

# A Specialty Service

*My Life Behind the Gun*

## Chapter One

### The Nazis next door

Stinky is walking the fence. Ok, I call him stinky because he needs a name and I don't care what his really is. He's filthy, in dirty camo and hair that looks like he hasn't washed it in weeks. He has an AK 74 with a flashlight duct taped to the forward grip. There are maybe twenty magazines attached to him. He couldn't move quickly much less fight effectively. If he worked for me he wouldn't for long. As stinky walked away another guard came up. I call this one Bubba. A good old boy in jeans and a flannel shirt over wife beater. A double barrel shotgun over his shoulder and a 357-colt python with an 8-inch barrel. The handgun is so long he had to cut a hole in the holster to make it fit. Making the look complete he has a trucker hat overtop of what looks like a mullet. Every time I see him I think of the intro to the old television show Hee-Haw. Two men walk a five-mile perimeter surrounding what was billed as an army of racists. This could be easy.

A month ago, a local farmer hired us to "*do something*" about his neighbors. A survivalist group bought the farm next door. The first thing they did was build a large metal fence around the property. At the gate, they erected a sign proclaiming themselves free and powerful. As in white power with swastikas and everything. At last count, they had around fifty people on the property. Farming, building housing, digging holes and burning crosses. During this time, the farmer has noticed his corn crop near the fence disappearing. He has lost some equipment and fencing. After calling the police about the missing property he was visited by a couple of his new neighbors. They broke his glasses then set fire to his chicken coop with the chickens inside. He couldn't call the police again. He knew a guy who knew another guy who knew us.

I run a specialist service dealing in security. To most we are mercenaries. Paid thugs with guns and no morals. The people who work for me will attest that we have plenty of morals. We keep them in your wife's nightstand. We don't take jobs for drug cartels, terrorists, oppressive governments or the girl scouts. But the girl scout one is a longer story. Let's just say cookies can be a cut-throat business. Most of the people working for me are former military or police. Most didn't see any action. My second and head of operations is a woman named Tima Cocks. Most people call her TC. She's about 6' 3" with a deep ebony skin and long twisted multi colored braids. She calls them a Senegalese twist. She was born in Senegal but moved with her parents to

America before she turned two. Her father is an American doctor working for The World Health Organization and her mother was working as an interpreter for them. Every year she spends about a month in Senegal connecting to where she came from. It's a pretty place if you can get past everyone speaking French. Most clients look at TC as one would look at a supermodel if one showed up with an AR-15 in her arms and a Glock 19 strapped to her side. When she likes, me she calls me Jack and when she doesn't then I'm whitey. I hear whitey a lot.

While I watch the main gate TC and another man named Ted watch from the farmer's property with the thermal imaging camera. Ted is new. 5' 10" white guy with a crewcut and scar running down his cheek. Just before he was to join the army he was in an accident on his motorcycle. The crash destroyed his knees. With the replacements, he was ruled unfit to enlist. Their loss is our gain. Ted is an excellent shot and a wiz with the fancy expensive camera.

Looking at the compound a frontal assault would be suicidal or just resemble world war three. Over the radio I hear, "*hey whitey is the idiot with all the ammo your brother?*" I answer back, "*I don't think I'll see that guy at synagogue anytime soon. Those Neo-Nazi types don't seem to like my people much.*" She replied, "*mine either.*" We spent the night collecting data watching dumb asses act like they know what they are doing.

The next day in the techno Twinkie we went over the data. Our mobile command trailer is an old airstream fitted out with all the tech a peeping Tom or in case a peeping Ted would want. Anyone who knows the old airstreams knows they look like a silver Twinkie. Inside the gate there is another large fence. The fancy camera can't see past it. Using a little barrowed imagery from a satellite we can see the marijuana operation inside the fenced in area. We had a lot of inadmissible evidence but no usable proof. We debated on sending in a spy to join but that sounds like something a stupid television show or movie would do. We need the authorities to pay attention without making this the new Waco.

Day one

We sent one of our long-time employees to the gate. His name is Bobby and if any of us fit the bill it's him. He's 6' 5" with curly blonde hair and a blonde goatee. Bobby likes to dress in modern digital camo from his military grade boots to his very unmilitary cowboy hat. To complete the look, he speaks in a deep southern Georgia accent. The kind that makes a Yankee

like me say what every other word. Using some captured audio from our surveillance we knew that they needed some ammo for their AR-15s and AKs. Using the name of one of their suppliers he could gain access. He gave them a crate of ammo including some incendiary rounds. Yes, gave them. Built into the box was a special tracker used by the ATF that no one is to know about so don't tell anyone. It tracks the rounds and acts like a listening device. It only activates if a box is taken out. A group like this is going to inventory the crate so it will active soon. Maybe too soon for our plan. So, we made sure the tracker didn't function and it could be found by the group. Paranoia can be an effective weapon.

Day two

The next day the group doubled their guard. That is when they started to find the painfully obvious listening devices and cameras we planted around the fence. By noon half the population of the compound was walking the grounds. So, send in the drones. Using several drones, we bought online we buzzed the perimeter of the compound. We made sure that one could be shot down. After they shot twenty or thirty rounds at it we gave up and crashed it into the fence. The drone had on a plate on the bottom *Property of the Federal Bureau of Investigation*. That night the grounds were littered with extension cords and spot lights.

Day three

We rented a couple of black Suburban SUVs the kind used in the movies by the FBI. Every couple of hours we would take turns driving by the entrance to the compound. At one point, we had TC stop and take a picture of the entrance. She was in a black suit with a white shirt and black tie. Something these jerk offs would find much scarier than an FBI agent. A black female FBI agent. Using a cheap brand of two way radios we started sending messages back and forth. We looked for a type we knew they could listen in on. As we drive by we send messages such as passing target. This went on for two days.

Day six

The large contingent of guards left the fence. The group was harvesting their crops and packing up the guns. We now need to call the Drug Enforcement Agency and the FBI and let them know a large shipment of drugs and guns would be on the road. The FBI just said they

would consider it. The DEA hung up. We went to local law enforcement with the evidence. They called the state troopers.

Day seven

Early in the morning four trucks left the compound. At the state line, they met the law. Every state trooper, every cop from town was out there. Without their compound, there were in the open. In the end, it all ended without a single shot being fired. The compound was raided and all the evidence was collected. It included some plans they made for raiding a supermax prison and blowing up a state capital building. Drug and gun charges quickly became terrorist charges and long terms in jail. A month later, the property was auctioned off to the highest bidder. The farmer bought it.

## Chapter Two

### De facto Mayor

Edward Franko was the de facto mayor of the town. He operated his little kingdom free from police intervention. He was the police. Well sort of. About six years ago he took over the town by kidnapping the police chief's wife and children. The chief's wife is also the mayor's daughter. The real mayor. Franko knows that as long as the mayor is in office he can do as he sees fit. In the last election, the mayor ran unopposed. A city councilman once proposed a term limit for the mayor. He and his whole family died in a tragic fire set by Franko's de facto police. In his desperation, the mayor call for help from an unlikely source.

We are a specialist service dealing in quiet interventions around the world. Ok, we are mercenaries hired to take out targets, rescue hostages, and do whatever needs to be done. One day we are in the desert attacking insurgents the next day in the jungles of South America hitting coca plantations. We do it all. To hire us all you do is send a request on our website. No really, we have a website. The site looks like any other shop from home service. To order you need to know the codes and how to order. Without the right code an order of a rack of short ribs with sauce will get you the beginnings of a great barbeque. With the right codes, you will be ordering a hostage rescue. You must know one of us or a specialized broker to have one of the codes. The mayor knew my right-hand woman. He and the mayor's younger son served in the army together.

On the site the mayor ordered a rack of ribs for four with corn and potatoes. A rescue of a woman and children. He also ordered a full desert. This meant leave none of the aggressors alive. The site directs the user to a special pay application that diverts the user to a phone number to call. On the phone a meeting is planned to talk price and time. In the call the mayor wanted it done fast and he didn't care about the cost. Within two hours we were face-to-face with the mayor in an International House of Pancakes. He told us how it all started.

One day without an appointment this man walks into the mayor's office. He hand's the mayor an envelope and then moves over to a couch across from the mayor. The envelope contains pictures of the mayor's daughter and his grandkids bound and gagged. He told the mayor the security would be fine if the mayor the chief did as they were told. He would call the mayor's family "the security" whenever they spoke. That was six years ago. He thought that at

reelection he would get his family back but anyone who considered running against him would find themselves having a tragic and final accident. The last one was killed in a one car collision with a tree and several baseball bats. Then came the fire that killed the councilman, his wife and seven kids. The kids were the breaking point for us. This one would be on the house.

Within an hour our cyber tech had the blueprints of the house and satellite photos of the grounds. Not even well placed thugs can get around building codes and eyes in the sky. The house was a large brick colonial with a massive brick and iron gate around the perimeter. A driveway went in a crescent shape from one gate with a guard post to another without one, a clear entrance and exit point. The plans also laid out the services coming in, there was just one point with all services from gas to cable lines. In the back was another gate with no signs of access points. Using infrared cameras, a team sent to do a visual recon found twelve heat signatures. The hostages were most likely in the basement. About ten feet from the fence all wireless signals dropped. They had a jammer.

In the recon, we found out the owner had the house swept for listening devices every other week. It seemed silly with the jammer, but I guess paranoia can make a man do strange things. We decided to use this to our advantage. We bought the service he used for "bug" detection and went in. At the gate we were searched. They took any phones and anything that looked "funny" to the guards. In the recon, we found the basement. It had a metal door with a keypad on it but no knob. It did have a place to read a keycard in the keypad. That night we devised a plan.

When doing these kind of operations, we never refer to each other by our names. Our codes were simple I was number-one my second on command was number two. All together we went from one to nine with number seven and eight in the panel truck. Number nine was in a van nearby for a quick exit. That left six of us for the raid. Two would secure the ground floor. Two would take the second floor. The last two would find a way into the basement. We would go in saying how a malfunction in our equipment could have provided a false negative for bugs. After watching us most of the day yesterday the guards would be a little more at ease with our presence.

Inside the house, we started the fake scans. As the guard nearest me turned away I struck. Using a suppressed Glock 26 I shot him in the back of the head. At the same time number-three

shot the other guard nearby. Two down ten to go. In the kitchen, we found five men sitting around a table eating and watching soccer (football). They were so interested in the game they didn't hear the shots in the next room. From the time we entered to the last shot it was maybe six seconds. Only one had time to react. Just not fast enough. Upstairs number-two and number-four searched the bedrooms except for the master. They found and ended three more thugs. I went up to meet with number-two as number-three went out to find the breaker box. He found it in a small building just outside of the house. He cut the cable service lines. This would effectively cut off the voice-over-internet phone service. With the jammer active, the house was silent. Number-five and number-six found the basement door unguarded. Number-three found a cardkey on the table in the kitchen and went into the basement. Outside on the roof of the panel truck number-seven using a Springfield M1A with a suppressor took out the guards at the guard post and by the front door.

