

FACTS:

1. Light-water reactors, used at both the Chernobyl and Fukushima disasters, are the most common type of nuclear reactor in use today. The United States Department of Energy oversees the operation of 99 light-water nuclear reactors, providing 20% of U.S. electricity.
2. Molten Salt Reactor technology was developed in the 1950s, consumes existing spent nuclear fuel, and will not melt down.
3. California has a population of 40 million people, each of whom uses 109 gallons of fresh, pure drinking water every day during summer months.
4. In 2015 CRISPR gene editing technology matured to the point where biologists could accurately change the genome of living organisms, including viruses.

CHAPTER 1

August 1st – Stockton, California
11:15 p.m.

Mass murder can be complicated. But profitable.

From a vacant corner of the Chili's parking lot, behind a four-foot-high wall of cropped manzanita shrubs, Gunther Pertile scanned the area for civilians. Not a soul in sight. He whipped out his Glock 9mm – with suppressor – aimed at each of the two main overhead lights and squeezed off two muffled rounds. Glass shattered, falling to the ground as the entire scene went dark.

He dismounted his jet-black Harley, then slid off his helmet to reveal the short, curly hair he'd recently bleached to no longer be the dark-haired, dark-eyed killer on the FBI's most wanted list.

Running his fingertips along each of the four loaded mags inside the pocket of his leather jacket, he calculated the time to empty all sixty rounds. At three rounds per second and another three seconds to swap each mag, he could finish in just over half a minute.

One dead every half second.

Not bad.

But he tossed aside his mass shooting fantasy, forced himself back to reality, drew a deep breath and relished the security of

his weapon. After two decades as a sniper, he knew tonight's assignment – his actual job – would succeed.

Piece of cake.

His weapon holstered, he glided through the front door of the restaurant and took a window seat.

A flash of blue pulled into the parking lot. The target – a civil engineer named Jake Bendel – wore a gray fedora hat, jeans, a light blue dress shirt and plaid charcoal sport coat as he exited a Tesla and strolled toward Chili's carrying a laptop, several rolls of paper, and a three-ring binder. Inside, the hostess escorted him to a booth on the room's opposite side. Physically, the target's height and weight matched the profile the boss had provided. At a height of just above six-one, maybe two hundred pounds, Gunther evaluated the level of effort to accomplish the abduction.

Within tolerance.

After Bendel sat, he ordered dinner and worked, checking his Apple Watch every few minutes.

Gunther took a slow sip of ice water, studying the mostly vacant dining room of the restaurant.

Eventually, the target's food came and he ate – still checking his watch. Gunther smiled.

The other members of the assault team had already taken care of Jake's friend, Dave, who most definitely would not be dining at Chili's tonight.

Or anywhere ever again, for that matter.

Gunther finished his water and set the glass on the table.

His Android read 11:55 p.m.

Perfect.

He dug a hand into his pants pocket and wrapped his fingers around a syringe filled with enough Trihypnol to subdue a professional wrestler. With the quarter-inch-long needle capped at the tip, he'd avoid accidentally injecting himself with the hypnotic drug.

Trihypnol was the perfect concoction for tonight's events. Once administered, the victim would remain fully awake, but in

a highly suggestible and altered state of consciousness—alert and fully mobile for up to four hours. The famous Dr. Jake Bendel would later crash like a pelted pigeon and sleep for half a day, with zero memory of the evening's activities.

Bendel stuffed the last piece of halibut into his mouth, chewed, and washed it down with a final swig of beer.

Game time.