

RADIATION Angels



THE KEY TO DAMOCLES

By James Daniel Ross

Novel/Ebook and Softcover
published through Mundania.com
ISBN-13: 978-1-59426-452-8

King joined me, dumping his half-full magazine and loading his last full one into the weapon's well. Then Doe's voice came like an answer from God. "Party's over, people. I am at the roof; the time to evac is now, everybody out of the pool."

King shrugged. "Permission to get the *frag* out of here before he finds another way to say hurry up, Captain?"

"Granted." I smiled, and while I could smell the burnt skin on my face, I couldn't feel anything except for dull pain deep in the bone. For the record: that's bad. I smiled anyway. "Everyone: get onboard the *Succubus*."

King sent another short burst downstairs, and we ran up the last flight three steps at a time. We reached the roof, and even through my helmet I could feel the angry howl of our dropship's engines. Figures made tiny by comparison, the rest of the *Angels* were piling onto the ship through the wide fast-loading doors in the side.

Logan stood beside the ship, uncharacteristically tense. "Captain?"

"What the *frag* are you doing? Get on that ship, Master Sergeant."

"But, Captain—"

King and I spun at the door, peppering the landing below to keep heads down. "Master Sergeant, your leg has been *mudraked*. It's going to take you thirty seconds to hobble aboard. We will just jump aboard once everyone is clear."

"I can't leave you, Captain."

"Logan, get in that goddamned ship."

There were three seconds of silence between us. "Understood, Captain."

Logan turned and radioed *The Succubus*. "Two tons coming aboard on the port side, Pilot, make room."

I had to spin back to the door and spend the rest of the magazine in insurance. I dropped the empty pistol and pulled out my rifle. "King: Time to go."

"No arguments, Captain."

We sprinted for the dropship as Logan finally managed to struggle inside. We were almost there when a few, stray blasts slapped the roof around us. I ordered King to keep running, and I turned and dumped an entire magazine, leaning into the rifle to control recoil. The A2R-91 drew little circles across the doorway, snapping into the darkness with deadly intent. I reloaded and began running for *The Succubus*, hoping that in a second or two Doe could use the ship's weapons to cover the door—

Doe screamed over the comm, "I've got incoming! Abort! Abort!"

What the-? The engines of *The Succubus* revved and the ship leapt off of the roof, Logan bodily hauling King into the ship. In the distance, a small dot was getting larger with every second. My HUD automatically zoomed in to focus on the PISs flier. Ship weapons, the smallest of which dwarfed anything carried by the team, lit up. In between the dot and my dropship, dark clouds exploded in midair, marking the end of a dozen incoming missiles. *The Succubus* dove between the buildings and out of sight, decoy rockets flying in all directions, seeking to lead enemy fire astray.

More beams of coherent light struck the building around me, and I dove behind a large air-conditioning unit. *I hope that this thing is real instead of some kind of prop.*

A second later, beams began punching through the cheap sheet metal as if it wasn't there. I swore viciously inside my head and leaned out to direct fire back at the bastards coming out onto the roof. One burst caught an Agent in the leg and he went down, howling. I shifted fire as he fell over, sending two more Agents diving for the rocky roof.

Below us, incoming fire from the enemy flier impacted on the building, rocking the entire structure. I was thrown from my feet. I could hear constant chatter over the comm, but it became vague, unimportant as my enemies regained their feet. I came to my knees and lined up my sights on an Agent. Without mercy or hesitation, I swept a line of bullets across him.

The Succubus popped above the roof and unleashed a storm of fire, indirect smart missiles arcing up on a deadly path.

I burned another magazine at my enemies and rolled from one piece of scenery to another. Fire followed me as an exultant triple explosion came from off in the distance. The first was from Doe's missiles hitting the ship, the second from the aeroline tanks going up, and the third from the ammunition. At any second, Doe would bring the Succubus around and-

I emptied out my rifle and reached down for another magazine. My hand found one empty mag pouch, and another...and another. My voice was strangely hollow as I activated my comm. "Rifle out."

All chatter died on the channel as I pulled out my laser pistol, made sure the chamber was charged, and flipped it to fully automatic. I leaned out and let a dozen shots off. Even those that connected with my target simply bounced off the PISs standard issue armor. I ducked back behind my flimsy cover as fresh holes appeared all across it. I dove to the ground and reloaded, painfully aware I only had two spare mags for my damn laser pistol. They were getting closer.

Forget what you see in the mind screen theaters. One man with a pistol taking on four police officers armed with rifles ends only one way. I scrambled at my nearly empty belt for a grenade, a magazine...any handy miracle would be nice. All I came up with was my MercTool. *Well, it's almost big enough...*

I stole a glance and then tossed the MercTool in a high arc, letting everyone see it glint in the sunlight. Men, expecting a grenade, dove for cover as I ran, feet clawing for distance. My ruse bought me thirty meters before they opened fire again, twenty-nine more than I had any right to hope for. Flares of fire and superheated material snapped at my heels. I dove to the turf, skidding to a halt behind another piece of fake scenery. The sound of the cracking light-smashed stone and concrete got louder and louder, the shots homing in on me without pause.

The roof beneath me began to rumble. Then it bucked, tossing me upward to flail in the air like a cat on a trampoline before I slammed

back down. I floundered to my knees and took aim over the metal box but found my enemies replaced with wide smoking craters. *The Succubus* had come back for me.

Unfortunately, a massive amount of firepower had been poured into the top of this abused office building. Made for looks and longevity, no architect could have foreseen it would be hit with weapons meant to crack bunkers and tanks. I stood and ran at my dropship as flames erupted from the roof, turbulent air forcing Doe to take his ship out into open air. I could hear Logan over the comm. "Get lower! I'm going to lean out to get him!"

I was running for my life, every step screaming for life as my hands worked to dump rifle and belts.

Logan's metal and glass eyes would have caught every detail, stripping me bare second by second. My vitals were all over the place. I hit the emergency release for my pack.

Five meters to the edge.

I wrenched my helmet off and tossed it aside. Every gram I shed let me go just a little bit faster, just a little faster.

The Sergeant reached out, causing the dropship to lurch again and come closer to the roof of the office. "We've got to get closer!"

Three meters to the edge.

Logan could read the ragged gasping of my lungs, measure the flow of blood through my organs, he could even detect the flares of chemical pain from the burn in my calf that was slowing me down.

"Captain!" He cried.

One meter.

I did not have the breath to answer.

Logan leaned out further.

Fires converged in the upper floors, weakening supports. Gravity raised her patient hands to the top of the building and pulled. The whole north side began to fall away.

I leapt into the sky.

One heartbeat.

A dark cloud erupted into the sky behind me.

Two heartbeats.

I stared into Logan's metal eyes.

Three...

There are heroes that sprint through their lives. Heroes that dance untouched through gunfire. Heroes that smile with bright, shiny teeth.

This guy is not like that.

The Radiation Angels Novels and Short Stories by James Daniel Ross.