

## CHAPTER 2

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### ENEMIES

*New York's Financial District  
Summer, 2012*

The prince said, "I hope this won't take all day."

Wearing an immaculately tailored silk business suit and an unaffected air of superiority, second in line to lead one of the twelve richest countries on earth, his tone made it quite clear that he felt he had better things to do than negotiate a trade agreement that could easily make his country the tenth richest.

The seven other men who shared the large quiet elevator with the prince decided staring away from him and remaining silent was their best response. Only Edgar Treeves felt it was correct to speak.

"If my opinion may be of any value to your highness, I can assure you, with a great deal of certainty, you won't be inconvenienced for very long."

As he spoke, Treeves alerted a man standing behind him that they were entering a situation where they'd be fighting for their lives. He stretched his neck by turning it slightly to his right. Anyone who had noticed the movement would have thought that he was feeling a bit tense before the impending negotiations.

However, with that small motion, Treeves made sure his Weapon was ready to be used.

Time understood the signal as clearly as if Treeves had turned and shouted at him. Soon, the tasteful décor and hushed conversations in the luxurious law offices of Lang & Ellsworth would not set the tone. An irreversible act was about to shatter the day-to-day business calm. The people on the twentieth floor, several who had just completed a short pleasant walk from Wall Street's life-sized bronze statue of a bull, were minutes away from a dramatic change in their plans. At least one person near Time was about to be killed.

Time didn't speculate about who was fated to die. To guess would be a dangerous waste of his concentration. Time was like a man engrossed in a book, except that he was reading Edgar Treeves.

The heavy elevator doors opened and the prince's lead bodyguard stepped out.

As he followed him, the prince remarked, "I don't care for offices. Can you imagine having to work while simultaneously being forced to deal with other people all the time?"

The men surrounding the prince didn't seem to appreciate the irony of his remark, even though as well-trained bodyguards, they were constantly forced to interact with each other and almost everyone around them.

However, Time, at the rear of the entourage, imagined Treeves might allow himself the subtlest of smiles. Although it was not relevant to their current mission, Treeves appreciated everything about human behavior on one level or another.

As Time stepped from the elevator, he tested his footing on the expensive carpet. His shoes had been custom made to provide maximum traction and control on a variety of surfaces, but he automatically checked any critical factor that might impact his abilities. He continued to watch the tall frail Edgar Treeves, waiting for the subtle indicators that would tell him which people in the operations area would remain civilians and who would become his targets.

Time adjusted his breathing. He calculated distances and listened for sounds as soft as deep breaths. He had shifted into predator mode.

Directly to the left of the elevator, an attractive floor receptionist stood as the prince entered. As instructed, she bowed slightly without speaking. The prince acknowledged her with a subtle nod.

As Time passed by her, she smiled warmly at him and he smiled back. It crossed his mind that, despite her slightly flirtatious greeting, soon she could be labeled one of his targets. It had been deeply ingrained in him that the moment Edgar Treeves identified a target, that individual was no longer to be considered a human being. Rather, targets were only walking talking collections of opportunities for Time to neutralize them the instant Treeves signaled him to do so.

Time knew that multi-opponent close-order combat was chaos. A random shot or a knife scoring a few centimeters to the left or right could decide the outcome. No one had control over luck or destiny. Therefore, he focused on variables that would provide him with the edge he needed to eliminate targets as quickly as possible with a minimal amount of collateral damage.

The most important variable was Edgar Treeves. When the moment arrived to make the key decisions of who should go down and in what order, it was Treeves who gave him that vital information.

There were hundreds of silent signals Treeves could convey to Time in one way or another. They were separated into categories, some requiring patience, others instantaneous reaction.

The two of them had practiced for countless hours. Once they were certain a signal was clear, they practiced it again a hundred times.

If a person unexpectedly and quickly moves their hand towards another's face, even in a gesture of affection, the object of the movement will instinctively pull away. The level of silent communication that existed between Treeves and Time was similar to such a natural reaction.

Elio, the prince's chief of security, remained close to his employer's right elbow. His gaze buzzed like a fly over everyone within twenty feet. Treeves was on the prince's left and didn't appear to be overly interested in anyone or anything.

The prince's entourage calmly approached Charles Lang, the senior partner responsible for the most important decisions regarding the firm's direction. He waited patiently near the entrance to his luxurious office with a welcoming expression.

Lang did not feel it was wise or necessary to be obsequious. Although he was hosting royalty, he felt just as powerful in his own kingdom. Surrounding Lang, in ten slightly less-imposing workspaces, five on either side of his office, his attorneys were converting words of specificity into piles of money.

