

SLEEPER

part 2

I answered the phone and the familiar voice spoke without introduction.

“Sleeper 178, status change, active! Location-,” he went on to give details of the hotel and the situation, followed by the objective. “Infiltrate and neutralise threat, minimal collateral.” I looked at Jen who was staring straight at me.

“He has to Now. Ha ha,” she said, as I hung up the phone. “Watch this,” she said excitedly, turning to baby mummy “Watch him now!”

I looked up at the TV screen to see Helen’s face once again. She was still sat in the dining room surrounded by other hostages, while breaking news ribbons scrolled below.

“Order me some breakfast,” I said, “I’ll be back shortly.” I turned and walked back the way we had come, past the police who were struggling with a female tourist.

“My husband is in there,” she shouted. The police replied telling her there was no way in. I knew a way in, but I was keeping that to myself.

The gist of my instructions were to bring this to an end quickly without too much fuss. I hadn’t wanted to get involved but now I had no choice. I guess Mr

Bowman had pulled some strings somewhere with one of his drinking buddies at the golf club and now the agency was involved. I can imagine the call,

“of course Mr. Bowman. Yes sir, we have an asset on standby. We will get it done.” People in suits often say “we” but rarely get their hands dirty. This time it was fine by me. I had a couple of scores to settle of my own.

I snuck back into the neighbouring hotel pretending I'd forgotten my passport and quickly moved up the stairs to the room with the balcony. I slipped inside the open door closing it softly behind me. The room was empty and quiet just as we'd left it. I slid open the balcony door and the sounds of the chaos outside poured in. Police sirens howled as radios crackled. I looked across the gap at the neighbouring building, the hotel looked quiet and calm, the opposite of what it should be in peak season giving a menacing feel. Curtains blowing through broken windows finished off the look.

I hopped across the gap between balconies to the corner room and moved passed the broken screen onto the balcony of room 402. Sliding open the window I took a look around the room which was also exactly how we left it. I pushed open the door to the hallway. The opposite door was wide open. Luggage had been abandoned there, some clothing spewing out as if someone had grabbed that favoured position in a hurry.

Peering up and down the corridor everything seemed quiet. I moved out and turned toward the lifts my feet moving quickly but quietly as I felt exposed with no weapon. I arrived at the heavy fire door of the stairs and peered through the wire covered strip of glass. Once again, no movement. I pushed on the door and it creaked open on noisy hinges, the sound echoing in the bare stairwell. This made me wince as I didn't know who may hear it. I closed the door softly behind me and listened for a few minutes as this was a whole new environment.

I began to descend the stairs slowly and quietly listening for movement. The sound of a door banging somewhere below froze me to the spot, but it was a good few floors below. I pressed on arriving at the landing where I had met the baby family earlier. Still sitting there was the extinguisher. I collected it feeling the need to arm myself with more than fists. I descended the next flight of stairs slowly pressing my back against the wall maximising my view around each corner. I paused by the door to the landing of floor 3. My senses tingled as I could hear the sound of someone coming on the other side.

The door flung open to reveal the shorter of the two terrorists I'd seen in the lobby. I sprayed the gas from the extinguisher in his face, he staggered backward letting go of a burst of fire from his rifle. I instinctively dove into a forward roll holding the extinguisher at either end. As I came out of the roll, I flung it in his direction. It contacted his upper body, with a clang. Dust hung in the air as I used my momentum to launch back onto my feet and into a run. I leapt into the air with

both feet and landed a double strike to the chest. Shorty flew backwards slamming into the wall making a hole in the plaster adding debris to the already dust covered floor. I had landed flat on my side in the middle of the hallway. Shorty, regaining his posture, levelled his rifle and fired. I rolled sideways, the bullets missing me by inches. His rifle emptied leaving him defenceless. I was on my feet and over to him in seconds, I grabbed his collar with both hands put a foot in his chest and rolled backward flinging him over my head. We both landed with a large thump though I quickly swung my legs either side of his neck locking my feet. He struggled grabbing at my legs unable to breathe but a few minutes later he went limp.

