

## Opening Chapter Critique

### Chapter 1.

Bucharest 011142C0609

"Listen friend, I like you." Paulie was explaining for the sixth time why he wanted more money. And Ryan was listening patiently. But it really made no difference. In fact, it was probably better this way. Ryan just needed his Russian contacts. So, Ryan just walked patiently along next to him, listening nodding. And repeating the line doggedly 'Ten percent. No more.'

**Commented [KV1]:** Intriguing first line. Has me wondering who Paulie is and if he has ulterior motives. Also, what does he want the money for?

Ryan was trying to ignore just how hot he was. Bucharest was bathed in bright sunlight, and he was sweating in cheap grey polyester suit jacket. They were flanked by some heavy-set men, receding hairlines, steroid muscles. Dressed in expensive tailored suits. Paulie, as always wore a designer tracksuit. Ryan hated this Russian influence. Paulie was short and squat, decked out in decadence. His expensive watch hung loosely off his wrist. His designer sunglasses worn on top of his head.

**Commented [KV2]:** The wording of this sentence had me thinking Ryan was attracted to Paulie. May need to revise to clarify Ryan is bothered by the heat.

**Commented [KV3]:** I initially thought we were describing Paulie here because of the opening sentence but he's described as wearing a tracksuit later in the paragraph. May need to revise for clarity.

The gross display of wealth was in contrast with the city. Pavements were old and knackered. Weeds grew between the cracks, and the slabs were frequently broken. They walked next to a soviet era public park. Penned in by a dull concrete wall. The park was unkept but well used. People were rushing about inside, playing football, sunbathing, enjoying a day with their kids. Ryans side of the wall was amorphous of noise and confusion. The one-way road that circled the palace was packed with static cars, people honking horns, protestors shouting and waving placards, marching and weaving between the stationary traffic. Ryan had liked Bucharest. The old city had been beautiful, and the food amazing. The smells of the quaint cafes and restaurants filled the still summer nights air. But today it smelt like pollution. There was a smog. A haze coming from the fumes, and heat rising off the tarmac. It was weather that drove people into a frenzy, and the culmination of these protests had antagonised a country.

**Commented [KV4]:** Good setting description here.

**Commented [KV5]:** We don't need to get so specific with the details. A couple of evocative images will do the trick.

**Commented [KV6]:** Having trouble following the focus of this scene. Too many details can make it difficult for readers to identify where to focus. I'll link to some tips on avoiding this in the report.

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“Do you like computer games? I love them.” Paulie continued without waiting for answer. “We should play. Come see my gaming PC. Ohhh.” He chuckled to himself. “It’s a thing of beauty. My girlfriend, she will bring us some ‘refreshments’, then we do business.”

**Commented [KV7]:** Paulie has great voice. 😊

Ryan continued to ignore him. He looked past him, and felt consumed by the vast behemoth of the ‘Palace of Parliament’ building. It was vast.

**Commented [KV8]:** Telling emotion here. Ryan’s feelings are made clear by the expression of “vast”.

**Commented [KV9]:** This sentence could be condensed to reduce redundancy: Ryan looked past him toward the behemoth of the Palace of Parliament building. It was vast.

Paulie caught him staring. “Largest single piece of carpet in the world. Third heaviest administration building in the world.” He sounded proud. “And have you been inside? Have you seen the room of mirrors?”

“No.” Ryan answered honestly. He would desperately have loved to have gone around the Parliament building. He was fascinated by history.

“Oh ho my friend. It is beautiful. And not a single mirror.”

Fucking Paulie, Ryan thought savagely. They kept walking. Paulie spouting off other nonsense statistics about the building. Dampening Ryans enthusiasm to visit it. He was looking forward to going to Dracula’s castle, even though its Wikipedia page had informed him, Bram Stoker had never been there, and in fact it had zero relevance to the legend at all. But instead housed a museum. Ryan was tuning Paulie out. He could just about make out the cathedral now. Another beautiful building, but walled in with a high ugly concrete wall.

**Commented [KV10]:** Try to be consistent with Ryan’s feelings about Paulie here. He pays attention to the details about the building and then ignores him. 1 or 2 references to ignoring Paulie are enough for us to get the idea.

“Scoo-zeh.” A man had bumped into Ryan. Clearly distracted by the protests.

