

## CHAPTER 1

“You sure it’s going to work this time?”

“Of course it’s going to work. Why wouldn’t it?”

Dr. Eric Baginski wasn’t convinced. “It didn’t work a few months ago. What makes you think it’s going to work now?”

“What do you care? You got paid for the last one, you’ll get paid more. Are you going to help this time or not?”

Baginski wasted no time answering. “After what that idiot put my best friend through, you’re damn right I’ll help. My friend was innocent, damn you! He was set up!” The beer bottle crashed to the table, frothy goodness splashing through the neck. “I’ll do it.”

Baginski smiled reassuring at Smith and put up his hand for a fist bump, like friends do when they have known each other for ages. Smith didn’t reciprocate. He just stared back with no emotion whatsoever, tossed his empty beer bottle to the floor of the abandoned shack out in the middle of nowhere, and sat back in the barely usable, uncomfortable, ugly, green and brown plastic lawn chair.

“So who’s our first test patient?”

When he didn’t get a response, Baginski drank some more to avoid the uncomfortable silence.

Finally Smith replied, “Don’t worry about the details,” and continued to stare at the walls.

Baginski was struggling to hold a conversation and felt the need to get out of there. It seemed Smith didn’t want to talk but wanted Baginski’s company. He tried one more question. “After your entire group was caught last time, there are still people who want to get in on this? How’d you get enough corrupt lawyers to help as well?”

“Everyone’s forgotten about me,” Smith said, opening up a bit, “and for your information, all lawyers are corrupt. They’ll do anything for money.” Smith got up and, without saying another word, left Baginski sitting there all alone.

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Blake sat beside his wife Sally in their very own mansion’s courtroom and watched the eighty inch projection screen display the killer as he plunged the knife into his victim’s flesh a half dozen times, making an audible squishy flesh sound. Blood squirted from the wounds and splashed over the brick alleyway walls until the victim stopped screaming.

There was no emotional reaction from either of them. It wasn’t the first or even fiftieth time either one had seen a murder taking place, looking through the eyes of the killer as it was pulled directly from their mind and displayed on the large screen.

Notes were made in Sally’s court document as they studied the video carefully. Blake watched the reactions of the murderer.

They had seen enough. This man, without a doubt, was the one who committed the crime. Blake removed the helmet from David Ratcliffe, which made the video on the projection TV immediately go black.

“I had to do it. He raped my wife. He deserved to die.”

Having heard this scenario numerous times, Sally already had her scripted response. “No, he didn’t. He deserved to be put away for life.”

Ratcliffe and his lawyer stood up to leave under the escort of security guards, Barna and Williams. In the many years that Blake and Sally had been doing this, not one single person was able to hide their memories and thoughts from the helmet’s capabilities – reading peoples’ minds and displaying those moments in time on a large screen for everyone to see what really happened. The helmet recalled any memories from the point of view of whoever wore it, as if watching through their eyes. With this

capability available, it made the “I didn’t do it” scenario undeniable. Blake wondered why people still committed murders and horrible acts of violence.

The courtroom was now vacant, except for Sally and Blake. He leaned back in his leather chair while Sally did all the paperwork and stretched his legs. “Are we done for the day?” He put his hands behind his head, yawned, and linked his fingers together while stretching some more.

“Yes,” Sally replied, “but don’t get any ideas. Dinner will be ready in twenty-five minutes. It’s going to be a quick meal tonight, just have to throw it in the oven.”

“Then that means I have twenty minutes to make some adjustments to my helmet.” Blake looked at his watch, picked up his invention, and rose from the chair. He knew Sally wouldn’t protest. She had learned a long time ago that it was useless.

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Blake sat behind his workbench with capacitors, resistors, wires, and all kinds of circuits in clear boxes stacked high. He held the circuit board directly under the magnification lamp, inspecting every solder joint.

*What an incredible device this thing has become*, he thought while he thoroughly examining the circuit board. A light knock was heard on the door. “Time for dinner.”

Saying “Just five more minutes” wouldn’t work. It had in the past, but now he knew better to even speak those words. A “be right down” wouldn’t work either. He put the helmet down and walked toward Sally, standing by the door and holding it open for her husband. Blake kissed Sally’s forehead on the way out and trotted down the stairs to the dinner table.

His eleven year old son, Nathan, was already seated and looked up. “Hi, Dad!”

Blake pulled up a chair next to his son. “Hey, buddy.”

The pot pie was removed from the oven and Sally placed it in the center of the table. The handheld video game was removed from Nathan’s hands and set aside. “How was your day at school?”

