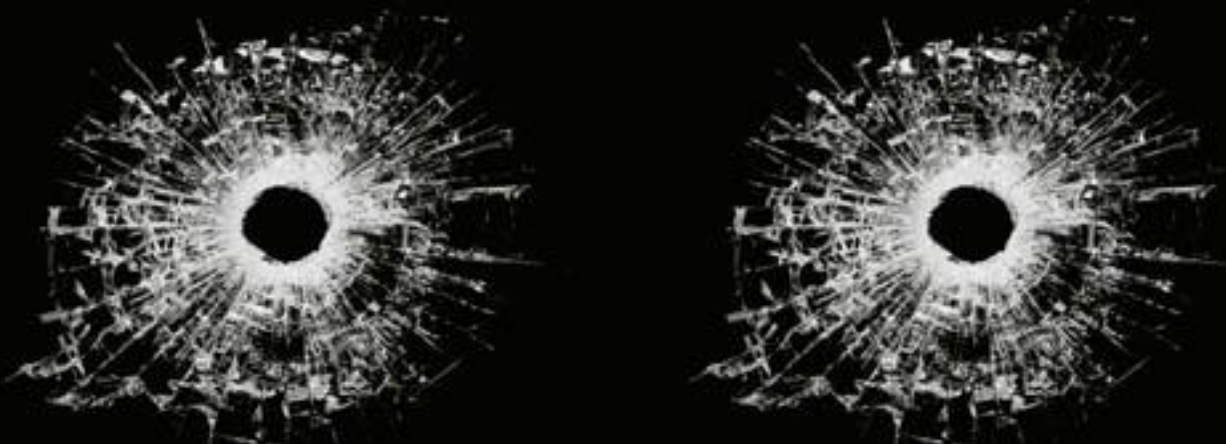




SURVIVAL



STRATEGY

He just wanted to retire -
They just wanted revenge ...

A thriller by
MAX DRAYTON

THE STRATEGY TRILOGY

Part 2 - SURVIVAL STRATEGY

A thriller by Max Drayton

There is strong language, violence and scenes of an adult nature.

Cover by Phil Lewis

If you enjoyed this novel, please let me know.

If you didn't ... I have other novels.

max@maxdrayton.co.uk

www.maxdrayton.co.uk

SURVIVAL STRATEGY
PART TWO OF A TRILOGY
A thriller by Max Drayton

There are scenes and language of an adult nature.

SAMPLE

Jagger Gilchrist is an assassin who wanted to retire. Events forced him back into his old ways and having to help his friends in an Hungarian farm, get rid of mercenaries.

From my meagre backpack, I removed a few items of camouflaged clothing I'd brought with me. They were neutral designs, so would blend in with the rural environment. I pulled a balaclava over my head and left just my eyes showing up in the midst of all the greenery and wooden buildings. I checked my watch. Three hours before touch-down. They needed to leave soon.

There was a flurry of movement, and one of the team was ordering the others around. I took a good look at him and saw no distinguishing features. Ordinary looking man. Just under six feet. Deep voice. Abrupt movements.

I saw the big bulky guy climbing onto the farmhouse roof. Good all-round position. He was facing away from me and was not looking at the rear of the farmhouse. That's when I decided on my strategy.

I eased myself towards the rear of the farmhouse. I could no longer see the front, but I needed to get into the house from the rear as soon as I was able.

Then I had to change my mind because one of the men was coming out of the kitchen and settling down at the rear of the house. He was the other of the ordinary-looking guys. Didn't fit the pattern of a mercenary, so I guessed a specialist in something. He looked more like a farmer than an insurgent trouper. He was ten metres away from me. I froze and slowly lowered myself into the undergrowth. Was he there permanently, or doing something temporary?

I just had to wait.

I heard a car start up and move away. I'd no idea where the rest of the guards were. I had sight of two only. The one on the roof with his back to me, the ordinary one outside the back door who was sitting on a log and picking at his fingernails. His weapon rested against another tree stump. He looked bored and indifferent. It was time to put him out of his misery.

As he was only a few metres away from the man on the roof, it had to be silent. I slid out my throwing knife and held it ready. Even if I had a handgun, I couldn't use it yet. I started to move, very slowly towards him.

There was a patch of ground two metres from the last bit of cover to the man on the log. I had to time this right.

I saw his head slump, fatigue getting to him, along with several days of inactivity. I moved silently forward, knife held ready to throw.

