

F Train to Newark

“RRRIIPPPP” the distinctive sound of duct tape being yanked off the reverberates off the walls of this cold and desperately in need of several bottles of bleach NYC subway bathroom. I doubt anyone heard me fumbling with this duct tape, as for starters there is no one around here this time of night and secondly, I can barely hear it myself over the sounds of the trains echoing down the tracks.

I complete my make shift field dressing with the cotton innards of some tampons I liberated from the woman’s room and add them to the duct tape I found in the janitor’s closet.

I softly mutter to myself “Gone are the good old days of fast cars, shaken martinis, and a decent med kit.” I secure the field dressing over the wound on my arm, and rip off another couple of lengths of tape, to wrap around the dressing to keep it in place.

I hide in the last stall in the bathroom, I need to figure out what happened tonight. I don’t work for The Company anymore, I retired over a decade ago. I’m a InfoSec consultant these days.

On rare occasions, like tonight, I do a little bit of corporate espionage, stealing the secret formula to your favorite soft drink, or copying a compression algorithm.

Nothing about this job was unusual, it was all too perfect, they didn’t negotiate my fee, the target had just enough security to make the job interesting, but not overly difficult. Just a nice normal job, probably good I retired from The Company, I lost my edge.

The target was a decent sized tech company down near Coney Island, located on the top floor of a five-story office building. Researching the building and the company was easy enough, I was able to infiltrate the staffing company that supplies the maintenance workers. I planted myself and after a week, I had it all worked out.

The real question is why not simply eliminate me during the recon. Tonight, I was meeting with Sparky, a “Cutout”, someone who would simply take the package and take it over to the client’s agent. It was during this meeting when all hell broke loose.

I will admit it was a bit risky to meet on Coney Island, but I didn’t want to be walking around with the package any longer than I had to, so figured we would meet over near the Cyclone Roller Coaster, then they would make their way to the subway and I would follow a short time after. With two different lines at the nearby station, we would take separate train lines and call it a night.

Sparky saw them first, he whispered “two behind you on a flanking route”. Just as this registered, I saw two behind him, lifting pistols up from their jackets and taking aim. Instinctively I pulled my 9mm and popped off several rounds, I managed to take out one.

That is when I saw the flash from the rooftop near the Starbucks, I wouldn't have thought about the flash I saw except for the fact that I saw Sparky crumble to the ground, I knew that this was Sparky's last drop.

Immediately, I took cover and saw that the assailants were either overconfident or not seasoned professionals, they were not taking cover. This told me, they had body armor, overconfidence, so that means aim for the head or the legs. My goal is to get away from here alive.

I took aim and managed to hit the thigh of one of the one's blocking my best exit route and thanks to the hours I still log at the range, I managed to land one right between the eyes of the other.

I now have a viable exit route, but I still have one on foot and that sniper to worry about. I make a mad dash towards the subway. There is a police department just a few blocks away, surely someone has reported in the gunshots.

"Maybe the sniper took off after taking Sparky out?" was what was going through my head just about the time heard the distinctive sound of a high-powered rifle round hitting a car door. The sniper had repositioned after his first target was down and had just missed taking me out. I duck down and quickly make my way to the train station.

I can hear the train coming, there is a small crowd of people waiting for the train. Just as I am about make a break for the crowd, that agent I had lost track of, he sucker punches me. As I recall the details of the evening, this is a mixed message. The sniper took Sparky out in one shot, but just barely missed me. And this palooka sucker punches me, rather than punching my ticket with that 45 he was wielding around earlier. They must have orders to take me alive.

To bad for him, I knock out a couple of his teeth with the buttend of my 9mm. Having stunned him for a second, I grab his coat wrap it over his head and put two rounds into his cranium. It doesn't do much to muffle the sound, but it keeps the blood splatter to a minimum. I do my best to shove his body under the Tundra that we had been tussling next to.

That is when I hear another bullet hit sheet metal, but this time I stifle a scream. My left-arm is on fire. God damn sniper winged me, given I can still wiggle my fingers the wound isn't too bad. I grab my lucky bandana and do my best to bandage the wound, because bleeding all over the train won't be easy to explain away.

I make my way to the train station and with the train just pulling in, the sniper seems to have orders to avoid collateral damage, as they've stopped shooting at me.

