

## 1008

As we preparing to transition from the station to the attached terminal, looking for the bus line that would connect us to the BH safe house in the Kőbánya (X) District, our attackers were dismounting their vehicles from across the street as well as to our left and right. They were dressed like cops. Had they been armed like cops...

"Oh look," I snickered to Pamela, "I see a whole bunch of heavily armed people coming our way."

"Good for you," Pamela muttered. "Your eyes are still working."

"Do you think they are here to raise me up on their shields and proclaim me 'Prince'?" I joked.

"I think they are here to kill us," Pamela grinned.

"I prefer to think positively," I grinned back.

"I am positive they are here to kill us," Pamela laughed. It had to be our relaxed demeanor that confused them.

Had we been the droids they were looking for, we wouldn't have been chatting in the open with our bags in our hands. That would have made us crazy - and they would have been right. We were crazy alright and there was a method to our madness. It was mid-afternoon, yet there were plenty of average Hungarians wandering about*Ww.ñöveL(w)(c)rM.com*

Sure, they saw the 'special cops' closing in. They didn't see the upcoming shoot-out because that was plain nuts. A gun battle in a modern metropolis in broad daylight? London yesterday was an aberration, not the new normal. Our impromptu plan was to let the killers get as close as possible to limit the collateral damage.

This wasn't classic Amazon training. It was a concession to allies who did care about civilians killed in the cross-fire. The oncoming hit squad was finally putting faces to targets when Odette broke the calm before the storm. All she did was squeak when Vincent pushed her behind a kiosk. Riki took Virginia shifting her to cover in silence.

Delliah took off at a dead-run to the south-east. They were raising their shotguns and assault rifles. We were drawing our pistols. Normally this would have been an unequal match, except that in the time period where, in their eyes, we had gone from bystanders to targets, they'd also covered a good deal of ground - to the point that they were out in the open while my fighting band was in close proximity to all kinds of cover.

It started out as eighteen to twelve. Pamela, Chaz and Selena quickly cut down those odd by five. Me? I didn't try to shoot and run at the same time, so I made it to cover and was stuck there by our opponents use of fully-automatic fire.

My lack of martial prowess could be forgiven by the reality I was the one they were trying to off. My greatest contribution to this skirmish was tossing my SPAS-12 to Chaz so he could use something more than his standard military issue Glock-17. I had barely gotten Chaz's appreciative nod when two grenades went off in close proximity to me.

At first, I heard and felt nothing. My eyes were having trouble focusing. When my limbs began to orient themselves, I had to fight down the instinct to move. I was lying down, which was far safer than staggering around in the middle of this hail of lead. The twin grenades turned out to be their second and very fatal mistake on this mission*ww(w)(w).ñöveL(w)(c)rM.com*

The first had been their delay in identifying my group. The second - using the stun grenades - did put me, Pamela and Selena out of commission temporarily. But their mistake was having misplaced my six Amazons in this mess they had created. They did have thirteen shooters versus Chaz, Virginia and Vincent. They rushed our position using the classic advance while firing rote.

Two meters from me, the six Amazons revealed themselves with five P-90's and one big-ass bow. Four escaped the kill zone only to find themselves flanked by Delliah. Her .480's, combined with their confusion, finished off the survivors. That wasn't the end of it. We still had to effect our get-away.

I was still getting my head on straight as the ladies decided to hotwire some of the deceased men's rides and get us the heck out of Dodge. Recovery brought with it the knowledge that Virginia and Chaz had been shot. Pamela, Selena and me ... we had some scrapes and bruises. Everyone else checked out. Mona let us know that she could handle the wounded. They wouldn't be doing jumping jacks for a week or two, but a hospital was not required. On the downside, no one believed that eighteen killers dressed as cops randomly rolled up on our transit point by accident. The only people who knew about our change in travel plans had been the Black Hand. We'd lied to the US.

We broke into an abandoned factory to stash the vehicles and make our next plan. Selena was coldly furious. Not only did she come to the same conclusion we had - the Black Hand had set us up to be murdered - we weren't letting her call in. Wieslawa and Charlotte kept their guns pointed at her, so low was our level of trust.

Chaz was pretty much of the opinion that Selena should be coerced to provide us with the names and locations of the Black Hand involved so that we could do our own 'fact finding tour'. Oddly, none of the Americans asked to be pulled out. Vincent and Riki wanted to let the US Embassy know what had happened, yet were willing to wait until we were secure somewhere first.