The three of us gathered at the door to the master suite. I knocked. From inside a man yell, "not now I'm working." I knocked again. A thump sounded out as a man got off a bed and walked to the door. Franko opened the door wearing a bathrobe open in the front defeating the purpose of putting on the robe. Before he could speak I shot him in the knees. He fell backward. Number-two and number-four shot him in the shoulders. His arms fell to his sides limp. In the room was the mayor's daughter bruised and bloody trying to cover herself with every blanket and pillow on the bed. It was clear what this man meant by working. I went over to Franko and said, "consider this a recall mister mayor" then I shot him in the head. That is when an alarm sounded.

When it was all done, we realized you most likely needed both a keycard and a code to enter the basement. Without the code, the alarm sounds. A voice came across the once dead radio, "Jammer down." This was most likely done automatic so a signal could be sent out. We had to go now. number-two stayed with the mother and helped her clean up so her kids wouldn't see the blood. She felt the mayor's daughter would feel more at ease with a woman helping her clean up and dress. Four or five minutes later they came out of the bathroom. She was bruised but no longer bloody wearing men's pants and a shirt way too big for her small frame. On the way out of the bedroom she stopped to look at Franko then kicked him in the misshapen head. Then the other head. On the ground floor, she met up with her children. Two daughters ages

eleven and nine and her seven-year-old son. Both gates opened and number-nine pulled in. About ten minutes after we started we were off the property.

We let the daughter call her father to tell the news. Right after the call the police chief sent out an alert. Within an hour every known illegal and some legal activities of Franco's was raided and shut down. In all over seventeen dealers, five pimps and nine chop shops were hit. Most of the raids left no one for trial. A week later the mayor stepped down and retired from public life. With his daughter and grandchildren reunited with his son-in-law he felt his job was done. He couldn't see himself doing a job a thug like Franko help him keep. The first act the of the new mayor was to help put in place a term limit on the job.

## Chapter Three

### Canada

About a week ago I received a call from a Canadian citizen having trouble with poachers. Now I can already tell you are thinking, “*what the heck do they need mercenaries for something already illegal?*” You are right. And a little rude. This man’s trouble is that the government was unwilling to come out and deal with this. He is what could easily be called a conspiracy nut. He called once for the cattle defiling aliens probing his cattle. Then on the Canada geese wearing all those cameras implanted in them by the US Government to spy on him. Cry wolf enough and people stop listening.

Now I guess I should feel bad about taking a job for money, but how many days do you go to work and say to the boss. “*don’t pay be today boss this is my free day.*” Electricity isn’t free and we have a payroll to pay for. With TC, out of the country with the best of the best I am stuck at the headquarters with the scrubs. TC stands for Tima Cocks a Singhalese American who looks like a supermodel and fights like a ranger. They are guarding a shipment of AIDs drugs going to eastern Africa. Yes, I’m bored. Looking for nothing but a good time and how can I resist. At best, we spend a couple of days in the north at worst an alien ass inspection. Ok, that would be bad.

To get to his land we needed to first drive to seven hundred miles away. Then fly into the part of the country near the arctic circle. It is late July and already freezing. The pilot spoke of snow soon. I moved from Ohio to get away from snow. My business was built in the jungles and desert because they have no snow. On the way, I read the intelligence report. Gavin Le Grand was a relief worker for an agency working in the Congo trying to help stop deforestation. When he left that work, he moved to Canada and took over his family’s ranch. A few years, a few cattle deaths later he sold the ranch and moved north to track the wild life. The Congo must be how he knows one of our booking agents. He spends his days tracking animals such as wolves and polar bears. At one point the pilot asked if we were out here for the grizzly ahole. I had to explain to my crew that he was referring to an old show called Grizzly Adams and yes, we are out here for him.

After a three-hour trek into the woods that took four hours because I left the mapping up to an idiot. Oh, wait I had the map. We finally found the client or rather he found us at the end of his shotgun. I explained to him who we are and showed him my identification. He grumbled something about "*too many foreigners.*" Gavin Le Grand looked like a person would look if they lived by themselves out in the woods for years. Long black and gray hair with a thick beard. A coat that was more quilt than original material and boots with duct tape around the soles. We made it to his cabin about twenty minutes later. It's most likely a good thing I left my tech guy back at HQ. The client's cabin has no electricity. He uses a hand crank to generate power for a radio. No cell phone towers mean no cell phones. The satellite phone doesn't work in the valley where his cabin is. With all that there is no internet access. Even the cheap two-way radios I brought would be limited to a short range because of the mountains. The Canadian government limited us to basically weaponry a person would use to hunt with. I have my M1a rifle and a Smith & Wesson 500 with a four-inch barrel just in case we run into a bear. The round will most likely just piss the bear off but it makes me feel safer.

With the dream team in Africa I have what was left. Phil is acting as my second on this job. He is maybe 5ft 3" with a bald head and bright orange sideburns for some reason. He's short but good with a knife and deadly with the Winchester model 70 he is packing. Next to him is Janet. She is about 5ft 9" with almost white long blonde hair. As a member of a SWAT team in Los Angeles she was hit with friendly fire in a raid. The shot cost her a left hand and we gained a person who knows tactics. Only if she would use her knowledge in the field. The final player in this little game is Jimmy. Jimmy is a 6ft tall white boy from southern Georgia. His brother Bobby is a long-time employee who said Jimmy would be a natural fit. In his time, he has shot a hole in the roof, set off a flash bang in a car being used for surveillance and just recently said to TC that he was better at hand-to-hand than her. Fifteen seconds into the fight he was slapping his hand to the mat trying to stop the fight without having to say, "*TC is the woman.*"

In his cabin, the client explained his troubles. In a word, Russians. He said the Russians invaded and set up camp in the hills. As he spoke I just thought about the vacation I could have taken. Maybe on a beach or fishing in the Gulf of Mexico. Then he spoke of the flag the Russians erected in their camp. A red flag with a hammer and sickle. The flag of the Soviet Union. Once again, I found myself explaining to my team what something was. To some of them

the USSR was just the villain in the fourth Rocky movie. The Soviet Union ended in 1991 twenty-five years ago. The client said, "*from the look of the camp they have been here for at least thirty years.*" This was the slowest invasion I ever heard of.

That night using a map the client provided Janet and I snuck over to their camp to see what was what. At first their camp looked like a recreation of Jamestown fort. A triangular palisade made of local trees with one main building and several smaller buildings. On a makeshift pole was the old Soviet Flagg. It felt like staring into someone's strange fan fiction. They had men dressed in old Soviet army uniforms walking the perimeter. Each of them had an AK47. With a count of forty all of them packing AKs we were very out matched. We are a well-armed hunting party they are an army. We tried to quietly exfiltrate from the scene when Janet dropped her handgun. She hadn't secured the gun in place. It didn't go off that is something for the movies, but it did make a noise. Then as if to make sure they knew we were there she yields, "DARN."

We ran for the cabin with about a dozen angry Russians following us. Nearly with in site of the cabin I could finally use the radio and alert them to what was coming. Phil closed the shutters and barricaded the windows from the inside. As we approached some rounds went by my head and into the cabin's structure. We made it in just as the Russians opened fire. The logs of the cabin are thick and could take a beating. The client looked at me and said, "*now I could have done this!*" From the outside, we could hear in a thick Russian accent, "*Yankee come out we only shoot you once.*" Jimmy yelled back, "*surrender now and we will go easy on you.*" I just looked at him and shook my head. Outside the Russians were laughing.

Within ten minutes the entire camp was surrounding us. An older Russian most likely their commander stepped up in front of his men and spoke, "*evil capitalist pigs you have no chance the red army is here to free the workers and cleanse the land.*" He spoke as if he was reading from a script. In fact, he had a paper in his hand. The client looked at me and said, "*you don't think I'm going to pay you for this.*" I responded, "*the check already cleared.*" The Russian commander walked up to the door and knocked. And I swear to god he made a joke. He said, "*Fuller brush salesman.*" Then he said, "*can I borrow a cup of sugar?*" I started to hand my rifle to Janet then thought again and gave it to Phil. Then I answered the door. As the door opened the solders tensed up and aimed. With a wave of an arms they lowered their rifles. I invited him in.

Inside I offered him a cup of coffee. He took the cup and smelled the contents. He said he hadn't had a cup of coffee since their supplies ran out about twenty years ago. He and his men were sent into the woods to prepare for an invasion to happen in 1987. They were just waiting for the signal. A signal that was thirty years in the waiting. I tried to tell him about that has happened in the last thirty years but he just didn't believe me. They were dedicated soldiers and would wait until the last for orders. I gave him my satellite phone and suggested he call home. He would have to go up the mountain to make the call. He hadn't seen anything like it. On his way out he said, "*if this is all a lie then we will burn the cabin down and shoot anyone who tries to exit it.*" Outside he spoke something in Russian to his men. Then he handed the phone to a younger officer who took off for the mountain. Younger as in maybe sixty. That is when the shit hit the fan.

One of the Russians stepped on a trap the client had set for bears. A snap and a scream then hot lead. They opened fire on the cabin. It was a cacophony of sounds with gunfire, smashing logs and distant screaming. The windows imploded into the cabin with shrapnel flying inside into the blankets Phil hung. After three minutes the gunfire stopped. The cabin then shifted to one side as first the foundation failed then some of the logs started to split. The client said, "*I want my money back.*"

About an hour later the officer with the phone came back. He said something in Russian to their commander. I really should learn some Russian. Then the commander turned to the cabin and said, "*is everyone alive inside.*" I yelled back, "*so far.*" As it turned out the battery died during the call to Moscow. At first Moscow didn't believe they were who they said they were. That makes two of us. After authenticating themselves with janitor that was once a soldier in the red army they were ordered to stand down and wait. Then the phone died. The commander said, "*until we receive complete orders we will stand down and wait here in the woods.*" Over the next couple of days, the soldiers helped rebuild the cabin. By the end of the week a plane flew over with a better satellite phone with a built-in hand crank. They were informed that they were relieved of duty and needed to go home.

Some decided to go while a few including Ivan the commander decided to stay. Hey, spent most of their lives here and didn't want to go back. Russia tried to explain that they were an embarrassment to their countries past and could hurt their current relations. If they don't come

back then they won't get any support from the government. That was just fine for Ivan.

Eventually all the men decided to stay in the woods. Even the client Gavin Le Grand moved in with the soldiers. He said he finally felt safe from the alien menace with these armed men. So somewhere north in Canada you will find a small piece of occupied territory won by Communist Russian forces who wouldn't mind if you sent them some coffee. And yes, I paid the money back.

