

M A Y H E M



DEREK E DYKES

***Mayhem:** the intentional and wanton removal of a body part that would handicap a person's ability to defend himself in combat. Under the strict common law definition, this required damage to an eye or a limb, while cutting off an ear or a nose, was deemed not sufficiently disabling. Later, the meaning of the crime expanded to encompass any mutilation, disfigurement, or crippling act, done using any instrument. The noun "mayhem", and the verb "maim", came from Old French "mahaigne".*

Book One:
MADNESS

Book Two:
MAYHEM

Mayhem by Derek E Dykes
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Special Thanks to Rebecca, April, Angela, Nicole and Amanda
And to all the true friends and family
who helped me through the best and worst times of my life.

☞Procurement☞

"I'll bid four-hundred thousand," I responded, holding my hand up for the auctioneer to see.

"Four-hundred thousand for each, or for the pair?" Grummold asked, gesturing toward them. It had never crossed my mind that even scum like Grummold would consider breaking them apart, but all eyes were on me now, and I had no time to argue the point.

"For the set, of course; don't go there again." I answered, feeling a roomful of eyes staring intently at me. "This auction was advertised as being for the pair." We were down to two bidders; me and a man who called himself 'Strong-arm'. Whether it was supposed to be his name, or his title I am not sure, but at the moment I really didn't care. All I wanted to do was win this auction, grab what I had come for, and get out of the Miami Dark Zone as fast as possible.

Grummold responded slyly, his vaguely Indian accent making him sound like more of an indentured servant from film noir than an auctioneer. "Of course - the bidding is for the pair. Yes, yes... so we continue now." Grummold placed his hands on

the center of the bidding device and nodded his head toward Strong-arm. We each placed our hands on the flat metal plates in front of us, as Grummold announced, "Round Seventeen - place your bets!" The room behind us was filled to standing room only. With the announcement, the crowd started placing their wagers on which of us would pull our hands out first. Whoever held out longest was allowed to place their next bid on the set for auction. If a bidder lost three rounds in a row - they were out. Two days of this had passed, clearing out over a hundred participants. Strong-arm and I were the only ones left now, and we were both down to two losses each. This round would decide who took them home.

A bell was rung to stop the wagers from being placed in the room, and Grummold announced the beginning of the final round. The electricity arched over the top of my hands, much more intense than the last two-dozen shocks I'd already taken today. I looked over to Strong-arm to see him clenching his teeth so hard that a trickle of blood started to slowly crawl down his chin. As the seconds stretched on, the smell of ozone and searing flesh began to make me nauseous, but I dared not look to see if it was my own hands cooking, or if I was finally getting the best of Strong-arm. The roar of the crowd behind me began to fade off into the distance, replaced by the sensation

of millions of biting ants on my arms, breasts and neck. When the voltage increased, I knew that if I blacked out, I would lose my chance. I looked to the small stage behind Grummold, seeing them huddled together, imagining them to be horrified at the spectacle of violence before them. "I'm no good to you dead," I thought to myself, and prepared to raise my hands from the metal plates.

My opponent apparently had other plans. Before I could work through the pain and contortions of the electric shock, Strong-arm acted on his own. His foot had somehow broken the shackle on the floor where we were both tied down; he reached up with his foot, and used all his remaining strength to kick me away from the table. My own simple leg restraints gave under the pressure as my seat flew backwards into the crowd. Strong-arm stood, arms raised over his head announcing his victory. His blood-stained smile waved in front of me like a flag, signaling my failure.

The crowd around us, however, didn't seem to approve of his success. While I still maintain there is no honor among thieves, there is a certain code in the underworld that rules the Dark Zones. Despite being in a roomful of rapists, murderers and the very worst that humanity had to offer, these men left no room for

a cheater; not here. Not with the stakes as high as they were, or with the amount of physical pain each of us had suffered through. Grummold took a revolver from his jacket, and placed its muzzle to Strong-arm's forehead. Without a word of warning, he pulled the trigger, splattering Strong-arm's brains across the already bloodthirsty crowd. Placing his revolver back in his jacket, Grummold took the gavel in his hands, and with one final swing toward the table, announced, "Sold for four-hundred thousand credits."

Grummold's men helped me up from where I'd landed as the crowd quickly dispersed. Walking up to the auctioneer, I held out a plastic card that he ran through a swipe machine. He keyed in six hundred thousand credits, and turned the device toward me.

"I bid four-hundred thousand, Grummold." I said, letting the dryness of my throat add a degree of deepness to my voice. "What's the extra two hundred K for? Killing Strong-arm?"

Grummold smiled and chuckled quietly as his men removed the body from the room.

"Hardly. If I had allowed him to cheat, I'd be either dead, out of business, or both in a matter of hours. The extra is my fee, of course; fifty percent of the winning bid."

