

The Winner Stands Alone

By Paulo Coelho

He is following a dream of love.

Igor Malev has one thing on his mind - his ex-wife Ewa. He's handsome, rich and effortlessly personable - but she left him for a successful fashion designer, a sting he's never recovered from.

So he travels to the glamorous Cannes International Film Festival where they'll be appearing, intent on winning her back. There amid the luxury and excess of the new Superclass - the ultimate winners in the hedonistic game of modern life - he begins a 24-hour campaign of extraordinary violence.

For Igor is a man of rare intensity and cold intelligence, and this is to be no ordinary reconciliation. Because he made a promise to destroy whole worlds to get his beloved...

And he always keeps his word.

3:17 a.m.

The Beretta Px4 compact pistol is slightly larger than a mobile phone, weighs around 700 grams and can fire ten shots. Small, light, invisible when carried in a pocket, its small calibre has one enormous advantage: instead of passing through the victim's body, the bullet hits bones and smashes everything in its path.

Obviously the chances of surviving a shot of that calibre are fairly high; There are thousands of cases in which no vital artery was severed and the victim had time to react and disarm his attacker. However, if the person firing the pistol is experienced enough, he can opt either for a quick death - By aiming at the point between the eyes or at the heart - or a slower one - by placing the barrel at a certain angle close to the ribs and squeezing the trigger. The person shot takes a while to realise that he has been mortally wounded and tries to fight back, run away or call for help. The great advantage of this is that the victim has time to see his killer's face while his strength ebbs slowly away and he falls to the ground, with little external loss of blood, still not fully understanding why this is happening to him.

It is far from being the ideal weapon for experts. 'Nice and light - in a lady's handbag. No stopping power though', someone in the British Secret Service tells James Bond in the first film



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in the series, meanwhile confiscating Bond's old pistol and handing him a new model. However, this advice applied only to professionals, and for what he now had in mind it was perfect.