## Chapter Four

### Mexico

When most people think about the border they think illegals, terrorists and drugs. They don't think stolen cars. About a week ago an auto insurance company dealing in exotic cars called us. The insure hard to find exotic cars. Really the insure the other insurance companies on their policies on exotic cars. Not just cover any Ferrari or Bentley not they focus on handmade speed machines that cost millions of dollars or more. In the past two months, they have had nine cars stolen. Using their trackers, they all end up in a small town on the border with Mexico. The American government investigated and found nothing. The Mexican government never bothered to send anyone to the border. The insurance company sent two investigators to the small town. One was found out in the desert. Well, most of him was found. The other was just gone. While it would be nice to find the cars they really wanted to know what happened to their investigator. That is where we step in.

I run a small specialty security service. Some would call us mercenaries other call us when they need mercenaries. Over the years we have become a sort of swiss army knife of ask kicking and name taking. We can do it all. What we won't do is work for the bad guys so no drug dealers, no terrorist, oppressive governments and defiantly not the Salvation Army. Black kettles and broken noses. And a bell as a projectile. But that is another story.

We said we would go and search both sides of the border and find the cars and people. A week later and nothing. The locals' no nothing on both sides. Our contacts in the underbelly of society no nothing. It is as if these cars just vanish into thin air. The incurrence company gave us access to their tracking system. About 2am a tracker went online. We traced it as the car made its way to the border and the small town we are in. Just a mile out of town we found a sight that would kill a car lover. An exotic car graveyard. The thieves have been stealing the cars than chopping them up for parts. Unlike most cars these cars are worth more than their parts so it made no sense to cut them a part. This is on the American side and the investigators disappeared in Mexico. So, there must be some connection. About an hour later a car carrier pulled up with some old busted up cars. The workers took the valuable parts and attached them to the junk cars. We followed them to the border and watched them cross. Before they did cross we sent one of our own to act as a border guard to attach a tracker on the truck.

We tracked the truck to a compound about thirty miles from the border. Using the ever so fancy thermal camera we could see at least twenty men inside. One heat signature was in what looked like a cage near a wall. The compound had thick cinderblock walls about fifteen feet high and surrounding the complex. The missing investigator was a young woman named Jennifer. She was new to the insurance game working under a mentor named Harry. It was Harry they found most of out in the desert still missing a leg and his hands. My right-hand woman everyone calls TC was angry and wanted to collect some heads and I don't mean the ones on their shoulders.

TC is a tall beautiful black woman originally from Senegal who likes to kick ass and is good at it. I said, "*we need a plan or things could go wrong fast.*" TC countered, "*my plan is simple much like you, whitey. Go in shoot everyone, rescue the girl then tacos.*" When she is angry she calls me whitey. One day I will have to remind her I am the boss. I think I'll do that over the phone when she is out of the country. Because I'm not stupid. We did our best to gather as much data as we could as our mobile command center the techno Twinkie made its way to us. The Twinkie is an old Airstream camper fitted out as a mobile super computer. We say we use it for recon because it sounds better than for spying. I think Ted uses it to spy on his neighbors but I have no proof, yet. That night we worked out a plan. By morning every operator, we had available was there. At least fourteen men and women. The plan would happen that night and move fast. First objective was the girl. Second was to find anything connecting the chop shop and this place. TC added, "*the third is to kick ass and bust caps.*"

Team one moved in on the wall beside the girl. Team two was about six hundred yards away on top of a panel truck in a sniper position. Team three was on the opposite side of the compound with some drones that will be guided from the Twinkie. Once launched team three will scale the wall. My team was team four. We bought and brought a snow blow truck down. The border guards look mighty confused. We are going to knock on the front door. A little shock and awl.

Using a special cutter team one cut through the cinderblocks at the mortar. They made an opening for access to the cage. Before freeing the girl, they checked the cage. Underneath the cage was a pressure mine set to go off once the girl was out. Jimmy didn't think twice about it. He climbed on top of the cage adding the weight so the girl could be freed. I hired Jimmy because his brother Bobby is an effective operator who can get the job done. He recommended

him. In is time with us he has shot a hole in the roof, set off a flash bang in a surveillance car and most recently nearly got me killed yelling at long lost Russian Solders.

Once the cage was open and the girl was free. I went to knock on the door. Over the radio I said, "*now.*" from a distance team two took out the guards on the roof and in a tower nearby. Behind the wheel, I drove the truck into and through the gate to the compound. Lights came on people came out and died. In the back of the truck underneath a wooden shield my team sprung up and started firing. On the right came gun fire. First from drones then men on the walls. Within minutes we had the compound. One round hit an employee named Scott deforming into his flak jacket. It still rattled him. From the compound, we moved into a room to room search. Ten minutes later over a loud speaker a man said in Spanish, "*they surrender.*" They thought we were DEA and were there about the massive drug haul in the back. A truck full of heroin they were trying to find a way to smuggle into the US.

In an office, I found some paper work detailing the cars and what to do with the parts. The papers were all from the owners. They had the cars stolen so they could collect from their insurance company. The money from the insurance company as well as from the parts would pay for the Heroin. They had the checks made out to the dealer's shell company. As it turns out a car is only worth what someone is willing to pay for it. The heroin was worth more than every car stolen. I also found a remote that disarms the mine under the cage. I disarmed the cage and sent someone to let Jimmy know. I said, "*take your time.*" We tied up the remaining thugs and left them for the DEA. TC tied them up naked but to face in that human centipede style like the movie I recommend no one watch. For their sake, I hope the DEA gets there soon. Well maybe not too soon.

With the paper work from the Mexico raid the FBI raided the cars owner's houses. They sized many documents and encouraged enough people to rat on their bosses. Some of these guys won't see a bar less view for decades. The largest drug bust in the border's history made sure of that. You lay down with dogs and get fleas or you do business with drug gangs and face drug charges. Jennifer was reunited with her family who promptly sued us for endangering her in a fire fight. Your welcome.

## Chapter Five

### 2006, the Year We Made a Company

An explosion rips through the wall tossing shrapnel into the room. Smoke fills the air. Everyone scrambles to both get to their feet and prepare to fight. Outside we can hear voices. Something in Somali I think. I really should learn the language. One of the others yells, "RPG." I duck as a rocket propelled grenade is launched through the window and travels out of the newly made hole onto the opposing forces on the other side. Friendly fire can be a good thing. Using the newly created chaos we escaped the building and separated. But not by any plan or with any goal. I found myself in an unfriendly city, in a time of war, in a place where I don't speak the language.

My name is Jack Pressler. I work as a security specialist in less than secure areas. Ok, I'm a mercenary. I can hear it now, "*it's a shame the RPG missed.*" I am not that kind of mercenary. I don't take on clients such as drug cartels and oppressive governments. And many have asked. I only work for clients that I feel I could care about. About a week ago I was offered a lucrative job guarding relief supplies being transferred from a port to a couple of villages in Somalia. In December Ethiopia sent troops into Somalia attacking and helping the government win back the capital. The ongoing war has made any humanitarian aid to be considered suicide. So, when I was asked by a group that wanted to help anyway how could I say no. No, really was there a way I could have said no. I would really like to know.

I made it to a building with four walls and everything. I found a door and used it. the building was mostly empty with some old crates and cigarette butts. Using one crate like a chair and a larger one as a table I emptied my ammo out and counted rounds. The good news was I had three full magazines of ammo. The bad news was it was for an AK47 and not the M4 carbine I was issued by the client. In the rush, I must have grabbed the wrong bag. I have one magazine for my Barretta M9, half a magazine for the M4, two flash bang grenades and a boot knife. Outside I could hear some sporadic gunfire. The gunfire turned toward my hideout. A woman was pinned down behind a long dead shell of a car. I returned fire with the last of my M4's ammo hoping to cover the woman. She made into the building and immediately pointed her AK47 at me. A pointed my M4 back forgetting I was out of ammo. We sat there pointing rifles at each other.

She was beautiful. Maybe 6ft 3” with ebony skin and long braids that seem to be either frosted gray or silver. Somehow a runway model grabbed a rifle and joined the fight here in Somalia. She said something in Somali. I still regret not learning some simple phrases like, “*I don’t understand you.*” She looked over my shoulder then back to me. She was wearing desert camo with a head scarf wrapped around her head. She then spoke in Arabic which is another language I don’t speak. She had small cuts in her arms and spots of blood on her pants. She noticed me looking at her legs and said something in French. We were 0 for 3 in languages I understand.

After about ten minutes that fell like ten hours I decided to speak. I had hesitated in speaking because I didn’t want to give away my nationality. Some sides in this conflict don’t like Americans. I said, “*if you understand me I think we are screwed here.*” She furrowed her brows. I took a chance first showed her the five radio batteries I had and the radio with a large bullet hole. She said, “*you’re an American.*” She said it in what sounded like a slight Boston accent. I replied, “*and so are you from the sound of it.*” She gave a slight smile then a hard frown. She said, “*what are you doing her whitey. Some sort of mercenary or paid thug.*” For some reason that escapes me I said, “*isn’t that the same thing?*” and just like that we were pointing guns at each other. My rifle still empty.

Another couple of minutes went by before we spoke again. Finally, she said “*who are you and what are you doing here?*” I said, “*my name is Jack.*” I fought the urge to say, “*but you don’t know me.*” I did say how I was with a relief organization guarding food and medicine being delivered to some hard-hit villages. She lowered her rifle and said, “*I think, no I know I was sent out to find you. I work for WHO as an interpreter but I also help out where ever I can.*” I said, “*you work for who?*” she said, “*yes WHO.*” I replied, “*why are you asking me I don’t know who you work for.*” She said, “*yes I work for WHO.*” I say, “*why are you asking me, how would I know?*” She said just a little bit angrily and just a bit mockingly, “*The World Health Organization aka WHO.*” I said, “*yeah I know I just wanted to see how long that could go on.*”

She said to me, “*whitey just keep messing with me like that and I won’t tell you a secret.*” I jokingly said, “*that your gun is empty?*” She spun around and said, “*how do you know that.*” Instead of answering I picked up my rifle and showed her the empty magazine. Then we both laughed. She said her name was, “*Tima Cocks but most people call me TC so they won’t*

*mispronounce my name.*” She went on to say her father is a doctor with WHO and was here working the crisis. Her mother was sick so she stayed back in Boston. She said, *“we were waiting for some relief supplies. I volunteered to come look for them and the people bringing them but all I found was a bombed-out warehouse.”* It would seem right after I left they were able to aim lower and strike inside with an RPG. Anyone that stayed behind was dead. She said, *“I think your right we are screwed,”* I said, *“no I think we may have met for a reason.”* I went to the large crate picked up the three AK 47 magazines and handed them to her. I said to her, *“I grabbed the wrong bag in the chaos.”* Then I added, *“now we are only nearly screwed.”*

She had a colt 1911 on her hip she gave me and with her AK fully loaded we planned. My team hadn't picked up the supplies yet so they may still be available. We would go pick up the supplies and any wayward team mates we find. Then make to back to the village here her father was. The gunfire outside had stopped and the gunmen had moved on to targets who may have something worth stealing. As the sun was setting we made our way out of the building and down an alley. Along the way, we found members of my team dead. Some shot others with their throats slit. I found a functional radio on one body. I used it to call out, *“boxcar this is skull cap over.”* Nothing. I tried again and still nothing. Boxcar is a code used to call out for anyone on the radio.

