

Pineapple Down

The Special Forces sniper adjusted his ear protection, checked the walkie-talkie clipped to his left shoulder and sat down on the small bench facing the brownstone's attic window. He nestled the aluminum alloy stock of his McMillan Tac-50 into his right shoulder and positioned the 24-inch barrel plus silencer extension on the sill. Through the eyepiece, he had a clear view of the boathouse's door, ajar and allowing an unobstructed view of his target, who was still seated inside the cab of the bus. The sniper waited patiently, finger resting lightly on the trigger, waiting for the signal from his brain.

After several minutes, the bus's door opened and the tattooed man with the horseshoe mustache stepped out, pushing the boathouse door wide open. He was now fully exposed.

This was the moment. The finger squeezed the trigger.

There was a muffled supersonic crack, almost entirely unnoticed in the early morning calm.

The bullet left the muzzle at 2,700 feet per second, forming a burst of smoke as hot gas met the cooler air. Upon impact the .300 Winchester hollow point mushroomed inside the man's upper leg, exploding the flesh of his groin and shattering his femur as fragments of bone shredded his thigh. Blood gushed in a fountain from the severed femoral artery. The young man roared as he collapsed to the ground, sliding into a pool of his own blood.

The sniper leaned into his walkie-talkie. "Pineapple down. Repeat, Pineapple down."

Upon the pre-arranged signal, the strike team positioned on rooftops and windows around the lot began moving quietly, quickly, towards street level, closing in on the boathouse.

At the same time, an older man wearing sunglasses ran towards the fallen body. No palpable pulse. Four younger men had run to the scene and stood some five feet away, stunned witnesses of the catastrophe.

The older man rose and pointed to the open door of the boathouse. The five men dashed inside, closing the door behind them. Rushing to the far corner of the building, they began to sweep the dirt away from a certain patch of earth until the handle of a trapdoor became visible. The old man wrenched it open, revealing a ladder going down

Fatally Flawed

a level. He signaled the others to go down first. Removing his sunglasses, he followed them, lowering the trapdoor behind him. The tunnel ran diagonally approximately 200 yards, ending in a one-car garage facing away from the street alongside another one of the condemned brownstones.

It was time to activate Plan B.

The old man had already bathed, shaved and dressed to take over should Plan A go south for any reason. And now his time had come. Breathing hard, he hoisted himself out of the tunnel and looked around. The dark, complex universe of his mind had now hard-boiled down to a single thought. The moment of *istishbad*, and his imminent martyrdom, was just hours away. He felt a cool, directed sense of purpose as if this was exactly the way it was supposed to be. His movements were precise and deliberate, his electric eyes darting efficiently around the dimly-lit garage. All appeared in order. The olive drab 2.5-ton utility cargo van stood there, freshly painted with the words 'Mobile Bomb Detection Unit' in large letters along the side. He climbed in behind the wheel and signaled to one of the men to raise the garage door.

The Hercules diesel sprang to life and the van moved out of its enclosure. Two hard left turns and then a right, and the vehicle was heading south just below the speed limit.