

The Killswitch Initiative

Chapter 1

“Crisis of Consequence”

“STOP running!”

Below Killswitch were three cops, and despite having a decent head start on them, they were gaining on him... *FAST*. He would've preferred not to run from the police at all, but they have a nasty habit of showing up at the most inopportune times, like a shooting in a hotel on the Las Vegas Strip.

Just a bit more, Killswitch thought as he pushed himself further up the stairs, taking the steps three at a time and trying to ignore his burning muscles. In his profession, it's best to remain in the shadows, unknown, but this time, things had gone sideways.

18 minutes ago

Killswitch pulled his KTM 1390 Super Duke R behind the Triple Seven Hotel and Casino. He'd affectionately dubbed the turbocharged, all-black beast of a motorcycle the “War Bird.” It had long ago been stripped of its factory plastic bodywork, replaced with ballistic steel mounted to custom frames that surrounded the engine and fuel tank. He parked the bike in an empty lot just off Flamingo and Las Vegas Boulevard and shut off the engine. He didn't like doing jobs on the Strip, but if he had to, he tried his best to avoid all their damn security cameras. The bike had fake plates that weren't registered to any name or address; still, he didn't want to risk being caught on security cameras more times than necessary.

Killswitch dropped the bike's kickstand and got off. After hanging his helmet on the left side of War Bird's handlebars, he walked to the back of the bike and opened a small Pelican Air case attached to the frame, behind the seat. He removed a Kimber

CDS9 pistol from the fitted foam inside the case and threaded a Hush Puppy Model 2 suppressor onto the barrel. Then he pulled a 15-round magazine from the case and loaded the weapon. He chambered a round and did a press-check, pushing the slide back slightly and looking into the chamber to ensure the round was properly loaded. He holstered the CDS9 under his left shoulder, beneath a dark blue Dickies work shirt, then pulled two more magazines from the case and slipped them into the shoulder holster on his right side.

Finally, he took an M111 concussion grenade from the case and put it in the left cargo pocket of his black tactical pants.

The target was some scumbag drug dealer named Nino Garcia, who was throwing a party at the Triple Seven with money skimmed from Killswitch's equally objectionable boss, Jimmy Durant. Jimmy had made a fortune running a check-cashing and payday loan operation that served as a front for several more... nefarious businesses. Killswitch didn't care much for his boss, and even less for his targets, but he did have two basic rules: ***no women and no kids***. He was reasonably sure that children wouldn't be at a drug dealer's party, so to avoid having to break the first part of his first rule as a matter of necessity, the plan was to kill Nino before the party began. Killswitch wanted to do the job at Nino's house, but Jimmy wanted it public; something to send a message that he could always get to you. Most importantly, *you don't ever mess with Jimmy's money*.

Killswitch walked along the sidewalk towards the hotel, putting on a dark grey logo-less baseball cap as he approached the employee entrance of the hotel tower. Killswitch pulled a device known as a Flipper Zero from his pocket and pressed it to the card reader outside the door. Pressing a button on the right side of the device, he started a "brute force attack," which cycled through standard access card codes to open the door. These systems were often chosen for cost, not necessarily security, and much to Killswitch's surprise, the door unlocked after running only three code sequences.

Killswitch put the Flipper Zero back in his pocket, opened the door, and went up the stairs, two at a time, to the top floor. Nino's room was a penthouse suite, one of two at the Triple Seven, each occupying its own floor. Based on the intel Killswitch had, the suites had a bedroom on either side, connected in the middle by a large communal room. Looking out of the stairwell and seeing no one, he made his way to the middle of the hallway where the room's entrance was located. He knocked on the door, standing with his head tilted slightly down, so anyone looking through the peephole would see only his cap and work shirt.

“Who is it?” A voice called through the door.

“Maintenance. Got a complaint from someone on the floor below about a leak through the ceiling. We think it might be coming from this room. I need to come in to take a look,” Killswitch replied.

“Chinga tu madre! Ain’t no fucking leak, vete a la chingada!” The voice fired back.

