

Killing Ploy "first chapter"

Pablo de Silva crouched behind the stone wall that edged the boulevard and municipal Stadtpark in Zurich's Old Quarter. Still no snatch teams in sight. Worst case, he feared, a CIA no-show, and he'd be forced to pull the trigger. A clean shot across, if he was lucky, whenever Billy Foster reemerged from the Franz Joseph Hotel. No bodyguards bunched close to that American-turned terrorist to hinder his aim. No freezing up either; that humiliating Berlin incident behind him.

A sudden flurry of movement. He relaxed his grip on the long-range gun, wiped his forehead of sweat, peeked above the wall, then froze his gaze, stunned. Still another one? An eighth bodyguard exited the grand hotel's main entrance and trotted down the steps to join the others in front. He scanned for anything threatening before dumping expensive-looking suitcases on the sidewalk next to piles of other luggage stacked high, apparently not caring about the wet, dirty pavement. Eight against one. Jesus, how many more were inside? Pablo felt his hands tremble. He glanced at his wristwatch. 9:38. Nineteen minutes since he had phoned in sighting Foster. Dammit guys, where are you?

The Arabic voices of Foster's men carried in the drizzly chill of the Saturday morning quiet. Some scolded into cell phones. Others paced in circles arguing with each other. All sounded panicky to flee their hideout. No doubt heavily armed to protect their most wanted charge. If he could fire off even one clean shot he had, he guessed, only seconds to clear out before they gave chase, ripping loose with their arsenal of weapons. A safe escape, hopefully.

Eight, maybe more, against one, if those snatch cars didn't show. Block it out, he warned himself. Focus just on your target, which he did, after a bitter ironic thought. The CIA intended to abduct a top jihadist inciter of human bombs just as it had once kidnapped him.