Lang's partner, Carlin Ellsworth, had died four years earlier. However his distinguished career warranted keeping his name on the door. Their partnership agreement kept Ellsworth's daughter, Beth, impatiently waiting to be made a full partner. She occupied the office directly to Lang's right.

Lang's political connections, forged over many years, made him invaluable to those who needed the services of an attorney who could navigate the details of an international trade agreement that required an intricate blend of corporate cooperation and government approval.

In addition to someone with Lang's experience, it was equally essential to employ the services of a Corporate Diplomatic Liaison. A CDL was tasked with impartially smoothing over rough patches that inevitably arose during complicated negotiations.

Every party involved in the current negotiation had no doubt Edgar Treeves was one of the finest Corporate Diplomatic Liaison available. Although he possessed more than the necessary skill set, Treeves was not a CDL. He was a ghost. A man whose identity was so deeply buried, it was possible to stamp detailed personal histories and high-level credentials onto him at will. Treeves played any role a situation required. Afterwards, the identity he had assumed simply vanished. During a mission, his physical appearance was often disguised in some manner. However, that was almost unnecessary. People with unacceptable intentions who found themselves interacting with Edgar Treeves either wound up dead or unable to recognize him in the unlikely event they ever saw him again.

Time moved closer to the rear of the prince's entourage. They passed around a group of plush sofas that encircled a large sculpture in the center of the room, complete with a waterfall of recycled water that fell in gentle sheets into a pool containing *Koi*. If the surface of their world was

disturbed, the fish exploded into a swirling canvas of movement and color. For anyone idiotic to consider doing so, a tastefully placed small sign, written in the type of gold lettering found on expensive wedding invitations, read: *Please do not feed the fish or throw coins into the fountain.*

The bottom of the pool was littered with coins, proving that wealth often had little effect on traits such as cleverness or consideration.

Various clients, employees, and supplicants were scattered on and around the sofas. They had exited or were waiting to enter one of the soundproof offices on the circular edges of the reception area. There was no way to know what transpired inside the offices once their doors clicked quietly shut.

A security guard stood next to the receptionist's desk. He had the height and weight of a college football player beginning a descent into seed. Time noted that Lang, perhaps because of his prestigious location and strong electronic surveillance system, didn't seem overly concerned about the capabilities of his security personnel.

As the guard nervously shifted his weight from right foot to left and back again, an expandable baton jiggled in a Velcro holster strapped to his thigh. A Glock 21 rested in a holster on his right hip. A strap over the top of the handgun was snapped closed.

Handguns were not Time's specialty. However, as a professional, it had vaguely annoyed him to see such an excellent weapon treated so foolishly. He mused that perhaps the Glock was snapped into the holster in case the guard chose to break into a few jumping jacks to remove some of the extra weight he carried around his middle. Any serious opponent could have killed or disabled the guard nine different ways in the time it would have taken him to raise the Glock into a position where it would be useful.

On the other hand, the security detail that surrounded the prince was made up of five very serious men. Elio, the man in charge, walked in lock step at the prince's elbow. He had placed the most capable bodyguard two steps in front of the prince. Three other members of the security team and the prince's personal assistant followed, all of them only one or two steps behind. Once they reached Lang's office, three members of the team were to secure the entrance. Elio, who never left the prince's side, and the prince's personal assistant were the only subordinates who would be allowed to enter the soundproof comfort of Lang's inner sanctum along with Treeves, Lang, and the prince.

Treeves had not given him further instructions so Time simply watched as Elio suddenly quickened his step. He halted next to the bodyguard directly in front of the prince and, in one swift motion, slit the man's throat.

It was neatly done, nothing dramatic about it at all. With a gurgling sound and a spray of blood, the bodyguard raised his hands to the expanding wound, turned to Elio with a puzzled expression and collapsed. He shook for a short time, desperate to draw air through his own blood.

Two other members of the security team, a few paces behind, drew twenty-two caliber automatics, and placed them against the heads of the prince's assistant and his last loyal bodyguard, and pulled the triggers. The small metal projectiles entered the victims' skulls, but lacked the force to exit. They rattled around in brain matter until they were still.

As intended, the sound of pistol fire caused waves of fear and confusion to crash upon the reception area. People rushed from offices only to bump into those who were trying to get as far away from the gunmen as possible.

Time stood his ground, appearing surprised and shocked, although he felt neither emotion. He'd witnessed violence much more swift and brutal. His focus remained upon Treeves.

Lang was awash in blood from the bodyguard's throat. He rubbed his hands from the top of his chest to his groin and said, "My God."

