

Marvin was doing the kind of leg work that many aspiring crooks did when they entertained the idea of making burglary a career. He was casing the joint. He had no intention of being in the city when the crime went down. He'd have nothing to do with the actual heist. All the crew needed was up to date intel on what the interior of the place looked like. It was the third case job he was pulling for Smithwick. He always did a thorough complete job that included photos, and schematics. Marvin was good with CAD (Computer Aided Design) so the last time he had included a professionally drawn floor plan in the report he gave to Smithy. It probably impressed the old con quite a bit. It may have had something to do with his all expense paid trip to Houston, Texas. He knew that in the end his cut wouldn't be near what the entry guys would get, but that was alright with Marvin. Fresh out of college with a degree in electrical engineering, he could make a good life going legit. He wasn't about to risk his freedom until he was one hundred percent sure his practical knowledge had caught up with his theoretical knowledge. So he settled for all expense paid trips to various locations, and a cut that would add up to ten grand. Not bad for just wandering into a place and loitering around long enough to figure out how the establishment planned to defend itself.

He parked his rental car in the parking lot outside of Texarkana Software, Inc. It was a typical building purchased by small firms like this. A one story building with probably 10,000 square feet crammed with twenty odd programmers in cubicles. It was located on a block in Houston that also had a strip mall and the obligatory Starbucks.

Marvin stepped out of the rental and locked the door. He stared systematically at the corners. As expected, cameras were in place. Whether or not they were active was unknown. Often times small companies like this would have a security company install such equipment only to decide later not to upkeep the monthly payment for service. Cameras and signs of a

security system were enough to deter most thieves. He looked over at the Starbucks and then at his watch. That would be a good place to start. The walk would give him access to the side of the building without drawing attention even if the cameras were rolling. He noticed a camera on the far corner and assumed there must be one in the final corner. He walked past a steel maintenance door and timed the camera pan for when he was out of sight. Without making sudden movements, he lifted an arm holding a small compass and slid it across the top of the doorway. Right where he would have expected, the north needle swung around to point west...facing the door. An inch later the south needle swung to point at the other end on the magnet's polarity. This confirmed that the door was protected by a magnetic security alarm. He smoothly dropped the compass back into his pocket and glanced at the lock on his way to the Starbucks. The lock was a push button Simplex style lock. They were popular for employee entrances where many different people needed access. While push button locks seemed high security, the truth was that Marvin would just need to stake out the door and watch what numbers were pushed.

Marvin fucking hated Starbucks. It wasn't that they were exploiting the fair trade coffee market, or running all the quaint beatnik cappuccino dives out of business. In fact, it wasn't Starbucks as much as it was the people who went there. Marvin loved coffee. Well brewed French roast coffee, or perhaps a good solid Americano. Either of those drinks could be made in a manner of seconds. But at a Starbucks, it seemed that he was always caught behind either yuppies or hipsters that thought the way to express to your friends that you were a coffee connoisseur was to order a double mocha cappuccino with a spritz of caramel syrup extract added to the exact ½ ounce. Not only would this yuppie do this, but he...or she, would make an order full of these fancy "wanna be euro" cups of coffee for each of his...or her, pretentious friends. A half hour later the poor coffee "chefs" at the Starbucks would get to Marvin's simple

order. Two heaping teaspoons of French roast dropped in a cup sized French press, add steaming water, press, and pour into a cup. No milk, no sugar, the perfect cup of coffee made in ten seconds flat. It made him so pissed he forgot for a moment that he had come over here to get a better angle on the roof of Texarkana, Inc. and started casing the Starbuck's.

Marvin suppressed his anger and started doing his job. Flat roof. No visible cameras covering the roof. Add to that the usual heating and air conditioning vents that jutted up. Just what he expected out of a strip mall start-up company. He looked ahead of him in line; a tall lanky college kid wearing a sweater and a stocking cap. Coolness had gone out of control. He was sure that in the sixties there were kids running around in Hawaiian shirts and shorts in Minnesota because surfing was cool back then. Now that rebellious snowboarders and gangsters were cool, kids in Houston, Texas, who had never seen snow in their life, nor shot a homey in anger, were wearing sweaters and stocking caps. It was June! Marvin was wearing pleated slacks, a breezy white button up, and a tie. He was already sweating. If he had had a gun he would have held the place up right then. But he had an interview to go to. Finally, he got his cup of coffee. He ignored the "tip" jar as he wondered what the reaction would be if the pimply high school kids who worked the register at McDonald's put out a "Tip" jar.

