

Chapter 20

Depression Match

After they crossed the street, Doug noticed a homeless man standing on the sidewalk near the entrance to the building. He looked back. A guard started to walk toward the group with his security wand, and Doug knew they would have to stand there long enough to get hit up for cash.

Doug usually felt bad about homeless people. He encountered a lot of them in Boston, and even spoke with them in the subway stations. As bad as he felt, he almost never gave them money. The cash in his pocket was usually earmarked for a newspaper, coffee, or a night out. Doug gave a few quarters to only one homeless man on a regular basis, a guy who sat on Boston Common barking out the weather forecast.

As Doug, Rich, Vanessa, and Brey stood there waiting for the guard, the homeless man looked at him and said something that surprised him.

“Be joining me soon, yeah?”

“Probably,” Rich said somberly. Doug chuckled. Even the homeless guy knew something was going wrong on Wall Street. They walked through the gate at the next chance.

Doug looked up at the New York Stock Exchange building. The Greek revival façade with its tall windows and giant columns had been a fixture in his mind for a long time. He had always dreamed of taking this building by storm. As he

entered through the small door in the base of the building, he hoped we would not have to.

In the lobby, a bank of escalators led up to the trading floor level. The group approached the turnstiles and tried to look like they belonged. The guards standing nearby watched them with confusion, since they were 5 hours late for a trader. They got through the metal detectors with no problem, but in truth, they were all very concerned about the next small step.

Doug slid his credential through the turnstile and the bars turned. He was in. He was sure the others were as pleasantly surprised as he was. They followed him with varying nonchalance, and Rich was the most convincing.

Once on the trading floor, Doug realized how hard it was going to be to find Eric and the rest. Traders were everywhere, most of them taller than him.

The floor itself was in a tall room at least three stories high. Above, a mezzanine ringed by a wide marble railing was reached in the four corners by marble stairs. The whole room was clad in black and white marble. They looked at the famous trading pits surrounded by railings, the screens that read ticker readings, and the screaming traders. It felt like home.

Above the balcony was a bank of windows where camera studios and offices were stationed. They looked like the press boxes at a hockey arena.

On a normal day, this floor was supposed to be mayhem. On this particular day, it looked more like war. Traders were running toward each other to trade instead of

calling out trades and making their hand signals. They were all yelling, some crying. Doug saw traders sitting on the rails with their heads down. Some of them were tearing up paperwork. He saw a few guys trading only punches.

Rich was the only one who could see above the others.

“See anything?” Doug asked.

“Nope. Let’s try to get a little higher,” Rich said.

They made their way toward the stairs leading to the mezzanine. This was the famous balcony where the bell was rung every night, and where the suit of armor now stood. The steps were guarded, but with the room threatening to devolve into chaos, it did not look like the guards were in adequate number. Doug figured the turmoil could work in their favor.

Brey pointed to the stairs. “Guys. Look at this,” he said.

The guards at the staircase were intently watching a fight about to break out. One of them palmed his sidearm.

“Let’s move,” said Rich.

They walked toward the stairway, watching the guards, who were ready to pounce on the fighters. Doug could not tell how many were actually in the brawl. It looked like more than two. A bunch of guys tried to hold some people back, but would probably wind up in the mix themselves.

At the core of the fight were two guys frantically wrestling, pulling each others’ coats up over their heads. There was yelling all around them, and it looked like the entire room began to pay attention to the fight. The guards finally made

their move, just as Doug and the others were close enough to bound up the stairs. They did.

“I think they got their panic,” said Vanessa.

“Yeah,” Doug said. “May not need a b-”

“Shut up!” hollered Rich. Doug nodded as they got to the top of the stairs. Rich was right. He was about to say something really loud and really dumb.

“Sorry,” he said.

Rich chuckled. The group stood on the balcony opposite the bell and the suit of armor. They moved away from the giant marble railing to avoid being seen by guards on the floor. The four ran around the corner to a place where they could see the whole room better.

“Ready, guys?” Rich asked.

Doug moved to the railing to look for the bright purple jackets. He could not see them. The brawl below began to break up with the help of the guards, and Doug realized that guards would soon be back at their post again.

“Anything?” he asked.

“No,” said Rich.

“Nothing,” Vanessa said.

Brey shook his head. They kept looking. Below, a guard wrestled a trader to the ground and bound his hands in the familiar plastic ties. Doug looked at his own wrists, as another guard assisted the first one. Then the guard turned and looked upward as if in slow motion.