Nathan shrugged.

“What did you learn today?” Sally asked.

Nathan shrugged again and blew on his pot pie to cool it down. Sally was barely able to dish out Blake’s share when he jabbed at it with his fork, fanning his mouth as it entered piping hot.

“Slow down, hun. Your helmet will still be in there when you’re finished with dinner.”

It was Blake’s turn to shrug. Nathan snickered.

The rest of dinner seemed rushed, but at least they held dinner conversations about upcoming weekend plans and where they wanted to go on vacation this year. Everyone had a different idea in mind. Blake wanted to go to Jamaica, Sally to Ireland, and Nathan, Disney World.

As soon as Nathan raised the last bit of pot pie to his mouth, Blake gathered all the plates and put them in the sink, even before Nathan was able to chew his last morsel fully.

Sally gave Blake an annoyed look.

He kissed Nathan, then Sally. “Sorry. I’ll be outta there soon, promise. I just gotta snap that circuit board into place and test it.”

Sally’s eyes rolled. “Soon? Yeah, sure. Okay.”

He headed back to the lab and picked up the flexible circuit board, inserting the connecting cable and gently placing it into the top of the helmet. He programmed the helmet for last week, Tuesday night, eleven p.m., placed it on his head and powered on his desk monitor. Up came a clear video of what Blake had seen at that exact moment in time. He was in bed, looking up at the ceiling in the pitch dark bedroom. But the video wasn’t dark. His upgrade had worked yet again: night vision! Not only could the helmet show anything that happened from any moment in time through the eyes of the person wearing

it, but now if a crime happened in the dark, he'd still be able to see what occurred, clear as day. Blake shouted in victory. "YES!"



There was another reason Blake had picked this day and time, though. He continued to watch the video as he and Sally made love, now able to see every detail of her gorgeous body.

The door to his lab opened slowly. "I guess you got it to work?"

The frightened Blake almost jumped out of his skin. The monitor went crashing to the floor when he quickly pushed the power button. "Oh, hi, babes."

Sally gave Blake her famous stare and shook her head. "Really, hun?"

## CHAPTER 2

"Okay, jackasses." Smith looked sternly over his newly hired crew, all crammed into a single room in the abandoned shack. He examined all ten people up and down while he watched their facial expressions very closely. There was no way he was going to have another disaster like last time. "You all know what happened five years ago, and yet you're all here. Either you're all very stupid, or very greedy."

There was no reaction from anyone. "There's a very high probability of getting caught. Why do you want to go through with this?" He looked directly at the man in the backwards baseball cap.

"I need the money," said the man, trying to act cool but he looked like a wanna-be rap artist.

"Not good enough. Get out."

The confused rapper squinted in confusion and didn't move. His eyes shifted, then focused back on Smith.

"I said get the hell out." Smith aimed his gun at the man and pulled back the hammer. The man raised his hands in surrender, shook his head, and left the room. "And what about you?"

The hot-chick wearing black silk gloves that extended up her entire arm, leather boots which ran all the way to her knees, and white lace stockings which ended just below her very short mini-skirt gave a long hard stare back at Smith. If she said the wrong thing, there'd be no second chance.

"I hate Blake Stone with a passion. He put my father in prison for life and I want him dead."

Smith pondered over it for a while then motioned with his gun for her to step to the side. The answer was a bit lame, but he was aroused at the sight of her and thought maybe he'd have fun with her later on a one-on-one basis. He then looked at the youngest person in the room, who seemed barely old enough to drive. "Are you sure you want to do this? Are you allowed out after it gets dark?"

One of the others snickered at that comment. Smith pointed the gun at that individual and motioned for him to get out. Everyone else stiffened as he exited the room. Smith was already getting impatient for the answer. Without thinking, the kid blurted out, "I hate him more than she does."

Just as those words came out of his mouth, he realized it was a mistake. "Wait, I mean..." But it was too late. Even before Smith raised his gun, the kid moped as he dragged his feet out the door. Smith wondered if this crew was going to work out. Three gone already. He considered being easier on them, but knowing his last crew of eight were caught (except the one who turned herself in), he had to be stern.

The same question was asked of every single person. When all was said and done, he ended up with seven. All he needed was five, so he was pleased with the outcome.

"Okay, we're done here. I want all your phone numbers on your way out. Now get the hell out of here, right now."