I rose to my feet and checked him for weapons. His rifle was empty but he had a pistol in his holster, which I took. I popped open the magazine and looked inside. I guessed there were about 6 rounds left. That's when I noticed two hostages hugging each other scared to tears in the doorway of the next room. Shorty must have been taking them the dining room.

"Come," I said, to the man and the woman. "Go up these stairs to room 402 go along the balconies to the next hotel and you are free."

"Thank you," said the man, picking up his wife, "Who are you?" he asked.

"I'm just trying to get to breakfast," I said.

A loud ping snapped my attention back to the lift doors now opening. Someone had heard the noise and was responding. Slamming the magazine back into the pistol I began to run toward the lift aiming the pistol at the doors. As they parted I saw the outline of a terrorist wearing a suicide vest. I began to fire one shot after another directly at the lift as I ran forward. The shots pinged all over the doors. the stunned guy inside hid behind the 18 inches of panel to the side. As the last round fired the top slide of the pistol stayed to the rear. I hurled the pistol at the guy who instinctively put a hand up to protect his face. I dove into the lift. My body slamming into his, both our bodies slamming into the mirror at the back shattering it. He wasn't going to live 7 years and I made my own luck so it didn't matter. Long weapons were now no use at this range. He grabbed at the knife mounted on his chest. I wrapped my arm around the back of his neck and pulled him in close not allowing him the space to draw it. my bicep bulged with strain of absorbing his struggle. A few seconds of eye to eye struggle ensued. A bead of sweat ran down my brow and he began to groan. Feeling he was losing he pushed off the wall using a foot, slamming my back into the control panel. The doors closed and lift began moving downward.

I drew my head back and head butted him on the bridge of the nose. It broke spraying us both in bright red capillary flow. Stunned, he staggered backward. I grabbed his knife with one hand and palmed him hard in the chest with the other. He fell into the wall the knife coming away in my hand. I moved closer knife raised. A couple of frantic moments followed with arms flailing in a desperate fight for

survival, but he just couldn't keep at my pace. finally, the knife came down between his neck and collar bone. He slumped to his knees, it was over. I wiped my face and checked his vest, it appeared to be real explosives but I couldn't find a trigger switch on him anywhere. This again seemed odd.

The doors pinged open at the first floor. I rolled his body out onto the landing. I pressed the button for the lobby and regained my composure. The lift juddered its way to the bottom and came to a halt where the doors slid open with a ping. The noise was obviously heard in the dining room as the gunman from the Beach came wading through. I bent over adopting a submissive stance hands on my head.

"Wait, wait. Don't shoot I'm looking for my wife." He stormed over to me, and I cowered leaning into the role of scared tourist. He grabbed the back of my hair dragging me to my feet and shoved me forwards toward the dining area. I took a couple of steps and felt the poke of the barrel between my shoulders. I stumbled forward a few more steps, hands in the air. I pushed through the doors of the dining room and everything went into slow motion as I surveyed the scene.

I counted 12 hostages sat in the middle of the room but no sign of Helen. The room was large, most of the tables had been shoved aside to clear a gap in the center. To the rear of the hostages, a single terrorist stood holding a rifle pointing toward the window. It would take him a few seconds to turn. It would be enough. Him and the gunman behind me made two, I could see no others. I counted the exits, including the doors we had just come through and the kitchen doors to my right, there were also two fire exits, that's 4 in total. The fire exits appeared locked from the inside so no immediate threat of someone entering. the kitchen doors were the only other main threat. I walked forward slowly, all 12 eyes of the hostages on me. Some looked worried, some were sniveling, while others looked defiant. I studied them as they were the only remaining unknown quantity. I hoped they stayed put and didn't do anything crazy.

I felt the hand of my captor grasp the cloth over my shoulder. His closeness meant I could see his rifle in my peripheral vision, this was his first and last mistake. I looked up at the large clock on the wall each second taking longer and longer to tick by as time slowed. My pulse beat in my ears in time with the second hand punctuating the moment.

