

UNPUZZLED

BOMB

A Jigsaw Puzzle Thriller

Read the story, complete the puzzle and interrupt the bomb. Can you find the culprit?

Story by R. D. Zimmerman



"**T**he bomb is set to go off in exactly twenty-three minutes. The Russian exhibit will be destroyed and everyone in the museum will be killed."

Security specialist Tyler Williams heard the terse message over the phone but couldn't believe it. The Museum had hired him specifically because the Soviet exhibit touring the United States had already received such a threat. This time, though, it appeared to be the real thing. Not only would any damage be an international incident, it would also be a tragic loss. On display were priceless icons, ancient carvings, embroidery, silver, and gold.

"What do you want?" asked Tyler. "Who are you?"

Just keep them on the line, thought the tall, lean man as he leaned across the desk and switched on a tape recorder. Then, instead of a voice over the phone he heard the roar of a car engine. Instinctively, Tyler spun around and surveyed the bank of security monitors.

With a deep scratchy voice the woman said, "We only want to cause destruction."

On the top left television he saw a big red car pulling out of a space in the museum's garage. Tyler took a closer look and in the background saw the figure of a woman in a leather coat and jeans. Her black hair was wild and mangy, she was huddled over something. Yes! Wasn't that a pay phone?

"Perhaps we can make a deal," began Tyler. "Maybe we can give you what you want. Can we meet?"

Over the telephone line he heard the ring of an elevator and the voices of people. On the monitor he saw a lift arrive and a group of visitors step out. That was the source of the call. The woman on the phone was indeed the terrorist.

"The bomb's set! It's already too late!" she shouted as she slammed down the receiver.

No, it's not, thought Tyler. Not yet.

His dark eyes scanned the screen one last time and saw the woman duck into the stairwell. By his calculation there were less than twenty-two minutes left. With any luck, they'd at least be able to empty the building.

Williams charged out of his office, into the main security room that was filled simply with a few desks and a couch. The three guards lounging about and drinking coffee hadn't expected anything but a normal day.

Not stopping, Williams shouted, "There's a bomb! Get everyone out of the building!"

He left them in panic and headed into the corridor. Turning left, he nearly smashed into the Soviet security director, Ilya Rodsky, and his burly assistant.

"What is it?" asked Rodsky, sensing the danger.

"Another bomb threat. I think it's for real this time — we've only got twenty

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minutes," said Tyler, not stopping. "I saw a suspect on one of the monitors."

Rodsky — tall and tanned as if he'd just come from the Riviera — went pale. He shouted in Russian at the other man, who darted back toward the exhibit.

"I'm coming with you," said Rodsky, who spoke perfect English.

"Suit yourself," said Tyler.

The two men by no means worked well together, and had encountered one conflict after another. Williams, for his part, found the Russian simply too skeptical and always desirous of tighter control.

"Who are we looking for?" asked Rodsky.

"A woman...dark hair, leather jacket. She was up on the fifth floor of the garage."

The American and the Russian raced down the corridor, past the heating plant and a series of storerooms. Using a passkey, Williams opened a door into the lower level of the garage. They took off to the left, toward the concrete stairwell.

"Is this typical American hospitality?" asked the Russian. "Or is this some plot to ruin the success of our exhibit?"

"You might never know," shouted Williams as he ran. "Just like I might never know if this is a Soviet ploy — you know, to use back home as propaganda."

Tyler threw open the metal door and the two men bound up a flight and a half of stairs. Bursting out, they saw nothing but parked cars.

Then Rodsky spotted a figure huddled behind some cars. "Look!"

The dark-haired woman burst from the shadows and toward the entrance, where a stream of cars were pulling in. Another twenty feet and she'd be past them and on the sidewalk.

"That's her!" said Williams, racing on.

The woman — carrying a black bag — looked back, saw them, and hurried faster. She ducked around a car that had stopped at the gate and dashed outside. Immediately she smashed into a man and woman, knocking them both over.

Within seconds, Williams and Rodsky were out on the sidewalk, where a flood of people from the museum was now pouring. The Russian and the American pushed through the crowd, but lost the woman. Desperate, Williams turned from side to side.

"Over there!"

