

UAV

*Book I in the
Horizon's Wake*

A Novel By
Lincoln Cole

Copyright © 2015 Lincoln Cole
All rights reserved.
ISBN: 0692560076
ISBN-13: 978-0692560075

Table of Contents

Chapter 1.....	9
Chapter 2.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 3.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 4.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 5.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 6.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 7.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 8.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 9.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 10.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 11.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 12.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 13.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 14.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 15.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 16.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 17.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 18.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Epilogue	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Dedication

This one is for my wife, who supports me in everything I do, no matter how insane or ridiculous.

“It has become appallingly obvious that our technology has exceeded our humanity.”

Albert Einstein

Chapter 1

Lahore, Pakistan

1

“Do you think they are staring at us because of how we smell?” William asked.

Victor Cross blinked, wondering if he should laugh or groan. He was sitting on a park bench outside the Siddiq Trade Center in Lahore, Pakistan, twirling a pair of Chanel sunglasses in his hand and trying to appear inconspicuous; a task made all the more difficult by his bumbling compatriot.

“What?” Francis asked from the opposite side of the bench, just as confused as Victor.

“You know,” William explained, “like hamburgers. Do you think we smell like hamburgers?”

Victor decided groaning was the proper response.

“What the hell are you going on about?” Francis reiterated. “Why would we smell like hamburgers?”

Francis was Victor’s second in command, the only person Victor would trust with his life. Unlike William, Francis Umstead was lithe, standing barely over five feet and thin as a rail. His accent was thick cockney, hard to understand until enough time had been spent with him, and he wasn’t at all intimidating to look at.

His size was deceptive, though, and Victor would prefer facing William, the three hundred pound bull of a man, in a fight over Francis. Francis was the most brilliant tactician Victor had ever met, and he knew every dirty trick for disabling and crippling opponents.

While Victor built his reputation and became famous as an international mercenary for hire, Francis was always there at his side keeping him out of trouble. They both worked for JanCorp, a mercenary company that ran jobs for governments, corporations, and private citizens. Francis was brilliant and dangerous.

William, on the other hand...

“You know, like in that movie,” William elaborated, completely missing Francis’s objection. “The one where soldiers keep eating Chinese food so they don’t smell like Americans when they sneak in to shoot people. These people keep staring at us, and I was wondering if it’s because we smell like strange food to them. Like it’s seeping out of our pores or something?”

“Do you ever run out of stupid things to say?” Francis asked.

“No joke man, all the attention is starting to creep me out,” William replied. He was staring at the passing crowd and tapping the side of his leg. His gun was strapped there, beneath the robes.

“Don’t do that,” Victor said casually. “No sense drawing attention to yourself.”

“Okay boss,” William said, folding his arms.

It was an oppressively hot day in the Lahore, Pakistan and Victor couldn't stop sweating. Places he hadn't even known *could* sweat were swampy and uncomfortable.

He was less worried about his own comfort, however, and more about his gear. Heat was brutal on electronics, and too much time in the sun could fry the hardware. His laptop sat open on the bench beside him, and he was using it to monitor the timeline and details of his plan.

Francis stirred beside him, glaring over at William.

"You don't think they might be avoiding us maybe because you're a gigantic freak?" Francis asked.

William continued, keeping his voice low and ignoring Francis: "I mean, you wonder if they can smell meat on our clothing or something. Do you think it makes them mad since cows are sacred?"

Francis stood in stunned silence, and Victor couldn't help but laugh. A minute passed as Francis sought a reply.

"That's Hinduism, you moron," Francis said breathlessly. "These are Muslims."

William hesitated. "Oh."

"In his defense, we *just* left India," Victor offered.

"When's the last time you even *ate* a hamburger?" Francis asked. "Just how long do you think it stays in your system?"

William was red-faced and confused. He didn't take taunting well.

"I was only wondering..."

"They are on schedule," Victor said, ending the conversation and closing the laptop. "We have a little under two minutes."

"Why do they want him alive?" William asked. "It would be a lot easier just to kill Imran."

"That isn't our job," Victor said.

"They want to hold him responsible for his crimes," Francis added.

"What crimes?" William asked. He shifted. "The guy hasn't even done anything yet."

"No," Victor agreed. "But the people would follow him if he asked. So they are going to hang him publicly and make an example of him for everyone to see."