“Hey! Eye gree-jah peh oon-deh merj, pross-tool-eh!” Paulie called at him and his two-security stepped toward the man who look flustered, wafting his hands and stepping backwards bowing his head slightly saying.

**Commented [KV11]:** Not sure what this says

“Scoo-zeh, scoo-sez, noo the-ahm vuh-zoot” before weaving hurriedly away amongst the crowds.

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Els earpiece crackled as he slipped it back in. “Successful hand off?”

**Commented [KV12]:** Interesting opener, but I’m hoping to see Emma abducted by the end of the chapter. It’s an awesome hook. The suspense is much stronger with the reader knowing that something is going to happen to Emma, but not knowing how.

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El stripped the running jacket off he had stolen and dropped it between some cars.

“Yes.” El tried not to move his lips.

He was down to his vest and circumvented back onto the pavement and slipped into the park, before jogging up the wall. He wanted to get back to their temporary ops room quickly.

He knew he would be much faster than Ryan up this road on this side of the wall. He could already see the intersection. He swept his thick dark hair back behind his ears. He was breathing hard, not because he was out of shape. He was in really good shape, but because it was so hot. It just drained energy from any exertion. El made the cross walk. The lights and paint on the floor seemed to have no impact on traffic on good days. Today in the chaos-

El easily slipped around the back of the hotel, and into the foyer and took the stairs to the third floor two at a time. Wwiping sweat out of his eyes on his vest, he swiped his card and re-entered the room.

“How’s he doing?” He asked one of the lads giggling and chewing gum at a console. The man ignored him. El kicked his chair.

“Where is he.” El asked again. Fucking amateurs.

“TPDs here.”

“T-P-D?” El fired a look at the grizzled veteran in a chair on the other side of the room. He sat sweating with his back to them. Dark green stains in his old light green, cotton company PT T-shirt. His long ginger hair greasy and mank, swept back over his head and down his shoulders. The room stank of BO and gas. It was disgusting.

“Ten percent Downs.” The man giggled and his mate high fived him.

“Where did you get these clowns?” El asked the ginger man as he went and grabbed a water from the minibar. “I thought we were only going to work with professionals now.” The water was warm. It was less a mini bar and more a drinks cupboard. Cheap hotels. No AC and no fridge.

Commented [KV13]: Supernatural abilities?

Commented [KV14]: Could cut. This is implied and the temporary ops room can be addressed as he enters

Commented [KV15]: Be sure to check for typos in final revisions.

Commented [KV16]: Temporary ops room

Commented [KV17]: Is this the man with red hair speaking?

Commented [KV18R17]: NOTE: May need to tag dialogue differently

Commented [KV19]: Stick to a few pivotal details to hold the reader’s attention.

Commented [KV20]: Is this the same man who giggled and ignored him before? If so, you could give him a phony name like Mr. Giggles or something like that.

Commented [KV21]: Does El know this man? Could he be referred to by name to avoid offending any red-headed readers. :)

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The ginger man stood up and turned around. His huge beard glistening with sweat. He had tight navy tracksuit trousers and garish running shoes. He looked a mess. But El wasn't bothered about him, or his appearance. He and Cain had run missions together for years.

"Pack it in." Cain snapped at the two at the laptop. And the laughter quickly muted. His voice was low and authoritative with a slight American accent. El had once asked where he had gotten it and been told Boston. But on another operation, someone else had asked and Cain had said Texas. He strode over to the thick curtain that had been pulled shut and twitched it open, holding a high-power telescopic monacle to his eye. He pointed and El joined him at the window.

"We got to work with what the organisation sends us. They're capable."

El looked down at the packed streets and crowds. He saw Paulie and Ryan easily. Ryans completely inappropriate loud grey suit jacket marking them out clearly as planned.

Cain offered El the monacle and El took it gratefully. They were just about to cross the street El had come in on.

"Have we got eyes in the hotel?" El asked over his shoulder.

"Yup." One of the men said but added nothing else.

"Well?" El demanded tersely.

One of them sighed. Fuck sake El thought to himself. He would have to raise this again when they got back. There was the sound of tapping keys, and then one of them spun a laptop around to show a poor-quality video feed. Something partially obstructed the view. El knew the camera would be hidden in a bag on a table.