He looked directly at Doug.

“Guys,” Doug said. “We’re spotted.”

“Just stand here for a minute,” said Rich. “Don’t look.”

Doug turned his head, but glanced back at the guard, who pulled out a radio.

“We’re done, guys,” he said. “Let’s go.”

“Stay here!” Rich said. “They will just escort us down. It’s most important we keep looking for as long as possible.”

“We’ll just say we were trying to stay out of the brawl,” said Vanessa.

“Pretend you didn’t see him, just keep looking.”

Rich was right. The plan sounded better than anything he could think of, which was nothing at all. He saw the guards come up the stairs. They only had a few more seconds.

“Fuck that,” said Brey.

“Stay there,” Rich whispered loudly.

With no sign of the Free Majority, the group was about to be kicked out of the NYSE. They had blown it.

The four guards came around the pillar at the top of the steps. “Hey!” one of them called.

Doug, Rich and the others turned toward them.

Rich acted as congenial as he could, like he was the guards’ weekend fishing buddy. He had a real knack for that.

“Sorry, guys. We just wanted to stay out of trouble,” Rich said.

“Well, you’re in it,” said the guard. Apparently, Doug realized, he didn’t fish.

“Sorry, we saw the fight and wanted to get away from it. Thanks for shutting it down.”

Doug saw a flash of purple in the corner of his eye and turned toward it.

“You’re not supposed to be up here, and I may have to arrest you.”

Doug looked at what had first caught his eye. It was Eric and Beth from the Free Majority. They were on the balcony, coming toward them.

Another guard looked at Doug. “Gotta problem?” he asked.

“No. Sorry. We should get back to the floor.”

The guard shifted his weight and cocked his head. Doug got the impression that the guard was about to let them go.

“Hey!” Doug heard a voice call out from behind him. It was Eric. The guards turned and saw that they wore the same purple outfits. The guards immediately became suspicious.

“What the fuck is going on?” asked the guard, loudly. The others moved toward Beth and Eric.

Eric was only a few yards away now. “Nothing at all,” he said. Doug realized he had something in his hand. It was a gun. At that second, Eric raised it toward the guard and shot him. The hall echoed with the loudest crack Doug had ever heard. Thousands of eyes suddenly looked up at the balcony.

The guard flopped to the floor like a sack of potatoes, already dead. Eric had shot him in the head.

The other guards didn't have a chance even to pull their pistols. The two other Free Majority members, Jim and Colin, came out of nowhere and shot two of them in the back. They hit the floor screaming. The fourth guard had a little trouble pulling his gun, and for him it was fatal. Jim slit his throat.

It was over in half a second. The shots reverberated through the building, and were followed by silence. Then there was only screaming.

All around the trading floor, traders were yelling and running for the doors. Some of the traders fell to the ground, only to be trampled. The guy with his wrists bound by wire ties was running as well. Doug realized their little jaunt had gone horribly wrong. This was going to make the news.

Guards ran up the stairs, but Eric and his group had the upper hand. Jim and Colin cut them down with automatic rifles, and Doug cringed at the blood flowing across the balcony. The guards rolled back down the stairs and nearly took out a few more of the guards running up. The remaining guards grabbed their radios and ran for the exits, helping stragglers as they went. Eric held up his hand and his guys stopped shooting. There was no more gunfire.

Doug and the others watched the building empty in a frenzy of screaming and chaos. He was shocked. He was impressed with how quickly the building emptied.

"Killing people?!" Vanessa screamed. She ran toward Eric as Jim trained his rifle on her. Rich grabbed her and held her back. "What did you do this for?"

"You didn't need to do it!" Rich hollered.

Vanessa sank to the floor, helped by Rich. Even Brey's eyes watered as he looked at the dead guards. He looked human for a moment.

Doug's eyes were wet as well. As he began to speak, he realized his throat was hoarse. He must have been among those who were screaming.

He looked down at the guard, whose blood pooled under his head, ran toward the railing and dripped to the floor below.

"Why?" Doug asked.

"We have to show them that we're serious. I had to make a few points."

"Points? To who?" Vanessa yelled. She took another run at him. This time Doug grabbed her. In the next instant, everything went black and Doug saw stars. He was suddenly on his ass and so was Eric. Vanessa had pushed him to the ground. Rich pulled her away while Eric stood up again.