"Won't that just make people hate their leaders even more?"

"That isn't our concern," Victor replied. "Our job is clear: take Imran alive. Whether or not they kill him isn't our concern."

"Helen won't like that," Francis said softly, looking pointedly at Victor.

He gave Francis a long look. "Helen doesn't need to know. As far as she's concerned, Imran is getting a fair trial."

"Of course," Francis replied smoothly. "Do you think she knows?"

"She doesn't have the slightest clue," Victor said.

"And what if she figures it out?"

"Then I'll take care of it," Victor replied. "Wouldn't be the first time."

Victor's phone buzzed in his pocket. He glanced up at the streetlights around him. It was the middle of the day in bright sunlight, but those lamps were flickering to life with a telltale yellow glare. It was their cue from the fourth and hidden member of their team that the convoy was under a minute away.

"That's our signal," he said, closing the laptop and standing up from his bench, "time to work."

Helen Allison typed a sequence of commands into her keyboard and glanced out the window at the street below. She was on the third floor of the Siddiq Trade Center, overlooking Jail Street where Victor and the rest of the crew were assembled.

She was average height, attractive if a bit skinny, with brunette hair and soft features. She rarely bothered to wear make-up or fix up her hair, because she spent most of her time with computers.

She was also the newest member of Victor's team, this being only her second time out in the field. She had worked with Victor before while contracting with JanCorp as a hacker, but from a distance usually in a lab with other analysts. Those jobs had also taken place while her sister was alive.

She had offered to join Victor in the field because he had been the one running the operation when her sister was killed two weeks ago. There hadn't been a lot of information released to Helen from JanCorp about exactly what happened, nor any pictures or body. Only a report that her sister was dead from an explosion. Helen wanted to know what had happened to her big sister, and no one seemed to know outside of Victor's team.

Maybe, if she got close enough, she could get the truth. For now, she would play along, pretend to be oblivious, and get her answers.

She glanced out the window and tried to locate Victor or Francis in the sea of people. They were somewhere below. Had they seen the lights? She hoped so, because none of the team were in her vantage. All she could see was a throng of locals going about their daily lives like nothing was wrong.

How many will die today?

She didn't want to think about that. If things went well, none would. Not civilians, anyway.

Her phone started ringing. She glanced at it, then clicked the connect button:

"Mom, this isn't a good time."

"Helen," her mother said. "Where were you?"

"I've been working," Helen replied. "I couldn't make it."

"You couldn't make it to your own sister's memorial service?"

Helen felt a tightness in her chest. "I was busy."

"You're still working for that company aren't you? You promised your sister that you would quit?"

"I know," Helen said. "But there isn't much point in that now, is there?"

"She didn't want this life for you," her mother said. "I don't either."

"We don't want a lot of things," Helen said. "I need to—"

"Is this how you honor her memory, by risking your life like she did? You always looked up to her, but that's no excuse for getting yourself killed."

Helen was silent for a moment. When she spoke, her voice was icy: "There was no reason for her to get herself killed either. Look where that got us?"

"Helen..."

"Mom, I need to go," Helen said, hanging up the phone.

She let out a deep breath and tried to clear her mind, pushing the concerns away. She felt unsettled with an aching feeling in her stomach. It had been two weeks since her sister had been killed and she hated being reminded of it. Her older sister; her perfect sister; her dead sister.

She pushed the thoughts away. She needed to focus on work.

Down the road less than a quarter of a mile away was the approaching convoy. The vans were bulletproof and insulated, with the sole intention of transporting Imran Hyderi safely through the city of Lahore to an important business meeting.

She didn't know what Imran's meeting was about. Didn't want to know.

This would be Imran's first trip into civilized territory in six weeks, and there was no telling when he might reappear if they missed him today.

She was out of radio contact with her team—Imran's convoy traveled with jammers that blocked electronic communication within a half mile—so she would have to trust that they held up their end of the plan. Her job was to hack the security systems of this shopping center, disable the power grids and set off fire alarms.

With luck and a little encouragement, panic would ensue and civilians would flood the streets. After a few seconds, she would reroute power, turn everything back on, and cover any trace she'd been mucking around in their security system. Certain people would know that the system was hacked, but the government would play it off as a random system glitch.