Two metres. One metre.

I grabbed his mouth and nose with my hand and squeezed.

He reacted quickly, but my knife had already severed his vocal cords and his artery was draining the life out of him. His struggles lasted a few seconds. I eased him to the ground while looking up at the man on the roof. He hadn't moved.

It had all happened silently. I searched him quickly and found a Glock 17 and a spare clip of ammo. He had an SAS knife in his boot and I took that too.

Quietly, I sat him up, with his back against the log. Wiped my knife on his clothing and slipped it back into its sheath on my belt. I slipped his flat cap down over his eyes and made it look like he was asleep. I left his rifle in plain sight to complete the illusion.

One down.

There had to be someone inside the house, guarding the family. Possibly two. I had to be extra careful now. I walked to the back door and eased it open until I could glance into the kitchen.

I heard a noise and froze. I recognised the noise. Dishes being washed. Mama Kobay!

I eased my head around the door to see she was alone in the kitchen. The door to the main room was open, but from here I couldn't see anyone in there. I stepped in behind Mama and put my hand quickly over her mouth. With my other hand, I pulled off my balaclava and smiled at her.

Her eyes were wide with fright and then seemed to erupt in tears. I've never seen emotion so immediate as that before. I let go of her mouth and she hugged me soundlessly. She quickly realised the situation and let me go.

I thought she looked a little frailer than I'd last seen her. She was never a big woman. Slight, made to look bigger by the long full skirts she wore and the big, baggy blouses. Always black colour.

I moved towards her ear and said quietly but distinctly,

'How many holligans in there?' mama said.

I pointed to the main room. I knew she had a smattering of English and was a very bright and capable woman. Her eyes went wide again as she realised what I was attempting. She looked nervous but held up one finger.

I gave her a peck on the cheek then mimed for her to continue with the dishes. She managed a smile, nodded and showed me her crossed fingers.

I can shoot well with both hands but did not want gunshots to wake everyone up just yet. So I transferred the Glock into my left hand and held the throwing knife ready in my right. I'm extremely practised with the knife. But you never know if the target should move suddenly, or the knife hit a heavy gold necklace and glance off. It was always risky.

I dipped my head in and out of the doorway. Enough to get a glance at what was waiting for me.

I saw Olga's father László, sitting in his favourite chair, looking into space. Both the brothers were lounging on a sofa each. Looking bored but restricted to do anything about it. The huge boyfriend of Olga's, Géza, was sitting at the dining table, reading a book. I assumed Olga's absence meant she'd gone to the airport.

Standing by the front door, looking out the window towards the outbuildings was the tall lanky team member. He held his rifle loosely against his chest. The clothing he was wearing was so baggy on his thin frame, he looked more a caricature out of a comic.

He was at least fifteen metres away from me. More than ten strides in a hurry. Wooden floors that I remembered creaked. Could I make it in time? I doubted it. I needed to throw.

With a start, I felt a touch on my arm. I turned to see Mama. She put her lips to my ear and said, 'Shall I bring him in here?'

I shook my head. It was my first reaction, I didn't want her exposed to more danger. She just nodded and wiped her hands on her apron. She winked and pushed me gently to one side. I put my arm out to stop her and she looked at me with sadness in her eyes.

Her mouth formed the word, 'Please.'

On second reflection it made sense. I'd no time for further deliberation, she was on the move. I eased back out of sight and tried to think of the best way to silently disable the man.

I heard a conversation with Mama using her pidgin English. She sounded happy and encouraging. It went quiet. I heard the floors creaking. Would she be first through the door or the enemy?

It had to be quiet again. There was a man on the roof. At any moment someone else might come into the house. I heard Mama's muttering and

realised it was for my benefit, she was coming in first. Smart woman. I knew where Olga got her brains from.

I flattened myself against the door jamb and slid out my knife. I held it in a safe, but light grip and knew exactly where I wanted to place it.

Mama swept in talking loudly in Hungarian to cover any noise I might make. I saw a movement behind her and made my move. The man was taller than me, but I got my hand around his mouth quickly due to the sheer surprise. The knife slid in under his chin and twisted to sever his spinal column. He didn't know he was dead.

I eased him to the ground and Mama immediately spat on him.