Doug's left eye was numb. He realized that Vanessa had whacked him with an elbow. He wondered if she meant it.

Jim and Colin moved in with their guns held level. Eric stood up and waved them off. He rubbed an obviously sore elbow with his other hand.

"Cool this one or I'll put her down!" Eric yelled, raising his handgun toward Vanessa.

"Fuck you!" she screamed. Rich doubled his efforts to hold her back.

“Okay, here’s another point to make,” Eric said, steadying the gun within inches of her face.

“Doug, come in!” came a muffled, electronic voice from under Doug’s jacket. Everybody stopped to look at him.

“Come in, Doug?” It was Jacobs, calling through the radio.

“What’s this?” said Eric. He lifted Doug’s jacket open with his gun and saw the radio and its blinking red LED. “You’re on a mission. Congrats!” he said, motioning to Beth to take Doug’s radio.

“I suspect you all are,” he said as he stood back and motioned to the other Freemers to take all of the radios.

Vanessa had stood up, while Rich and Brey relaxed slightly. They were all being held at gunpoint, and the mission was over. Doug felt like a failure.

After Beth and the other Freemers took the radios, Eric held Doug’s radio up above his head.

“I suppose you came to stop our plan?” The other three stood back a little while he paced in front of them. All of them were holding their guns, though pointed to the ground.

Eric looked at Doug and each of his colleagues in turn, then gestured to the empty trading floor below.

“If you wanted to prevent a crash today, you failed.”

Eric then held the radio close to his face, looking amused. “Hello, whoever is calling Doug. I would like to report that he has botched it completely.”

“Who is this?” asked Jacobs through the radio.

“I’m sure you know who it is,” Eric said into the radio. “We are the Army of the Free Majority.”

“Where are Doug and the others?”

“Worry not, dear sir. They are well, for now.”

“Will you let me talk to them?”

Eric held out the radio toward Doug. He stood with the device at arm’s length for a long moment. Then he pulled it back to his face.

“You’re welcome,” Eric said.

“Welcome for what?”

“I let you talk to them. Why you chose this moment to be tongue-tied is your business.”

“What are your demands?”

“Demands?”

“Yes.”

Eric did not look amused. “We can dispense with the usual bullshit, sir. Yes, we are holding hostages. Yes, we have demands. No, you should probably not come storming in here, unless you want more blood on your hands, et cetera, Allah be praised, and all that jive.” He said it all with sing-song sarcasm.

“More blood?”

Eric paused and looked at the guards on the floor, realizing he had made a mistake. He was relatively new at being a terrorist.

“Don’t worry, just a few cops you won’t miss,” he said. Doug felt his own blood start to boil.

There was another pause. Doug got the impression that Eric wasn't very good at this, and that made him even more dangerous. He imagined the frenzy of activity going on outside, with evacuees running and screaming. Cops, ambulances, and media trucks arriving, and Jacobs outside with not nearly enough Federal agents.

They had to deal with a siege, and there was no way they were ready.

Doug suddenly remembered the Liquid Lunch television program. It, and a lot of shows like it, were shot in front of a window above the trading show floor. It was likely they were on television right now. Either that or Eric's group was far more sophisticated than Doug thought. He looked at the wall of windows on the other side of the room, and saw camera after camera aimed directly at them.

Eric watched Doug looking. He looked at the windows and waved.

The radio crackled to life again. "Hello to you too. What is your purpose here?"

"Purpose?" Eric said, lyrically, still looking at the windows. "We're here to make a few points. First, I'd like the building to be evacuated, except for our friends here."

"Why?"

"Because we're going to blow it up."

Eric turned toward the windows and mouthed B-O-M-B as if he was yelling the letters.

Doug heard some yelling from the windows above, and the cameras that he could see went limp.

"That changes the game a little bit, doesn't it?" said Eric. "What is your name?"

"Never mind that."

"Okay, but I'm sure you would like mine, right? I am afraid of nothing. My name is Eric."

"Eric what? Eric the Red? Commander of the Seas? Sovereign of All He Surveys? What is it?"

Eric's face suddenly went slack, he looked at the floor. Eric shook his head and closed his eyes tightly.

The radio crackled to life, this time with a different voice. "Let me tell you your name, then. It is Eric Molin."

Eric looked at Doug, his friends, and the rest of the Free Majority group. He nodded.

