

Why am I here? In a small apartment on the second ring third district, a young beautiful woman sits caring for a small child, waiting for a husband out late for work. So why is he standing outside in this torrential rain waiting for god knows what. Servos from a nearby Muzzle sounded as a restless operator shook to keep himself awake.

Something was wrong here. We hardly ever brought along operators, yet already I've seen two Muzzles and what I could swear was a Zero. Although what bothered me most was that Reynold was jumpy. Reynold was never jumpy.

Ten of us currently stood around the open lot. The two muzzles on either side with the rest of us scattered around in a circle. The Zero, if that was a Zero, was presumably hidden somewhere, waiting for something to go wrong.

I toss a glance at Rickard. Stone cold as always, his constant surveying of the sky being the only sign of any anxiety.

Finally the sound of an approaching vehicle roared in the distance. An almost visible wave of relief seemed to fall over the rest of the men but for some reason the knot in my gut only pulled tighter. Alarm bells were sounding in my head and I couldn't tell why.

The new arrival however didn't help. Class 4 Armored transport AKA Iron Maiden. Damn thing was a stones throw away from being a tank. Our orders were simply to secure the area till we were told the job was done. A simple job in theory. Stand in one place and wait till you're told to go home. But then again, a lot of things sound simple, in theory.

Three men had exited the vehicle and were currently discussing something with Reynold and Rickard. Two of them wore body armor and carried Markson.30-06 assault rifles. The third however

was cloaked in a heavy coat and as far as I could tell wasn't armed at all.

The five of them seemed to reach an agreement eventually and Rickard began speaking into his com unit.

I could hardly hold my position. I may not have known what the hell was going on but I could hardly wait for it to all be over.

A door to the storage facility behind us opened and I could hardly believe what I saw. A Zero walked out, but that wasn't what had me in awe. No, what shocked me was what he was carrying. An AC&T-U, or Atherium Containment & Transport Unit. Ergo, we were involved in black market Atherium. And I just lost any and all desire to be within 10 miles of this area.

My eye's danced back and forth wildly as I tried to verify if anyone else knew just what was going on, but I could tell by the looks on their faces they had no idea. Which meant that only me, Reynold, Rickard, and whoever else was in that vehicle knew what was being carried by that Zero. And how much shit we'd be in if we were ever to be found out. So this is what made Reynold jumpy. I searched Reynolds eye's for something, anything to tell me it wasn't true, but all I found was the look of a starving man so close to his first meal in a long time.

This was stupid. They were stupid. Hell I was stupid for agreeing to be here tonight. We weren't big time crime lords with infinite resources and connections to all the right people. We were a small time drug ring with just enough men, and just enough connections to stay alive and keep the authorities out of our business. What in the devil's unholy name were we doing with Atherium?

My grip tightened as I was becoming uncomfortably aware with my decision to forgo bringing

extra rounds and mentally beating myself over the head for it. Then again, had I known this was going down I probably wouldn't have even come. After all, what more could one guy with a shotgun add to whatever hell could come of this?

The Zero approached the vehicle as every hair on my body stood on end. Were I not covered from head to toe right now I'd look like a giant puff ball. In any case, just a few more steps and he'll have reached the vehicle. The men inside will load the container, the job will be over, and I'll be sitting in that apartment next to my beautiful wife and our little baby boy.

Suddenly a sound like Gods arm clotheslining a mountain erupted in the air destroying any semblance of order along with whatever hopes I had of getting out of this in one piece.

I didn't hear him drop. I was too busy trying to remember what hearing was, the ringing in my ears ceaselessly rattling through my skull, but I did see. Thousands of credits in top of the line armor, a self sustaining cocoon of protection on legs, dropping to the ground. It's head now tiny fragments sent flying around the clearing.

Shock rounds. A nasty mixture of explosives and pressure fired from a high caliber sniper rifle. They were designed to cause chaos during skirmishes by exploding their target and eliminating whatever chances anyone nearby would be able to hear for the next few days. And I'll be damned if they weren't effective.

People started exploding all around me in a macabre wrath, brought down by an as of yet unseen angel of death.

And yet I could do nothing but remain on my knees, as unmoving as the metal floor beneath

me. After all what could I do? Running would only draw the attention of whatever sniper that was picking us off. Might as well just stay still and pray I don't die.

Something prodded me in the back. I looked up, hopping it was just a kind officer getting ready to cart me off to jail. Unfortunately however I was greeted with the half marred face of Rickard, motioning to the container. I couldn't hear what he was saying. But then again I didn't have to. Either I stood up and got the Atherium (and probably die), or I stayed where I was and got shot in the head by Rickard. In which case I'd definitely die. It's funny how small chances sometimes justify stupid decisions.

Picking myself up I realized that half of Rickard was practically gone. His left half a charred remnant of what it once was. However once again my attention was drawn elsewhere. The scene before me had become a war zone. Smoke had been deployed at some point, no doubt to somehow deal with the sniper, and gunshots were being fired everywhere, no doubt most of them being aimed at nothing but their gunman's own fear.

I was almost left in awe, that is until another prodding in the back reminded me of my own state of affairs.

Sparks danced all over the ground as bullets scraped across the metal floor, with tracer rounds occasionally lighting their way through the smoke. Charging through to the container was almost like running through some twisted nightmare dreamed up by a psychopath.

Finally I made it to the container and began another mad dash to the IM. Or at least, I thought I was. One moment it was there, and the next it was gone. Nothing but smoke and molten metal signifying that it once did indeed exist.

I turned to Rickard, motioning to our "ride". Perhaps I should have felt something, some sense of terror, but on the inside I might as well have died the moment I witnessed a man standing next to me explode from a bullet that might as well have been sent from the heavens.

Rickard on the other hand took it a lot less lightly. There he was. Stone Cold Rickard. Rickard whose face might as well have been stamped on an assembly line; Half dead with one arm, staring in utter dismay at a clump of molten metal.

And I laughed. I don't know why really. Just something about it just seemed so ironically perfect. So I laughed. As bullets whizzed by my head, and painful cry's of agony wailed through the air I laughed. Falling on my back I looked up to the sky as rain pelted me in the face. The pathetic whelp holding a gun no longer being a threat to me. So instead of running, or praying, or pretending that by some miracle I could actually fight my way out of this mess I simply looked up at the sky, and I laughed.

Why the fuck was I even here?