From his tone, it wasn't entirely clear if he was bemoaning the fate of the man lying on his carpet or his own custom-made pinstriped suit.

Time was certain he could kill Elio and his two men where they stood without much risk. He had already choreographed the most effective movements in his mind, but Treeves had not given him elimination orders. Three directives were seared into Time's personality profile. Protect Edgar Treeves at all cost, clearly communicate with him without detection, and follow his orders

without question or hesitation. These simple directives had saved his life in many previous operations they had become ingrained into Time's survival instinct.

Treeves had scanned everyone on the floor the moment he stepped from the elevator. He weighed indicators that increased the probability they would become targets. Naturally, he'd known about Elio and his men long before the entourage had entered the building. He quickly tagged two others in the reception area. Moments after the sound of the gunfire faded away, his choices made them themselves obvious to everyone.

The secretary seated outside of Beth Ellsworth's office rose and quickly moved towards Elio and his men. The young guard by the elevator managed to free his Glock and, rather than pointing it at the gunmen, began waving it randomly over the heads of the terrified crowd. These two were sleepers. They had passed many ordinary days waiting to show themselves as more than faces in the crowd.

By slightly moving his right foot, Time signaled, "*Instructions?*"

"*Hold position,*" Treeves responded.

With a fluidity that comes with countless hours of practice, the men who had fired the pistols put them away, trading them for Russian PP-90 submachine guns. The PP-90 was manufactured specifically for protection details and covert ops. It combined compact size with excellent firepower. Capable of firing seven hundred rounds per minute, it featured a large ejection port to prevent jamming and folded up to the size of a socket wrench box.

The prince stared at the leaking throat of his close body man with a grim expression. However, he said nothing, simply moving his feet slightly backwards to avoid having his shoes stained by the expanding puddle of blood. He had a reputation as a tough character. Having survived his nation's violent internal conflicts, he was no stranger to bloodshed.

Treeves moved closer to him. It was natural for a Corporate Diplomatic Liaison to remain calm in any situation, regardless of how unpleasant or stressful. It was one of the reasons CDLs were traditionally compensated with one fifth of one percent of the first two years gross profit from successful negotiations. Treeves knew a CDL would likely believe that he was not in any immanent danger. Terrorism has morphed from a political weapon to a religious struggle to an international business. There was a great deal of money to be made by anyone who had a talent for it. A good CDL, especially one who could be convinced to work for bargain-basement prices in exchange for his life, was invaluable.

The targets moved the hostages towards the center of the room near the fountain, herding them together, facing away Lang's office.

The guard shouted at the terrified receptionist to lock the elevator. The volume of his demand was excessive. Time saw the secretary and Elio exchange glances, but they did nothing to restrain him. When dealing with hostages at the outset, having a member of your team display an acceptable level of frenzy was a good tactic.

Time watched as Elio hustled Lang, Treeves, and the prince into Lang's office. He was uncomfortable whenever Treeves was out of his sight, but he wasn't overly concerned. Treeves had told him to take no action. He also knew that somehow Treeves had already formulated a plan to bring Time into Lang's office.

While he waited, Time assessed the strengths and weaknesses of his targets. The secretary had been given one of the twenty-two caliber automatics. It was clear she knew how to use it. Time also noted how the guard handled the Glock. It was equally apparent that he hadn't been thoroughly trained with it and hadn't practiced enough to employ it effectively. He might terrify civilians, but against Time, the guard would have an equal chance of survival armed with a toy pistol.

As the guard attempted to maintain the appearance of a forceful man in control, he gave the impression he was, in fact, jittery and unfocused. The powerful emotions of a fanatic didn't radiate from him. It was no longer necessary to recruit fanatics to a cause. As with all modern human conflict, it was capital that fueled the machine. A significant segment of the current generation was not too bright, but they had embraced a philosophy with greed at its core. Quick large paydays and high adventure seemed like shiny coins compared to the heavy leaden slugs of small tax-ridden checks from jobs at outlet malls.

For the briefest moment, Time thought it a shame that the guard had made such a bad choice so early in life. Soon, he wouldn't be making any more choices. Then, he put those thoughts away. Time did not hold onto regrets regarding what he had done or what he was about to do. If his targets had the slightest suspicion what he was, they would do their best to kill him as quickly as possible. Killing them before they came to that realization was simply self defense.

Later, if there was a later for him, he might remember faces and the things that he had done. Fortunately, he was well supplied with experts trained to make sure that those memories didn't keep him awake late into the night.