He spotted the mass of dark hair, then saw a brown van roar to a start down the street. Wasting not a moment, the woman bolted across the busy street.

"Hurry, Tyler!" cried the Russian.

Williams used every muscle he could as he charged into the traffic. Dodging a truck, he began to doubt his chances of catching her. Yet he had to. With her in custody there might still be a way to stop the bomb and save the exhibit.

Suddenly the woman glanced over her shoulder, her eyes big and dark. As she did, though, she failed to see the small blue sports car racing down the street. A horn screamed. Brakes screeched. The woman jumped yet was unable to save herself. The car clipped her left leg and sent her tumbling to the pavement.

"Come on, Rodsky!" shouted Williams, hoping they could apprehend her now.

The van was faster, however. The woman pulled herself up and hobbled on one leg as the side of the brown vehicle was thrown open. The van barely slowed as a man reached out, grabbed the woman, and pulled her in. With the woman's legs dangling out the open door, the vehicle sped off.

The air burning in and out of his lungs, Williams ran onward and focussed on the

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license plate. As he slowed, he seared the number into his mind.

Then Rodsky saw it: a black purse lying in the street.

"Look, she must have dropped it when she was hit," said the Russian.

"Right."

Rodsky scooped up the bag, and the two men returned to the sidewalk. Later they might be able to identify the terrorists, but for now they needed a clue — something, anything — that would point out the bomb's location. Tearing open the purse, Williams couldn't believe their luck.

"It's a map," he said.

Rather, it was a blueprint of the hall and exhibit, indicating the floor plan and displays. Written across it were a series of numbers and letters.

"It's all in code," said Williams. "These must have been her instructions where to place the bomb."

"Come on," said Rodsky, heading toward the museum. "My specialty is decoding."

Williams glanced at his watch. Less than ten minutes left.

"Yeah, well, let's hope I'm a specialist at defusing bombs."

The Russian Folk Art Exhibit was enormously popular, and now thousands of people were being herded out of the museum. With some difficulty, Williams and Rodsky cut through the crowd, up the stone steps, and into the large building.

Hurrying through the now empty corridors, they made their way past the permanent installations to the hall that housed the Russian exhibit. Immediately to the left of the entrance was a display of gold and silver sheathed icons while straight ahead was a display of brass and silver samovars.

Williams laid the map out on a plexiglass display case. While each area of the exhibit was carefully drawn out, a series of random letters and numbers was penciled over the whole map. At once Williams assumed this to be a sophisticated group of terrorists. The leader, who was perhaps unknown to all, probably issued his orders in code.

"The icons are here," said Williams, getting his bearings on the picture.

"*Da, da.* That's it! And here are the contemporary crafts." The Russian rubbed his broad forehead. "They know our exhibit perfectly."

"Yes," said Williams, a chill running up his spine.

Precious minutes flew by as the two men struggled to pull words out of random numbers and letters. They came up with a variety of sounds, yet nothing made sense.

Tyler Williams glanced at his watch. Four minutes remaining. He and Rodsky, though, wouldn't leave till the last possible minute.

"Hey, look at this," said the American.

The Russian grinned, "*Da, da.* That's it! That's the beginning of the code." He laughed. "And here. Here's the rest that tells where the bomb is hidden!"

Williams dashed across the room. Now if there was only enough time to defuse the device!

WHERE WAS THE BOMB HIDDEN?

NOTE: Puzzle illustration different than cover.

THE SOLUTION:

Every third letter in the code began to spell out complete words. Piecing this together, Williams and Rodsky decoded the location of the bomb: BEHIND KREMLIN.

Not wasting a moment, they rushed to the wooden replica of the Kremlin. Hidden beneath the display so that it seemed part of the exhibit, they found an explosive device attached to a timer. With less than a minute before detonation, Tyler carefully unscrewed a red wire and neutralized the bomb.

"Wonderful!" Wonderful, shouted the Russian, unable to hide his relief. Their work, however, was not yet finished. Using the contents of the woman's bag and tracing the license plate of the van, Williams and Rodsky later led the FBI to the terrorists. It was learned that the group was neither Russian nor American, but from a third country determined to destroy international diplomacy.

To celebrate their success, Tyler Williams and Ilya Rodsky went out for burgers and vodka.