

Chapter 1

Tuesday, September 28, 2004, 5:17 PM

After running up a flight of stairs with Agent Joel Grivner, Donald Corbitt adjusted the miniature speaker perched in his right ear. They took a moment to catch their breath, but Corbitt felt the stress mounting as they drew close to their objective.

“I feel like I’ve been running since they declared the Code Red,” Grivner said.

“This one’s for real, Joel. The Department of Homeland Defense mobilized everyone,” Corbitt said. “Ready for this?”

Joel nodded. “I guess we’ll know soon enough if all the training was worth it.”

“All units, report your status,” Corbitt said into the tiny microphone extending from his right ear to the corner of his mouth.

“Delta Ready,” an agent said over the radio.

“Alpha Ready.”

Precious seconds ticked by as the rest of his team attained their positions around the apartment complex in the south side of Bayonne, New Jersey.

Verified intelligence information located a new terrorist cell and determined that an attack in the northern New Jersey-New York City area was imminent. Thousands perhaps millions of people were at risk, and his team’s actions in the next few minutes might prevent the gruesome agony of another September 11.

“Bravo Ready.”

“Charlie Ready.”

Corbitt acknowledged the units positioned at stairwells and across the street. “We’re ready,” Corbitt said into his microphone to Communications Specialist, Jocelyn Hafner, who served as a focal point for relaying operational status back to Homeland Security staff, FBI supervisors, and the President of the United States.

Her delayed response indicated that something else was brewing. “Did you copy?” he said, when she failed to respond.

“Hold.”

He acknowledged her instruction.

A minute later she spoke in his ear. “Be advised that additional information may require your team’s immediate relocation. Proceed with your current operation.”

He acknowledged her transmission and drew his weapon. “All units, we have a ‘Go’.” Corbitt said.

One second later his size eleven shoe slammed into apartment door 227 sending splintered doorframe into the room and leaving the door partially open. He kicked it again to gain full view of the living room.

“No one yet,” he said, speaking into the microphone. He entered just ahead of Grivner and surveyed the immediate area overlooking the mattresses, porn magazines, and dirty paper plates on the floor. Quickly they searched the kitchen, bathroom, and two bedrooms.

“This place smells like wall-to-wall armpit,” Grivner said. “Looks like we missed them.”

“Yes, but not by much. Notice the smoke?” Corbitt asked, pointing to an ashtray. “Someone’s cigarette is still burning “

”Status?” Jocelyn barked in his ear.

“Vacant. No one injured.”

“Proceed to vehicles. Departure immediate, precise directions shortly,” Hafner said.

“Copy,” Corbitt acknowledged. “All units proceed to vehicles. Move, move, move.”

Chapter 2

Tuesday, September 28, 2004, 5:31 PM

Bayonne police barely had enough time to block traffic at intersections along the twelve-block route from the apartment complex to a self-storage facility. Hafner advised that the Radiological Emergency and Control Unit would respond to support their team's efforts but only after they captured the terrorists and then only if it was safe. Corbitt saw their brown van and noted how well government agencies were responding to this emergency.

Information flowed continuously from Hafner to the three vehicles transporting Corbitt's team. Jocelyn Hafner spoke as rapidly as she could without distorting her words. Torrents of relevant information flooded the communications center, and it was unlikely there would be enough time to use standard communications protocol. Her team's job required quick decisions to supply field agents with only relevant information. Too little or too much information often contributed to injury or death of field agents under fire.

As they made the last turn a block away from their destination, they saw the four small flatbed tow trucks that Hafner mentioned. "I think we've caught up with them, Don. What are the metal caskets on those trucks? Do you think the bombs are that large?"

"That's my guess, Joel," Corbitt responded. "Hafner, any mention of eight foot long metal boxes?"

"Nothing about them yet. Why?"

Before Corbitt could describe what he saw, four men came from the rear of the storage area carrying identical brown envelopes. The men were all tearing open the envelopes as they approached their respective trucks.

Corbitt, famous for his lightening fast ability to process information and perform the correct action, barked commands at the agents in the other vehicles. Seconds later the team pulled up beside the trucks. Ten agents swarmed the trucks with guns drawn.

Instead of attempting to escape or fire the handgun that each of them carried, the surprised drivers merely raised their hands. When the drivers failed to move, the agents yanked them from their trucks and threw them to the ground.

Corbitt struggled to hear Hafner over the yelling of the other nine agents who handcuffed the hapless drivers on the pavement. Corbitt, sensing something vital from Hafner's tone, tried to quiet the other agents.

"Hafner, I only heard 'fifth, leader, dangerous'. Repeat your last please."

"You filthy, Jew-loving, American pigs. You think you have stopped us, but you are wrong. Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar—God is great."

Several agents looked up from their charges to see an olive-skinned man standing forty feet away. The man moved quickly to extend a short antenna from a black device the size of a small cell-phone. Without hesitating, Corbitt fired three shots. Two found the man's heart and one entered his right eye. The expression on the man's face never changed but three high velocity bullets caused him to fall backward. For a few agonizing seconds the black electronic device flew in the air. Ten agents watched helplessly as it hit the ground first on its side and then roll on its back away from the buttons.

"Let's make sure that there aren't any others lurking about," Corbitt commanded. He pointed to two of the agents. "Stay here and baby-sit these guys. Agent Grivner and I will search the driveway on the right, the rest of you spread out and check the area."

Corbitt walked with Grivner toward their area. "Ya know, Don, there's something 'bout these guys I don't understand."

"What's that, Joel?"

"If God is so great in their eyes, and they believe that heart and soul, why do they think that God needs them to run this planet?"