Time's current identity was Dr. James Warren, a major in the United States Army. On the day the prince's entourage arrived in New York, his personal physician had left their Manhattan hotel for a quick visit with a colleague. He suffered a shattered arm and ankle when a careless bicycle messenger crashed into him and then immediately disappeared. As the doctor was rushed to the area's finest hospital, the United States President telephoned the prince to apologize.

He insisted that he would immediately assign a member of his personal medical staff as a replacement to remain with the prince at all times during his stay in America. It would have been an unthinkable insult to refuse.

Time was not a doctor. However, as a trained and experienced battlefield medic, he could put on a good show if the situation demanded it. In the event of an emergency requiring an actual physician, a top-notch substitute, who had been provided with an excellent explanation regarding a medical specialty, was prepared to step in on a moment's notice.

Even in that eventuality, Time's current identity, as false as the one Edgar Treeves currently inhabited, was unbreakable. But in Time's case, because he didn't possess the morphing skills of Edgar Treeves, his athletic frame needed to inhabit a more suitable skin.

Thousands of people disappeared from the face of the earth every day. Many of them had no friends or close family who cared enough to try and locate them.

Their absence might be noticed for a short time.

Neighbors might say, "Hey, have you seen that guy who lives upstairs recently? He must have taken a vacation or something."

However, after a short time, the speculation stopped. Concerned with the ups and downs of their own lives, the man upstairs left no imprint in the memory of anyone who had been vaguely aware of him.

General Martin Tresain employed two invaluable tools to provide identities for Time. His orders allowed him to stealthily tap into the computers of intelligence agencies all over the world. By combining and sorting their information, he maintained a single private and comprehensive database of almost every man on earth who was a reasonable physical match for Time.

In addition, he was fortunate enough to have the services of a young computer genius with neither the temperament nor the poor judgment to be indiscreet. The programmer was not particularly curious as to why he was asked to create a program that output personality profiles based on parameters provided by an unknown source. Men of notable accomplishment, close families, or gregarious personalities were tagged as unsuitable. Only profiles of men who possessed specific traits and relationships were provided to Dr. Edgar Treeves for evaluation.

One candidate that drew Treeves' attention was a young cadet, two months shy of graduation from West Point.

Name: James Warren;  
Religious Affiliation: Atheist;  
Significant Family: Father (Factor==1);  
Significant Relationships: (Factor==2);  
Current, Physical: (Factor==8);  
Condition, Mental: (Factor==1);  
Prognosis: Chronic Depression (Factor==9);  
Medication/Treatment: (Factor==1);

These parameters and others attracted the interest of Dr. Treeves. Posing as visiting psychologist, Treeves went to West Point, pretending to evaluate a group of cadets who had not performed up to their expected potential. After a ninety-minute session with James Warren, Treeves informed General Tresain that, regardless of intervention, Cadet Warren would end his own life. Furthermore, without immediate counter measures, he would do it in the weeks prior to a graduation that Warren felt he was unworthy to attend. Armed with that information, General Tresain made arrangements to insure the cadet's suicide would not be noticed.

After Warren took his own life, General Tresain had him cremated and arranged a credible cover story. The boy had been taken ill with a contagious disease and transferred to a military hospital. Warren's father, Colonel Thomas Warren, was serving a tour of duty in Iraq. Treeves informed General Tresain that once the colonel had been assured his son was not in mortal danger, he would decide it was unacceptable to abandon his command to simply stand at his son's bedside. Colonel Warren believed, as with all things, the boy's fate rested in the hands of the Almighty.

General Tresain arranged for the boy to graduate from West Point in absentia. He had that kind of power. Colonel Warren never saw his son again. However every so often, he received short letters from him, informing him of his assignments and accomplishments.

On paper, James Warren went on to receive a medical degree from the very military hospital where he recovered as his classmates attended their graduation. The same unmemorable Warren was assigned to combat zones and awarded medals for bravery. He enjoyed a distinguished career. One year after his son's graduation, Colonel Warren suffered a heart attack in an officer's club. His son, busy with important responsibilities, was unable to attend the funeral.

When it was needed, Time slipped into James Warren's identity as easily as he might guide his arms through the sleeves of an overcoat. In the depths of America's military computers, Warren's face was replaced by Time's face. His history was grafted onto Time. His experiences and abilities belonged to Time. Barring a statistically insignificant stroke of misfortune, it would have been impossible to prove, without a doubt, that Time was not currently Major James Warren.

The targets armed with PP-90s ordered some of the hostages to pull furniture from the offices and reception area and cover the elevator doors. The stairway doors were welded shut. Time considered it a bad sign that the targets seemed intent on sealing the only access in or out of the floor. It appeared as if a clear escape route didn't factor into their plans.