I was ready. In a split second my demeanor changed from pathetic victim to supreme predator. I abruptly stopped walking. My captor bumped into me bringing the barrel of his rifle level with my shoulder keeping me out of its range. I threw my arm backward over the hand that gripped my shoulder my elbow striking is chin, twisting my body right. the clock ticked one second. I placed my hand underneath his arm then drove it forward like a punch completing the arm lock and breaking is grip on my shoulder his hand ending in my armpit. The clock ticked again. I continued the movement holding his arm and twisting aggressively. His

free hand still on the rifle fired a shot into the ceiling as I continued the movement throwing my hips into it. I felt his arm snap and he let out a huge cry. The other gunman was already turning and levelling his weapon in our direction. The clock was now at four seconds. I continued turning until I ended up behind my captor. I didn't hesitate to place an arm around his neck in a choke hold. We fell backwards, me landing onto my back with my legs wrapped around his waist in a sick cuddle as I used his body as a shield. The other gunman got off his first round into the floor and his second which hit his buddy in the chest armor testing their friendship. I raised the rifle that was still in the hand of my captor turned captive and helped him pull the trigger. The loud rasp of automatic fire rung out as Gunman two dropped to the floor. My whole concentration switched back to my new cuddling partner as both my arms locked together strengthening the choke hold. A couple of seconds of thrashing legs and he was gone too.

The clock had barely passed the ten second mark and all was quiet. A few hostages had screamed but all of them had just laid flat on the floor. I rose to one knee, making eye contact with a few of them who were trying to work out if I was friend or foe, their fear still freezing them to the spot.

Then I heard the flap of the double doors behind me. The kitchen! I grabbed the rifle that lay by the body at my feet and dove for some cover. The Whizz crack of a bullet striking the ground next to me illustrated the closeness of my situation. I turned to see another suicide vest wearing terrorist. He panicked and fired. Rounds falling everywhere. I stayed calm using an extra second to aim carefully while bullets hit the ground around me, however my focus didn't waver. I fired, my round struck his forehead his body falling back through the double doors proving panic doesn't pay. The doors flapped back toward me Parting just enough for me to fire the weapon again through the gap into the suicide vest. A Huge 'Whoomp' of an explosion shook the building, blowing the kitchen doors clean off. Debris flew everywhere as the hostages screamed and cowered wondering if this new guy was worse than the terrorists.

I rose to my feet as smoke billowed from the kitchen and fire alarms rang. I walked to the nearest fire exit and kicked it open. I looked back at the hostages hugging the floor and shouted.

"Anyone remember a blonde woman in a bath robe?" One guy came over to me.

"They took her out. They have a room at the top of the hotel that's fitted out like a studio. A few of us were taken there to film videos." With that I waved all the hostages to leave through the fire exit.

"Don't run straight out," I said, "there are gunmen on the top floor, keep close to the building and move around to the front. The police will give you instructions from there." They didn't hesitate and poured out of the door. One of the last to leave was an elderly man who paused at my side and squeezed my shoulder.

“I thank the lord, in his wisdom, for creating all of his creatures,” he said, in that preaching tone of a religious man. “even creatures like you.” With that he too was gone through the door.

I closed the door and moved to the dead terrorist that I’d shot by the hostages. He showed the same signs of disguise as tall guy in the lobby, confirming that this was indeed propaganda, just as Helen had said. I collected his rifle an AK47 with folding stock. I removed the magazine drew back the bolt and looked inside. It was clear. I pulled a new magazine from his body armor and placed it on the weapon letting the bolt go forward, putting a round in the chamber. Now armed, I headed to the lobby. At that point I felt a pulse in my pocket and pulled out my phone. The message read:

‘Target update, apprehend. Log in for details’

I didn’t know what this meant yet but I’d yet to see the guy in the white robe or the Asian looking Arnold character. I moved to the small corridor where the dead tall guy had laid earlier but the body was gone. I entered into the catering managers office. The power was off due to the explosion and the computer was useless. I decided to ignore the message and press on to the penthouse.

The lifts no longer worked so I hit the stairs. As I pressed upward I passed a few more guests who must have been hiding when they heard the explosion and thought “shit or bust we are getting out.” I instructed them to leave by the door behind the reception desk and carried on upward.

