

**DAVID  
BALDACCIO**

**#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR**

**TO  
DIE  
FOR**

**A 6:20 MAN THRILLER**



DAVID  
BALDACCI

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*TO* **DIE**  
**FOR**



GRAND  
CENTRAL

New York Boston





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*To the memory of Guinness, the other half of our  
canine dynamic duo.  
You gave us nothing but love for sixteen years, Guinn.  
I will never forget you.*

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## CHAPTER

# 1

TRAVIS DEVINE SAT IN THE cab staring at the note he'd just found in his coat pocket, and wondered how many more minutes he might have to live.

And here he thought he might just grab a cup of overpriced java, pick up a good book, and chill tonight after almost losing his life several times during his last mission.

*And why am I still apparently in combat even though I no longer wear the uniform?*

Devine had just returned from Maine, where most people ventured to fish, hike, and commune with nature. Instead, he'd run smack into people who wanted to plant him in the dirt without the benefit of a funeral service.

He read over the words again.

Nice bumping into you in the airport, former Captain Devine. We missed getting you twice before. But you know what they say, the third time is usually the charm. At least one can hope. See you soon. I promise.

XOXO

The Girl on the Train

The airport taxi driver, a gray-bearded Sikh wearing a *pagri*, glanced at Devine and said helpfully, "Just put your card or phone next to the screen, sir, and follow the instruction. Easy-peasy."

Devine looked up at him, touched his phone to the device mounted on the plastic shield separating the front and rear areas of

the vehicle, and completed the transaction.

"See, easy-peasy," said the driver.

"Yeah, easy-peasy."

Devine got out with his bag, his Glock, and his distrust of everyone and everything.

He took a few moments to perform a 360-sweep of the area, looking for what he wasn't really sure, only he knew it was out there. *She* was out there. First on the train gliding like an eagle through the Swiss Alps, then on dark back country roads in murderous and cold-as-hell Maine, and now here within spitting distance of America's capital.

It appeared the girl on the train was getting a little obsessive with him.

Devine walked into the hotel where he had earlier booked a room, since he currently had no permanent residence. His occupation didn't really allow for putting down roots, and neither did his temperament. Since people were usually either trying to kill him or frame him for various felonies, he made for the world's worst tenant or neighbor. But if your thing was long-range sniper shots through kitchen glass, or a C4 stick wedged under front porch flower pots, he was your man.

*Maybe I should stop paying into Social Security, because I am never making it that far.*

He bypassed the front desk and kept going until he reached the rear entrance. He turned left out of the pricey building and picked up his pace. Death threats almost always required a change in plans, and he had no desire to make himself an easy target. In fact, the rulebook said you made it as hard as possible. Otherwise, some people might take advantage.

Despite what the note had said, they had actually tried to kill him *three* times before, including, initially, on the high-speed train darting between Geneva and Milan. So this would be the fourth time, which wasn't usually charming at all, not that violent death ever was. Yet if they did manage to murder him, Devine figured it would have to do more with incompetence on his part than skill on theirs.

He texted his boss, Emerson Campbell, and reported the



threatening note.

Campbell immediately replied: Stay where you are, we'll come and get you.

Devine answered: No, I'll come to you. If I don't make it good luck to whoever replaces me. And in lieu of flowers make a donation to the VA.

He walked into an office building and rode the elevator to the fifteenth floor, where he looked out through the wall of windows at all the activity down below. Time and space from the battlefield allowed one to think things through, details that might be important enough later to allow you to stay alive. But when the bullets were flying and you felt like you were inside the pulsing heart of an erupting volcano, he'd take sheer luck over brains and proficiency. But the harder Devine worked, the luckier he seemed to get, so there was that equalizer in a world that otherwise didn't seem to make much sense.

Devine saw couples entering bars or restaurants; families heading to wherever families went; working folks hustling to their first, second, third, or gig jobs; and idlers idling while caressing long smokes or tutti-frutti vapes. But he saw no one who looked like they wanted to kill anyone generally, or him specifically. And from his point of view, that was a real shame and a wasted trip up to high ground in a war zone that usually revealed many answers.

He descended in the elevator while thinking of a plan going forward. Halfway down he had come up with fragments of one. As the elevator eased to a stop on the ground floor, he had formulated a strategy that probably had a 50 percent chance of actually working. But he would take those odds right now.

