

"It's an honor, Minister."

They sat. He poured.

"I've relieved you both of the boredom of the large meetings, and consequent arguments and threats that have resulted from his return to full control. He can have it. I have the heavy work to do."

He walked to his desk and picked up an mp3 player. He placed the player in the middle of the small table they were at, and pressed play. A sonorous voice spoke.

"We have the President. His condition is good. In order for his condition to remain that way, you must do the following. First both the Prime Minister and the Information Minister, and therefore the Russian government, will acknowledge the President is well, and has returned to power. You will hear the President's voice soon, as he has spoken with American and United Nation representatives. In these statements he has disavowed any Russian involvement with the launch of nuclear weapons, blaming unnamed terrorists. This will continue to be the policy of the government."

"Second, upon the President's release and return to you, and his full reinstatement to power, his orders for replacement of ministers will be obeyed immediately. His orders for change in policy will be obeyed immediately. There are other nuclear warheads available. They are pointed at both the United States and China. If we do not hear from you within two hours of the receipt of this message being sent to both the Information Minister and Prime Minister that you agree to these conditions, the President will die and the missiles will be launched. This is no idle threat. You can not afford to be wrong. The fate of Russia is in your hands, perhaps the fate of the world."

"Both of you will go on television. You will say "we comply". Nothing else. We await your performance. One more thing.."

There was a break of two seconds.

"Yevtuschenko, it is me. Your American friends can check for proper voice identification. I have spoken with the American Vice President, and the Secretary General, assured them we had no involvement. Call and verify. It is me. Listen, don't."

Another break. Then the previous voice.

"We are waiting."

The player stopped.

"How much time?" Anya asked.

Yevtuschenko looked at his Rolex. "We have 56 minutes. The feed came from a hacked machine in Warsaw. The computer was owned by a bakery. So who knows where he is?"

"This is a coup, sir. It's 1991 all over again."

Melissa knew Anya was referring to the short lived take over of the then Soviet government by long time Communist bureaucrats. Mikhail Gorbachev was overthrown, but soon restored to power on the back of popular resistance. Nevertheless it spelled the death knell for Russian Communism and the Soviet Union, which ceased to exist four months later.

"Yes," agreed Yevtuschenko, "and instead of a rifle to take power, now they use missiles. Perhaps just as effectively."

Melissa could see the older man shudder for a moment, as he contemplated catastrophe on one side or the other. The world was in his hands.

"Sir, if this is a coup, is it the Communists? Fascists? Anyone particular you have in mind? Let me call Washington..."

The Minister just held up his hand.

"We're past "bringing in the wizards" stage, Ms. Trown. We have our own good people, and you could not do a better job in the time than we have. No, I have no idea who it is, and the point is it does not matter. The question is what do we do about it. But that is my worry, and the Prime Minister's. In the meantime you have another job to do. Anya, please bring Ms. Trown up to date. You'll have to excuse me, ladies, we're about to be overthrown by nuclear terrorists."

"Minister, I must ask," she said, "Does the name Seventh Son mean anything to you?"

Yevtuschenko nodded slowly.

"So it has come to this as well. Yes, Ms. Trown, Seventh Son is known to the Russian government, both our version of the program and yours."

Melissa felt like she'd been hit by a truck.

"Wait a minute, there's an American Seventh Son?"

Even the Minister could not hide a smile.

"What, your General Claggart never told you? Well, that's true security. Don't tell anyone anything, not even your best people. That must have a special clearance level. But then again, both programs have been shut down for years."

"Can you tell me what it was about? "

The Minister sighed and reached for his cold glass of tea.

"What difference does it make now? Cloning, Ms. Trown. We were both trying to clone soldiers, using the knowledge developed by captured German scientists after the war. It failed."