About ten minutes later we heard over the radio, *“skull cap this is carrot top. Come in skull cap this is carrot top.”* Carrot top is a guy named David and no he doesn't have red hair. When we first met, he was trying to use a prop to make a joke. I don't remember what it was just that it wasn't funny to anyone. We met in the ninth grade back at Springfield High school in Springfield township in northeast Ohio. We followed each other into football, baseball and the Army. David drove a truck in Georgia for four years while I became a professional starrer. I worked as a guard in many different places practicing the stare.

He said, *“after everything went pair shaped I went back to the ship to regroup. I knew you would find away over.”* I said, *“supplies still there over?”* he replied, *“yes I am unharmed. Yes, they are still here over.”* I said to him, *“pack a tuck with as much of the medical supplies you can and be prepared to go as soon as we get there over.”* He replied, *“we over?”* When we made it back to the ship we found David by a large armored car. He took one look at TC and just kept on looking. He looked at me then back to her. she said to him, *“keep starrng and I'll*

*cut those eyes out of your head.*” David looked back to me. He said a truck wasn’t available but the UN was willing to let us use one of their armored transports. The truck was loaded and ready to run. I asked, *“anyone else here and willing to.”* David interrupted me, *“no. No one else made it.”* We came to Somalia with sixty men and now it was just the two of us. After the last time, I tried to drive one of these things we both decided David would drive. I grabbed an AK 47, a couple of magazines for my Berretta and a bag of AK magazines. David whispered to me, *“is the scary model coming with us?”* I whispered back, *“she is the only one that knows where we are going.”* TC took the gun torrent on top. She directed David from it using a built-in intercom.

Somehow, we made it out of town with the medical supplies. About an hour away from her father we ran into a hunting party of a sort. One old Land Rover and two jeeps. All three had makeshift gun torrents on the back. The two Jeeps struck from both sides while the Land Rover tried to block the road. Using the 50 caliber machine guns in the torrent TC shredded the Land Rover. Then David plowed through the remains. The two Jeeps first broke off then tried to strike from behind. I popped a hatch on top and using a portable rocket launcher struck the led Jeep. The hit spun the Jeep into the second ending the chase.

At the village, we found her father and a contingent of UN troops. We unloaded the truck. After some introductions, we made plans to leave and go back to the ship. TC said we would be welcome to stay. I said to her, *“we signed a contract with them so we have to follow their protocols. One is that after the delivery we are to report back.”* David looked around at the village sting not to look directly at TC. He said, *“no I am going to stay here and help. This looks like the place I need to be.”* This was to be David’s last time in the field. TC said to him, *“stay go it don’t mean shit to me. Just don’t think you are going to get something.”* When he eventually came home he went back to Kent State and became a lawyer. His wife TC helped him out with the big words.

Three years after Somalia I met up with David and TC back in Ohio in a diner in Stow. David suggested that we form a company that dealt with security issues that most other agencies wouldn’t touch. Such things as Security for African relief or personnel security for people who the system deem unimportant. I had just come into a large amount of cash on another job. I could retire or do this. I said, *“yes as long as TC is a part of this. I want someone I can trust.”* David said, *“why not me?”* I said, *“trust a lawyer?”*

## Chapter Six

### On My Own

I can flex my hand. So, there may be no tendon damage. It hurts like a mother. With it wrapped I can try and keep from bleeding to death. I lost my gun back there in the fight. What the hell happened. I have my knife and backup gun. But the gun will be hard to use with one hand. TC said I should carry a revolver instead of that sub-compact Barretta Storm. First, I have to get out of here. Back at the warehouse I can hear the gunfire. It is clear now this was all a trap.

I own a Specialty security service. Have gun will travel is not just an old show it's our motto. Over the years we or I may have helped create some grudges and graveyards. You can't make an omelet without breaking some eggs. You can't free hostages without capping some thugs. My team and I are some of the best money can rent. We don't work for drug dealers, despots, and the Home Depot. That last one was one strange miscommunication.

A few days ago, I was contacted about a job just across the border in Canada. A private security company was looking for some outside help with an internal problem. One of their teams was helping a robbery crew with break-ins. They didn't know which one so they needed to stake out the crews and guard their clients. We usually stay away from such jobs. Working with others doesn't usually work out well in our line of work. Most mercenaries are in it for the money then you have the bad one. They are into it for the killing. Some like to kill others desire to kill.

I went ahead to a meeting being held to discuss the contract. It was a warehouse near downtown. Something was off. There was screaming inside. I reached for the door with my left hand and my Barretta Storm with my right. Gunfire ripped through the door. I was hit in the vest and hand. My hand went numb. I darted for the car. Looking back, I saw my gun on the ground covered in blood. My blood. Inside I could hear the gunfire. Whoever planned this out didn't think this out. To paraphrase Taylor Swift, "killers gonna kill, kill, kill."

The car wouldn't start. So, then my phone. And my phone has a bullet hole in it. I just bought that phone! If I can get out of here I can go to the warehouse where my team will be in about an hour. The warehouse is about two miles away. With whoever set this up still back there

I can get a good lead. The gunfire stopped. Either they won or their plan failed. I can't take the chance.

I ducked down an alley. It seems a little strange that I have found nobody around. I would think the gunfire would bring out the locals. But, nothing. Not a single person around. This part of town was mostly businesses. Most of them are closed. Signs of the times. I can hear some voices just ahead of me. Very carefully I pulled my gun with my left hand. Luckily, I had one in the chamber. I got down and slowly approached the voices. It was three men with Colt M4s. they were discussing me and how they needed me dead. I recognized one of them. David Speck the lead operator of the security company. Definitely not the employee of the year.

He told the other two to wait here for what's his face. I assume that is me. David said he had to get the trap ready at the other site. Are they going after my team? David left and the two remaining went back-to-back. Dumb asses. It made it easier for me to shoot them. one round to one head that passed to the other. I guess the next question is if David is the leader of this team or is he just a flunky? I should have tried to save one of the two to politely ask some questions. Live and lean. I need a phone and some ammo. The two dead guys had Colt M4s. one had a Hi-Point 9mm and the other had some sort of 32 caliber automatic I had never heard of. Neither looked promising. I unhooked one of the colts and bagged any magazines they had.

Our warehouse is a stand-alone building just off the main strip. I couldn't just approach the building without being seen. If they wanted to make sure they got us all they would have a sharp shooter on a rooftop nearby. Neither of the two had a phone or a radio. So their absence won't be missed until they don't physically report in or someone checks in on them. the bad news is that my hand is getting worse. I will need to do something soon. The M4 is a good start but it will be tricky one handed. Once the gunfire starts I will need all the advantage I can find.

Looking at the roof tops I find the best place to put a sniper. That is if the sniper is just a guy with a good rifle and not a true sharp shooter. On top of the roof was a guy with a Barret 50 caliber rifle. The dumb ass is holding it at his hip looking down at the warehouse. It is a lot of rifle being held by a lot of moron. I wanted to take him without a shot just in case he had backup nearby. Oh, did I say dumb ass. He has headphones on with music so loud he couldn't hear a jet behind him much less me. Now do I kill him or try and take him?

The choice was almost taken from me. He turned around and saw me. As he tried to shoulder his portable anti-tank gun he backed away. In the process, he slipped on a loose round and went down. He hit his head on the roof top and turned his own light out. The rifle finished the job in smashing his nose as it hit him. In his pack, he had a file folder with pictures of my team. I should have shot him. I cleared his rifle then tossed it down a hole in the roof. He had a cheap 38 policeman's special. It will do. I did the best to tie him up. The knots are ugly and will have to be cut off.

As I waited for my new friend to wake up I watched the warehouse. As I did he woke up. Which is good because I have some questions. He rolled over and looked at me then around the roof. He said, *"where is my rifle?"* I replied, *"you have got to be kidding me. You are tied up on a roof with a guy you were supposed to shoot and your worried about your Barret?"* he somehow got to his but then after looking around said, *"I have a deposit on that and that gun in your hand."* I looked down at the old cheap revolver. I said, *"they rent these to you and you paid for this?"* He said that the company requires them to rent their equipment from them. On jobs like this they use guns that can't be traced back to the company. Their company wanted to expand into the US by eliminating the competition. Then he asked, *"are you hiring?"*

A Hummer pulling an Airstream camper pulled up to the warehouse. My team was here. I had no time. Inside the rival company had a trap setup. If they make it inside they were dead. Without thinking I aimed and fired. A direct hit to the little smiley face on the antenna of the Hummer. I stood up and held out my arms in a "T" shape. TC got out of the car and gave the "what the f" shrug when she caught on. Gunfire erupted all around me. Every shot missed. Then the guy I tied up tackled me. He grabbed the M4, but instead of shooting me he took aim at the other roof. He hit the scope of the guy shooting at me. The shot must have been at least 300 yards away. I said, *"as long as you can prove you didn't kill anyone in this plan then you are hired."* The other shooters from the warehouse ran for their lives. I bet they are still running.

After TC cleaned up my hand, I told them about what was happening. My new employee told them the bosses were in a trailer nearby. We now have a target. Our plan would be simple. We would take the command trailer and explain to the company owners why they will need another line of work. The person who set this up will need to die. We won't kill him. The other

mercenary companies will do that. I just want a picture of the guy for the internet and just maybe accidentally break his hand. Can something planned be called an accident?

We took the trailer. These guys weren't even armed. They surrendered and a foot accidentally slipped landing into someone's nuts. TC wasn't happy and said so with her foot. The others were happy that we weren't going to kill them. The big boss knew the score. His big win would end up in a shallow grave or a meat grinder. The new guy's name is Gregg. His first job was to retrieve the 50 Cal from the hole in the roof. TC said I would most likely need several surgeries to fix my hand. So, a vacation it is.

## Chapter 7

### Neo-Nazi Bikers of Lodi

I was on a beach in Southern California I got the call I've been waiting for. My father has been battling throat cancer for a while now. Today he lost the battle. I was on the beach watching the surf when the call came in. He was diagnosed about three years ago. About a year ago they had to remove his larynx removed due to the cancer. His last words to me were, "*I don't know why you came.*" This was nothing new. He and I have never had that all-American father son relationship from the movies or television. I had a better relationship with my grandfather. I had to tell my sister I couldn't come right away but I would be there as soon as I could. I had another surgery in the morning on my hand scheduled. I was shot while on a job in Canada and required four surgeries to fit my right hand. It also required spending days on the beach and plenty of drinks. She said she understood and she wouldn't touch the house until I got there. I was the oldest but Ruth lived nearby. She lived in Uniontown Ohio about 5 minutes from dad's house. It would be a week before I could go back to Ohio.