Helen was depressed with how easy this job was turning out to be. She had a toolkit with wires and splicers to hack directly into an internal feed if that was necessary. She thought at least the critical systems would be off the grid.

Instead, she'd managed to hack the entire system through Wi-Fi from a coffee shop on the second floor. Her tools sat unused, and the entire hack had taken under thirty seconds. A simple script she downloaded from the internet had gotten through all of their firewalls using backdoor proxy servers and web kits. It made her feel like a script kitty.

The rest of her time waiting consisted of a bagel and two cups of Turkish coffee to stave off nervousness.

Two cups, it turned out, had been a bad idea. Now she was writhing in her chair, afraid to leave her post.

"Come on, come on, come on," she groaned, bracing herself for the ensuing power outage and blaring alarms. She didn't enjoy loud and repetitive noise, so she was as far from the speakers as she could position herself. "Hope you boys are ready.

With an anticipatory grimace, she typed the activation command into her laptop.

3

The streetlights turned off again, but that was the only sign that anything was amiss during the first few seconds. Most of the civilians didn't notice the streetlamps at all, and only a few glanced over as Victor and Francis meandered away from the benches toward the roadway.

William had disappeared into the shopping center a few moments earlier, milling near the sliding front doors and waiting for his moment to push them down.

The convoy was in sight now, less than two hundred meters away. If Helen blew the alarm too early, the caravan would stop and detour down another street. If she blew it too late, the reinforced and defensible vans would slip past before there were obstacles in place to hinder them. In either scenario, they would have no hope of capturing Imran. Timing was everything.

A little more than one hundred meters away, Victor heard the alarms blaring from inside the shopping center. He watched the approaching vans out of the corner of his eye and turned his attention to the sliding doors behind him. They were sensor operated, and without power couldn't function, but they were built on safety hinges for disasters.

Pushed off the hinges they would swing safely out of the way. Victor was certain that civilians would figure out how to open the doors eventually on their own, but right now he didn't have time to wait. That was where William came in.

A group of confused people milled at the door. A few seconds after the alarms began, William pushed at the glass door in a rush, knocking the sliding doors off of their hinges and escaping into the sunlight outside.

Victor noted with dismay that only one doorway swung open and the other hung at an angle, blocking passage.

Behind William in the mall, civilians were milling in a state of uncertainty, but when they saw the large man knock open the emergency exit their confusion shifted to fear.

They swarmed outside through the single door, but Victor knew the stream of people wouldn't be fast enough. He needed more, and the small opening with only one doorway had turned into a bottleneck. They were afraid, but only afraid enough to go outside. No one was panicking.

Not yet, at least.

"Stop the convoy," Victor mumbled to Francis, walking toward the open door. He pushed through the oncoming crowd, fighting into the mall. Hundreds of people were vacating stores and filling the antechamber, confused.

The vans were close, and without more people rushing into the streets, Imran would disappear past without any problem.

Francis nodded and turned to face the road, pulling his hood up to cover his face. Victor fought to the double doors of the shopping center, grabbing the blocking door and yanking it out of the way.

He began waving his hands and pointed frantically at the windows above them.

"*Aag!*" he shouted in Punjabi.

"*Nar!*" he added in Arabic, just in case some shoppers weren't local. "*Aag Lagana!*"

At the declaration of *fire*, confusion shifted to terror, and seconds later other people were screaming as well. It took Victor only seconds to incite real panic among the shoppers, but those were precious seconds he hadn't expected to waste.

He wasn't worried, though, not yet. They might have to improvise, and he had to hope something would present itself. Victor slipped through the crowd and worked his way back to the edge of the road.

He picked his target out of the line of oncoming vehicles. He was responsible for neutralizing the third van in line, but he was fairly certain it wasn't the one Imran would be traveling in. The delegate would be in the middle or front van.

Victor scanned the crowd for Francis as he moved down the street. The convoy was fast approaching and right now it would have no difficulty bypassing the impromptu blockade of milling civilians.

He caught a momentary glance of his second in command, ducking in the crowd near the edge of the street. He hoped Francis had a plan to stop the vehicles, or this would all be for nothing.

Whatever he is doing, Victor thought, he'd better do it fast.

4

"*Where is your mother?*" Francis asked in Punjabi, kneeling next to a young child and speaking slowly.

