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# Designated Survivor

## Chapter 38

by Jeff Somers

38.

A minute-and-a-half after stepping over the writhing body of the man he'd nicknamed Fugly, Frank Darmity stood in front of the blast door and watched the woman — he'd named her Red — work the keypad. He felt like a thin wire had been run through his whole body, hooked up to a weak battery. A sleepy buzzing.

She'd fucked up the first two tries, getting a flat unhappy noise and a red light each time. One more fuckup and the blast doors would lock down for fifteen minutes, sending an alarm to the deserted, half-destroyed Security Office where no one would see it. Fifteen fucking minutes would be disaster. He held his handgun loosely down by his thigh, ready to teach her a lesson if that happened.

He glanced over at the other man. Darmity hadn't named him yet. He studied the man's dark skin and tight curly hair. His huge build. A weightlifter. Darmity wasn't a racist. He realized there were examples of greatness in every ethnicity. It was just harder to find anywhere but in the white races. He distrusted the black man instinctively.

Red punched in the code a third time, and finally got a tiny green light, and then the blast door began its ponderous journey

to being open. The tiny space filled with noise and vibration. Darmity glanced down at his shoe and noticed some of Fugly's blood on the toe. He stared at it for a moment, then decided to just leave it. He'd have more blood to deal with before this endless fucking day was over.

They had five minutes or so to burn.

Red shrugged off her pack and dropped her Herstal on the floor. Darmity watched her snap open the hardshell pack and inspect it. He turned to look at ... at Hulk, he decided. Hulk was doing the same thing, a fast field inspection. He'd started with the rifle. Darmity smirked. Fucking professionals. They always dug in deep to the goddamn *procedure*. The ritual. Like knowing shit made them better at their jobs, which was bullshit.

He didn't move. Kept Hulk and Red in his peripheral vision. His breathing was slow and heavy. He felt weak and off-balance. He stood watching the door move in almost invisible increments, just more and more steel door sliding past him. They all had their jobs. Three in the lobby to prevent exfiltration. Two in the cavern to set the charges in motion. Four in the complex to erase any survivors. He and Red had been organizing for a sweeping of the complex, the idea being to herd Renicks and his bitch agent ahead of them, trap them, and get rid of them. Then, one of the vital signs alarms on Red's people had triggered: One of the cavern team, dead.

They'd headed for Level Fourteen at a run. Fugly in the lead because he was fast. On Level Thirteen they'd gotten the second vitals alarm: Man two in the cavern, dead. Fugly had taken the ladder at a slide, pissed off. It hadn't worked out too well for Fugs.

“You feel a draft?” Hulk suddenly said. Darmity scrubbed his voice for an accent. There wasn’t one he could detect.

Red stopped and was still for a moment. “Maybe,” she finally said.

Darmity ran his eyes over her. Thirty, maybe thirty-five. Skin like milk and red hair out of a bottle. Pretty enough. A little angular in the face. The body armor made them all look the same, but he thought she must have a tight little body under there. Fit.

“It’s the door,” he said tiredly. “Voids inside the rock, a vacuum effect when it starts extracting.”

Fucking *professionals*.

After a second Hulk and Red shared a look and went back to their field tear-down. Darmity kept them both in his conscious thoughts. He’d never met them before. None of them knew each other’s name or anything about each other. Police? Military? Mercenary? He didn’t know. They didn’t know *him*, either. He was nominally the commander of the operation — he’d been given that code. So they were under his command. But Darmity knew his orders were to leave *no one alive* at this facility even before it was set to blow. No chances. No assuming anyone would just burn up in the explosion. *Everyone*.

He glanced at Red. Everyone. Including these two.

Darmity figured they’d both been given the same orders. Kill everyone, including him. When Fugly had slid down the ladder and ended up with half his face on the floor like a piece of fucking hamburger, Red had put a bullet in his head without too much hesitation. One more man down, which was no good, but better than hauling some screaming, bleeding asshole behind

them, especially when he was going to die anyway.

Darmity had no intention of letting that happen. His orders were sparse: *Kill everyone. Blow the complex. Kill yourself.* He'd been solemnly handed a paper packet of cyanide pills in case he objected to being torn apart by an explosion or the feel of warm gunmetal against his head. Even as he'd taken his oath and acknowledged his orders — he had a quick memory of the room, dark and hot, fires burning in the sconces, the heavy, sweet smell in the air — he knew he'd been lying. Just about that last part. He served his country. He believed in this mission. He'd served it honestly and to the best of his abilities and he'd been truly willing to sacrifice his life if that's what it took. But the mission had failed. The mission was fucking borked, there was no reason he had to go down with the ship.

Red and Hulk, on the other hand, and their two other people in the cavern, the three upstairs — they would go. Darmity would make sure of that. Security would be maintained. He glanced at each of them casually. Assumed they were both thinking the same thing. Darmity had seen this before. You order people to go down with the ship, half the people in the room start clocking where all the fucking life preservers were.

He did nothing. For now he needed these people until he'd put bullets in Renicks and Begley's heads, make sure the charges were set. Then he would handle them.

"Pack it up," he said quietly. "Both of you. Be ready when the fucking door opens."

They didn't say anything, but both started quickly re-packing their gear. He waited, listening to himself breathe through his nose, biting the inside of his cheek until he tasted blood. Forced

himself to stand very still. He hated being in charge of people. He liked working alone. There was always this attitude.

He told himself he was going to enjoy slitting their throats. Then told himself he had to be patient.

In short increments, he forced himself to relax. Muscle by muscle he unclenched. Took deeper breaths. Slowed his heart rate. It was all conscious acts of will, orders from his brain. He knew if he charged in there pissed off, he would make poor decisions. He couldn't afford to make poor decisions.

He checked his watch. Sixty seconds.

He chewed over the problem. Renicks and Begley were in there. It was dark. Unfamiliar. They'd had time to scout it. Time to set up a defense. Traps. Tricks. They knew exactly where he would be coming from, and would try to be ready for him.

He paused. It occurred to him that one of his goals was to get rid of these two shitheads.

"They may be trying to disable the charges," Red said, standing up and slipping her pack back on.

Anger flared. "No shit," he snapped. "You figured that out all by yourself? Jesus fucked." He took a deep breath. "Cover the door as it opens, wait for some light. Manage your exposure — don't stand there like a pair of knuckleheads. Wait for the door to be fully open, get a good look. Once we have access, I want Hulkaburger here in first." He ignored the look the big guy shot him. "Don't be stingy. Shoot first. We got no collateral damage to worry about. Just hit anything that moves as hard as you can. Then hit it again."

Darmity felt satisfied with himself. He had two pawns. He would use them.