"Isn't that supposed to be between you and the seller?" I asked, as I nonchalantly entered the numeric sequence to approve the transaction.

"Not this time," he replied, offering no explanation. Grummold then motioned toward the stage, saying "OK - they're all yours. Don't wear them out in one night!" They were cornered in a small, wheeled cage, and despite their silence, I could see they were truly terrified. I opened my backpack to retrieve my comm unit and place it back into my ear; leaving it in during the bidding would have shorted it out, and I knew I'd need it in order to get out of the Zone alive, let alone with my recent 'purchase' intact.

I bent down to the cage, and peered through the narrow aluminum bars. They each wore flimsy, threadbare nighties that had probably been white at some time in long forgotten past. "You could've at least cleaned them up a bit," I spat at Grummold. The two small sets of eyes in the cage looked at me fearfully, getting as far to the back of the cage as

possible while still holding onto each other. I bent down to the cage again, and flashed the girls a broad smile.

"It's okay, loves - we're going to have a lot of fun! But first, you need a bath." I winked at the girls, then turned back to face Grummold. "You tell your customer that if they aren't up to snuff, I'm coming for him."

"That would be most unwise," Grummold shot back. "Nor would it be wise to seek me out... unless, of course, I have other items for you to procure for your pleasures."

If I didn't know it would blow my cover, I would have shot Grummold in the balls right then and there, but I couldn't afford the luxury of vengeance upon this filthy thing that called himself a man. It had taken me four weeks to penetrate the Zone enough to even get close to this auction. God knows how many others like this would take place; but this one was unique. *'Twin girls, aged four years - living dolls for all your pleasures!'* the message had read. It was special even in the underworld of human trafficking, to have twins available for purchase, let alone some this young. Sadly, there were too many people who would've bought these girls for sick

sexual gratification, torture, snuff films, or any one of a thousand horrors the depraved things around me called entertainment. The bankcard I had used would, of course, end up transferring no money to the criminals; the FBI was not in the habit of paying people like Grummold for little girls. Now, as I pushed the wheeled cage out of the room, and turned on my non-federal issue night vision glasses, I made my way out of the light of the room and into the deep unyielding night of Miami's Dark Zone. The sweltering heat of South Florida made this place feel more like a convection oven, and clothing was either limited or optional on the streets of the Zone. For my own part, the black dye that covered my naturally red curls only served to make me feel the heat more; add to that the deep olive skin dye that concealed the paleness of my Celtic heritage, and I felt like I was roasting alive.

The girls were sobbing softly in the cage, and I stopped just long enough to cover it with a thin sheet and give them each a pouch of cold water I had kept for them in my pack. As I did so, I leaned down and whispered to the girls, "My name is Ellie; I'm here to save you."

If anyone thought that the Dark Zone in Mobile, Atlanta, St. Louis or any other major American city was the worst thing they'd ever seen, you knew automatically they'd never been to the Zone in Miami. This place was unlike any other; not only was the humidity almost unbearable, but the concrete above acted like the walls of a brick oven. Add in the regular flooding during hurricane season, an overflow of Caribbean illegals, and the crime controlled industries that still interacted with the world above, and arguably you had the most dangerous mix of drugs, money, and free access anywhere in the world. The streets of the Miami Dark Zone were always packed with people, almost all of whom were criminals in one or more countries. With the Port of Miami being directly connected to the far edge of the Zone, there was essentially a full featured port of access, allowing anything from Opium and weapons, to biochemical stockpiles of medical waste and human slaves to move freely into and out of the US. The Crime Lords ran free here in Miami, letting their industries take complete advantage of the unbridled access in the Zone, all while having 'civilized lives' above in the comfort of the new city.

It was only a matter of time before my deceit would be discovered. Grummold was sure to be more than a little upset when he learned that the money

transfer was a fraud, and if I wasn't out of the Zone with the girls by then, I may not make it out at all.

"Zim," I said softly after tapping the control switch in my pocket to activate the comm in my ear. "I've got the girls - now get us out of here."

"That may not be as easy as I'd like, Ellie," Zim answered nervously. "According to the bank capture we used for you to buy them, the transaction reversal is starting now, and I can't stop it. You off the main street yet?"

I took a look around and saw an alleyway that looked unoccupied. "Will be in two seconds, Zim." I made my way over to the entrance of the alleyway, pushing the girls along the rough and uneven road in the hybrid cart/ cage. "I can't wait to get you two out of there." I said, directing my voice toward them. "But we've got to get out of this place first, ladies." The girls sat in their cage, snuggling a dirty, stuffed rabbit between them. One of the girls looked to the rabbit, then over at her sister, who turned her head to face me. She grabbed the back of the rabbit's neck and it nodded an approval for them all.