I cracked open the door to the top floor an inch and peered in, all was quiet. Opening it further I had a view of a small lobby outside the lifts and the large double doors of the penthouse suite. It was the only suite up here and obviously covered some floor space. I moved over to the two huge doors and listened at the door but heard nothing. I tried the handle quietly and the door opened an inch. I moved back bringing the rifle to bare on the crack. With the barrel I pushed it open side stepping in an arc to get a full view inside. Nothing! I moved forward passed the threshold into a short but wide corridor. One door lay either side but were closed. I’d leave them for now as the bigger threat came from the open space to my front. The corridor opened into a large open plan lounge. I moved forward step by step, weapon in the aim, always pointing where I looked. I scanned to the left to an area with sunken seating all empty. Then to the right to a fully stocked bar with stools, all empty again. The room was a kind of L shape to the right and as I moved forward into the space I could see that around the corner was the film set that the man downstairs told me of.

A large black terrorist banner was pinned to the rear wall and in front of it was a camera on a tripod its red light flashing away. Next to that was some lighting equipment and resting on a table was a case laid open full of makeup. Between the banner and the camera was a chair, and tied to that chair with a gag in her mouth

was Helen. As she saw me her eyes widened. I put my fingers to my lips and held up a hand instructing her to wait. I left her there while I moved into the bedroom and then the bathroom, weapon ready clearing each space one at a time. Once done I returned to Helen.

She looked very different from our earlier meeting. She wore a grey pinstriped skirt suit and high heels. Her hair was neatly tied up and she had fresh makeup on that didn't quite cover a new bruise. She looked professional and elegant. Dressed for the propaganda I thought. I moved directly toward her and untied her arms though the chord was barley tight. I pulled the gag down and she looked at me puzzled.

"Dan?" she quizzed.

"It's OK I'll explain later, let's get out of here first. Have you seen anymore Gunmen?"

"Err no, I've been tied up here for a while, it's been quiet. Everyone rushed out when that bomb went off." I picked up the rifle and began to look round the room.

"Is there another way out of here except the front doors?" I asked, as I poked my head in and out of dark spaces. "Hellen?" I repeated. No answer! I froze on the spot. I'm not sure if it was a lack of her reply or some sixth sense. Maybe it was that I could feel that she hadn't followed me. Or it could have been my brain catching up that the knots that tied her hands were not really tied properly. I turned slowly to stare directly down the barrel of a silver 44 revolver. Helens outstretched arm with a dangling bracelet, and the painted nail of her finger wrapped around the trigger.

"Drop the rifle Dan," she ordered. With that the front door burst open and in stomped the White robed guy and another terrorist in a black one piece and red skull cap. She waved the pistol as an instruction for them to take hold of me. They complied removing my weapon. Suddenly it occurred to me what must have been in that target update message. Helen was involved somehow and someone wanted to question her about it.

"So this is all you," I said, nodding at the camera, the lights and the makeup. "What about white robe over there and Stanford holdings?" she laughed out loud.

"I am Stanford holdings dear, and he works for me, they all do," she bragged. If it were not for my father, that silly old sentimental fool I'd own a lot more than that. My mother never loved him anyway. She married a meal ticket, that's all. Cleaver woman," she said, touching her cheek with the pistol as if in thought. "and now she has left it down to me to finish the job."

"I don't understand?" I said

"You don't need too," she replied, "Now, enough of these theatrics," she said, wiping the fake bruise from her face, "My alibi is complete, so let's have us a real execution." She motioned the two men to drag me over to the chair and assume

their positions either side of me in a classic terrorist propaganda scene. Both had automatic weapons and Helen's revolver meant I was more than outgunned. Helen strutted around holding her pistol.

"Tear his shirt," she ordered. The men complied leaving me topless. "Shame, she continued, running her hand across my chest and up to my chin where she pulled my face her way and kissed my cheek. "We could use some decent muscle around here." with that she put the red sole of her high heel shoe on my chest and gave me a shove toppling my chair back ward. She moved closer and stood one foot on my chest and levelled the pistol at me. She knew this exposed her underwear but she was obviously enjoying using her sexuality as power.