His dialect was precise but unpracticed, and he was forced to enunciate the words to ensure she would understand. The little girl was terrified, and Francis felt bad for what he was about to do.

Bad, but not enough to stop. She was young, between five and seven years old, and had no idea what to do in this situation. And of course, things were worse for her than they should have been:

Francis had circumvented the crowd as it dispersed outside the broken doors, separating this young girl from her mother and guiding her several dozen feet away without anyone becoming aware.

Now she was lost, disoriented, and wanted nothing more than to find her mother. Francis heard the mother in the distance as the crowd dragged her along in the undercurrent, begging to be reunited with her child.

Unfortunately, that wasn't what Francis had on his agenda. His plan relied on the humanity and generosity of his enemy. Woe to this girl if they didn't have any.

Imran Hyderi was important to the people of his country because of his nobility and honor. He was among the heroes and saviors who would not resort to violence and preached peace. The last thing such heroes wanted to do was associate themselves with the tactics and mannerisms of their opposition. As such, they would surround themselves with people of similar ilk.

He'd chosen this young girl because the drivers were more likely to stop from hitting a child who wandered into their path than an adult. The girl was scanning the gathered crowd for her mother, tugging at the little Bhurka covering her hair.

Francis timed it perfectly, letting the vans come close enough that they would have to swerve and stop rather than change course, then pointed across the street and gave the little girl a push:

"*There's your mother!*" he said, and the little girl didn't hesitate. She ran into the middle of the street, shouting for her mother, oblivious to the black vehicles barreling down on her.

Several people started screaming, and Francis stepped into the roadway behind the little girl, pretending as if he was trying to stop her.

He was careful to stay far enough back that if the driver *did* decide to run the girl over, the van wouldn't come close enough to clip him too.

His gamble paid off, however, and the sound of screeching tires filled the air as the front driver slammed on the brakes. The van swerved, and the smell of burnt rubber filled his nose.

The little girl screamed and fell on her butt, staring at the engine block coming to a halt less than three feet from her face.

Only seconds later the street was filled with dozens of pedestrians, surrounding the girl and the now stopped line of vehicles. Some shouted angrily at the drivers, others shouted to find out what was going on.

Francis disappeared back into the crowd and maneuvered to the second van in line. Victor didn't have intel on which vehicle Imran was traveling in, so the plan was to sneak a view into the interiors of each and eliminate the ones they didn't need.

It wouldn't do any good to attack from the outside: the van exterior was armored against small bombs and bullets up to fifty caliber by armor plates. Anything sufficient to stop the convoy would likely kill everyone inside.

But to save weight and cost, the interior was not compartmental or fortified. Once a door opened, all of the outer defenses were for naught.

He adjusted his loose fitting thobe to hide his movements as he drew a Colt revolver. As predicted, the passenger door opened and a guard climbed out, waving a gun and shouting in Punjabi for the crowd to disperse. Francis readied to shoot if the man moved to close the door behind him, but luckily it was left open.

The guard was armed with an assault rifle—a modified AK—and he was using the barrel to encourage civilians to step away from the van and clear a path.

Francis shifted nearer to the passenger door, cocking back the hammer on his revolver and pulling a tear gas grenade from another pocket. The crowd was getting more and more chaotic, and the guards were having no luck pushing them away from the vans.

The crowd was also growing in size as more and more surprised shoppers flooded out of the mall. Francis moved into position next to the passenger door.

He found an angle to peer across the front seat of the van, and with practiced ease fired off two rounds into the driver in rapid succession, tossing the tear-gas grenade into the backseat. It all happened in less than two seconds, and Francis ducked back into the crowd again before the guard in the street knew what had happened.

The civilians screamed and thrashed about, struggling to get away from the gunshots. A few pointed at Francis, but no one moved to hinder him as he shifted through the gathering.

He heard more gunshots from in front of and behind him in the roadway as Victor and William took out the other vehicles.

He ignored them and focused on his own job. He slipped around the far side of the van, next to the rear sliding door, and waited. A few seconds later it opened and gas billowed into the air.

Two men stumbled out, coughing and covering their faces with clothing. Francis fired two more shots and both men collapsed to the ground. Then he moved forward into the interior of the van overtop them, avoiding the noxious gas, and peered inside.

