



MAKE IT LOOK IMPOSSIBLE

There was a small island off the southwestern coast of Iceland where the sky was gray, the sea was a slightly darker shade of gray, and the small strip of beach was made of black sand. The only way to get to this island was by boat or helicopter, which wasn't generally a problem because it was always cold and wet and not the sort of island you would want to visit anyway.

The island had only one building: a small wooden shack with one door and two windows. The paint on the shack had once been blue, but it was so faded from the salty sea air that it almost blended in with the gray sky. The salt-streaked windows looked like they hadn't been cleaned in years. The only thing that looked new was the lock on the door, which was so bright and shiny, it might have been installed yesterday. It was a magnetic lock that was impossible to pick.

The door was wide open.

Inside the shack were two small beds, a small table, a small refrigerator, and a small potbellied stove. Lying on the floor were two large men dressed as fishermen. They were

not really fishermen, but instead United Nations elite guards. Or rather, they had been. Now they were dead.

A secret hatch was installed in the floor of the shack. It was hidden by a rug and insulated so that if you walked across that part of the rug, you wouldn't notice it. The only way you could have found it was if you already knew it was there. And even if you somehow learned of the hatch's existence, it was locked with a retinal scanner keyed to only three people on the planet.

The rug had been pulled up, and the hatch was open.

If you had somehow managed to locate the remote shack, pick the magnetic lock, eliminate the elite guards, discover the secret hatch, and bypass the retinal scanner, you would find a ladder that led down into an underground room. Once you reached the bottom, you had ten seconds to walk over to the sealed door at the far end of the room and speak into the microphone. If the vocal recognition software accepted you, the door opened. If it rejected you, the room was flooded with poison gas and you died quickly and painlessly. As with the retinal scanner, there were only three people on the planet that the vocal recognition software would accept.

The door was open.

On the other side of the door was a small chamber no bigger than a closet. In this small chamber was a table. On the table was a bulletproof case. On the case was a thumbprint

scanner that was keyed to unlock the case only for those same three people.

The case was open, and the object that had been inside was gone. An old video game cartridge from the 1980s had been left in its place.

Most strikingly, all three people who had access to the case—one in Washington, one in Moscow, and one in Beijing—had been found dead in their homes the previous night, seemingly from heart attacks, several hours before the object had been stolen.