He dismissed the thought. It no longer mattered what they planned. Time thought of the targets as having no future. After this situation was resolved, they would never again enjoy, endure, or regret the events of their lives. It had been an essential element of his training.

Time maintained an unshakable conviction he would defeat any opponent in any arena. To imagine he might lose was to have lost before the fight began. Whether his conviction had any basis in fact was immaterial. It was the absence of doubt that mattered. Even his code name was chosen in part to assure him that he was the ultimate instrument of death. All things fell to Time.

Once the exits were covered, the targets arranged the hostages again and ordered them to sit together on the floor. One target was almost as tall as Time, a couple of inches over six foot. He was slim in comparison to the other, who was a foot shorter and at least thirty pounds overweight.

The slim target walked to where Beth Ellsworth sat and pulled her to her feet. He dragged her roughly by her left arm to a position close to the front of the captives. Ellsworth was an attractive dark-haired woman in her thirties and, for possibly the first time in her adult life, she was terrified that she'd never look any older. Her long obsessive pursuit of a partnership in Lang & Ellsworth no longer seemed as imperative to her as it had earlier in the day.

"We have wired this floor with high explosives," the target said calmly with very little accent. "However, we are not planning to die. This is about money."

He paused.

"After all, we are on Wall Street, are we not?"

He enjoyed his little joke for a moment.

"We have no reason to harm you," he continued. "You are our guarantee your government will not act foolishly. However, it is essential that you understand we are serious."

He allowed the submachine to hang from its strap and took a revolver from the side pocket of his jacket. He snapped the gun open and allowed all the bullets to fall into his hand. Then he showed one bullet to the hostages and inserted it back into the cylinder. He spun it to insure the position of the bullet in relation to the firing pin was unknown.

He rested the barrel against Beth Ellsworth's temple and pulled the trigger. The hammer came down with a click and Ellsworth grimaced as if she had just been slapped hard across the face.

"Oh my God, no," she said.

The target pulled the trigger again. When another click sounded in her ear, her eyes rolled up, and she fainted onto the floor. The targets let her lie there.

"We will tell you what to do and you will do it instantly. No talking, no discussion. If one of you doesn't instantly do what you're told, I'll repeat this demonstration with someone else, but I will use three bullets instead of one. Spend your time in the next hour or two calculating your odds of surviving that. Now, one by one, get up and prepare to be searched."

He pointed to Beth Ellsworth's office.

"All of your possessions will be placed there. You can retrieve them when this is over."

He pointed to a man to nearest to his left.

"You first," he said.

Time was certain the target had palmed the bullet before playing roulette. The demonstration was meant to frighten the crowd, not outrage them. The possibility of the unthinkable happening often instilled more fear than actual event.

The targets conferred quietly. The secretary and the overweight target went into Lang's office to join Elio. The roulette player and the young guard patrolled the floor, controlling the hostages.

Time looked uncomfortable and adjusted his seated position on the floor as a target passed by him, hoping he might notice. Although he was capable of maintaining positions much more uncomfortable, it was the small details that supported an identity. It was also good tactics to feign weakness before combat.

Inside Lang's private office, Treeves had determined how the targets in the room should be eliminated. Since he'd met with the prince several times prior to this meeting with Lang, he was familiar with Elio and his team. He'd noted basic factors such as left or right handed, the way they stood or sat, how they moved their arms and fingers, and how quickly they reacted mentally and physically to the unexpected. He gave extra attention to the woman since he had not seen her before.

Earlier that morning, Treeves had formulated a plan to place Time in a strategic position when he was required. It wasn't long before the woman stepped out of the Lang's office.

"Which one of you is James Warren?" she said.

Time raised his hand.

"You're the doctor?"

Time nodded.

"We need you inside the office. Now."

Time got up slowly, pretending that his legs were cramped. He pointed to the office where the hostage's possessions had been thrown behind a rolled-up rug.

"I need my bag," he said.

"I'll bring it in," the woman said.

Time glanced at the kid as he walked past him on his way into the office. Anyone might have mistaken his expression as one of discomfort as he walked past a heavily armed man. In fact, Time was checking the width of the kid's neck, considering the amount of torque he would need to cleanly snap it.

On the floor of Lang's office, pushed into a corner, was the body of Charles Lang. He'd drafted his last agreement. His legs and arms lay at unnatural angles and his suit had been torn and stained with blood. There were defensive cuts on his hands and forearms. Someone had come at him hard with a blade, not bothering to employ it carefully. Time was careful to stare at the corpse. Even an experienced military physician would find such an unnecessary and savage mutilation distasteful.