The alleyway was almost abandoned, save for a few men and boys slumped against the walls in a

drug-induced fog. I went in as deep as I could go, staying as far away from the people here as was physically possible. "All right, Zimmerman," I asked, speaking into the air. "How do we get out of here?"

I could hear Zim's fingers darting across his keyboard, his usual rhythm upset by his nervousness. "OK, Ellie. You are about two miles from the waterfront. Michaels is headed to Pier 23 with a boat and can pick you up there. You just have to get there."

"Sounds too easy, Zim. What's the catch?" I asked, finding myself pacing around my new cubs like a lioness waiting for battle.

"You have to go back the way you came, El." Zim said.

"You mean I've got to skirt around Grummold?" I asked. The mention of his name made the girls whimper in their vessel, and attracted some unwanted attention from a man who had entered the alley from the other side. "You've got to be kidding me, Zim." I groaned, turning the cart around and reaching in it to stroke the girls' heads with my

fingertips. I took a deep breath. "So back the way I came. How good is your fix on my position?"

"Fuzzy at best, Ellie. But I did manage to hack into some of the old security cameras scattered around the zone. I used a modified recovery drone to repair a few of them, so I can at least tell you that you currently have a pretty clear path to the waterfront."

"You're a God-send, Zim." I left the channel open as I made my way back out into the street, and worked to get my bearings to find the waterfront. The smell of human waste and filth kept me from using my nose to find the water. All I could do was look out into the green-tinged darkness to find the silhouettes of buildings I had come to know during my stay here.

I almost wish that I could have been a fly on the wall when Grummold discovered my deceit. Not only would I have been able to witness the fruits of my labor, but it would have given me notice that he had indeed discovered the bogus money transfer. If I had known that, I could have guessed on precisely how much time I had to get the girls and myself past his little corner of the Zone. One thing is for certain; I definitely would have been a lot more careful rounding the corners of the old warehouse district,

and possibly have been more prepared for the gunfire that erupted in my direction. The girls let out startled screams while bullets jetted by, and I jerked their cage back around the corner for a moment of safety, quickly losing the gunmen in the maze of old warehouses and broken shipping containers that created the skyline here.

"Shh.... it's OK girls." I said, stooping low so they could hear me over the gunshots. "I'm gonna sneak us out of here; but I need you two to be really really quiet, alright?" Once again the smaller of the two girls looked to the rabbit, then to her sister, who looked to the stuffed rabbit and had it nod their approval. I smiled a broad, friendly smile for them, and stood back up, draping the sheet over their cage and began to work my way behind the building.

Pier 23 was the best and worst choice for our escape. I knew that, as the old dock closest to the real business ports, we had the advantage of possible backup, more than a hint of sunlight, and lots of water. While all that sounded good, it came with a price. Pier 23 was also the bottleneck for getting things in and out of the Zone by water. As such, crime families from across the globe had representation here, to look out for their own interest. Sadly, it was also the most logical place for an

escape. If I was lucky, I could use that to my advantage. If my luck had finally run its course, not as much as a finger of mine would ever see its way out of the Zone.

The shadow of New Miami covered the old wharf district both literally and figuratively. As part of its design, New Miami had support columns well out into the water, causing the waterfront to be a mix of silhouettes, blinding rays of distant sunlight, and almost opaque darkness. The wheels of the girls' cage squeaked slightly over the rough, worn pavement, and we rolled along the backside of the first of the warehouses until we found an unlocked door. I gently drew it open and found the inside of the 'abandoned' warehouse to be a busy hub of activity. In the center of the large open room, six large trucks were parked; their cargo areas open and a few dozen men switching large boxes between them. Since all of these places were supposed to be shut down more than a decade ago, you could guarantee that whatever packages these folks were processing were far from legal. No matter what they were doing, they weren't paying us any attention, and I wanted to keep it that way. My only goal right now was to get the girls out of here alive, and we quietly made our way around

the activities in the center of the warehouse, and over to a door on the other side of the building.

We were able to make it through six more warehouses in this fashion; each one bringing us closer to Pier 23. When the girls and I entered the last warehouse, just outside our escape point, I immediately knew it was going to be different. The trucks in this warehouse were carrying weapons - lots of weapons. Another truck rolled in through the front bay, and more armed men jumped out, pointing their guns at the crew who was already present. I thought to myself, "*Damn it, Ellie; why did you pick this warehouse to cut through?*" The two groups of men shouted and made racial slurs at each other, raising the chance of a firefight. The terms 'Reeferistas' seemed to be thrown out at the men who sported large, pot-leaf shaped tattoos on their necks. These men in turn called out the 'Listillios', who each wore orange and purple tops decorated with anything from braids of hair to baby toys. As the men argued and waved their firearms around, the girls and I tried our best to get to the large open bay door that bordered the pier we needed. Just as we made our way behind a stack of containers near the corner of the front wall, Grummold walked into the warehouse with a team of gun wielding henchmen behind him.