Marvin walked back across the parking lot taking in all the details he could and then entered the front of Texarkana. He did not bother checking details on the lock. Clearly this was not the best entry location. He was also sure there was a magnetic switch much like the one he had detected on the side door. As he entered the reception area, he noticed another corner mounted camera but no motion detectors. He walked up to the receptionist and introduced himself.

"Hello, my name is Robert Robinson," he was proud of that name. In his mind it didn't

sound too fake. “I’m here to meet with a Mr. Jenson for an interview.”

She had that sort of sexy librarian look to her. It wasn’t a surprise at a Tech firm. He just knew the geeks who programmed in the back rooms all whispered about her around the coffee pot. She looked away from her computer screen and glanced at him through her horn rimmed glasses. Marvin wasn’t sure what trendy fashion designer had had an epiphany and realized that the horn rimmed look could be sexy after a thirty year absence. He was pleased with the look all the same.

“Of course, Mr. Robinson. Please take a seat and I’ll let him know you are here,” she said pointing to the seats in the reception room. He thanked her and took a few casual glances. With a main street so close it was a bad spot for entry but he wanted to map it just in case. He panned around the room with his briefcase. Inside was a small camera that fed video to a recorder that was running inside the rental car. He was pleased with this gimmick. He had purchased it online for twenty bucks. Anyone could be a James Bond in this day and age.

Mr. Jensen soon walked through the entryway into the reception room and strode towards Marvin with an extended hand. Marvin stood from his seat, transferring the briefcase to his left hand and returned the gesture.

“Robert is it?”

“Bob’s fine, sir.”

“Oh, cut the ‘sir’ crap. I’m Don. Nice to meet you.”

“And you, s...Don.”

“Come on back. I’ll show you around.”

“That’d be great.”

“I suppose you have already met Zara?” What kinda dope smoking name was that,

Marvin wondered?

“Bob,” she smiled and nodded back. She did it politely but also with the kind of expression that sexy girls give geeky guys when they want to say ‘we can be friends but you won’t fuck me until you have a six figure salary.’

As the two walked past the receptionist’s desk, Marvin looked back and aimed the briefcase that way. It was a sly move. He got a quick glimpse of any extra security features behind that desk and when Zara caught him taking a glance back she immediately assumed he was checking out her ass. Usually Marvin would dart his eyes away when a woman caught him checking her out, but because he wasn’t concerned with her ass at the moment he just flashed a cocky smile. She turned a bit flushed at his audacity as he turned to follow Don to his office for the interview.

“This is our main work area. We hate the fact that everyone is in cubicles but most of the guys who work here are happy that we spend our money on mainframes and not building frames.”

Marvin kept the camera panning, “No worries. These work centers aren’t anything different than what I am accustomed to. How much processing power do you have here.”

“Oh more than enough for what we do. Why don’t you step into my office for a second.” Marvin followed Don into his office. It was all pretty standard. He had a window, the type that didn’t open. No obvious matt switches to detect if the window was broken. A nice desk with family photos, the fancy flat screen monitor for his computer, and the obligatory name plate, as if anyone who worked here didn’t already know that Don Jenson was the fucking VP.

“Video games, man. That’s what we do. Now you haven’t heard our name out there because we don’t make the play station, x-box crap. Our Video games are designed for the

pentagon. We currently have the contract to make a simulator for the CIA's predator surveillance drone. That got us our start. Now, Vin and I have expanded. The guys out there are working on an infantry simulator for Army Special Forces. It is kind of like the old fashioned shoot or don't shoot video feeds that cops would train on but it is much more sophisticated."

"Well, you know that most of my experience is in interfacing games with Sony and Nintendo game controllers. I don't actually design the games." Marvin knew how to program but he was more comfortable designing circuits. Everything that was coming out of his mouth was basically bullshit but he figured he knew enough to score a tour around the firm. He certainly hoped they didn't give him the job. That would only complicate things.

"No problem, Bob. You see, our idea is to make a Play-Station and Nintendo version as soon as the top secret classification runs out. That should be in about a year. It will be the best first person shooter ever. In the meantime, we need someone like you who can get the basic controller options transferred. Of course, you will need a Top Secret clearance to get the job. That should take about three months. You're not a crook are you, Bob?"