He glanced at Elio as if to say, *Was that really necessary?*

Elio had no reason to comment, but he said, “Lang was a pig. If I had the time and equipment, I would have hung him from a hook.”

As the overweight target searched him again, Time kept Edgar Treeves in his peripheral vision.

Treeves, by shifting his right foot slightly outward and raising it a couple of millimeters, signaled, “*Character behavior only.*”

The prince, pale and semi-conscious, was slouched in Lang’s large leather chair. The targets had moved it to the left side of Lang’s desk. Time went to check his condition.

There was a double tap on the door and it swung inward. The female target entered the room carrying the medical bag and, rather than taking it over to Time, she walked over to stand at the right side of the overweight target. They were on the opposite side of the room from Time and the prince. She had searched the bag thoroughly, but it was nearly impossible that she had stumbled upon or recognized tools that Time could access in seconds. If, by some miracle, she had found anything that she might consider suspicious, it could easily be explained as a piece of cutting-edge medical equipment.

Time didn’t need to be a doctor to diagnose that the prince’s condition was deteriorating. The prince’s pupils were dilated, his breathing was shallow, and spots of vomit soiled his chin and impeccable clothing. The obvious conclusion was that he was suffering a reaction to some allergen or poison.

“I’ll have to move him,” said Time, helping the prince to slide from Lang’s chair onto his back on the floor.

When he knelt over him, there was a clear field between himself and his targets across the room.

“What did you give him?” he said, turning to Elio.

“We gave him nothing,” Elio said.

“I need my bag. Bring it to me. All this stress has exacerbated his coronary condition.”

“No,” Elio said quickly.

The security chief was not a man who took unnecessary chances.

“Tell us what you need,” he said. “She’ll hand those things to you.”

“This man doesn’t have time for amateur games,” Time said, with a practiced air of arrogance and annoyance. “Do you think she’s qualified to understand what I need as quickly as I may need it?”

Elio removed a metal object from his right jacket pocket. A four-inch blade slid out dramatically.

“Then imagine this,” he said. “The next few moments will determine how you walk for the rest of your life.”

Treeves gave a clear signal, “*Dead end.*”

The building’s air conditioning had been shut down. The FBI had initiated their standard protocols. They were unaware they had allies in the center of the action. Time noticed that, although none of the targets complained about the heat, two of them were feeling it. The overweight man had taken off his jacket and tie and had rolled up his sleeves. Sweat began trickling down his round cheeks. He pulled one of the office chairs against the wall directly across from where Time leaned over the prince and sat down. That was good. Time knew the PP-90 the target held was pointed directly at his back. That was bad.

The woman remained standing, close to the seated target’s right. She held the twenty-two automatic at a forty-five degree angle. It wasn’t a submachine gun, but she seemed content with it. She had short light-brown hair and wore a blue short-sleeve dress appropriate for a young corporate employee.

Elio’s only visible weapon was the knife. He stood near the left corner of the room, furthest from the entrance. It was an excellent tactical position. He had positioned his subordinates to control the room. If trouble arose, he had distance and cover. Time had no doubt a firearm of some type was not far from Elio’s grasp.

The security chief was a slim man, just under five-ten. He had short straight black hair and determined merciless eyes. He wore too much cologne. Despite the heat, he remained dressed in a

black suit, white shirt, and slim tie. His shoes shone with polish. He was focused on his objectives. The heat didn't seem to bother him.

"All right, then," said Time. "I'll need my stethoscope, the blood pressure cuff, the portable defibrillator..."

He continued to name basic supplies. It was a critical moment. He knew at least one of the targets was looking at him. He needed a diversion. He expelled his breath and made a small sound as if the heat was getting to him.

Treeves instantly understood. He stepped forward.

"How long are we going to be here?" he said, in an upper class London accent that had nothing to do with his true upbringing. "Who knows what the anti-terrorism teams outside are planning? And what about your prince? He should be in hospital, not lying on the floor."

"Be quiet," said the leader. "You think because you're a CDL, you're invaluable. But no matter how clever you are at tricking people into seeing your point of view, you lack discipline."

In any other situation, Time might have laughed. Edgar Treeves was, without doubt, the most disciplined human being he'd ever encountered.

During this exchange, Time had taken off his jacket and folded it, placing it under the head of the prince. As he did so, he ran his hands down the front and stripped off four buttons. He waited to see if he'd have to move immediately. If the retrieval of the buttons been detected, he knew it would be very difficult to save both Treeves and himself. He didn't relish the choice.

The prince emitted a low choking moan.

"He could stop breathing any second," said Time. "I need someone down here with me."