"Thommo's in there. And he's left the jacket on the chair opposite. See." The man stubbed his finger at something on the screen. El looked away and back out the window. He lost sight of the group walking in front of the hotel.

"Not long." Cain went and stared back at his ruggedised laptop.

**Commented [KV22]:** The focus on description here implies that El DOES care about his appearance which would be a contradiction. Once we've acknowledged that the man is sweaty, we don't need to do this again, so I would pick one reference.

**Commented [KV23]:** Best to introduce the man by name earlier on.

**Commented [KV24]:** This is a fun, intriguing characteristic

**Commented [KV25]:** What is Ryan doing? Just walking? Talking?

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“Why TPD then?” El couldn’t help himself, and was amazed they didn’t pick up on the derision dripping from his voice. “Because he likes history?”

“Yup.” The first one answered up again sounding bored.

“Roads been blocked?” El stared at the gobby one.

“Yup.”

“Not filling me with confidence mate.”

“We put the delivery lorry there last night. It’s been blocked all morning. And we put in the front windows to the hotel last night as well. So, everyone’s using the other exit. Its empty right.” The man shrugged, and picked up a headset. Fucking amateurs El thought savagely again.

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Ryan and Paulie turned down the side street. The hotel entrance was only about twenty meters further on.

“We go to your room, go to the mini bar. I call us up some friends to party...” Paulie smiled as they walked happily in the shadows between the two buildings. Thank Christ it was cooler here. Ryan thought. The road was empty. Paulie didn’t seem to spot this unnatural calm among the chaos. Ryan picked up on the security getting more shifty. They must have noticed the change in the atmospherics. Ex military and police were usually more in tune with these things. Ryan knew he didn’t have long. Ryan knew soon they would see the shut entrance. He tried to guess if they were far enough down the alley to avoid a scene. It would be close.

“Paulie.” Ryan stopped and held up his hands. “We need a figure, a realistic one” Ryan added quickly as Paulie went to interrupt again. Ryan put his hand in his suit jacket, as though going for an interior pocket. He had been searched already and so Paulie’s security weren’t bothered. His fingers closed around the handle of the loaded and cocked pistol El had handed to him in the bump earlier.

**Commented [KV26]:** Having trouble following this phrasing. If El has been working with Cain for years, shouldn't he understand this acronym? Not sure what's meant by "Ten Percent Downs"

**Commented [KV27]:** Is this the same man talking?

**Commented [KV28]:** Feeling El's frustration here. Curious to see what happens next!

**Commented [KV29]:** Good tension here

**Commented [KV30]:** Ohhhh...

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“I have a figure written in an envelope. Greater than ten. But not much” Paulie frowned. “But it’s got something a bit extra for you. To make this work.” Paulie’s greedy face smiled, and he closed in keenly. Ryan waited until he was a meter away. Flanked by his burly security team. Ryan grinned. Everyone let their guard down for a bribe. He brought out the Glock and swiftly discharged two rounds. One each into the lower abdomen of the security detail, aiming to drive the rounds down and into their hips below any Kevlar vests. And then one well aimed shot into Paulie’s left knee. The noise was deafening and echoed loudly around the alley. All three men screamed and moaned. Ryan quickly silenced the security detail with close range head shots. There was suddenly a pungent, sharp smell. It wasn’t the blood or violent traumatic injuries that ever-made Ryan nauseous, it was always this smell of blood. He swallowed hard tasting the acid reflux in his throat.

“Paulie.” Ryan said stepping over the bodies to stand above him.

“Fuck you, boz-gor! You’ll die for this Englishman. My boss-”

“Do you know” Ryan began, watching Paulie squirm. “What your boss calls you?”

Paulie spat him, and squirmed in pain, dragging himself backward. Ryan put his earpiece in, it had been taped to the side of the gun El had passed him.

“Paulie fuck-nuts.”

Paulie muttered and cussed under his breath.

“Hurry it up Ryan.” Cains voice came in his ear. “Movement at the end of the alley”.

Ryan looked down the alley and saw people were pointing from the entrance.

Paulie saw it to. He laughed with a grimace. “Finished Englishman. Finished. Ooohho”

Ryan pilfered Paulie’s tracksuit pockets seeing the bulges. Discarded the wallet teaming with Lei notes. Hurling the keys down the alley, they jingled and scrapped on the floor in the distance, and looked at the iPhone.