Killswitch didn’t know a lot of Spanish, but the little he did know was mostly profanity, and he was sure the voice behind the door had just told him to “fuck off.”

“Listen, sir. I can either come in now to take a look by myself, or I can come back with the hotel manager and security in about fifteen minutes. I really don’t care which, but it would be a lot faster if I just came in now to confirm whether or not there’s a leak. If there is one, the manager said they’ll set you up in the other penthouse for the trouble. No leak, and I’m out of your hair.”

There was no answer, but Killswitch heard rustling behind the door. Sixty seconds later, one of the doors into the suite swung open, and the biggest Mexican he had ever seen filled the space. Killswitch looked the man over, sizing him up; he was covered in tattoos, his massive shoulders and arms rippling out of a white “wife beater” tank top. *Definitely the “muscle” of the group*, Killswitch thought. He couldn’t see if the man was armed or not.

“Alright, puta, let’s get this the fuck over with.” The man said with a thick Spanish accent.

“Sorry, guys. Don’t wanna be here any more than you want me here. Got called in for this shit, y’know?”

“Me vale verga! Just tell us if there’s a leak and get the fuck out.”

Killswitch didn’t reply, but nodded to the Mexican as he stepped into the room. As the man shut the door, Killswitch looked around to assess threats and identify Nino. The suite had a small bar to the left of the entrance, and it was clear from the boxes of liquor and open bottles that they’d already started drinking. On top of the bar, there was a smooth glass plate with neat lines of cocaine on it.

They're prepared for a long night, Killswitch thought as he stepped further into the room. The suite was huge, with a large sunken seating area in the middle that had two couches facing one another and a long wooden coffee table between. Behind each couch was a set of double doors that led to the bedrooms. Beyond the seating area were floor-to-ceiling windows that spanned the entire width of the room. The curtains were drawn, which was lucky for Killswitch; he didn't have to worry about anyone seeing him or what he'd be doing from the exterior of the hotel.

Two more slightly less tattooed men were seated on the couch on the left, and another tattooed man sat across from them on the couch on the right. They were playing cards, a mirrored plate of neatly lined cocaine on the coffee table next to the "draw" pile. A rolled \$100 bill rested on the edge of the plate, a Glock 17 next to that. Killswitch recognized the man on the right as Nino because of the "full-house" playing card tattoo on his neck. He couldn't tell if either of the other men was armed beyond the gun on the coffee table, but if he dropped them as quickly as he planned to, it wouldn't matter anyway.

"Leak is most likely coming from one of the bathrooms," Killswitch said, motioning to the room on the left side of the suite. "But I'll need to check both bathrooms, just to be sure."

"Ay chingón.. Go do it so you can get the fuck out!" The massive Mexican replied.

"Gladly."

Killswitch walked to the doors on the left side of the room and opened them, the Mexican following closely behind, watching him like a massive, muscley hawk. Walking into the bedroom, Killswitch looked around quickly and didn't see anyone. *Clear so far...* He thought. He turned to his left and proceeded to the bathroom. Crouching down, he did a fake "scan" around the tub and toilet, then opened the cabinet doors under the sink, really trying to sell the ruse that he was from hotel maintenance.

"So far so good. No leaks in here. Just one more and I'll be done." Killswitch said, standing up and walking back out to the main room.

Killswitch walked to the other side of the room, the tattooed Mexican still following closely. Killswitch opened the doors to the second bedroom and, seeing it was

unoccupied as well, turned right into the bathroom. He did another fake scan around the tub and toilet, the Mexican standing behind him in the doorway. While performing his “inspection,” Killswitch unbuttoned his work shirt, slipping his right hand inside to grip the Kimber. He pulled the weapon from its holster slightly to engage the trigger and maneuvered it to bring the suppressed muzzle in line with the chest of the man behind him. Then, he clicked the safety off and pulled the trigger.

Thwip.

Thwip.