Elio thought about it. He didn't like it. He'd expected a fluid situation, but the prince's unexpected illness made him uneasy. He wanted to keep all his assets in place. Treeves saw him make the decision.

"You," he said, pointing the blade at Treeves. "Help him."

As Treeves knelt beside him, Time attached a heart monitor.

"Watch these readings carefully," said Time. "If this dial here falls below eighty, tell me immediately."

They pretended to work on the prince. It was as close to an ideal situation as they could have hoped.

Treeves signaled, "*Eliminate visible targets. Low volume.*"

"*Understood. Identify targets.*"

Treeves responded by numbering the targets from left to right, beginning on Time's right. The woman was one, the seated man was two, and Elio was three.

"*Sequence?*" Time signaled.

This was the essential question. Which target should be eliminated first? Treeves needed to tell his Weapon the order in which the targets in the room should be neutralized, counting down from the first to die to the one who was least likely to prevent Time from killing all of them.

Treeves used his thumb and right index finger to lightly tap out numbers on the prince's chest.

"*Two, One, Three.*"

The seated overweight target was to die first, then the woman by the door, and finally, Elio. It wasn't the order Time would have chosen. The woman looked as if she was itching to kill someone and would open fire at the slightest provocation. Plus, her weapon was lighter and she could bring it to bear more quickly.

If it were up to Time, he would have taken her first, but his opinion was irrelevant. Treeves had devoted his life to human pre-behavioral science. He was possibly the best in the world at predicting what a person was thinking, was capable of doing, and was about to do before they actually did it.

Time cradled two of the buttons from his jacket in his left hand. He held the other two in his right. He made his final check of distances and positions. He signaled to Treeves.

"*Target three - weapons?*" Time signaled.

"*Knife - right hand - pistol - right jacket pocket,*" Treeves responded.

"*Ready.*"

Treeves signaled their countdown.

Time rose slightly and turned as if to ask for something from the medical bag. He pretended to stumble, as if his leg had gone weak from kneeling too long.

Treeves screamed, "No!"

It was a terrified sustained high-pitched wail.

With astonishing speed and accuracy, Time flung two of the heavy buttons at the wall between the woman and the fat man. In almost the same instant, he threw the two that remained in his right hand against the wall over Elio's head.

The buttons operated on centrifugal force. As they spun, a mechanism released sharp spiked edges on their perimeters. When they impacted against the walls, they exploded, filling the air with a light powder. It impaired the targets' vision and caused them to involuntarily choke for a moment. Time had become immune to its effects long ago.

The seated fat man saw a spectral figure explode towards him like a ghost in a horror film. Reflex caused him to open his mouth to shout, but before he could force air out of his lungs, a stifling pressure squeezed his vocal cords together. His head snapped to the right and he felt an odd wetness pour down his chest. The last action of his life was to raise his left hand to discover that Time's right hand had torn away the front of his throat.

The woman also saw the specter in the mist. She quickly turned to her left to empty her automatic at it, but her arm bumped into something. It was Time's left side. He encircled her neck with his left arm, positioning his left forearm against her throat and snapped upward. She went limp as an empty dress.

With his arm still around her neck, holding up her body as a shield, Time spun to face Elio.

Treeves had stopped screaming. The haze was clearing. Time saw that Elio had made the mistake of taking a few precious seconds to transfer the knife to his left hand before reaching for the pistol with his right. However, his hand was already halfway into his pocket.

Time moved his right hand from behind the woman body. He showed Elio the automatic he had taken from her.

"It won't even be close," Time said.

Elio pulled his hand away from his pocket. Treeves watched him form a strategy.

After a moment, Elio said, "This room may be soundproof, but not enough to silence the sound of a pistol shot. If you fire, my man outside will open that door and spray the entire room with automatic weapons fire."

"And you'll die with us," said Time.

"I'm prepared. Are you?"

"There's no need for either of us to die," Time said. "I need to get out of here. You're worth more to me alive than dead."

As he spoke, he allowed the woman's body to slide to the floor. Stepping over her, he began moving towards Elio as slowly and deliberately as a hunting jungle cat. With each small movement, he kept his attention on Treeves.

"I don't know what you are," Elio said. "But you're not a good liar."

Then he nodded his head towards Treeves.

"But he is an exceptional one, isn't he?"

Treeves watched the thought form in Elio's mind. He had decided to go for the pistol and force Time to fire. He believed his best chance was to duck behind Lang's desk and hope his luck would change.

Treeves signaled, "Now."