Brey, Rich, Vanessa and Doug stared at him. The name, and a thousand thoughts that followed it, seemed to roll over them like a herd of racing cars. "I knew it," Doug thought. At least he thought he did. He saw a resemblance the first time he met Eric, and he would have guessed the dude was related to Todd Molin somehow. It was that kind of thing one never knows for sure until the truth is out, and then everyone realizes they always knew.

Eric looked at Doug as he paced the floor. "A funny thing about that, Dad," he said into the radio.

"How so?"

“I’m here because of you. I’m doing what I’m doing because of you.”

Eric gestured to the other Freemers, and they pointed their guns at Doug and the rest. Eric walked along the balcony to the large open area behind the bell. With guns prodding them along, Doug and the others followed.

The radio spoke again, “What you’re doing now has nothing to-”

“Busy!” Eric hollered back into it. Doug noticed that Eric’s eyes had begun to water. The group kept walking toward the suit of armor. Eric stopped right in front of it.

“Eric, we would like to talk about a compromise,” said Mr. Molin.

Eric looked up at the suit of armor, and held up the radio. “Compromise?” he said. “I never compromise. I push my agenda until I get my way. You know who taught me that?”

The radio was silent.

“My dad. What a guy. You never took prisoners in your life. I don’t either.”

“So will you release your hostages?” the radio asked.

“Ha! Nice try.”

“You said no prisoners.”

“These fine folks are not my prisoners. They are guests, like at Disney World,” Eric barked into the radio.

“Son, we need to-”

“I won’t be your scapegoat, Father, I won’t!” Eric screamed.

“Eric... Eric, I-”

“We are done now. Goodbye.”

Eric took off his Global Grid medallion and lifted it toward the suit of armor. Doug and everyone else watched in silence.

“Then we are free to go?” Brey asked. Doug thought it was a stupid question until he realized he also wanted to know.

“Well, free if you are not slaves to the market.”

“I don’t understand,” Brey said.

“No. You wouldn’t.”

“What are you doing, then?” asked Rich.

Eric held up the medallion to the suit of armor. It looked like it would fit perfectly into the depression in the front of the suit. A match.

“This world runs on finance, trade, and growth. We colonize, expand, and when we can expand no longer, we globalize. Some despise it. It changes their way of life, raises the bar. But it’s called progress.”

“And you’re among them, so why would you do this?” Doug demanded.

“Of course we want to see it continue. That’s why we’re here. Currier has taken over the market, using the system we devised. He has full control.”

“And you can stop it! You guys wrote it!” Doug yelled.

“Maybe we can stop the macro, but the damage is done. Nobody will trust the market after this.”

“No,” Doug said, “but-”

“And we don’t have the PR people like he does. So it’s plan B. Right here, in this suit of armor.” He turned toward the suit and held the medallion to the depression.

“Wait!” Vanessa yelled.

Doug thought about what was going on in the world outside. The media people were probably in a frantic race to find out who was involved. They would find out about the Army of the Free Majority. Dr. Currier. Kand. The gold from Singapore. The database. If they found out about Doug, they would find out Jonathan.

If they followed Eric’s ‘Allah be praised’ comment, they would look for some kind of brown-skinned Middle Eastern terrorist. No doubt that would send them on a wild goose chase, while Eric was whiter than the cocaine hidden in desks throughout the NYSE building.

Doug figured that Eric had met his aim. He gave the media a month or so of coverage in just a few minutes.

“Now we have a chance to fix it without any more killing,” Vanessa said. “We can figure out this database. This macro. We can shut it down.”

Eric glared at her. “Can you? Then why hasn’t the trading system shut down? It is supposed to do so whenever the building is threatened,” he asked.

Rich and Doug looked at some of the ticker screens on the trading floor. They still fluctuated, though nobody was trading.

“It’s the macro. We can fix it,” said Vanessa.

Eric looked at her for a moment, then pulled the radio up to his lips. “Is the building empty now?” he asked.

There was a pause. “The evacuation seems to have petered out,” said the radio. “Can you give us more time?”

“No.” Eric said. Then, in a second that seemed to last for ten, he pushed the medallion into the opening. It made a loud click. Doug shut his eyes tight. He was not smiling.

Nothing happened. Doug opened his eyes again. The others had all done the same thing, except for the Freemers. Eric looked at them with a slight smirk.