Two bullets zipped through the back of the shirt, hitting the Mexican before he even knew what was happening. As the man began to drop, Killswitch used his left hand to pull apart the buttons of his work shirt, yanking the gun from its holster and spinning around on his right heel. He shot the Mexican once more in the head and stepped over his body, back into the doorway to the main area of the suite.

Nino never saw it coming as two rounds tore through the back of his skull. The henchman sitting across from him took three shots: two to the chest and another in the head. The third henchman lunged for the Glock on the coffee table. Killswitch fired again - one bullet going into the man’s back, another into his shoulder, and two more through the crown of his skull. The man’s body slumped across the coffee table with a thud. Playing cards fluttered out randomly before settling again on the table and floor, and a white plume of cocaine puffed out on either side of his body as the table strained audibly under the weight.

Killswitch reached under his right arm and took out a fresh magazine, gripping it between his index and middle fingers. He gripped the CDS9’s magazine with his thumb and index finger, pressed the magazine release, and pulled it free from the gun. He pressed the fully loaded magazine into the CDS9. He press-checked the weapon and re-holstered it, slipping the partially spent magazine into the empty spot in the holster under his arm. Just as he was pulling his phone from his pocket to take a picture of Nino’s lifeless body for his employer, the electronic lock on the suite’s door beeped, then unlatched, pressed open by a slender Mexican holding a case of Tecate. The slender Mexican was followed by two more men, each with a bottle of liquor in either hand, all having a lively conversation about which girl they were going to have sex with later that night.

“What the fuck?!” the second man said as he dropped the bottles he’d been holding, just as Killswitch sent two bullets into his chest. A final, more definitive shot went into his head and flew backward into the hallway.

The slender Mexican realized what was happening and started to drop his case of beer just as bullets ripped through it, sending cardboard, glass, and lead into his stomach and chest. The man slammed back against the now-open door as two more bullets hit him in the jaw and neck. His body slid down, trailing blood across the door before thudding dully on the floor, and his head slumped forward over his knees. The third man was now in the fight, having had enough time to draw his gun as Killswitch dispatched his friends. The man fired wildly at Killswitch as he dove backward and rolled behind the couch to his right, bullets splintering the door frame behind him.

Killswitch came back up from behind the couch and fired twice, just missing the man as he moved into the hotel room. He fired again, this time hitting the man in the hip, cracking the bone. The man yelled out in agony as he fell sideways to the floor, pain and stress causing him to squeeze the trigger of his gun unintentionally, firing a round into the ceiling.

Killswitch got up from his crouch and quickly put his remaining bullets into the man’s chest and head, the slide of the Kimber locking back as it ran empty. Killswitch could hear the trigger of the man’s Glock click as it reset, his hand going limp as his life drained into the pool of blood now staining the carpet. Kicking the gun from the man’s hand, Killswitch reloaded his pistol with the second full magazine, using the same technique as he’d use with the first. He pulled the slide back quickly to chamber a round, putting the empty magazine into the holster under his arm.

Damnit. Someone definitely heard those gunshots, Killswitch thought as he moved back toward the front door of the hotel suite. “This is why I don’t like doing jobs on the FUCKING Strip,” he said under his breath as he leaned out slowly into the hallway.

Killswitch listened for any sound coming from outside the room, then looked down the hallway to either side. Not seeing anyone, he holstered the CDS9 and made his way swiftly toward the stairs. He opened the door carefully, stepped onto the landing, and looked down the middle of the stairwell to see if there was anyone there. Not seeing anyone, he made his way down the steps, nearly reaching the bottom of the stairwell

when he heard a door open on the floor below him. Killswitch looked down the middle of the stairwell again and saw three Las Vegas Metro PD officers staring back at him.

“Hey, you!” One of the officers shouted.

FUCK! Killswitch thought as he turned on his heel and started back up the stairs, not feeling he could explain the firearm or the explosive device he had on him.

“Stop running!” another officer called after him. “STOP!!” yelled another.