I heard a noise behind me and spun, knife ready, Glock pointed. It was Henrik with a big grin on his face. He hugged me so hard it hurt. He pushed away and held up one finger and pointed it to the roof. Man on the roof. I nodded. He pointed out through the kitchen and held up a finger. I shook my head and drew a finger across my throat. He smiled. I then held both hands out in the gesture of "And?"

He took my arm and led me to the main room. I saw the others in the room staring at me in puzzlement. I put a finger to my lips. Henrik stood just back from the windows and pointed to the workshop. One finger. To the cattle barn, another finger. I held up three fingers, and he nodded. He looked at me and waved a finger at both of us and then pointed to the two men outside.

I shook my head and whispered. 'Not this time Henrik. Far too dangerous. These men are trained killers. Let me worry about them.'

I saw the disappointment on his face. But I had to move. Decision time. If I tried to take out the two in the barns, the roof man would see me and have an excellent position to fire. If I took him out, I then would have the good position to attack. I decided on the roof as the best place to be.

I was aware of another presence next to me. I looked up into the serious face of Géza. He looked at me then held one finger up to the roof and pointed it at his chest, then drew it across his throat slowly. I was shaking my head when Mama pulled at my arm. She said nothing but nodded.

Something was going on. Should I risk Géza taking out the professional? If he alerted the other two, it'd be a gun battle. I thought the risk too great. I was shaking my head when Géza walked out past me into the kitchen. I was about to stop him when Mama held back my arm. Again the head shake and mouthed, 'Please'.

What could I do? I nodded.

I followed Géza into the kitchen and watched him bend over the dead lanky guy. Géza pulled a knife from the dead man's belt and walked

stealthily out of the back door. I picked up the rifle lying on the floor and hurried back to the front door.

I could see little from the inside but would be exposed if I stepped outside. I opened the front door and took a step back.

I checked the action of the rifle and that it had a full clip. I knelt on the floor, with the rifle to my shoulder and waited.

Time passed slowly. It was silent everywhere. Tamas was still seated on the sofa, unbelieving that I had arrived out of nowhere. László watching me silently.

It seemed far too long before I heard a slithering noise above, followed by a big thump, coming from the back of the house. I waited, holding my breath. Still silence.

A few minutes later I heard the floor creaking behind me and turned to see Géza walking towards me with a smile on his face. He slowly drew a finger across his throat. The other big guy was history.

Two left. How to draw them out?

Géza made the decision for me. He walked past me and on out of the open door and stood on the veranda. He was now partially blocking my sight. I quickly ran back through to the kitchen, out the back door and around the side to the front of the house. As I ran I saw the big man crumpled on the ground. His neck broken from the fall, but his chest was covered in blood. It looked like Géza had cut his throat and made him bleed out slowly. What did Géza have against the big guy?

As I crept toward the front wall, the workshop building came into view. I crouched and sighted the rifle at the door. A step forward and I would be in sight of the cattle barn too.

I heard a bellow of indignation and pride come from somewhere. I think it was Géza venting his frustration. The top barn door flew open and over the top half, there was the weedy-looking man holding a rifle.

I fired twice, quickly. The sounds echoing across the woods and bouncing back. Before the echo had died, I'd moved out to the front of the house and was running towards the cow barn. I saw a movement there as the black guy revealed himself to see what the noise was about. He had only a few seconds from the shots to react. His rifle quickly to his shoulder and pointed at me.

I fired three shots on the run. Hoping they'd at least make him duck down. I saw him fly backwards as two struck him in the chest. The rifle flew away and landed in a cloud of dust.

The shots died away and there was silence. I spun around and checked there were no more surprises.

Rifle ready, I went and checked the two men were dead. They were. I pulled them under cover and ran back to the house. I pulled the dead man from the kitchen and put him next to the other two outside. They would have to wait until later.

If I had the head count right, two were with Olga at the airport. Mama confirmed this for me later. In a few hours, they'd be calling in to check if all was well. I needed to stall them.

I walked into the house and everyone wanted to hug me. Mama was full of kisses and big Géza wanted to crush my hand several times.

Henrik was overjoyed.

'Every time we meet, someone dies.'

This seemed to please him.

I let them have their moment of relief before saying,

'We still have two more to go and they have Olga. Tell me everything you know about these men. I mean everything.'

If you enjoyed this sample please consider reading the whole novel.

If you didn't like the sample, let me know why at:

max@maxdrayton.co.uk

Or visit:

www.maxdrayton.co.uk