“It’s not a detonator,” Eric said, looking very satisfied. “It’s just a magnetic arming device. The explosives are in every antique replica in the building. Look around.”

Doug and the others looked around the empty trading floor. Eric wasn’t kidding. Dozens of artifacts were visible, from small vessels of pottery to large items like a miniature trebuchet. All of them were plugged into network jacks and presumably full of explosives.

“These are all plugged into the building’s network, to look like a security precaution. It’s just to sync them up with the detonator, of course,” Eric said.

“And where’s that?” Doug demanded.

“The macro is the detonator. We were only going to arm it and leave, then when we’re far enough away, boom!” Eric said. “You guys fucked that by showing up, of course.”

“What if that medallion is removed?” Vanessa asked.

“Oh, it detonates. Either way, it will look like terrorism. And most importantly, it will still erase the economic mayhem of the last two days.”

“Why would you do this now?” Doug demanded. “Haven’t you listened? We can stop this thing!” Doug had no idea what Vanessa’s skills really were. Eric was probably the technical mastermind behind the system, and he was unwilling.

“If we cannot bring order to chaos, we will simply create a different chaos,” Eric said quietly.

Vanessa started to shake, not with fear, but rage. “Then help us stop this thing!” she screamed. “Shut this down!”

“I will not,” Eric answered calmly as Jim and Colin stood straighter by his side. “Besides, you guys will be making a tremendous sacrifice.”

Everybody froze. Eric walked toward Doug and the others. “You guys want to save Wall Street from collapse. You will be part of the solution today. Economic martyrs.”

Doug, Rich, Vanessa, and Brey stood for a long minute staring at Eric. For the first time, Doug began to feel real fear. Goosebumps rose on his skin.

“What’s funny is; I tried to protect you guys. I tried to leave you out of this,” Eric said. “And you showed up anyway! So if you want to fix this macro, you’d better get started. By the fluctuations, this goes off in sixty minutes, give or take.”

“Give or take?” Doug asked. “How the hell are we-”

“Look,” Eric said as he gestured to the trading floor below. “If you can stop the macro, it will stop the bomb. Good

luck.” Eric said as he sat down on the floor of the balcony. Jim and Colin grinned and leveled their guns again.

Doug looked down at the empty floor. It was strewn with papers, and silent, but the blinking screens and lights were still running.

“You’re out of your mind,” Rich yelled at Eric. Completely out of your fucking-”

“Boom,” Eric mouthed the word softly. Rich turned to see Vanessa walking toward the stairs with Jim behind her.

Rich looked at Doug and Brey.

“I have no idea about this thing,” said Brey.

“C’mon,” Doug said, and started walking toward the stairs. Rich and Brey followed, with Colin and Beth right behind them. Colin held his rifle at his hip, aimed at Doug and his friends.

“That’s it!” Eric laughed from his position in front of the suit of armor. “Pound against the wall with your fists. Stand against the very flood! See you at the end.”

Vanessa reached a bank of computers. Most of the screens in the room were still spinning with tickers and index prices. The program still ran, despite the market being closed. There was no way the world outside could miss the story now. Something else controlled the markets, and everything people knew about economic security was turned upside-down.

Doug looked for a computer keyboard. There were none in the kiosks in the middle of the floor. Against the walls were just more banks of monitors, and a couple of doors.

Vanessa tried one set of them, and found them locked. Doug tried another door further down the wall, and it was open.

Doug looked inside and saw something that made him gasp. It was the mother lode. The room was full of banks of computer servers. Behind them was a central desk with large display monitors on the wall in front of it. The screens showed a mix of camera images from the trading floor, and stock values ticking by. He could see Eric sitting in front of the suit of armor directly above. He had spread out some playing cards and was playing Solitaire.

The door to the NYSE server room was obviously supposed to be locked. By dumb luck, the occupants must have left it ajar when they evacuated. There was no way they would get their jobs back if the building remained standing.

Vanessa walked into the room right after him. “We can do this,” she said. “Have a seat.” She tapped Doug on the back and he looked at her. He had no idea how it was possible, but she seemed excited. They had just watched six guards die at the hands of these assholes, and now Eric had probably doomed them all if they could not figure out Currier’s hack.

Beth walked in right behind them. It suddenly occurred to Doug that she had not killed any of the guards. Rich, Brey, and the two goons stepped into the room, and everyone had a good look at it. It was the Network Ops Center for the NYSE, and it was exactly what they needed to find.