Someone else shook their head and rolled their eyes as if to say, "What a jerk." The motion was very subtle, but Smith made a mental note as to who did it and watched everyone else carefully. When this man was about to leave, Smith smashed his head into the metal door frame, splitting it wide open as he

tumbled down the steps onto the hard pavement below. Six remained. After that incident, no one asked a single question or made any unnecessary moves.

As the last person was about to leave, Smith stood directly in front of him to prevent him from doing so.

He put his hands over his face to block Smith from doing something horrible to it, but after a few seconds of nothing happening, he put his hands down and braced himself for the worst. Smith laughed.

“Hello, Mr. Gary Horn.”

Gary nodded to confirm that he had heard Smith.

“Can you start immediately?”

Afraid to speak and trying to show no signs of fear, Gary was able to squeak out one simple word. “Okay.” He saw what had happened to the others who simply gestured or looked at Smith the wrong way. He tried to sound stern but it didn’t come out that way, and now was afraid he was going to go home too.

When Smith motioned for Baginski to take him away to start the procedure, he now was paranoid about that too and his reactions couldn’t be hidden. He had questions, but there was a lot of money at stake to lose here. He didn’t want to open his mouth and say the wrong thing.

“Relax,” Smith said, “I can see your paranoia. You don’t want to be like one of the others I let go, do you?”

Gary nodded. Truth was, Smith couldn’t afford to let anyone else go. He was stuck with Horn whether he wanted him or not. “You have questions, don’t you?”

Gary gulped, stared at Smith, then at Baginski, and continued, “Will this be painless?”

Baginski looked Horn directly in the eyes. “No, unfortunately not, sir. There will be intense pain for about a full hour, at least. Your head may swell quite a bit, but if everything is successful, it should return to normal size within two or three weeks. ‘Should’ is the key word here.”

Horn squirmed uncomfortably until he saw Baginski laugh. “Yes, of course this will be painless. In fact, the whole process will take about fifteen minutes or less.”

The unsmiling Gary Horn was escorted to Eric Baginski’s car while Allan lit up marijuana joint, sat back, and thought, *You’re screwed this time, Mr. Stone.*

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The weekend had finally arrived. There weren’t any court cases on the weekends since Blake and Sally had made it a point to make that their “family time,” which involved a number of events like Blake’s bowling league, Sally’s book club, Nathan’s football practice, movies, dinner, or just going out for a stroll through Francis Slocum Park with their family dog Sophia. They were all used to their bodyguards, Brad Williams and Joe Barna, following them everywhere they went for complete protection, although every single day they wished the paparazzi would just leave them the hell alone. Since day one of Brad and Joe protecting them, they had never once let their guard down. It was amazing how alert these two individuals were. They seemed even more alert than when they first started the job, getting better at it every single day. One would think after this many years that at least one of them would lose focus, but it never was the case with these two fine guards.

“Go, Nate! Go, go, go!” Sally shouted to their son as he ran around the football field. She elbowed Blake. “He’s getting better and faster, hun.”

“You ain’t kiddin’! If he keeps this up, he’s going to be playing pro before he’s a teenager.”



Nathan's touchdown won the game for The Dallas Mountaineers, and everyone, meaning the entire team as well, went for ice cream at Hillside Farms in Trucksville to celebrate. Nathan was today's superhero and he had a great time with all his teammates while Sally and Blake talked amongst themselves.

"So we're going to start to use the new upgrade as soon as next week?"

"Yup. It's fully operational. I've done extensive testing from several different nights. Haven't had a single problem, and saw everything clear as day."

"So let me get this straight. If someone committed a crime at night, ten years ago, you can recall that vision as if it was in full daylight?"

"Well, not full daylight. Night vision."

"How's that even possible? If what they saw was in the dark, aren't their memories in the dark too?"

Blake was watching Nathan enjoy time with his friends and focused back on Sally. "Yes, but the helmet taps into the part of the brain that would've been able to see it as if it were daylight."

Even though she didn't fully understand, she nodded as if she did. "I don't think anyone has been able to hide their memories from you, have they? I can't remember. We've been doing this so long, they all seem to blend into each other."

“Not a single soul. We caught every single liar who said they ‘didn’t do it’ when they actually did, and those who really didn’t do it were spared all that prison time.”

“Yeah, like the O.J. case. After all these years, who would’ve guessed he really was telling the truth.”

“And what about the Arias trial? That was the worst brutal stabbing we’ve ever witnessed.”

“I would’ve liked to have forgotten that one.” She looked over at Nathan, who was standing on his chair. “Sit down, Nate!”

“Sorry, Mom.”

Sally focus backed on Blake. “You’re amazing, hun.”

“I know,” said Blake.