“Code.”

**Commented [KV31]:** Yes! This is the action the reader is looking for.

**Commented [KV32]:** Repeat reference to blood

**Commented [KV33]:** PLEASE NOTE: These are filter words: looked/saw. They pull the reader out of the narrative. When Cain says, “Movement at the end of the alley”, you can follow with something like “People were already pointing at Ryan from the entrance.” Reader’s will connect the two details in their mind and see the visual like a movie. I’ll list a link to other filter words to watch out for in your report.

**Commented [KV34]:** Another filter we can cut and simply say: “Paulie laughed with a grimace.” The detail of Paulie also seeing people pointing isn’t important here.

**Commented [KV35]:** A few too many details to follow here.

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“Muh-nuhnch kuh-kot!”

“Ah” Ryan tutted. “English. Please.”

“Fuck you.” Then Paulie screamed, Ryan stood on his injured knee.

**Commented [KV36]:** Ouch! Ryan is cutthroat!

“I don’t have time for this Paulie.” He stepped off again. Paulie breathed heavily and looked at him with tears in his eyes. He was tougher than Ryan had imagined. He went to step back onto his mess of a knee again.

**Commented [KV37]:** Try to condense sentences like this to drive the pace and intensity: He stepped on Paulie’s knee again.

“One Nine Eight Nine!” Paulie shouted again trying to drag himself away.

“Good. Now the name of your Russian contacts please.” Paulie’s face paled.

“I can’t.” He whispered.

“Listen, Paulie Fuck Nuts.” Ryan stood over Paulie and looked down at him. God, he hated this drug dealing, people smuggling bastard. He had hated working with him. He was getting a real pleasure in this phase of their operation. “What’s his name? what’s his contact number? I can just go through your phone, and kill you now. Or You can save me time and tell-”

**Commented [KV38]:** Good flow of action and dialogue through here.

“You kill me anyway.” Paulie growled.

“I might.” Ryan agreed. “But what I really want, Paulie Fuck Nuts. Is for you to go back and pass a message on to your boss. No more money. It’s much better delivered in person. Its why I didn’t just kill you and take your phone. We could have cracked it anyway. So...” Ryan waggled the phone at him. Paulie stared at him malevolently.

“Fine.” Ryan changed the pin in the settings and put the phone back in his pocket. He levelled the Glock at Paulie.

“Ivan.” The word rushed out of Paulie. Ryan knew that it was his last hope. That this gun wielding Englishman might keep his word.

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“Thank you, Ivan.” Ryan said it for Cain listening at the other end. Always ‘Ivan’ for these Russians. He put the gun away. “Now remember Paulie. What are you going to tell your boss?”

There was always surprisingly little blood with a pelvic shot and hollow point bullets, but some blood was seeping down the road.

“Fuck you.” Paulie grimaced.

“That’s right.” Ryan ignored him. “No more money.”

“Get out of there.” Cains voice crackled on the comms again.

Ryan walked down the road, and unlocked the chained up hotel door. The windows and door had been boarded up by the advance team after they put them through to ensure secure exfil route for Ryan, and to reduce the visibility into the alley. It had been locked with a combination lock. As he entered the hotel, he was pleased that the reception was busy. People chatting, music on loud. The noise had masked the shots, and no one was paying him any attention. Protestors were frequently coming in and out of the other entrance, getting drinks before heading back out. That would be good to mask his exit.

Commented [KV39]: Trying to follow how this is possible with the hotel boarded up.

Ryan relocked the door from the inside, shrugged off his jacket and hung it on a peg in the foyer. Crossing the restaurant, he casually picked up and pulled on the jacket on a chair opposite one of the support team. He fished a dark blue baseball hat out the pocket, pulled it low over his eyes, and walked out.

Briskly Ryan walked around the corner, saw his next RV and ducked into the café. He went to the toilet and lifting the cistern he found the clothes wrapped in a plastic bag. He changed quickly into shorts, t-shirt and another new cap and sunglasses. Ryan placed his clothes and the weapon in the plastic bag and back in the cistern. As he left the cubicle another man nodded and went in with a rucksack, he heard the man scooping it out as he left.

Commented [KV40]: Good pacing of details here.