Marvin burst out in a laugh unable to control himself. "No, Don. I'm not." He wasn't sure if that was the best response but it was easier to disguise the lie with honest humor. And frankly he didn't give a shit what Don thought.

Don laughed along with Marvin, "Okay, well I can show you some of the facility. Follow me."

They walked back out into the cubicle room. A large room with twenty different work stations. No motion detectors. "Did I catch you guys at a break or are you a bit understaffed?"

Don followed Marvin's gaze to the many empty work stations. "Oh, no. We only have two positions vacant right now. We are flexible with these guys' times. Many of them do their

best programming around 2:00 AM. We let folks come and go. Their log in times and work accomplishments are how we track their work hours.”

Thus the lack of motion sensors, and a real pain in the ass for the black shoe guys, Marvin thought. At the end of the work center room was a room glassed off on three sides. This was the room that contained the mainframe. In the center, was a single work station with a frumpy looking thirty something gal busy at work. She was most likely the system administrator. On each side of her station was a printout machine and processors, and behind her, covering the only solid wall, was a bank of hard drives and disk drives as well as a small library of operating manuals. In the hallway behind that wall was supposedly the main boss’s office with the safe.

“There are a lot of advantages to working here. You see, because of the work we do, a lot of these guys make contacts with the NSA guys. So long as our folks meet their deadlines, we don’t object to their doing private contracts and using our equipment.”

They continued the tour complete with a few introductions and Don’s self congratulatory tale of how his start up was the Patagonia of tech firms. However, Marvin found it hard to believe that any of these guys took an afternoon off to go surfing. Maybe they bolted early to go to the space center and hit on the female astronauts with the shamefully bad eighties hairdos? After about an hour of Don going on about employee benefits and system protocols, and Marvin pretending he understood, it was finally time to meet the big boss.

Marvin followed Don down the hallway past the mainframe room and around the corner. No windows, no visual to the work cubicles. Good. No doors to the outside, bad. He walked past a door that was labeled “Maintenance.” Schalage lock, just like outside. The next door was Vincent Baylor’s office. His lock was a Medico. The safe had to be in here. As they walked in, Marvin carefully panned the briefcase around pretending to admire the office. Glass breakage

switch on the window, motion sensor in the corner, he assumed there was a magnetic switch on the door but didn't have time to check. In the corner was the safe. The safe looked similar to gun safes Marvin had seen in gun stores and that struck him as odd. There was a lock on the spin dial, meaning that a key was required before the dial could be moved. He knew just walking in the door that the whole situation was over his head. Marvin only hoped that whoever they hired could pull this off. Marvin would be paid twice as much if the job were a success.

He finally brought his attention to the man he had come to meet. There it was again, a name plate, "Vincent Baylor, CEO." The man behind the desk stood and extended his hand. Vin was the kind of guy who grew a Goatee thinking that it made him like the hip boss, not realizing that every boss was trying to look 'hip,' and 'with it,' these days. "Vin... You must be Robert Robinson."

"That's me," Marvin said through a clenched smile.

"I like that name. Robby Robinson!" He said laughing at his own joke.

Marvin didn't placate the man. In a dead pan voice he returned, "That's why I go by Bob."

Vin was subtly stung but he quickly shifted gears trying to be nice. "Oh, sorry about that. Well, I see you have discovered one of the best perks of this job. There is a Starbucks right around the corner," he said pointing to Marvin's cup.

Marvin looked down at his cup while panning the camera towards the safe, "Oop, Yup, that's dandy."

Vin was excitable then, "Yeah! Man can't do this job without CAFFEINE!"

Marvin's eyes widened as he subtly drew back.

"Hey! They have this great new latte. Their butterscotch, caramel mocha. It's the BOMB,

dude!”

Who fuckin’ says ‘the Bomb,’ anymore? Marvin wondered.

“Oh, I bet that’s tasty,” Marvin said, secretly hoping that the butterscotch, caramel mocha raised Vin’s cholesterol to a dangerously high level.

“Well, hey, man, it has been awful nice to meet you. I’ll let you and Don finish up your interview. We’ll give you a call and let you know how you pan out on the applicant list.”

Marvin, having observed Vin’s predilection for out of date expressions, sarcastically replied, “Oh, that’d be the berries.”