

Dead Minus One

Chapter 3

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“What the hell are you doing over there, Dmitri?”

Russian President Dmitri Salgutov was first annoyed by the fact that this President, the new President in place for no more than a day, had the gall to use his first name. Then he became livid.

“I am defending Russian national interests. The Saudis were -”

“The Saudis were at peace with you and the rest of the planet. Now, you’ve started something, something I don’t know - look I just got this job. President Griffin, just two days ago was murdered. -”

“And by a little boy. Dear God You have the sympathy of the Russian people and government. .”

“I don’t give a shit about that. You’ve destroyed a nation and killed thousands. The Middle East is arming. Saudis and other Arabs are moving to your borders. With more than just their families”

“My Defense Minister is keeping me completely informed. We will deal with all threats. From anywhere.”

“Are you going to nuke them, too?”

Salgutov held the phone away from him. Two beats.

“President Hale, Russia is a sovereign nation and we will protect our interests. Now, we found the Saudi nation a direct threat -

-”their oil as a threat to your own”

“a known supporter of Islamic terrorism which continues to plague our southern borders. You and the world will condemn us. I don’t care. Call your United Nations meetings. We’ll veto everything. I am not Yeltsin crawling to you. Look to your own nation, Mr. President. And do not judge this nation too harshly on middle east policy.”

There was a moment of silence.

“We never dropped an atomic bomb on Baghdad.”

“You could have fooled me, Mr. President. Good day.”

He reached across the desk and replaced the receiver. He let out a slow breath.

“Well done,” said the Defense Minister. President Salgutov grinned, and then winked.

Valery Yevtushenko sat in his chair in his office. He knew the President was talking to the new American President, true, because he had been in the room at the beginning of the conversation before being shooed out by the APresidnet himself. And that son of a bitch Defense Minister just sat there the smug bastard.

He slammed his hand down hard on the arm of his chair, and swung around to see Red Square from his window. Seemed that scuffle or whatever it was had been cleaned up. Some fool had killed himself. No doubt a protestor. First of many.

Not that he knew. Here he was, the head of Russian intelligence, and he had no idea what was going on. The nuclear strike was a complete surprise. He was cut off. Salgutov was getting his intel from the military now.

And that was dangerous. Very. What the hell was going on?

He picked up his phone. It’s bugged, of course. He placed it back in its cradle. Time for a ride.

He opened the door to his office. His secretary stood, waiting for orders. Like she had for years.

“Go home.” and he walked right by her “First, ring for my car.”

Soldiers stood at attention as he walked by. Bah. which of them could be trusted, if they are commanded by the Defense Minister, and through him the Armed Forces.

I am being too harsh, he thought. They are good soldiers, as they always were. They fought, even in our own foolishness in Afghanistan. But where will they stand now? I don’t know.

I DON’T KNOW. And that should be terrifying for every man woman and child in this

country.

His car was by the door. His regular driver. Years in the Service. He must be alright. Yevtushenko gave an address on the outskirts. He settled into the seat.

He'd been woken by the President late the night before with the news. "It is a glorious day for Mother Russia, Valery. Saudi Arabia is destroyed. Our enemies will fear us again. We'll talk in the morning. No need to come in now. My best to your wife."

Then the President had hung up. Valery, after calming down a very upset wife, called his assistant.

"Why didn't we know about this!?"

"I had nothing, Minister. It just came out of nowhere, a launch from Tetaschevo. Mobile Nuclear Missile Garrison. The missiles flew from there. He just did it"

Yevtushenko shook his head.

"This President doesn't just do anything. He plans, strategizes, he works things out. That's how he became President. Not even Stalin was ever so reckless. There is something wrong, Anton. Something wrong with the President, the Defense Minister. Russia herself. There's something very wrong. We are going to find out."

"How?"

"We'll meet. And bring her. I don't think we have much time."

They'd agreed to meet at a specific dacha, one that was swept daily by trusted men. The streets blurred as the car sped along.

He considered one more phone call. Then reached for the cell phone in his jacket pocket. Secure line direct feed to satellite. Their own satellite. The call went right through.

"Hello, Bill. How's everything at the NSA. If you'd like, I'll tell you. Ha, ha, I know. Listen Bill, are you doing all right over there. Good. Oh, you know we've got our hands full. That's right. Take care, Bill."

They pulled into the driveway. They sat and waited. This is when you sweated. Or he allowed himself to. Would the Army show up, soldiers at the ready, AK-74 rifles pointed? What were they planning? And the Middle East up in uproar.

He needed his people. And the car, a black ZIL 4104, pulled in.

Yevtuschenko moved toward the house, the two followed. The guards watched. The Intelligence Minister opened the door to the small home and the three entered the building.

The sniper located in a tree some 50 feet away relaxed for the moment. Too hard for a shot . The time would come. He lit a cigarette. The fools wouldn't see him.