I made it onto the F train, I really wanted to make I to a station where I could switch trains, but I could feel the blood reach my wrist, I had to exit. So the stop at 18 Avenue came up and I

figured I would find a bathroom in the station to address my wound or stumble into a McDs or some coffeeshop.

“Bzzzz...Bzzzz...Bzzzz” it’s my watch, there’s a message from booker, Glenda, “Call your mother”

She wants a situation update. While not encrypted, whenever we are on an unsecure comms channel, we speak in code. Looks like I’ve been in this bathroom for about 30 minutes. I chuck my watch into the trash.

I need to get moving, I’ve got a safehouse over in New Jersey that even Glenda doesn’t know about. My arm hurts like hell, but I can still wiggle my fingers and my field dressing has stopped it from further bleeding. Meaning, I should be good enough to hail a cab.

I think to myself how nice it used to be when I knew a job was going to be inherently dangerous, and that the “bad guys” would be shooting at me, hell I long for the days when I knew who the “bad guys” were.

After cleaning myself up a little bit more, I sneak out of the subway station and down to the street to hail a cab, needless to say there are not a lot of cabs out this time of night, so I start walking northwest. I would just order and Uber, but given that the agents who attacked were seemed to be following order to minimize collateral damage, I have a feeling all my accounts are flagged by The Company. I am fairly certain that my former employer is hunting me.

After about 10 minutes I am able to flag down a cab outside of a place call Café Paris. God I miss the assignment I had in Paris. The food, the women, the wine. I could really use some wine and some food.

I give the cabbie the address for Pizza 2000, it’s a late night pizza joint not far from my safehouse. Not as good as a fresh baguette, but a hot slice should help get me back on track. The drive from here will be about an hour, plenty of time for a nap.

“Yo, wake up. That will be \$97.59.” the cab driver barks at me, I can see the Pizza 2000 signage as I grab my wallet. I slide him three crisp Benjamin Franklins and tell him to remember that he dropped off some drunk teenagers who had too much fun in the city tonight.

He smiles and says “What are you talking about, I didn’t have any fares this evening.”

I am just about to my building, I already finished the slices I grabbed from Pizza 2000. Just as I start to relax and think about whether or not I’ve got any bourbon upstairs, the lights go out.

I wake up to bright fluorescent lights, a mirror on the wall, in a windowless room. I am handcuff to the table, by all accounts this is a police interrogation room. But there is something off about the room, it doesn’t smell like a police station, also the sounds are all wrong. Even in the dead

of the night a police station has a certain amount of "life" about it, this place is very cold and otherwise devoid of life.

I am wondering to myself, why has The Company decided I need to die? I've been doing what I am doing for years, I've even done a few jobs for them. So why take me out, why not just bring me in and ask me to help.

I wonder if maybe Sparky was the target, maybe he...

That is when the door opened and in walked a tall blonde woman, she was dressed in a business suit and had a few folders in her arms.

"You're probably trying to figure out if we're after you or Sparky?" she says.

"Yeah, that happened to be exactly what I was wondering."

"Well, the answer is both. But we knew he couldn't be trusted, but you sir. You always were a patriot, so we were hoping not to have to retire you in that most permanent of ways." she casually delivers what is still a threat to my possibly short life.

I tell her "Sorry about your agents." And she simply replies "While they were on Company business, I wouldn't have considered them full-time employees. Besides, if they could be taken out by someone who has been semi-retired for a decade, it brings to mind their true usefulness. Regardless, we'll send flowers to the next of kin."

"So why am I here?" I ask.

"I can only tell you so much you know. But the short of it is, you need to be more selective of your clients and your assets. Sparky was, for lack of a better phrase a double-agent. He was going to deliver your package to Iran. Though from what we found, your original client wasn't much better, the Russians." she informs me.

"What the hell did I steal? I thought it was just some video compression algorithm, some secret sauce to make it easier for the teens to make their faces look better or some video conferencing company have a few more folks in the conference." I angrily burst out with.

"You stole an encryption-decryption algorithm, one that has an added benefit of compression for video, but has an interesting side-feature of being able to decrypt just about anything. So needless to say we have been watching that company." she sternly replies to me.

"Well, where do we go from here?" I ask.

"Given the events of tonight, I was thinking it might be time to put you back on the payroll, full-time." she delivers with a devilish grin.