Rachel was on board with Chaz's idea... with the addendum that they kill every Black Hand they could get their hands on before fleeing the city. They had tried to kill ME after all. I was touched. It was Pamela who put things in perspective.

1) The attackers were not Black Hand, they were mercenaries and that pointed a bloody finger at the Condottieri.

2) Selena wasn't a fanatic and her life had been in as much danger as anyone else's. She wasn't part of our ambush. Her buddies had tossed her under the bus.

3) It would have been far easier to catch us in that convoy they'd tried to stick us with. Caught in pre-planned crossfires and without our heavier weapons, we would have all died.

4) Having failed to deliver us to the pre-planned ambush site, the Condottieri had to rush to our metro stop because... the safe house they had prepared for us wouldn't have worked. We had the numbers to allow us take total charge of our security once we were in place. No, gauging our numbers, this traitor had sent the mercs into a straight-up fight they'd just lost.

Pamela's conclusion: the Black Hand had a double-agent in the Condottieri. To up his/her credibility, he/she had been given the information which they had used to attempt to have me killed. Less we forget, the Black Hand was a murder-for-hire organization. If we accepted Pamela's conjecture, what was our next course of action?

The Black Hand and Condottieri shared much of the same home ground, so they needed to be aware of what the much larger Condo network was up to. Long term, they thought that losing me and Selena was worth the insight they would gain into how the Condo's worked. Understandable, unless you were me and mine.

It is said you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink. That may be true, except this Fehér mén was being led to water by Pamela and I took the plunge. I pulled Riki aside and asked for a favor. I wanted her to contact the State Department over an unsecure line and inform them that 'our' double agent had alerted us to the ambush and we were all fine.

The open, fearful look in her eyes said it all. If she made that report, someone was going to die. She was a human being whose actions were going to result in another human being dying - most likely in a bad manner. She was also a human being who had had a gun pointed at her. They'd shot at her, her life had been in danger and by the grace of more combative individuals, she'd been saved.

She might not be able to identify with the Amazons, or the Brits (soldiers), but Virginia had taken three bullets keeping her safe. The ballistic vest stopped two, giving her some titanic bruising, while the third had clipped her arm. Virginia had bled for her. Vincent was determined and grim. Odette was still rather shocky.

And all of that was the fault of the cock-sucker I was asking her to set up now. She made the call, making a very understated reference to their 'source' inside the 'opposition' that had exposed the ambushers in time. Her testimonial would take some time to filter to the 'wrong' hands. Excellently done.

Why did I have Riki do it? We understood the reasoning of the Black Hand action. We were fucking them over because NO ONE did that to the Amazons - period - end of statement. Pamela radiated pride. On second glance, so did Rachel and Delliah. They knew I was a nice guy. Now I was a nice guy who would defend and avenge his own - them.

After we left the abandoned factory and moved to a fourth location, I asked that Selena contact her superior to figure out how we could rendezvous and get to a safe place. He was unhappy, she was unhappy and she let him know we were unhappy. Another guide was sent our way and thirty minutes later, we found ourselves in an old Communist-era apartment block.

Think of Chicago's Cabrini Green from the 1980's, but built with less inspired labor and you could visualize our surroundings. The neighborhood screamed of poverty, high crime and a poor police presence. Chaz described it as a 'low intensity war zone' where ethnic Hungarian, Serbian, Bulgarian, Croat and Romany street gangs regularly scarred the landscape with their graffiti.*©Ww.ñöveLwóRm.©o(=)*

Matthias, the local head of the Black Hand, kept us waiting until after dark. His excuse was the problems we'd created.

"You are lucky I don't hand you over to the Rendőrség (National Police)," he menaced us once he'd scoped out our cramped quarters. I was thinking about how to approach this coolly.

"You are the one responsible for our safety. Asshole," Riki got in his face (he was actually sitting at one of the three chairs in the tiny kitchen space. Matthias pulled out a stiletto blade from somewhere and put it to Riki's throat.*wwWW.ñÖveLwóRm.©wörM.CoM*

"I don't know you, don't like you and see little reason to put up with your insults," he replied casually.

I pushed off the wall slowly and started walking toward Matthias. He pricked Riki's throat, stopping me.