I was born in Akron, Ohio but my family lived in Springfield township. This is not the same as the Springfield near Cincinnati. My home town was just south of Akron. My parents had a small home with a small stretch of land backing up onto a semi private pond. We lived here but for the first twelve years I lived on my grandfather's farm in Lodi. For those who don't know Lodi is known for three things, an outlet mall, the Amish and corn. We were not store owners or Amish. I have a Rabbi uncle who could attest to this. My grandfather was a corn farmer.

My grandfather as a young man had escaped Germany just before the war. My grandmother wasn't so lucky. She spent the war in a workcamp. When the war was over he went back to find her. About three months into the search he found her in a hospital. They moved to Ohio. Their farm was part of a group of farms owned and operated by Jewish families. They wanted new lives away from the cities and violence. Living among the Amish would provide this. I would work the farm and learn from my grandfather what it all meant.

Then I was eight he gave me a lever action 22 rifle. I had to keep it on the farm because my father didn't want guns in the house. I knew he had a Smith & Wesson police special in a night stand but I also knew better than to call him on it. My grandfather taught me how to shoot

with that gun. Most importantly he taught me that gun ownership is a responsibility not just a right. Every action has a consequence. By the time I was twelve I was using a lever action 1895 Marlin. I was becoming a good shot with the large caliber rifle. One day he said he had a job for us.

The coyote population was on the rise here in Ohio. One was spotted on the farm a few days ago. The Coyote had killed some chickens. It seemed that it had made its home in the drying corn. I grabbed my new rifle and we were off. We tracked it to a tree line used as a windbreak where it had just killed a mother rabbit and was eating its babies. The coyote was fast before I could aim it had killed all the young rabbits. I took aim and fired. The shot went about three feet above its head. The coyote looked around then went back to its lunch. Grampa put his hand on my shoulder and said, "*steady and aim true.*" My next shot hit it in the head. It felt right and wrong all at once. I had killed before. Mostly rats in the corn but I never killed something so dog like. It was doing what nature intended it to do. We buried it and the rabbits in the windbreak.

On the way back, we saw a bunch of motorcycles coming up the driveway along with a pickup truck. The truck belonged to a neighbor to the south named Pascal. The bikes were a mystery to me but not my grandpa. Over the last couple of weeks, a group of bikers were intimidating the locals trying to get them to sell. There had to be at least eight of them. Most had swastika tattoos. We approached from behind the barn. Inside he handed me a box. In it was a Beretta M9. He said, "*I was going to give this to you tonight.*" He instructed me to go into the hay loft and take aim. He said, "*don't fire unless they start something.*" I said, "*how will I know?*" He said, "*you'll know.*" With that he strapped his old Colt 1911 on his hip and went out to meet the thugs.

He walked up to Mr. Pascal and the two started to argue. I couldn't tell what was being said. My heart was beating so loud I could see it in the rise and fall of my gun. Mr. Pascal had some papers in his hand. As he spoke the bikers dismounted and started to box my grandpa in. Without warning Mr. Pascal dropped the papers, pulled out a revolver and shot my grandfather twice. He took a step back then fell backwards. My heart stopped and the picture became crystal clear. I took aim.

In my sightline, the bikers became paper targets. I rattled off three shots before the bikers could react. The rest scattered firing wildly in the air. Five shots later all the bikers were dead. Mr. Pascal had ducked behind the house. I jumped down from the loft and made it to my grandfather. He said, "run." From around the house I saw Mr. Pascal. I shot at him. I couldn't hit him but I could hit the house. The shots sent shrapnel into his face. As I shot I could hear more motorcycles coming up the drive. They had reinforcements. I looked back to my grandfather. He was dead.

I had three options. The house, the barn and the corn. The house and barn were a death trap. I could hear more bikes coming up the driveway. I had to run, now. I grabbed the Colt 1911 and ran for the corn. As I hit the field I could hear shots being fired. They followed me into the corn. City people following a boy raised in the corn. I had one chance, if I could make it to the neighbor to the north we could beat these neo-Nazis back. Mr. Kline was a survivor of Auschwitz and had no love for the Nazis. I zigged and zagged in the corn to throw off my trail. At one point, I came to a stop. One of the bikers was just above me. He looked down and hesitated. A big mistake. I shot him in the foot then in the head through the lower jaw. The 1911 had a kick and it turned the man into a blood fountain as he fell.

He had a radio and a cheap automatic of some kind. I had no use for such a gun, but the radio was a win. Just behind me a man fired a twelve gauge. I would have been cut in half but he had cut it down to hide it on his bike. The barrel was most likely rifled spreading the shot wildly. I was hit with a couple of shot in the shoulder. I had no time to think about it. I ran. As I approached the border of the farm I heard Mr. Pascal over the radio. He was calling some of the guys back to deal with my grandmother and sister when they came back from town. He was going to kill them then try and make it look like my grandfather did it. Time was running out.

On the way, I could hear them searching. One finally said, "*the tracker on the radio is working fine.*" The radio was a tracker. I was near a stream. With the fall rains the stream was moving fast. I put the radio in a plastic bag I had in my backpack and tried to fill it with air. Then I sent it down the stream so they could track it. By the time they found it I was at the Mr. Kline's house.

I first found one of Mr. Kline's sons working on a tractor. He saw the blood and called for his father. He knew me and my family. I told him what happened and that they were waiting

to kill my grandmother and sister. He said, “*no, not today. Never again.*” He and his three sons grabbed their rifles and followed me back. He had lost his first wife and three children to the Nazis. His second wife said I should stay and have my shoulder looked at. He said, “*no this is his fight.*” Like that we were off to kill the Nazis. The Neo-Nazi bikers from Heck.

Nearly a half a mile out we could see them searching for me. Six men all armed with the same cheap guns except for guy with the shotgun. From that point, the four men took aim. I didn't think they could hit anyone from there but within seconds four of the men were dead. I took aim and fired. After three shots, I hit one of them. Mr. Kline said, “*you didn't kill that one yet.*” We found him trying to hide in the corn. I hit him in the shoulder. The shot dislocated it. Mr. Kline took aim. I said, “*no. I need some information.*” He looked at me and smiled. I walked up to the guy and put my foot on his dislocated arm. He screamed. He told us that they were hired to intimidate the Jews into selling.

Mr. Pascal was trying to buy all the land because of a report that a new tire plant would be built there in Lodi. Anyone with the land would be rich. Also, these farmers wouldn't sell. I took my Beretta and shot him in both feet. I said to him, “*wait right here.*” We left him to be found by the police later. He would take a plea deal and tell how Mr. Pascal killed my grandfather and tried to kill me. His whole plan. Pascal was convicted and sentenced to two life terms. That lasted about a week. The Arian-brotherhood didn't like having their members killed like that. I would tell you what they did but it's better just no to think about t.

We reached the farm. The bikers were piling their dead onto a truck. The plan to frame my grandfather was being made. They all stopped working and looked up. It was almost cartoonish how they reacted. They reacted just a little too slow. We opened fire. The deer rifles were an asset in the field but by the house my lever action ruled. I handed the 1911 to Mr. Kline and he shot the last of them. Mr. Pascal was gone. He had a face full of wood shrapnel. About ten minutes later the police arrived. All the police that came were in some way related to Mr. Kline.

The police confiscated my guns as well as my grandfather's 1911. It didn't matter. My father wouldn't let me keep them anyway. I knew that from now on my life would change. I had no idea how much. About six months after the shootout my mother left. I heard her say on the phone how she just couldn't live with him anymore. I blamed him for driving my mother away.

It wouldn't be for years until I found out it was me she couldn't live with anymore. She told me this on the day I joined the Army. I went from being her son to a monster in a day. By then the wall between dad and me was too thick too high too strong.

That night I went to a hotel and settled in. My sister gave me a letter my dad left for me. I wasn't sure I wanted to read it. We left things so final that giving him the last word just felt wrong. But I had to know. In the envelope was a key to a storage locker. Also, a hand-written note.

*Jack, I wish I was a stronger man. I wish I could have been a better father or had the guts to say this to you when I could say anything. I was weak and petty. I blamed you for her leaving when it was her and me to blame. I could see my father in your eyes and his strength. You are a better man than either of us. The last time I saw you I tried to tell you I was proud of you and you needed to be out there helping people but somehow all I could do is question you. Even now as I write this I know I won't be around to answer for my neglect. One more act of a coward. I try and follow you and what you have accomplished with your company. Your partner TC sent me some information on your deeds. It makes me think that I may have done one thing good. But how can I take credit for your actions. All I can say is I am sorry and I hope one day you can forgive me.*

The next day I went to the storage locker. Inside was some furniture, both of my lever action rifles, my Beretta M9 and my grandfather's 1911. Later I stopped by the graves and placed a stone from Africa on my Grandfather's grave. On my grandmother's grave. I placed a stone on my father's grave and said I wish I was strong enough to say I love you.

P.S. The tire plant was built in Mexico.

## Chapter 8

### Defending the Bell Ringer

Here I am standing on a corner ringing a bell. In a Santa Clause suit. The job sounded easy. Find the people beating up the Salvation Army workers. In the past couple of days seven bell ringers have been assaulted. One lost an eye in the attack. The temp service that supplies the local Salvation Army here wanted to protect their workers. After the cookie incident, I had said never again but here we are working for an icon of Americana in red and white suits. As it turned out the initial part was easy. About a day into our stake out a rival charity showed up to go after my second-in-command a woman we all call TC. That was a very big mistake. TC is a tall strong beautiful black woman who likes to kick ass.

The three men followed her into an alley. The first dressed as an elf swung a tire iron at her head. She easily dodged the swing and brought up her knee connecting with his junk. The force of the kick doubled him over. As he fell away the other elf and Santa struck. The elf pulled a knife and came at her with a downward slashing motion. Like he was a movie psycho. TC shifted to her side and used his downward force to propel the knife toward him. He stabbed himself in the thigh. Santa struck with a lead pipe. He used a sideways motion trying to prevent what just happened to his elf. The result was a weak hit to the forearm. She easily disarmed saint nick and used the pipe on his, well let's just say he won't be walking right for a while.

TC is a valuable employee of a specialized security service I run. Some call us mercenaries, the ones dressed like elves just cry uncle. We handle cases most are unwilling or unable to take. If you are a drug kingpin, crime lord, or tyrannical ruler of an oppressed people then just don't call we won't help you. We may be mercenaries but we do have standards.

TC found a card on old saint nick for a charity called *New Hope*. The plot thickens. New Hope is a charity devoted to helping the poor and homeless. They put their people on every corner. Their business is high tech using specialized collection boxes that include debit and credit card readers and a money counter that could provide a receipt. They collect all year long using different themes for every occasion. Some are known for being aggressive with the bell ringing and asking for money.

