

Chapter 1: The Heist

seven years later

It was late at night at a truck stop just off of Interstate 70, some fifty miles east of St. Louis. At least a hundred or so eighteen-wheelers were occupying the truck stop's parking lot, nearly filling it to capacity. Most of the drivers were preparing to hit the hay, while some others were night owls who were either preparing to head out or just staying after maxing out their service hours for the week.

One driver in particular who was about to head out was Hannah, now twenty-five years old. She'd just finished charging up her hydrogen fuel-cell truck, affectionately named "Snake Juice", which was also her CB handle. It was snowing outside while she was doing a last-minute inspection on her beloved matte black rig, so she was bundled up in her favorite pullover sweater, a pair of gray sweatpants and steel-toe boots.

As she walked around the vehicle, she made sure to hit the tires a little with her thick tail to make sure that they were in good condition. She crouched down, took out a flashlight and inspected the underside of the dry van trailer along with the cord connections between it and the tractor unit.

"Looks good.", she mumbled to herself. "Time to check the trailer doors."

Hannah went to the very back of the trailer and pulled on the padlock just to make sure it was secure. After that, she finally went back up to the front of the truck, opened the door, and entered the cab. She closed the door and sat down in her "Captain's Chair", as she liked to call it, which was positioned in the center to accommodate her large frame.

Seven years on, and she was still keeping alive her ongoing search for answers as to why Alan was attacked that night. Although his body mysteriously went missing from the hospital's morgue, the courts declared him dead anyway after the seven-year window had expired. At least Hannah was comforted by the fact that because he was legally dead, his case was still open as there was no statute of limitations for murder.

Hannah wiped a tear from her eye and looked at the jumpseat next to her, where there was a cardboard box labeled "Alan". It was chock full of police reports, newspaper clippings, maps with circled areas of reported sightings, binoculars, flash drives, a small laptop and a framed photo of her and Alan at the beach, taken the day before the attack. Hannah picked up the photo to look at it for a few moments. It showed a shirtless and smiling Alan taking a selfie of them, with an also smiling Hannah standing just behind him and wearing an extremely revealing two-piece swimsuit. Her buff arms were wrapped around his torso, and her large breasts acted like pillows for his head.

"I won't stop until I find you, Alan. Dead or alive.", she whispered while kissing the photo and putting it back in the box.

She started her truck, silently made her way out of the parking lot and headed towards her destination, a military base just fifteen miles south. Her mission to deliver a load of Christmas mail there was finally almost complete. She decided to turn on the radio to pass the time and not get too distracted by her emotions.

"You're listening to KFUR radio. If you're sick of all that crappy Christmas music, you're not alone. So next up we've got *Feuer frei!* by Rammstein!"

"Ooh, I love this song!", Hannah exclaimed as she cranked up the volume to beyond eleven.

Meanwhile, at the base, a group of masked, heavily armed and fully geared mercenaries descended from the dark heavens onto a lone aircraft hangar at the far end via silk elevator, their boots making contact with the roof ever so stealthily. One of them, presumably the leader, raised his wrist to look at the time on his watch. He then looked around at the others.

"Little hand says it's time to rock and roll."

The mercenaries, save for one who took his position on the roof as a sniper and lookout, tied nylon ropes to the edge of the roof.

"One, two, three."

And they rappelled downwards.

Once they reached the ground, they activated their night-vision goggles and applied plastic explosives to one of the hangar's walls. They stepped back to avoid getting injured themselves by the ensuing explosion.

"Breach."

beep

The power was cut, and all hell broke loose.

BANG BANG!!!

They raised their guns and immediately opened fire, indiscriminately cutting down anyone within their line of sight.

BANG BANG!!!

All around the hangar, military personnel were cut down left and right before they could even react to what was happening. Even those who were knocked down by the force of the explosion were quickly disposed of as well.

Except for one.

After somehow managing to survive the initial onslaught, she made a desperate but futile attempt to crawl her way to a nearby pistol, a trail of blood following behind her. One of the mercenaries saw her and just shook his head and smirked. He calmly sauntered over to the mortally wounded cheetah, drew his own handgun and aimed it squarely at the back of her head.

BANG BANG!!!

With the last guard eliminated, the mercenaries were now free to make their way over to the stealth bomber that was sitting in the center of the building. One of them took out a small tablet computer from his pocket. Then, he got out a cord which he used to connect the tablet to a computer port inside the bomber's nose gear. After a minute or so of hacking into the mainframe, the bomb bay doors opened, and the rotary launcher spun until the smallest bomb came into view. They quickly went to work on stripping off the weapon's nosecone, fully exposing its small but still powerful warhead.

"Bingo."

BANG BANG!!!

"What the hell's going on up there?!", the leader barked into his earpiece.

"They know we're here.", the sniper explained. "Better hurry."

Which was no problem for them as they rapidly removed the warhead from the bomb's casing and put it in a backpack that one of the crew had brought along.

"Give it here.", the leader told him.

He obliged. Big mistake.

BANG BANG!!!

The other two dropped dead, and the leader walked back out of the hole that they'd just made earlier.

"Time to go.", he told the sniper.

"Copy that.", the sniper obeyed.

He rappelled down from the roof onto the ground, only to be staring down the barrel of the leader's Desert Eagle.

"Oh, you dirty son of a-

BANG BANG!!!

The leader pressed a button on the side of his arm, causing an inflatable tethered balloon to pop out and ascend skyward. After that, he tossed a grenade with a long-delay fuse into the hangar. A moment later, a four-engine cargo plane with two special guiding rods on its nose flew under the balloon and snagged the line, simultaneously severing it and spiriting the leader up and away.

BANG BANG!!!