Not entirely sure what he was going to do, but sure he needed to get out of the building by any means necessary, Killswitch sprinted back up the stairs. He took the steps three at a time, blowing past floors as he heard the officers below him calling for backup. His lungs burned as he reached the top of the stairs and saw the rooftop door dead ahead. The warm night air hit him as he crashed through the door, nearly taking it off its hinges. He took a moment to look around and assess his options. The front of the hotel and Las Vegas Boulevard were to his right, and the back of the hotel to his left. Neither direction offered an escape route that wasn't a sheer drop straight down. The Triple Sevens parking structure was beyond the roof, directly in front of him, across a small street that ran along the side of the hotel.

Damnit, have to take my chances, Killswitch thought.

He took the concussion grenade from his cargo pocket and ran at top speed toward the edge of the roof and the parking structure, just as the officers emerged through the doorway behind him.

“Stop... motherfucker... or you're... gonna... get shot!” One of the cops called out between gasps for breath, all of them clearly strained from physical exertion.

The roof ended in a 300-foot drop, but Killswitch couldn't worry about that now. Pulling the pin on the concussion grenade, he tossed it out, and it came to a rest at the edge of the roof. He hit the ledge at full stride, pushing off with a powerful grace and flying into the air as the M111's three-second fuse burned down. Killswitch was twelve feet from the roof of the hotel tower over nothing but air when the grenade detonated. The massive concussive blast wave, like a “rocket jump” in a video game, gave him the extra push he needed to clear the gap. The pursuing officers were blown backward, lucky

not to be caught in the explosion. After regaining their composure, they rushed to what remained of the roof's edge just as Killswitch landed.

Killswitch hit the top of the parking structure on his feet, but ended up on his back, the force of the explosion and subsequent landing throwing him into a nearby air conditioning unit. His Kevlar armor absorbed most of the impact, but it still knocked the wind out of him. Rolling to his feet, Killswitch found a door to the stairwell and kicked it in, tearing the door from its hinges. The cops could hardly fathom what they'd just seen, frantically attempting to describe the event to dispatch. Exiting the stairwell at street level, Killswitch pulled off his work shirt as he ran back to the War Bird, seeing the flickering red and blue lights of police vehicles passing on Flamingo Road. It looked like he'd gotten out just as they were setting up a perimeter.

Killswitch hastily stuffed his equipment into the Pelican case on the back of the bike and pulled his helmet from the handlebars. Climbing aboard, he started the turbocharged engine and put on his helmet. The twin-cylinder powerplant revved up smoothly, if a bit louder than he'd have preferred in that moment, and he rode east, away from the hotel. The street ended in a cul-de-sac; the only exit was a gated utility entrance behind a small "off-Strip" hotel. Killswitch kicked the lock off to open the gate, then cut through the parking lot and across Tropicana Avenue.

Killswitch rode past the condo high-rises and professional buildings and turned left on Paradise Road, following it to Main Street. Just past the Stratosphere Hotel, he turned right, passing several police vehicles that paid him no mind. Killswitch rode down Main Street into downtown Las Vegas, and under the US-95 freeway, just east of Vegas' infamous "Spaghetti Bowl," an entangled mess of freeway built in the late 1960s. It had been hastily expanded in the late 1990s and early 2000s, little thought being given to the future influx of people the city would continue to see.

Past the freeway, Killswitch turned into the parking lot of an "abandoned" warehouse; the weather-beaten sign on the side of the building read Precision Machine and Mechanical Supply. It was the ideal spot for an illicit hideout, security through obscurity, located in an area of downtown Las Vegas comprised of an eclectic mix of municipal buildings, old neighborhoods, vehicle repair shops, and warehouses like his. He'd owned the building for years, purchased for a song through a shell company that he used to conceal payments for his "services," mostly made with cryptocurrency. Before Killswitch bought it, it had once been a functioning machine shop, sitting vacant for nearly a decade, and the building had definitely seen better days. The people he'd

bought it from were so happy to get rid of it that he couldn't remember if they'd asked for his name during the process.