The next day I went to the New Hope offices to find out what was what. The charity is being operated out of an office space in a strip mall. TC stayed out on the street hoping someone else tries that again. No windows, just a handmade sign. I knocked at the door. Nothing. I knocked again. A voice came over an intercom to the left of the door, *“sorry we don’t take walk-ins or allow nonemployees inside our offices. If you want to make an appointment then please call.”* The disembodied voice gave me a phone number. I said to the voice, *“a couple of your employees tried to go after an employee of the Salvation Army and had their asses handed to them. It would be nice to hear if New Hope had an explanation.”* Dead silence. So, I left a card in the door and went back to the office.

About an hour later five men came to the office with baseball bats. I had an idea that someone would be coming so I was waiting in our reception area. The five men walked in. I said, *“this isn’t the batting cages fellas.”* The first guy in the door said, *“shut your hole and.”* He stopped as I stood up holding AR 15. I am wearing gray and black camo with a full-size Beretta Storm on my hip and a compact Beretta Storm on a tactical vest. I said, *“it seems that you all brought bats to a gun fight.”* The first one went to make a move. I took a step back and aimed the AR at the lead. He turned white then red. He almost looked like he was going to faint. Then the smell. Yes, he crapped himself. They dropped their bats and left. I went looking for an industrial strength air freshener.

The upfront way wasn’t working so we needed a new plan. This may shock you but our plan was to steal from a charity. We needed to get a better look at their fancy collection boxes. I doubt any of them would let us. Ted and I went looking for a mark. He or she would have to be in a remote location with an easy escape route. After combing the city, we found our mark. A man dressed like Santa with a top hat instead of the traditional one. Unlike many his box wasn’t chained down to anything. We were in a panel truck with a sign saying we were plumbers. Can anyone say shades of Watergate?

We made our move first speeding up then coming to a stop in front of the top hat Santa. Out of nowhere a shot rang out. The headlights of three cars came on. One car was parked just across from us with a guy and his AK 47. This was a trap. Top hat Santa dropped to the ground as gunfire erupted. After the first shot Ted had stepped away from the wheel. Which was a good thing as all the fire was directed at the driver’s side of the truck. Using our ARs Ted and I

returned fire. The other two cars opened fire. The panel truck was armored but not completely. Within a few minutes the engine was dead. And if we didn't do anything fast so were we. I shot out the street lights plunging the street into darkness. They didn't pack any night vision for this little hunt. I try and never leave home without it. Ted and I using suppressors and night vision picked off two of every person in the cars. They eventually drove off. I sent Ted to a car we had stashed for an emergency with all the guns while I waited to explain to the police what this was. Ted also took top hat Santa who as it turned was a junkie the others paid to act as bait.

After a night of saying wrong place wrong time the police released me and I went back to the office. In our main conference room, I found TC with one of New Hope's boxes on a table. She said, *"I found one in a bad location and offered the Elf three thousand for it. He said yes as long as I knocked him out and tied him up."* She looked me over then she looked to Ted who wasn't in yet. She said, *"how did your night go?"* I said, *"you can read about it in the paper."* TC went over and grabbed a crowbar. I waived her off and said, *"no this thing may be booby trapped. Let's wait until Ted gets in."*

An hour later Ted came in with a newspaper. The cover was **War in the Streets**. The second story was about an Elf for New Hope being tied up and shot on a street corner. TC Said, *"I didn't shoot him."* I tapped on the box and said, *"no my guess is there is a secret in this box worth killing for."* Ted said, *"yeah no kidding."* Ted went on to say he would need time to examine the box. I told him he had twenty-four hours. I was going home to shower and sleep. At home, I found two officers waiting for me. They needed me to come back to the station and answer some more questions. Ten hours later they brought me back home where I showered and slept. In the morning, I went for a run. I noticed a bigger police presence in my neighborhood. After running I showered again had a bowl of corn flakes. Then using the back door went to the office.

At the office, Ted said we would have to meet in the secure room. In it he had dismantled the box. He had found a tracking device inside. Our secure room acted as a Faraday cage preventing signals from coming in or getting out. Ted said, *"outside of the GPS marker this thing had no security."* I replied, *"the security was the guys with the guns."* He went on to say how the box was a large hard drive storing peoples stolen credit card numbers as the donated. He said, *"it's the perfect scam. Most people today don't carry cash so if they can donate using a card*

*then they will.*” The scam was worse. People with credit limits above fifty thousand or bank accounts above two hundred thousand a special marker was placed on the file. Using a program to retrieve erased files Ted rebuilt the past scans. He connected the marks with home invasions over the last couple of months with at least twelve deaths. But wait there’s more.

Ted said, *“this is where top hat Santa comes in. I found a receipt on him with a barcode. When I tried to take the receipt, he flipped out. So, using the street cameras I followed him to a dealer.”* Ted turned on a screen in the room. A video from a street camera showed top hat Santa walking up to a known drug dealer. The dealer stood on the opposite side of a fence from the buyer. The dealer pulled out what looked like a pricing gun and scanned the receipt. He left then came back with a small packer of something. I don’t think it was sugar. Ted said, *“I also searched every known charity for homeless and poor and couldn’t find where they gave any money away.”*

Identity theft, credit card theft, home invasion, murder, drug dealing and embezzlement of charity funds. I said, *“what no puppy kicking?”* Ted turned around and played a video of one of the elves kicking a puppy into the street and under the tire of a passing truck. TC who had come in without a sound said, *“we need to stop these people now.”*

As if to answer the question the police were at the door. They had a search and seizure warrant for all fire arms in the premises. They took everything from my personal Beretta Storm subcompact to every AR 15 in the arms locker. They even took a plugged barrel replica of a WW II M1 Garand hung on the wall. None of the guns used that night were there. I have a secondary location for heavier duty weapons. If Ted did his job those guns were long gone. The location isn’t in my name or the companies. Luckily the donation box was unrecognizable in its separate parts. Then they took me in for 24 hours so they could test the guns. So, I wouldn’t make a break for it.

24 hours later I was on the street. Back at the office I found everyone that works for me. TC called everyone who wasn’t on a job in to work on this job. I pulled TC aside and told her we need to do this by the book and within the law. With the police watching us anything stupid or illegal could end the company. She asked, *“then what will we do?”* I answered, *“I have no idea.”* It would seem Ted had an idea. He sent all the information we gathered illegally to a police

detective he knows. This detective is the one working on a rash of home invasions taking place in the city.

We needed to make it able for the detective to investigate the charity. TC said, “let’s raid their offices. Using baseball bats and our fists we would go into the New Hope’s offices and break stuff. This will give the police an excuse to go in and find the evidence they need to take them down. This also could end our company. Our preferred clientele does not hire criminals and the kind that do we don’t work for. Before we left I addressed the company, *“this could be our last action within this country. If anyone doesn’t want in I will understand.”*

Near the door with the annoyed intercom was two loading doors. If we were to give the police the best way of seeing all the illegality happening we would need to take these doors down. It’s a good thing I brought the Hummer. I attached a tow line onto the doors and pulled them off. Inside was the entire elf army. Twenty men all dressed like either elves or Santa Clause. Also, there was one in an Elvis Santa costume. They were surrounded by guns, money and what turned out to be stolen items from the home invasions. In other words, evidence.

TC yelled, *“let’s take it to them.”* we charged in with bats. The doors coming off and our invasion took them by surprise. We struck. Luckily, they didn’t go for their guns. They grabbed whatever was handy. One of them threw a bell. The bell clanged off the Hummer. Santa Elvis pulled a knife and came at me. Before he got to me TC put her foot in front of him and he tripped over it. the knife went sliding by. He got up and threw a punch. I countered and caught him in the beard with a good old fashion round house. That is when the police arrived.

In the end, the charity was closed. All their operators were jailed. Some with multiple counts of murder. Inside the offices the police found a detailed account of all the drug dealers they worked with as well as all the stolen money and houses invaded. After some negotiations, my team was charged with several misdemeanors from simple assault to property damage. I now find myself alongside of the road picking up trash for the next one hundred hours. Also, our client refused to pay us. The elf that kicked the puppy may have had a little accident involving a baseball bat and his nuts.

## Chapter 9

### Hiring

When somebody comes to work with us they sign a no-compete contract. They are not free to take jobs outside of the company. In signing the contract, a new employee will receive \$1200 a week plus health benefits. We also pay a bonus for every job worked. In a line of work such as ours having a steady paycheck without having to sell your soul is a good deal. Some people can disconnect what they do from who they are. Some are just evil and like to kill for money. It's hard to find the kind of people we want and not the one we don't.

I own and run a specialty security service. Mercenaries with a conscience. We won't work for criminals, political despots and the Home Depot. We deal in a very different kind of hardware. Our goal is to make money while doing some good in the world. As the business has expanded we have found a need for new employees.

We were told about a team just outside of Phoenix, Nevada. They were an actual family. Three brothers and a sister. I went down there to interview them. The sister was the person in charge. She made all their decisions. Her name is Tina and she just wasn't interested. She said how they already did all that without a boss. She also said they didn't use guns. What it came down to was they were a strait up security company and not what we were looking for. I gave them my card and told them if they change their minds and want a little more excitement then call.

About a month later I was setting up a care package to some Russian friends in Canada when I got a call from one of Tina's bothers. They took a job guarding a warehouse near the border with Mexico when they were ambushed. The simple job guarding candles was in fact a warehouse full of chemicals. Many of them can be used in the production of the drug Meth. What a surprise the client lied to them. To make the matter even worse the thieves took Tina.

About three hours later I touched down near their location. Most of my team on a job in Afghanistan. A relief agency wanted a little security for their workers. With that in mind I had some good people with me as well as Jimmy. Janet is a former LA SWAT team member Jimmy the brother of a much more capable operator and Gregg. I hired Gregg after he helped me out of an ambush. In his time with us Gregg has proven useful, but most of my team won't work with

him because of his past. Janet is the senior operator so she was my second on this job. Jimmy once set off a flash bang inside a car being used for surveillance. He almost got us killed by insulting some Russians surrounding us.

When we finally found them, the brothers had received a ransom demand from the kidnapers. They wanted either ten million in cash a list of chemicals they sent via email. These guys were looking to start a little drug operation here in New Mexico. Clearly, they don't watch television or they would know it won't end well. I sent the email to our tech guy named Ted and he traced the IP to a man named Thomas. Using an ever so slightly illegal search we found his phone in an old laundry matt near a town on the boarder.

We sent them a message saying we could get the drugs long before the money. They sent a location to take the drugs. We split-up with Janet talking two of the brother and Jimmy with her to the meeting place while the third brother and Gregg went with me to the laundry matt. We will need to strike first and fast so we can rescue Tina and take these guys down.