The old saying of 'shoot first and ask questions later,' seems to be a rule of thumb in the Dark Zones. Upon seeing an armed mass enter their already flaring argument, both sets of men in the center of the warehouse started shooting at Grummold and his men, who in return opened fire. Before I knew what was happening, more men started coming down ladders and jumping down from above in the warehouse, increasing the number of bullets two-fold. I took the opportunity to slowly back our way to the door we'd come through, whispering to the girls, "Let these boys play their little games. While they play cowboys and Indians, we'll sneak around from behind them!" The girls looked up at me blankly for a moment, then a small smile spread across both their faces.

I still say it was as good a plan as any we could've put together, given the situation. I knew Michaels would be waiting for me by now, so all I had to do was get to the end of the pier. With the firefight happening behind us, I really didn't think that anyone would be looking around for me. My boss, Director Forrest, said in my last review that I didn't make a lot of mistakes, but when I did, they were usually doozies. In hindsight, this was definitely a doozie. We tried our best to sneak past the building in the blossoming twilight of the Zone, but when we

got to the pier, we discovered that Grummold was one step ahead of us. Pairs of armed men jumped up from the sides of the pier where they'd been waiting for me. The gunfire behind us subsided, and soon the girls and I were surrounded on the old wooden dock, the muzzles of dozens of high velocity machine guns pointed right at us.

The girls huddled more closely together in their cage, trying to press their way through the wire bars to somehow touch me for comfort or protection. I reached down and stroked their hair as best as I could while the thugs around us tightened their circle. There was no way we could run through together for an escape, and there was no way I was going to let these girls go while I had a breath in my body.

"Six-Hundred Thousand is a lot of money to steal from me, little girl." Grummold said as he stepped through the barrier of guns that encircled the girls and I. "Add to it that you took merchandise you didn't pay for, and I am very cross with you." He gestured toward the girls, stating, "We'll just have to put these back up for sale. As for you, maybe we can find a buyer for you too!" Grummold reached out toward me to grab my arm, but pulled his hand back with a yelp before he ever touched me. Just as I felt the wood beneath my feet start to give way, the end

of Grummold's forefinger fell off, leaving a cauterized wound where it had been attached moments before. The unmistakable hum of a high-yield laser reached my ears from the water below us, and whatever bits of wood or fate had held us up finally gave way, sending the girls and I screaming downward into the sewage-filled waters of the Port of Miami. I held the girls' cage tightly, yelling, "Take a deep breath, girls! We're almost out!" Only a few seconds passed before we crashed into the water, surrounding us in filth and the momentary silence of the sea. As we bobbed back to the surface, a speedboat piloted by Michaels came charging up to us, and using a miniature loading arm to scoop us out of the water, deposited us into the bow. Bullets started raining down from the old wharf above us, putting multiple holes in the borrowed rescue boat Michaels had acquired. While I struggled to get my bearings I took a glancing shot to the upper arm, sending fire through my body as the putrid water ate away at the open flesh. Michaels did his best to focus on maneuvering the rescue boat in a zigzag pattern to make us harder to hit. The soaked girls huddled together in their cage, whimpering in each other's arms and holding the tattered stuffed rabbit between them.

I yelled out "Pulser!" to Michaels. Despite the vagueness of the one-word command, he knew exactly what I needed, and tossed my cherry red Pulser to me. I sat up past the buzzing bullets, the rich red flow of my blood dripping down my arm, and started unloading a volley of my own on the loathsome group behind us. The sound waves from the Pulser blasts knocked most of them to their knees, and allowed me to target the decaying supports of the old wooden dock we'd just escaped. It started to crack and crumble just as Michaels hit the edge of the shadows around us, maneuvering the speedboat out of the Dark Zone.

For the first time in almost a month, I felt the warm sunlight paint itself across my bare shoulders. The night vision goggles switched themselves off immediately, and I tossed them aside and into the open ocean so I could see the blue sky. The boat threw a mist of water across the girls and I, offering me the first bath I'd had in weeks, and I immediately dropped my weapon and reached over to open the top of the cage the girls had called home for far too long. The smaller of the two struggled out first, as her sister passed their rabbit up to her, and pushed upward on her bottom to lift her out of the cage and into my arms. I sat the first girl in my wet lap, and

reached over to help the second girl out as well.

While Michaels took us to the safety of a Coast Guard Cutter just offshore, the girls sat, one of each knee, with their tiny arms wrapped tightly around me, their rabbit and each other.