Killswitch pressed a button on the left side of the KTM's handlebars, and a large roll-up door at the front of the building opened. Bright LED lights flared overhead as he pulled the bike inside, passing a vehicle lift in the middle of the workshop with a behemoth vehicle on it, covered in a large oil-stained sheet. He parked the KTM next to his other motorcycle: a white Ducati Scrambler "Desert Sled." The ground floor of the warehouse was a large workshop area measuring about 10,000 square feet. The concrete floors were stained with oil, further highlighted by the overhead LED lights, which made the area extremely bright. Killswitch's living quarters were on the second floor, in a loft area that had been used as an office in the warehouse's former life.

Behind the motorcycles were several machines left over from the building's glory days. Killswitch wasn't a machinist, so they did little more than collect dust now. But he did have a Tormach PCNC 440 CNC mill that he used for gunsmithing and making custom parts. Opposite the Tormach mill, a long workbench covered roughly half the back wall of the workshop. The workbench was capped on the left by a weapons cabinet. To the left of the workbench was a large equipment locker containing Killswitch armor and other bits of tactical gear. A pegboard above the workbench held nearly any tool you could think of, along with a multitude of miscellaneous parts bins. The workbench continued 90 degrees along the right wall for another five feet or so; on the end of this was Killswitch's workstation, dominated by a large curved monitor; the computer was on a shelf beneath.

Killswitch checked the time on the screen as he walked to the weapon locker - 8:53 *pm*. He pressed his thumb to the fingerprint sensor in the middle of the electronic padlock securing the locker. A clear plastic ring around the sensor glowed green to indicate the accepted fingerprint, and the padlock trilled, then unlatched. Killswitch opened the doors to reveal his weaponry within. The back of the cabinet was fitted with black pegboard; each weapon hung from its own set of hooks, save for an FN Minimi MK3 "light" machine gun sitting on a shelf near the bottom, just above ammo cans that held thousands of rounds in various calibers. The FN Minimi had been used very little in his current occupation, but he had plenty of experience with it from his time in the Marines. It had seen no action recently, but had nevertheless come in handy, and Killswitch couldn't bring himself to give it up.

Dropping the magazine from the Kimber CDS9, he set the magazine on the workbench before placing the gun on a set of 3D-printed hooks mounted near the middle of the pegboard, above a custom DMR, or “Designated Marksman Rifle,” chambered in 6.5 Creedmoor. He took the other two magazines from the holster under his right arm and placed them on the workbench next to the first, then pulled a box of 9mm ammunition from the bottom of the cabinet. He reloaded the magazines and placed them on 3D-printed hangers attached to the cabinet door. After closing the cabinet back up, he clicked the padlock back on, and it beeped to confirm it was secure. Killswitch took off the shoulder holster, then his armor, and hung each on separate hooks in the equipment locker, then headed up to the loft.

In his bedroom, Killswitch picked up a Sony MP3 player from a small bedside table. Thumbing the controls, he selected “*The Truth*” by Handsome Boy Modeling School, the song playing over a speaker on the nightstand, connected to the MP3 player with an auxiliary cable. He took off his pants and hung them inside a secondhand wardrobe he’d found at a Savers near downtown Las Vegas, then pulled off his black t-shirt, revealing multiple scars.

Most of these scars were random, gathered over years of violent encounters, like a noticeable gash on his left cheek, or the knife and puncture wounds, bullet holes, burns, and shrapnel scars that dotted his body. He also had several larger scars that were not random, each about an inch wide, and all but two repeated on either side of his body: Two ran from his shoulder to his elbow, two more ran from his elbows and travelled down his forearms, ending about two inches above each wrist. Another two were on the front of his legs, starting near his pelvis and stopping just below each knee. A singular scar, two inches wide, extended down from the base of his neck to his lower back. The final scar was the smallest of them all and encircled the top of his head, just inside his hairline.

After changing into a fresh shirt, Killswitch flopped onto the pillow, listening to Róisín Murphy’s vocals about not being able to hide from the truth as he drifted off to sleep.