It was empty. Francis let out a sigh. It wasn't practical for Imran to be in the middle van, but he had to check nevertheless. William was working the first van and Victor the last, and Francis knew that if one of them needed help it would be William.

He reached into his pocket for more ammunition and saw the last guard stepping around the corner of the van. He'd recovered quicker than Francis expected and was raising his rifle to fire.

Francis dove toward the rear of the van, scrambling out of sight just as the rifle went off. He heard bullets thud around him, and knew several civilians were hit in the barrage.

Francis crawled to the far side of the van and rolled underneath, facing toward the rear of the undercarriage. He watched the guard's feet as they rounded the van at the back. Francis fired, hitting the man in the right ankle.

The man collapsed to the ground with a scream, and as soon as his head came in sight below the undercarriage Francis fired again, planting a bullet in his skull. Francis continued rolling through to the far side of the van, opening the cylinder on his Colt revolver and letting the empty shells spill onto the pavement.

He started to stand up, pulling more shells out of his pocket to reload. Things were progressing smoothly, and with a few more minutes they would be on the road with their target long before any response could be mustered against—

He saw the foot coming at the last second and managed to shift his neck far enough to avoid the brunt of the attack. The shoe caught him in the shoulder instead of the chin, knocking him against the van and sending a wave of pain down his spine. He fought to maintain control of his senses and spotted the man in front of him, stepping back and shouting.

The attack caught him off guard. His brain went into overdrive determining the ramifications:

Francis hadn't anticipated civilian intervention during this mission, and he knew that if he miscalculated his next move, things could turn from simple to desperate in a matter of seconds. If one civilian decided to join the fray and attack the outsiders, what would others do?

He couldn't afford for the crowd to turn into a mob. Francis shifted his weight underneath him as the assailant readied a second kick, and noted with dismay that more civilians were moving to join in.

They were emboldened by the first attacker's success. This could get out of hand, and if he let these people enter into mob mentality his team would be in a lot of trouble. He slipped one shell out of his pocket, spilling a few live rounds on the pavement in the process, and slid it into the chamber of his revolver.

He snapped the cylinder into position and waited. One shot was all he would get, so he would need to make it count.

Only a second before the kick came he sprang into motion, stepping forward and catching the leg of the assailant with his left hand. He stood up and threw the man backwards.

The attacker collapsed against another person and formed a heap in the center of the road, but Francis ignored them. He studied the crowd carefully, selecting a man who seemed likely to join the fray from those still hesitating.

The man wasn't aggressive yet, but he was big and strong. Francis knew it was only a matter of time. The crowd was building fervor now, ready to protect themselves against the outsiders, and that was something he couldn't afford.

Francis didn't hesitate, raising his Colt and firing his shot. The would-be assailant collapsed to the ground, half his head missing, and the crowd fell silent. The fervor was gone in the blink of an eye. Many were splattered in blood and gore. Many more seemed shocked as they stared at Francis.

He hadn't shot the man that attacked him, but instead an innocent bystander. *Who the hell does that?* The question was written on their faces, and they understood that this wasn't their fight. The mob mentality was gone, and now they were all afraid and isolated again. Francis calmly reloaded more shells into his revolver and stared back at them.

"*Anyone else?*" he asked in Punjabi.

There was no response, and he started walking toward the van parked in front of his. The crowd parted before him, silenced by his display of brutality. These were civilians, not trained to operate under battle conditions.

Or maybe it wasn't me that stopped them, he realized suddenly. His display of brutality was nothing compared to his compatriot's. The civilians were giving an even wider berth for William without the man needing to make any display.

William was leaning against the edge of his van, panting heavily and dripping in blood. It wasn't his. There was a man on the ground in front of him, tied up and with a cloth bag pulled over his face. Most impressive—and nauseating—was the crowbar he held in his right hand. The crowbar was, also, dripping blood.

"Where did you find a crowbar?" he asked.

William held it up for inspection, as though surprised to see it in his hand. "I'm not really sure...must have been in the back seat."

"Was it necessary?"

William shrugged. "Probably."

Francis shook his head. He gestured to the tied up man on the ground next to William. "Is he injured?"

"He's fine. He was begging earlier."

"He isn't now?"

William shrugged. "I kicked him in the face. He tried to rouse the civilians against us: kept asking for people to fight for him."