"I'm impressed," I said, motioning at her holding the pistol trained on me. "Doing your own dirty work." She aimed the pistol at me and softly mouthed the words pow.

"Don't be silly darling," she said, instantly snapping back to a professional cold exterior. She had played out her little fantasy of being the bad guy. "do you know how much these shoes cost." She nodded at one piece who took her place standing over me as she moved behind the camera laying her pistol down on one of the silver cases by the tripod in order to work the controls.

As I lay there on the floor, I felt a dull object digging into my bum cheek. I smiled, it was the folding knife that I took from the tall dead guy. with that one piece grabbed my hair dragging me to my knees my arms to the rear, positioning himself to my left while white robe took up position to my right. He was holding his rifle in a pose with the barrel at 45 degrees pointing at the ceiling. One piece drew out a large machete and held it by my neck and they both looked at the camera.

"Any last words?" asked Helen, in a patronising manor.

"Yes," I said, looking at one piece and white robe in turn. "Put down your weapons and leave the room and I'll let you live, either way she'd coming with me."

"OK get on with it," ordered Helen.

I breathed deeply to prepare my muscles. I focused on the situation: both terrorists, their weapons, the machete, then Helen and the pistol. I calmed myself for what was to come. While talking, I had slid the knife out of my back pocket and pushed open the blade with my thumb. I was holding it in my hand with the blade concealed behind my wrist. The new terrorist in the one piece overall began to raise the Machete above his head as they both chanted some religious rubbish, I guess was to sell it to the viewers. I let the knife slide into my hand grasping the handle, the blade protruding from behind my little finger. In a swift movement I stabbed at the closest part of 'white robe' plunging the knife deep into the back of his thy just above the knee. He wailed in pain. Without a pause I reached up and grabbed

the guy in the one piece by the collar with both hands leaning backward and lifting my feet from the ground. With my full weight hanging from his torso he toppled forwards not able to take a step. The machete arm went over my shoulder, his elbow connecting with my neck bringing the chop harmlessly to an end. We both barreled into the camera tripod. which fell backward striking Helen in the face. She fell to the floor losing one of her expensive shoes in the process. It felt good to wipe away her smug face but more importantly it separated her from her pistol. The pistol was now my main focus grabbing it with my free hand and pressing into 'one piece's' arm pit as we rolled on the floor. The weapon fired and his struggle was over. I turned and aimed at Mr. white robe who now looked more like a Japanese flag with a large red patch. Two more shots from the hefty 44 and I had just given them an alternative ending to this movie. I rose to my feet and walked toward Helen.

A Loud crash to my right captured my whole attention as 'Asian Arnold' burst through the doors. I began to turn to bring the pistol to bare, but he was too fast. He ran at me screaming aggressively. Before I could get a round off he hit me full force and we slammed into the French windows shattering them and crashing onto Hellen's private roof top patio. We rolled over twice and plunged into her infinity pool in a struggle to the death. I lost the pistol somewhere in the struggle, holding onto anything I could find. Hands grasping at clothes, hair, facial features, anything to get an upper hand while my lungs burned through lack of oxygen. I felt his hand on my cheek so a Bit down hard on it. He let out a garbled underwater scream as the pool blurred with a small amount of blood. We parted and I made for the surface bursting out, gasping for air. I clambered to the side and dragged myself out rolling onto the patio.

I looked over to Arnold clambering from the other side of the pool looking pissed off. His fake beard now gone and his skin colour washed off I could see the real man. He looked like a typical western mercenary. Muscular, tattooed and cropped hair like GI Joe. He took off the jacket full of pockets and dumped it in the pool. Through the shimmering surface I could see the shape of both his rifle and Helens Pistol on the bottom. I looked back at GI joe who was wrapping a handkerchief around his bite mark and tying it off.