Using the fancy infrared camera, we could count five bodies left after the other six went to the meeting. We setup a frequency jammer and went to the laundry. The third brother named Bobby took the M4 I offered and he and I went to the back door. The Gregg went to the front. His job was to make some noise while we broke into the back. Off in the distance I could hear a trumpet. When I first saw Gregg with the instrument I didn't understand but now I wish I didn't. He broke into a fast version of Taps. It somehow worked. The four men went to the front. We went in and untied Tina. That is when the gunfire erupted. Apparently the four potential drug kingpins didn't like Gregg's playing. In a fire fight the last place you want to be is in the middle. Too bad for them. We left the four dead men there and went to meetup with the others.

On the way back, there was a massive explosion. The plan worked. We made a bomb look like a container of potentially lethal chemicals. They checked the containers and were happy. They said they would release the girl as soon as they were away from them. The bomb was a clone of Thomas's phone programmed to go off if a key phrase was used. That phrase was "kill her." It was also get rid of her, shoot her and so on. They didn't waste any time. Too bad for them. Ok, not really. When all was said and done they joined in and came to work with us. Their first job was to deliver the care package to the former Soviet Army in Canada. But that's another story.

## Chapter 10

### Top Hat Santa with a Gun

We were sitting in a van watching an apartment building. Well some of us were watching the building. TC was watching Jimmy tossing a flashbang from hand to hand almost juggling it. Not long after I hired Jimmy he accidentally set off a flashbang in a surveillance car being used to watch a target. Ted lost some hearing in his left ear and the flashbang set the car on fire. The result was that Ted doesn't go into the field unless he has too. Or wants too. I wouldn't stop him. Mid toss TC caught the flashbang. She said, "*I'll make you eat this if you toss it again.*" She then let it drop into his hand. The flashbang suddenly became a priceless fragile egg like object to be protected and stored safely.

I run a specialty security service. For the most part, we are mercenaries. If you want security guards we can help you find Google and look them up. If you need the kind of help that comes with gunfire and bad guys crying then call us. If you are a bad guy then don't call. About a week ago we got a call from an apartment manager who thinks one of his tenants is dealing drugs from his apartment. While this wasn't our usual type of job a video he sent brought back memories. A man came into the building then back out. He was tall and thin wearing a red and white top hat. It's top hat Santa.

On a job a while back we met a drug addict hired by a twisted evil charity as bait. But that is another story. His name is Larry. He was or is addicted to heroin. We had help him find a treatment center and even paid for the treatment. Seeing him here was a little disheartening. I had to know more so we took the job.

After a few days of watching Larry finally came back. Just like before he went in the building then back out. We followed him. It wasn't hard to follow a 6' 9" guy in a red top hat. He went down the street and into an alley. As we watched I noticed another car was also following him. An old Monti Caro from the 80s in a low rider style were the car is almost scraping the surface of the road. It had a limo tint on the windows that was supposedly illegal. I guess when you're a criminal you don't care about the law. The car came to a stop and three guys got out with shotguns. Larry was about to have a bad day. We went to move in. That is when all hell broke loose.

Gunfire and not just shotguns. True automatic fire. Using a small drone, we went to do a little recon. In the alley, we saw the three would be killers' dead. In fact, almost cut in half. There were four men with what looked like old Thompson submachine guns and Larry with a colt 1911. Larry went from addict to killer. We pulled the drone away and went back to regroup. Too many questions and not enough answers. The next day we sent Jimmy disguised as a cable guy to place some cameras around the block. We would gather information on the situation. We also took up residence in the apartment next to the suspect tenant. Using the fancy thermal camera and some slightly illegal bugging devices we put the tenant under a microscope. The result was surprising.

The Tenant was a guy named Barry. He was Larry's twin brother. After nearly dying of a drug overdose he was house bound. Barry had a stroke from the drug. His brother would stop by and check up on him. Larry was part of a neighborhood watch program. But not one any city would approve of. They were killing anyone caught dealing drugs in their neighborhood. Personally, I have a no help drug dealer policy, but I also don't want to see good people do bad things. It's also nice to see Larry is still clean. We need to help them or stop them. I guess my only real job here is to tell the client he was wrong.

In the morning, I went to the job we helped Larry get. Before his days on heroin he was on his way to becoming a top-notch mechanic. He hurt his back and went from legal pain killers to the big H. People have a hard time giving a guy like Larry a break. Ex-convicts, addicts and people with mental health issues are unfortunately left out of society. So, for people like this, the non-violent and abandoned I opened a workshop. A little something for everyone. One part makes furniture. Another part operates a landscaping service. Larry works in a part that restores cars for sale. Some classics, but most are basic runners for people who can't afford new.

I met him in an unused office. After the usual greetings, I showed him a video we made of what he and his friends were doing. I could see on his face he thought it was all over. His second chance was dead. I said, "*I told you back them as long as your drug free you have a place here.*" I also told him I can understand why he is doing this. His brother won't be able to have a second chance like he did. I asked him, "*what will bring you satisfaction and end this. Because you know this has to end.*"

He said he wanted to set fear in the local dealers. They weren't killing all the dealers just the ones that used violence on the streets. He wants them to be afraid to sell in his neighborhood. I asked him, "*have you ever watched the old television show The Green Hornet?*" I explained how in the show's hero was a new paper owner that pretended to be a criminal mastermind. He would use this image to infiltrate gangs and take them down. What we could do is make up a new gang. One so over-the-top the others will stay away.

We started with a concept. After a couple of ideas, we set on a Russian gang. Most of us could pass better as Russians rather than Chinese or Hispanic. We designed some tags for marking our territory and the look of our gang. With all that we sent out some street artists a.k.a. taggers to spread our tag. The next day I rented ten black Chevy Suburbans. With every white guy in my employment we drove around Larry's neighborhood. Everyone was told to slow down by every known dealer. We also applied for a liquor license for a bar in the neighborhood. A Russian bar. Not some themed bar out of Disney. One real classy joint.

Three weeks later something unusual was happened. After we opened Klassnyy our Russian bar about three other Russian themed stores opened. The bar's name means Classy. The money coming in to the neighborhood was changing everything. The streets slowly were cleaned up. Abandoned buildings and rundown apartments were being renovated. A new vibe throughout. Our plan was to intimidate the dealers out, but what ended up happening was we priced them out. By the end of the year the bar was very profitable. The only trouble was I didn't get to use my fake Russian accent. Ok, maybe that's not a bad thing. Do svidaniya!

## Chapter 11

### Mexico 2009 or How I became my own boss

Let's see, one, two, three, four, five, six and me. Yes, if this was the old Adam West Batman show I would be Thug Number Seven. I took a job guarding a warehouse here in Mexico with eight other guys. I spend most of my day with an AK in front of me walking the perimeter. The others seem to be very uninterested in what we are guarding or in the actual act of guarding. The guy I am calling Thug Number three left his rifle at a card table and is now in the can. Thug Number Four is asleep in a corner. Clearly the owner of this warehouse was hiring top notch operators. Oh, wait they also hired me. Ok.

After a few years in this business I find myself without a partner. My old one found a different kind of partner in Africa. They are planning a wedding soon. It must be nice. I am broke and good honest work just isn't paying the bills. I left the Army to get away from the old job of standing in front of things as in guard duty. I now find myself standing in front of things for a lot of money. Maybe too much money. If I am getting paid \$900 a day and everyone else is too then they are paying \$8100 a day. I think a good padlock or set of dogs could do as good a job and be a heck of a lot cheaper. What are we guarding?

I asked Thug Number One, "*what are we guarding?*" he just look at me and then walked away. Thug Number Two was by the door. He said, "*someone is coming.*" I shouldered my rifle and came to the door. Thug Number Five started to laugh. A former Marine, he was always trying to bust my chops on how I acted in the field. It seems like everything was a joke to him. Five got up without his rifle and went to the door. He was laughing as he approached the door. Two wasn't laughing. He was tense and ready to strike. Something was wrong.

Two yelled, "*duck incoming fire.*" Five had no time to react. He was cut down in the open doorway. The incoming jeep had a 50-caliber machine gun on top and it cut through the door and Five easily. Splattered with Five's blood I returned fire. I aimed for the driver not the gunman. My aim was true and the Jeep crashed into a parked van tossing the gunman over it and into a pile of blood and agony. Everyone left took up a position. In the exchange of fire Thug Number Six was hit in the head while he was in the bathroom. Just behind the Jeep was a semi-truck minus the trailer. We had a couple of trailers in here.

With number Two, Three and Four at the door I went to check the trailers in another room. The first one was stacked from floor to ceiling back to front with cash. What must be millions of dollars. The second was also packed. Bricks of a white powder that I don't think is sugar. I can't tell them about the money. It wouldn't end well. Come to think it, they shouldn't know about the drugs either. I then understand that I was working for a drug dealer. It seems that I am defending one dealer from another. I never wanted to work for such people. I need my own people. Find our own jobs. Here I am just another paid thug. As I stood there staring at the drugs, more gunfire erupted.

I made it back to see three men rush in. Two was down with a fatal head wound and Three and Four were fighting back. I joined in and the three outsiders were dead. A blast shook the building. We ran to the other side of the warehouse. They blasted the doors open and were hooking up a truck to the trailer with the drugs. We exchanged gunfire and forced them out. That is when what was left of my team found the drugs. Oh, great. We didn't have time to deal with the discovery. The outside team made their way into the front of the warehouse.

As the fighting, reengaged Number nine was hit in some crossfire. He spun around and stumbled into the middle of the fight. The result was he was ripped to bloody rags. Thug Number One fished out a remote from his pocket and dialed in a number. The front room exploded. He had placed a sizable explosive in the rafters of the building. Makes me think it may have been for us. The explosive was too big. The building shook and supports started to fall. One support hit Thug Number One in the shoulder severing his arm. With that the building was on fire. Eight turned his gun on Three and fired. He shot him in the face then made a beeline for the truck. What he didn't count on was the boobytrap in the truck. A small charge in the back of the seat acted like a Claymore mine shredding him with what looked like buckshot.

This left me and Thug Number Four. He looked at me then the truck and said, "*let's take the other trailer and split the contents.*" I said, "*why not?*" If we left it there it would burn up like the drugs are going too. If we return it, the dealers will just buy more drugs with it. I asked him, "*what's your name?*" He said, "*my name is Robert, but most people call me Bobby.*" I had the most experience with a big rig so I went out to find a truck. Just outside I found an old Mack truck. The bulldog was missing its head but the truck started on the first try. I pulled the truck in and we secured the trailer to it.

We somehow escaped with the cash. He and I split around three hundred million dollars. He knew a guy who would launder the cash for 20% or sixty million. We sent some money to the fallen thug's families in our team. Even Thug Number One who looked as if he was going to betray us as soon as he could. To his credit Bobby only kept a little of the money. Most of it he donated to various charities. I split my remaining cash into thirds. One third to charity. Another third was used for investments such as low-income housing and eventually a Russian Bar. But that is another story. The final third I used to start my business. A year later with my old friend David, his new wife the tall Senegalese born TC and Bobby we opened up shop. My first rule was we won't work for or with drug dealers.

