

QUARTERSHOT

A short story by [Timothy Freriks](#) © 2016

The feel of the football in my hand as the center hikes it to me is comfortable and I start to move away from the line. I see the defense's secondary starting to watch my eyes and the cornerback trying to read what they are saying. *The guard can't see me, of course, since I'm lying behind the low ornate parapet of the dingy, half-destroyed apartment building in this sunbaked, God forsaken city. But I can see him through the Leupold Mark 4 scope which is pointed toward the speaker's platform 631 yards away.*

My wide receiver is a half-second late in getting off the line toward his route. It's a simple hook pattern made to look like a post pattern to confuse the Safety. If everybody else is covered, I'll hit him in the hook and settle for fifteen yards. *The Premier is just starting to enter my field of vision from the right. The guard backs away a step to give him room to climb the steps. Good, that gives me a couple extra inches. But there's another guard entering from the left... and the Ambassador is shifting, too. It's getting congested and I start to feel my only accomplice, the worm, messing with my insides.*

Momentary anxiety, the doctor called it: when you put yourself in a position where the next few seconds have critical importance. Twenty seconds left and twenty yards from field goal range can qualify as critical, especially when the game is tied, especially when it's the last game of your career. I try not to look directly at my Tight End for fear of giving too much away, but the Outside Linebacker is moving backward. If he continues, he'll be straight in the line of fire when my Wide Receiver stops. But I'm confident; I'm the best. *If the guard on the left continues, he'll pass the Premier just as he gets to the point where I have to fire. If I wait until the target reaches the podium, even my Barrett M98B 50-cal won't be accurate; the double-thick, bulletproof glass will deflect the bullet. If I wait too much longer, the target will be in front of our Ambassador which means he would be taken out, too. Not good. Not easy, but I'm confident; I'm the best.*

I have the ball now and I start the first step of the dropback that will take me into the pocket. I'm adjusting my grip, finding the sweet spot, fingers on the laces and my long finger near the point. How good it feels. How right. *The rubber cushion is firmly nuzzled against my shoulder. My thumb touches the handgrip with authority and my long finger gently caresses the trigger. It feels good. It feels right.*

The first of three steps of the dropback is complete. The linebacker is watching the running back as he sprints through the left side of the line and looks back at me. I shift my eyes to him, too, which makes the linebacker commit to a move away from my true target's path. My receiver is on track now, starting to hit his stride. The cornerback isn't fooled, though; he's following my man into the route. But he's going too fast. Good. When my wide receiver stops, he'll overshoot. *The guard starts to shadow the Premier as he steps onto the stage from my right. He's moving into my line of sight, into the line of fire. As the crowd sees the Premier, they start to cheer—as they were paid to do, if you believe our State Department—and the Premier begins to raise his hand in acknowledgement. The movement also motions the guard back. It's looking clean except that the guard on the left is still moving too quickly.*

The safety is sensing the hook now and he starts moving. My mind quickly calculates distance and speed and time. Unless my receiver waits too long, the safety shouldn't interfere. But I have to make the throw soon. *If the guard on the left moves any quicker he will block the shot. What now? The Ambassador is reaching forward to shake the Premier's hand. The Premier is still travelling left and waving. He doesn't see the Ambassador, who quickly changes his mind and stops his forward movement. To avoid an awkward photo, he will wait a few seconds to shake the man's hand. Of course, at that point, there will not be any consciousness at the other end driving it, but he can't know that yet. The good thing about this is that guard on the left is stopping. I have to make the shot soon.*

My back foot plants itself into the turf. I bend my knee slightly and pull my arm backward. The momentary anxiety has grown stronger. Not terror, yet, but the needle is passing fear as my heart starts its familiar fast-paced ka-chunk, ka-chunk. My wide receiver's helmet is moving.

He's turning. It's almost time. *The Ambassador has backed out of danger. The only other victims are directly behind the Premier. A M33BF cartridge doesn't care if they are kings or paupers; it just imparts to the slug of lead sufficient energy to penetrate whatever is in its way. The slug has its own mind once it is released, and it will only pay attention to the instructions given to it by the rifle and the laws of physics.*

My arm is drawing back as the receiver commits to his stop and turn toward me. A lineman tries to jump in front of me but I can tell he won't get into my passing lane in time. It'll be close, though, as I recall that Tackle is very quick side to side. He's raising his hand. The Safety is moving quicker than I expected, too, closing the gap sooner than calculated. The Cornerback is too late in figuring out his man is my target. Now it's just the Safety and the 300-pound lineman I have to worry about. *The Premier's hand comes down as he turns toward the podium. At 631-yards, the naked eye can't really determine the difference between a space of two feet and three feet. I can. And have about 18-inches of circular space in which to place the bullet. And the bullet has to be inside a 6-inch circle at the center of that space. I quickly check the data on the green BORS display then pull my eye back to the Leupold, adjust the reticle placement and stiffen. The weapon is ready; I am ready. The time between the pull of the trigger and the impact of the bullet will only take .64 seconds at this distance, but when the target is moving, a 10th of a second delay or a 1000th of an inch aiming error, can put the slug outside the circle.*