Before Elio could act on his own decision, Time was on him. Elio's survival instinct forced him to use the knife to defend himself. He held the handle so that the blade faced downward, edge towards his opponent. When Time reached him, he swept it across, trying to slow Time's advance. He planned to step quickly forward and thrust downward at his attacker.

But Time didn't step back. He allowed the razor-sharp blade to pass within an inch of his unprotected chest. Then he blocked the downward follow-up with his left forearm, sliding his hand to grab Elio slightly above the wrist. He saw the opening, formed an appropriate fist with his right hand, and drove it into Elio's throat, crushing his windpipe. The struggle was over. All that was left was to finish as quietly as possible.

Maintaining his grip on his Elio's wrist, Time grabbed his left elbow with his right hand and turned it upwards until Elio's fingers loosened their grip on the knife. Time removed it, and because of its length, chose to slide the blade into Elio's right eye.

Time lowered Elio's body to the floor.

"*Are we being monitored?*" Time signaled.

"There's a communications device in Elio's left pocket, but it's muted," Treeves said in Dutch.

English was their native language, but it was too widely spoken. Although English was not the native language of the targets, all of them spoke it fluently. If the remaining targets could possibly hear them, Dutch would most likely be mistaken for English, and there was a near-zero probability that any of the surviving targets were fluent in Dutch.

Time was reasonably fluent in Dutch, but it was a challenge to keep his cadence, tone, and sentence structure sounding like the byplay of a physician and his assistant. It was nothing for Treeves to maintain the intonation and phrasing of someone expressing concern over the prince's condition.

"How is he doing?" said Treeves.

"Without the quickly dying, he holds his own," Time replied, making slight grammatical errors.

As a linguist, he was not in the same league as Treeves. On the other hand, he'd just killed three well-armed targets in close-order combat and he wasn't breathing hard.

Treeves, an uncanny mimic, said something using Elio's voice and his native language. Time blinked as he heard the voice of the man he had killed only moments ago. No matter how many times he had heard Treeves perform his vocal acrobatics, it never failed to give him an eerie sensation in the pit of his stomach, as if Elio was speaking to him directly from the beyond.

Treeves removed the communications device from Elio's jacket. As soon as he turned up the volume control, an agitated voice crackled over the speaker.

"What's happening there? We're behind schedule."

"You heard the scream?" Treeves said, using Elio's voice.

"Yes, it barely came through."

"That was the CDL. I had to teach him a lesson. It's nothing to be concerned about. You'll hear from me in ten minutes and we'll continue as planned."

"Understood, brother."

Treeves made certain the device was muted again and placed it back in Elio's pocket.

"Did he believe that?" Time said.

Treeves narrowed his eyes.

"Is that intended to be an insult?" he said. "Did I ask you if you were certain you could eliminate these targets before I told you in what order you should do it?"

Time had no response. Instead, he gestured towards the prince.

"What about him?" he said. "What did they give him?"

"They didn't give him anything," said Treeves.

After a moment Time said, "You?"

"This morning with his tea."

"So, he was with them?"

"The general and I suspected as much all along, but he was an important man. The general wanted proof beyond a doubt. It had to be done correctly."

"How did you know it would be today?"

"I wasn't certain, but when I was with him this morning there were strong indicators. So I poisoned him. In the event that the operation was altered or canceled, I would have found a way to give him the antidote. It's too late now. In about fifteen minutes, he'll be dead. It will appear as if the excitement caused him to succumb to a coronary."

"I should have been told about him," Time said. "What if I altered my tactics to minimize the danger to him?"

Treeves allowed a perplexed expression to cross his features. He hated stating the obvious.

"Why on earth would you attempt to protect him? I didn't tell you to protect him. Your tactics, as you put it, are to follow my instructions."

“You know, there’s always the slight possibility that I’ll find myself out here on my own.”

Without saying a word, Treeves made it obvious that he believed Time wouldn’t last long on his own.

“Must I repeat what you were supposed to have absorbed in the first week of your training? Your first priority is to prevent anything from happening to me.”

Time knew this was an argument he had no possibility of winning. He decided to direct their discussion to more pressing matters.

“Speaking of priorities,” he said, glancing at the office door.

“I’ve seen enough of those two,” said Treeves. “They’re not imminent concerns. One has too much discipline and the other not enough initiative. Unless Elio calls for them, they’ll stay outside. We have sufficient time.”

“Sufficient time is always a plus.”

Treeves ignored the word play.

“Our task is to locate the target who just spoke with me as quickly as possible,” he said. “He’s on this floor, in one of the ten offices that surround us. He’s a fanatic, willing to die, and armed with biological weapon potent enough to kill every living thing within half a mile of this building.”