"I don't think that's going to be an issue," Francis replied, glancing back at the terrified crowd. "Is the van damaged?"

William shook his head. Everything was quiet, and a moment later Victor pushed through the crowd to join them. "I rigged the others to explode. We need to leave before these people realize they can swarm us."

Victor and William lifted Imran into the van, dragging the dead men out and dropping them onto the pavement. Francis was a little disgusted to see that only one man was shot, while the rest received death-by-crowbar. It was embarrassing and barbaric, but there was nothing he could do about it now.

"I didn't want to damage the engine, boss," William explained. "So I tried not to use my gun."

"Good plan," Victor said. Francis could detect a slight undertone of sarcasm, but he knew it would pass over William's head.

"In less than a minute, there will be a large explosion here," Francis said, addressing the crowd in Punjabi. They stared at him blankly. "Anyone who stays or tries to stop us will die."

He climbed into the driver's seat of the van and fired the engine. He used his sleeve to wipe enough blood off the windshield to see out, and decided he would have a talk with William later. *Sometimes a little finesse is necessary.* The crowd parted as he inched forward, and in only a few minutes they were on empty roads heading east.

"Will anyone follow us?" William asked.

Victor shook his head. "Not a chance. The civilians can't respond to the incident, and the military is loyal to the national leaders."

"What happens now?"

"Now," Victor started, "we leave Imran at the drop point and disappear."

"I mean here," William said. "What we just did."

Victor leaned back into his seat. "The military releases a report, some people get mad and write letters or stories about cruelty and horror, and the government's opposition disappears for a few more years."

"You're wrong," a foreign voice said, and it took Francis a moment to realize that it was Imran speaking, tied up on the floor of the van. The voice spoke clear English, though with a distinct accent.

"You didn't gag him?" Francis asked, glancing over his shoulder. William shrugged.

"Kicking him was easier."

"We will never disappear," Imran said, but he didn't try to sit up from his prone position.

"All evidence to the contrary," Francis said.

"You mock something you know nothing about."

"You are a prisoner tied in the back of your own escort van being handed over to a man who will kill you, perhaps publicly. What else is there to know?"

"My death means nothing. We fight for the people. For freedom. Something you have and yet deprive others of. You will never understand what it is like to have something to fight for. Something to die for."

"Maybe not. But I like to think there is *nothing* worth dying for. I might not have conviction, but I always win."

"Then you don't understand that you already lost the only battle that counts," Imran said.

Francis shrugged. "Yeah, whatever."

Victor walked into the field of sugar cane outside the military base in Eastern Pakistan. Imran Hyderi was now in the custody of the government, and he neither knew nor cared what they would do with him. His team was back inside the operation tent, packing their gear and belongings.

Helen was annoyingly hyper and continually retreating to the restroom. He would have to remember keep her away from Turkish coffee in the future.

Francis found him outside the tent. Victor could tell there was something on his mind.

“What’s wrong?”

“What happens when she finds out?” Francis asked.

“About Imran?”

“About her sister,” Francis replied.

“She won’t,” Victor said, waving the concern away.

“She’s smart,” Francis said, “and persistent. She isn’t going to give up.”

“No,” Victor said. “But she’s soft. She has none of the iron her sister had. She’ll be easy to break.”

“Do we need to break her?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, is this worth it? Why don’t we just cut her loose and get someone else.”

Victor was silent for a moment. “You said yourself that she isn’t going to stop looking for answers. When she finds them, I would prefer that she be close enough that I can deal with it. Her sister had a lot of friends. If Helen told the right people what we did...”

“Things could get messy,” Francis finished. Victor nodded.

“She doesn’t know anything yet. When she starts to figure it out, I’ll have a bullet ready for her.”

Francis eyed his boss for a second, nodded, and then walked away. Victor watched him leave. He started walking back toward the military outpost when his phone started ringing.

“This is Cross.”

“There’s been a change of plans. We need you stateside,” the voice said. He didn’t recognize it: JanCorp cycled phone representatives. Worst case scenario, he could pick one voice out of a lineup at most. “We have our opening.”

And it didn’t matter anyway. He didn’t plan on letting a worst case scenario ever find him. He hung up the phone and began meandering back to his crew. Only one thing mattered right now.

They had a job.