## Chapter 12

### The Devil's Icebox

I find myself in the snow again. Well, at least it's not snowing. We were working a job a now retired operator setup just before she stepped away. My right-hand TC decided she didn't want to risk the baby she was having on working in the field. She said it was selfish to put her wants before the baby's needs. She and my best friend from high school were expecting their first child soon. So, I find myself in uncharted waters. Yes, I have done many jobs without her. This will be the first with her completely gone.

I own and operate a specialty security service. I started this company to do some good while making some green. TC's father worked for the World Health Organization or WHO. He retired a few years ago but he kept some of his contacts. While there he and his wife started a secret organization helping women to escape violence. They started in the middle east but now operate all over the world including America. Occasionally, we provide security for those who are escaping from more violent troubles. Some are running from abusive husbands' others from family.

My team was split up with Ted, Tina and her brothers with me in Alaska setting up our hideaway while Gregg, Bobby, Jimmy, Phil and Janet are in Afghanistan helping our guests make the move. They will enter Canada then cross the border into Alaska. This site works well with most people thinking, "*who would go from the desert to the tundra.*" People in hiding move here for a year or two. while here we can help them assimilate into the culture. By the time they are ready to leave they have everything they need to start a new life.

We had a window of about three days. Then a storm will close off access to this site. I don't want to be here then. It could be a month or more before anyone can get to this hideaway. We built up enough supplies for twenty people to stay comfortable for two years. There will be at most thirteen people including the people TC's parents hired. This site also includes a remote weather station which provides satellite Wi-Fi. The station acts as cover for why we are there and provides a connection to the outside world. Now all we need is for my team to show up with the quests.

Five miles from the departure point they found themselves being chased. Gregg and Bobby were on point in a Land Rover with a 50-caliber machine gun mounted on top. Jimmy and Phil were in the rear with a Humvee and another 50-cal. Gregg and Bobby pulled to the side and let the convoy pass. They ducked behind a hill and waited for the ones following them to pass by. Three old Land Rovers passed. Two of them had 50-cals and one was loaded down with RPG rounds. This was bad. It would take some time to load the plane. A running gun battle with children would be a bad deal. They needed to stop them or at least slow them down. Bobby radioed ahead to warn the airstrip. With Gregg behind the wheel and Bobby at the gun they struck.

They caught the pursuers by surprise. Bobby hit the third car with the 50-cal. The excessive number of RPG rounds in the back exploded turning it into a fire ball. Gregg dodged the flames sending the Land Rover to the left. The second pursuer found his target and opened fire on the two. Over the radio Jimmy heard his brother and Gregg cut down. Jimmy Sped up and came to a stop. They were approaching the end of the mountains. The terrain then opened to a flat plateau. From here the pursuing Land Rovers could catchup. He had Phil get out. Janet in the truck with the refugees started to protest. Jimmy said, *“they will need all the help you two can give them. I need to finish my brother’s work.”* The truck slowed down enough so Phil could get on. Janet looked back knowing she would never see Jimmy again.

Jimmy blocked the narrowing road with the Humvee. He then grabbed his Barret rifle and a bag of magazines from the back. His last act was to set the explosives in the Humvee. He just had time to take a position when the two remaining pursuers arrived. They slowed to a roll as they approached the Humvee. Jimmy waited for them to get close. Then he set off the explosives in the Humvee. The explosion turned the Humvee into a large grenade. The shrapnel ripped and shredded both vehicles. The surviving men ducked behind a ridge. Jimmy opened fire on them. His first three shots hit their mark. Off in the distance he could hear more trucks. These guys had help coming. Jimmy fired until he ran out of ammo.

We received news that they took off and were on their way. They also told us about the brothers and Gregg. Bobby was one of my first employees and a good friend. His brother Jimmy was a screw-up. His last act was to give his life so they could escape. I hired Gregg because I

saw something in him. I knew he could be doing better. He proved to the rest of the team he was one of them. We don't have time to morn.

I sent Tina to the meeting point with the snow van. It is an extended van with treads instead of tires. Soon even this vehicle won't be able to go out. A strong storm is moving in. Our guests will just make it in time. We however, are going to be trapped with them for what could be a month or more. I guess I should stop calling them the brothers. Dave and Dan helped me batten down the station for the storm. TCs parent's employees won't be here in time. Their plane was diverted to Anchorage. So, their first months of education would be online. All we can do now is prepare and wait.

About five hours later they made it to the camp. Well, most of them made it. At one of the stops along the way Phil got off the plane. He said he had enough of the life and wanted out. We helped the quests out of the van along with the meager possessions they brought with them. Their clothing was bought along the way. Most of them had never seen snow before. Now there where surrounded by it. A security blanket with a temp of fifteen degrees below zero. Tina said there was one other plane on the tarmac. There was no pilot or crew and the plane was just left out for the elements. The troubling part was that the plane had a flight plan that originated in Saudi Arabia.

With the snow moving in we would be safe soon. Whoever that was, it would appear they didn't plan for the weather or remote locations. Off in the distance I could hear a helicopter. In this weather and at this temperature that is not a good idea. I pulled in my people and did a weapons check. Given the nature of our duties we planned accordingly. Each of my team had a Colt M4 and a Barretta Storm. I had my Browning Automatic Rifle or B.A.R. and my Barretta Storm. One of the ladies watched us prepare. She walked up and said in what was very good English, "*are we in trouble?*" I answered, "*don't know yet but it's better to be prepared than not.*"

We had snow gear just not deep snow gear. We were supposed to be out of here by now and the new crew coming in would have all the gear they would need. We would have to improvise. Tina said she saw a couple of rattan chairs in the back. with a little imagination and a lot of duct tape she could fashion some snow shoes. The rest was just layers of clothing and goggles. Jimmy had packed about fifteen pairs of goggles in a box marked grenades. I looked at

the box and thought about him and all he did. The sky turned from blue to ashen then black within a few minutes. The storm was here.

I stood by a window and watched it snow sideways. I grew up in northeast Ohio. So, snow is nothing new to me. I remember one day when it snowed three feet in five hours. It just snowed that in one hour. This wasn't just snow, it was end of times snow. Looking at this I can see why people say the suicide rate in Scandinavia is so high. Nothing but icy cold death as far as the eyes can see. Sara joined me at the window. She said, "*I couldn't have ever imagined such a place like this.*" Sara was the quest who asked us if we were in trouble. Her husband would beat her if she left the house. She is around 5' 11" with a dark olive complexion, long jet-black hair and a figure that makes Marylyn Monroe look like Olive Oyl. She wore her hair over one side of her face to cover a scar given to her by her husband. One day he was going at her with a bamboo rod when she picked up a kitchen knife and held it in front of her. He tripped and impaled himself on the knife. Although it was ruled an accident, his family wanted her head. No, literally her head.

What I couldn't tell her was I wasn't staring at the snow I was watching an auxiliary building. The lights were on and someone was home. It wasn't one of us. We had company. The thermal camera wouldn't work here. Although with it back at our headquarters it definitely won't work. The box marked camera was filled with ketchup packets. I want to ask who put Jimmy in charge of packing the gear. Oh, that's right it was me. That boy just loved ketchup. In our inventorying, we found something like three thousand packets of ketchup. They took the place of the camera, extra ammo for the Barrett, Ted's backup laptop and Tina's romance novels. As I stared out the window Tina was reading an old dog-eared copy of War and Peace.

A break in the storm brought about a dark yet clear sky as well as a clear satellite connection. With that I received an Email from Phil. He told me he had sold our location to the Taliban who then told the family of the quests where they can find us. He was to be paid around five hundred thousand dollars for the information. What really happened was they set an ambush for him instead. He said he was sorry and wished he could take it all back. I wish he had the courage to come to Alaska. Maybe then I could have forgiven him. Ok, maybe I would have buried him in the snow, but we may never know what I would have done.

Whoever that was must know that they will need the building we are in or we would already be dead. All the supplies are in here and those auxiliary buildings weren't built for long term habitation. They had another two to three hours before the storm stuck again. This time it would be around for days. I gathered everyone in the common room. I told them what was what and explained how we need to defend the main building. Deen took the three children that came with them into a panic room in the center of the main building. She also took a Colt 1911 with a couple of spare magazines. No one in their right or wrong mind would shoot the windows out so we took up positions at the doors. I quickly realized this was a bad idea we need to take the fight to them.

The snow was thick and deep. Tina's makeshift snow shoes actually worked. Tina, her brother Dan and I made our way to the auxiliary building they were occupying. There was six of them all in lite snow gear. All of them with AK 47s. Clearly, they didn't understand what fall in northern Alaska would be. Then Tina did a count. She realized there was ten cots on the floor. Four men were missing. We made our way back to the main building. As we approached we could hear the mistakeable sounds of AK and M4 fire. We made in inside to find two of them dead along with a woman named Kayoosh and Tina's brother Dave. They were taken by surprise. Ted was hurt but not badly. It took all of us to keep Tina from rushing out at the others in the auxiliary building. I made a mistake by splitting up and it cost us two good people.

One of the children watching out the window said the others were on the move. I ordered all the quests into the panic room. Sara would have none of that. She wanted a gun and a chance to defend herself. Is love at first fight a real thing? Soon all the woman wanted guns. Three of the men went to a loading dock on the other side of the building. The first thee charged inside the front. They found nine-armed people waiting for them. A very quick exchange of gunfire ended up with all three dead. I don't know or will ever know if the heard all that gunfire and were spooked or whatever they were thinking. The three at the loading dock made a break for it into the wilds of Alaska. Their wolf eaten frozen bodies were eventually found sometime in the spring. Two years later.

Just before the storm hit again we received a message. Jimmy somehow made it out of Afghanistan. He found his way back to our headquarters only to find a message Phil taped to the door. He then found Phil the next day on a beach in Mexico. He enclosed a video of him making

Phil dig his own grave then him filling it. As much as I want to say I don't approve of this, I did find myself watching this video two or three hundred times over the course of the next two months.

Two months later we were just days away from getting out of here. The site was compromised by Phil and the quests were going to be moved. All except for Sara. I woke up every morning with Sara next to me. I wouldn't mind doing this for the rest of my life. Up here in the devil's icebox a Jew and a Muslim found happiness with each other. Dan and Ted found something too. Who knew? Well, I guess they knew.

We would go back home and go from there. I didn't have enough employees left to keep the company running. Maybe one day I would open shop again. I gave Tina, Dan, and Ted enough money so they wouldn't have to work again. Bobby gave Jimmy seven million dollars in his will. He planned to open a catering business offering a restaurant experience in a person's home. It sounds a little too price but who knows it may work. Sara and I will go back and manage all the properties I built while working as a mercenary. Maybe we will franchise the Russian bar concept? It will be nice to have a job that only requires wearing one gun.

This has been a pleasure to write and I hope not an agony to read. If you liked any of these stories please post a comment on one of the blogs. I thank you for your time and patience.

Sincerely, *Michael Collins*