He stood looking out of the elevator car and started to combat-breathe, four up, hold for four, four down, hold for four. Rinse and repeat. He wasn't expecting to kill or be killed as soon as he stepped clear of the elevator car, but his mind and nerves needed a reset, and sucking air in and letting it out in a controlled manner did that.

Devine stepped out of the elevator thinking that these people killed for a living, as he did, in certain respects. He'd just assumed

he occupied higher moral ground. Yet who really knew? Dead was dead after all, with the victors left to tell the story all their own way.

He hailed a taxi but then waved it off when his warning sensors started to tingle, perhaps simply from paranoia. Better to be safe than deceased. He walked a few blocks and watched from inside another hotel lobby as the dented silver Honda pulled up across the street in response to his Uber request, the driver on his phone maybe already checking what might be next in his queue.

As he continued to observe, two men strolled into view. One on either side of the street. The humps under their jackets signaled the weapons they carried. The bumps on their rear waistbands were clear tells of the transponders powering the squiggly-lined earpieces so they could communicate hands-free.

They were trying too hard to be cool, nonchalant, and also kept their gazes dutifully averted from one another. But their guns and communication hardware and fluid synchronicity of movement were all Devine needed to conclude that they were working together with the firm goal of ending his life, unless POTUS was coming here and they were the Secret Service advance team. But they didn't look legal. They looked the opposite.

Devine got confirmation of that possibility when he noticed the bulky black Lincoln SUV with wrap-around dark-tinted windows slide into view like a slimy snake bellying out from its hole looking for dinner.

*They knew about the Uber. And they probably followed me here from the airport. And the SUV is here to take me to the girl on the train so she can say goodbye properly with a bullet to my brain. But that is not happening. Not right now at least. I have things to do.*

He three-pointed his phone into the trash since it was now clearly compromised and thus akin to a laser sight on his skull. He didn't turn it off or take the SIM card or crush it, because they would waste time tracking it (and him, they would think) to this receptacle. And without his facial recognition authenticator and password to access his cloud, the phone was a useless brick instead of a data treasure trove.

Devine exited the rear of the building, found an old-fashioned

cabstand in front of another expensive northern Virginia hotel, and got into the lead taxi.

He gave the driver the address and said, "Ride like the wind, friend."

"I'm not looking to get a ticket," said the gent, eyeing Devine in the mirror.

Devine flashed his badge. "Don't worry, you won't. Now, just drive."

The driver noted the embossed symbol of federal authority.

"You the man?" he asked.

"I am today," replied Devine.

## CHAPTER

# 2

**A**LL DURING THE RIDE DEVINE maintained a vigilant lookout as they careened along the capital beltway with thousands of other vehicles on the hamster wheel known as the DC metro rush hour, which actually extended to more hours than any weary commuter ever dared to admit. That was one reason why Devine had never wanted a nine-to-five desk job.

As they got off the highway, he wasn't so sure.

Annandale was a bubbling brook of immigrant-owned mom-and-pop businesses, and restaurants serving dozens of international cuisines, the smells of which constantly enticed the famished. For its part, US 50 was a perpetually bottlenecked artery of weary travelers heading directly into or out of the heart of the nation's capital. There seemed to be no reason to associate Annandale's ordinary commercial and commuter activity with anything clandestine.

Which was the point and also the only reason Devine was here.

He surprised the driver by paying in actual cash, and got out, his gaze sweeping fore and aft, threat-assessing all the way.

The outdoor strip mall looked just like thousands of other such places across America where cheap and pointless was the signature style of a nation falling into the fragments cast off from capitalistic excess. The small office located there was so bland that one would forget its existence in three or four footfalls.

That was also the intended reaction.

The front window held a sign that read BY APPOINTMENT ONLY.

Devine had to smile at this prop of deceit, when he had little else to smile about.

This was one of the places of operation for the Office of Special Projects, a tiny, stealth sub-group under the crowded circus tent cover of DHS, the conglomerate of the government world stuffed full of acronym agencies.

Devine doubted that many at Homeland Security even knew of its existence. He worked for the little boots-on-the-ground organization that could and often did punch above its weight. However, his service was not entirely voluntary.