"So Let's dance," he said, in his American accent. We tiptoed around the small pool for a couple of seconds weighing each other up until we were in striking range. He launched first with a volley of huge punches that I simply stepped back and ducked under or slapped out of my way. He had now closed the gap on me fully so he lunged forward and we both fell in through the same hole in the French doors we had previously made. Raising to our feet, he reached into his boot and drew a knife. I stepped backward as he took a swipe but missed. I stepped back again but felt a counter behind me and reached around my hand searching for anything I

could use as a weapon. I picked up a glossy women's fashion magazine and rolled it onto a tube.

GI thrust his knife forward and I struck the top of his hand with the magazine blocking the action. His eyes widened and he came at me with a flurry of slashes. I side stepped, ducked and struck him with the paper again. This frustrated him. The next flurry was more determined but I ducked, tapped, and slapped him again changing grip on the magazine so I could jab it in his breast bone, he staggered backward unable to make sense of how a piece of roiled up paper was beating him. On the next stab I side stepped and circled the magazine around his wrist grabbing with both hands and pulling down against his joint, he groaned and dropped the knife. I punched directly at his face causing him to stagger backwards. With no hesitation I followed with a roundhouse kick to the outside of his knee. His knee buckled so I kicked him again square in the chest. He fell backwards crashing into a table breaking it into pieces. I walked towards him as he rose to his feet blood now dripping from his mouth but with a table leg in his hands. I dropped my magazine and looked around for something better. He swung a couple of huge blows at me but I leant back only giving him clean air. The swoosh of the table leg was way too close for comfort as my back touched the wall. He swung again this time top down, I rolled to the side into the curtains, the table leg missing me by inches. I fumbled in the curtains and pulled off a small piece of gold rope used to hold them back with tassels on the end.

I pushed off the wall circling him with the rope wrapped round each hand, and half a meter span stretched between them. He swung again and I opened my hands so the rope caught the leg mid-way along the span. I span a quick 360 degrees crossing my hands and dropping to one knee which wrapped the rope around the table leg and pulled it to the floor. As it dropped his head came forward so I punched it with both hands, rope and all. He staggered backward so I wrapped the rope around his neck effectively tying his hands and the table leg to his face. I then circled behind him and yanked down hard on the rope sending him crashing to the floor. I placed a foot on the side of his head and pulled on the rope until he stopped fighting.

It was over. I dropped the ends of the rope and scanned the room. Helen had fled. I moved over to the camera and ejected the memory card. I'm fairly sure it contained her confession as the red light had been on the whole time. I picked my way over broken glass and out of the broken door to the small lobby. The lifts were still out of order so I descended the stairs to the reception and made my way out through the staff entrance.

Outside there was a media frenzy, flashing lights and cameras were everywhere. In the center of it was Helen. They were all asking her how she had escaped and how she felt being captured, as police poured into the hotel. As cool as cucumber

she played the part of the victim perfectly. Something caught her attention as she paused to glance at me. She smiled with a smug look on her face that said no one would believe me and she's too powerful to be touched. She turned back to the camera.

"I'd like to thank my father for sending these brave men to rescue me from these despicable extremists. This place is very special to me and I will ensure our company invests what is needed to make it thrive." Make it thrive with high rises I thought, unbelievable! I put my head down and slipped into the crowd.

To the rear of the bunch of reporters I found a small woman with a press badge trying desperately to get her camera over the shoulders of the others.

"Here," I said, giving her the memory card. "This is a full confession from the bad guys." The woman stared at it, then at me. Without saying a word, she ran off to a waiting van that lurched away from the curb. I looked back at Helen wondering how long her smug face would last.

I walked back to Jenny who beamed with excitement when she saw me.

"What happened to your shirt babe" she asked.

"Work hazard," I said

"Where's Helen?" she asked.

"Oh she's got some things to work out," I said. Jen looked over at the media hustle and then back at me.

"Thank you," she said, and kissed me. The kiss was interrupted by the phone ringing once more. I answered.

"It's done," I said, not waiting for a reply and tossed the phone in the bin. I turned to Jen "how about we get that breakfast and then start this holiday." Jen threw her arms around me and I lifted her from her feet. We kissed again and walked away leaving the chaos behind.

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