My arm is in position and my rear leg is starting the thrust, my hips starting the fundamental rotation, my upper body starting the finishing rotation that pulls my arm around. It's a well-oiled machine; the parts are functioning with precision. I visualize the fluid dance of the parts as they transfer energy to the ball. As my arm moves forward in ever increasing velocity, my wrist flexes, tightening, ready to snap the projectile forward on its path. Once free of my fingers, it will be committed, obeying only the laws of physics that I imparted to it. I am a weapon. *The Premier steps forward toward the agreement waiting to be signed on the podium. It must not be signed. My people know something the Ambassador and even the President do not: The Treaty would be violated within days. If signed, thousands of civilians on both sides will die. It's time. I pull in my breath and hold it. The Mil-Dot reticle is in the sweet spot*

and I tighten my finger, awaiting the release of energy, the simultaneous orgasm of man and rifle. We are the weapon. I feel the pressure of the hard metal as I close the 10th of an inch gap between guilty and not guilty.

The ball is free. The receiver is almost fully turned. His eyes lock on the ball with laser precision as it races toward him, dead on the expected trajectory. He knows what to do. He knows the risks. If he doesn't trap it there will be no time to try again. The game will be over and thousands of fans will blame him. *The bullet is free. The reticle was locked into the right side of the Premier's nose, but by the time the bullet reaches him, it will impact on the left side of his nose.*

The ball seems to take hours to close the fifteen yards. I see the receiver move his hands into position; his eyes see nothing but pigskin. I've seen those hands hundreds of times and every time they move like that, he catches the ball. The path is perfect, I think as my arm comes down from the release. I am as focused as my receiver is. The feeling is wonderful, satisfying. *I know the bullet will complete its mission. I don't have to watch the result, but I always do. I'm focused on the man's face, the face that will within a second cease to be a face at all, belonging to a very bad man who will also cease to be a very bad man.*

He has it. His hands meet the ball and clasp it, gripping it perhaps tighter than any ball he has ever gripped. He slows it and pulls it into to his abdomen, controlling it before he starts to turn up field. The cornerback will be too late. The safety expects my man to move out of bounds to stop the clock. I know he'll move in, though. I know my man. I love my man. The catch and control are works of art, a ballet of movement and action that creates a beauty of its own. *I see the cheek bone start to distort. Impact. It pulls the man's face around to the right as its inertia finally meets enough solid material to transfer. A drop of blood becomes a spurt of blood as it ejaculates from his face in an arc. I can see his eyes widen slightly as the slug increases its purchase and enters his brain. His eyes won't widen further; nothing will deliver the instructions. Something in my brain recalls a vision of a watermelon being cracked open when I was a kid. The Premier's skull is doing the same thing. Many new red spurts now join the ballet of blood, creating a beautiful pattern of action and color.*

One of the other team's linemen finally got through my guard and I feel his body impact mine. It's okay. I can take it as long as the cheering is loud and coming from the north side of the field—my side. The longer I hear it, the farther my man gets. Maybe he'll go all the way and I won't have to call for a time-out and risk a missed field goal. My legacy will be complete; I will have won my last game. As I hit the ground, the cheers turn to screams of disbelief. The cheers are now coming from the south side of the field. Something is very wrong. *The Premiers' head is spinning around and he is falling. My job is done and I feel time speed up. I leave my Barrett with a pang of regret—I love that weapon; it's more of a lover than a rifle—and reach for the dark robes and checked red and white head scarf. I try to dress as I scurry across the roof like a frightened monkey toward the door to the stairs. Suddenly, it bursts open. Something is very wrong.*

I scramble to my feet as my teammates start to change directions. They are running to the left, past me. As the field clears, I see my receiver on the ground ahead, ten yards from the goal, hands on his helmet, face in the grass. It is obvious: Somehow the ball was knocked loose and the safety was now running freely past me toward my own goal. And no one was catching him. I want to fall to the ground and kneel in despair. It's over. I made the big throw, but I lost the game. It is a disaster. I failed. *Bursting through the door are two soldiers, enemy soldiers. Behind them flow four more. I fall on my knees to the hard roof and raise my hands in disbelief; my heart is frozen with defeat. I made the big shot; I completed the mission, but I lost the game. They will know who was responsible—and that will be a diplomatic disaster. I failed. I knew this would happen someday. I knew the risks. I feel the worm trying to escape. It's done with me.*

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