Devine was a closer, snooper, fixer, investigator, and sometimes he had to kill in order to keep on breathing or complete a mission. He tried not to think too much about it, just as he had when he'd worn a uniform on behalf of his country. But killing was killing, no matter the reason, noble or cruel or a combo thereof. If it didn't make you feel something, maybe you were incapable of feeling anything, becoming akin to Ted Bundy, John Wayne Gacy, or Jeffrey Dahmer, which had never been a life goal of his.

Inside, he sat across from Emerson Campbell in an office outfitted with dinged governmental hand-me-downs. His boss was a retired Army two-star whose aversion to bullshit military politics had cost him a legit shot at the third and fourth stars. He had close-cropped iron gray hair, a workingman's lead pipe fingers, and a tree trunk neck, with a low whisper that was more menacing than a drill sergeant's spit-shot baritone. He deserved lusher surroundings, but Devine also knew the man didn't give a damn about that. He had fought wars in hellscape; impressive office furnishings and vanity photo walls like they had at the senior officer level at the Pentagon did not move Campbell's internal needle even a little bit.

He eyed Devine cautiously. "Any problems getting here?"

"Aside from the fact that they seem to know my every move, no problem at all. By the way, I need a new phone. My old one's in a trash can over in Reston. And new plastic, too. They've probably hacked that as well."

Campbell sent a text, and a minute later Devine was presented with a new phone and credit card.

Devine pocketed them and said, "Your assistant, Dawn Schuman? You thought she was the leak that I'm dealing with?"

"We haven't found her. Or her body. Yet. But it seems clear that she's the one. I still find it hard to believe that she was turned, but there's no other explanation for her disappearance."

"So she compromised my phone before she ran for it?"

"Or gave the folks she was dealing with the info they needed to crack it."

"I guess I'm lucky the girl on the train didn't stick a syringe filled with liquid fentanyl in my gut when she slid the note in my pocket."

"I *am* surprised they let that opportunity go by," noted Campbell.

"And hopefully *relieved*," added Devine coldly.

Campbell gave him the military once-over: stare, glare, but then, out of the blue, a touch of understanding, compassion even. "Look, Devine, I know you're pissed about this and you have every right to be. But we are doing all we can to resolve this as quickly as possible."

"Good, because I'm not sure I can count on them to keep sending idiots I can kill before they kill me."

"I understand your frustration, soldier. I really do."

"Then my work on that is done, sir." He drew a four-second breath to quell the fury in his chest. "What now?"

"Another assignment. West Coast."

"Why? To get me far, far away from here?"

"And to get you to a place where you're needed. To provide security for someone."

"So I'm now a glorified bodyguard?"

"And maybe a blast from the past for you."

"Okay, you have my full attention."

"Danny Glass? Name ring a bell?"

Devine nodded. "Iraq. We were thrown together during a mission. His actions helped save all our butts. I recommended him for a commendation. What's his involvement?"

"He left the Army shortly after the battle you just referred to. And his reputation is not a good one."

"I'd heard some scuttlebutt way back when about him, but feel free to elaborate."

"The government is going after him in a big criminal lawsuit out



in Seattle. Buddy of mine at the Justice Department got in touch. Wanted to know if I had a good man for this mission. He mentioned Danny Glass's involvement, and I recalled that you had known Glass from your military days. It seemed like a good fit. I told my buddy that and he agreed."

"And do you trust your *buddy*?"

"Yes. We served together before he jumped to the civilian side. Saved his life once."

"In combat?" asked Devine.

"No, on the LA freeway. Road rage incident."

"Okay, what else?"

"Glass has a niece, Betsy Odom, age twelve. Her parents recently died, and Glass is her only living relative. He wants to become her guardian and eventually adopt her."

"And why does that interest DOJ?"

Campbell pulled an old-fashioned paper file out of his desk and plopped it in front of him. "To be perfectly candid, I don't know all of it, which I don't like one bit. It's not how we did things in uniform but it's something we apparently have to live with in joint ops like this. But with that said, I'm going to do all I can to get a fuller picture. And anything I find out you will know right away. I don't like sending my people into harm's way on half-ass briefings."

Devine relaxed and leaned back in his chair. He greatly respected this man who, in some ways, was an older version of himself. And Campbell's last words had hit every reassuring mark for Devine.

"Well, what else do I have, except minutes to burn and blood to shed, sir? Let's get to it."