### CHAPTER 3

Horn was unconscious on the make shift operating table while Baginski carefully stitched up his head wound. Amazing what could be done in twenty minutes.

Smith watched carefully and, again, for the third time, asked, “Is it a success?”

There was no way Baginski was going to get impatient with this man. “Yes, sir. He should come through within an hour.”

“Can’t we wake him up now?”

“It’s not advisable, sir. I don’t recommend it. Even if we do, he won’t even be ready to fully test this until after a full twenty-four hours.”

“Then we need to bring everyone else in too. If we have to wait twenty-four hours after each operation, then we may as well get everyone ready for the moment we need them.”

“I thought the plan was to wait and see what happens with Gary before we cut open another one?”

Smith started to lose his temper and poked his finger right in Baginski’s face. “Do not question me. You’ll do as I say, when I say it.” Baginski backed up a bit, and Smith let out a deep breath to calm his anger. He needed anger management classes as much as he needed Baginski.

“Okay, okay,” Baginski said. He hesitated and continued, “I’m going to need payment before I start the next one.”

“No, you’ll get your damn money when everyone has that chip in their damn head.” Baginski showed no reaction. He was used to Smith’s ranting and raving. Smith turned away from the stare-down and made a phone call. “You’re up. Meet me at Kirby Park in one hour.”

“Already? My wife has our only car. I thought I’d have at least a day before you called me.”

“I told you that you would need to be ready at a moment’s notice!”

“But I didn’t think it would be this soon,” he repeated. “Please, may I have three hours?”

“Goodbye,” Smith said, losing his temper once again.

Only five remained. He couldn’t let anyone else go. Smith was going to have to be more lenient with people.

Smith dialed the next number. “You’re up. Meet me at Kirby Park in one hour.”

“Sure thing, sir.”

*That’s more like it.* Smith disconnected and grimaced. Baginski watched him make call after call, giving the same instructions, and started to see money signs flash before his eyes.

“I’ll be back in two hours,” Smith said as he walked out, nearly breaking the door off the hinges by closing it so hard.

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“Hello, is Mr. Stone available?”

“I’m sorry, he’s doesn’t personally take calls. Who’s calling, please?”

“Andrew Gronka. I’m a lawyer in Wilkes-Barre and have two high profile cases I need help with immediately, hopefully Monday. Is there an opening available?”

“Our schedule is filled weeks in advance, sir, sometimes months. I think I can fit you in three weeks from Monday? We had a cancelation just an hour ago.”

“Not good enough. Please!” Gronka pleaded. “I need to prove the innocence of my two clients or they get death by lethal injection the very next day. There’s no time to waste, and the only way to stop them from being murdered is to prove they’re innocent. I’m sorry this is such short notice, but I was just hired on as their lawyer two days ago. I know they’re innocent. Please, I beg you.”

Dana Litchkowski looked through the appointment book, trying to figure out where she could move appointments to make room for Monday.

“Are you still there?”

“Yes, Mr. Gronka, I’m just checking to see if I can fit you in. Please hang tight, I’ll be right with you.”

“Please. I can’t stress how important this is.”

“I know, I’m checking now, sir.” She scratched her head and thought for a moment. *Two executions?* Something didn’t seem right, but she reviewed several upcoming cases and noticed one that shouldn’t take long at all. She moved that one to a small time-slot on Thursday and bumped around others, hoping not to double-book anything.

Blake let Dana do the entire schedule since she was damn good at what she did. He didn’t know what case was up next until that same day. It amazed her how people still committed crimes all the time, but a staggering 88% of all the cases held at ‘Stone Court’ were found innocent. They just needed to clear their name. From there, leads or clues made the search to find the real murderer a lot easier.

“Can you tell me what the cases are about, please?”

“My clients are accused of working together as a team, first degree murder with twenty aggravating circumstances.”

*Okay, makes a bit more sense, I guess.* Dana thought for a while and finally responded. “Okay. I can make an arrangement for you since this is a special circumstance. I could fit you in. Please bring whatever information you have. Even though Blake rarely uses any paperwork since the helmet shows what really happened, sometimes it’s needed. Can you be here at nine a.m.?”

“Thank you! I’ll see you at nine.”

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Gronka made his \$100,000 phone call to Smith. “It’s done. We’re in on Monday.”

“Excellent,” Smith said with the sound of Mr. Smither’s voice from the Simpsons. “You’ll get your money as soon as the court session is over.” Smith disconnected the call without saying another word.

“Jerk,” Gronka said to the dial tone.