

What's Inside

By Roger Hobbs

There are a lot of problems with taking down an armored car.

First, I wanna make it clear what I'm talking about. There are dozens of kinds of armored cars, and they all have their quirks. I'm talking about the cash-n-carry kind, that bulky kind that serves banks and the government. You sometimes can see them driving slowly in big cities, always with two guys in the cockpit, and always at a pace that would make granny look like a speed demon. These vehicles are the great white whales of heisting, and for good reason.

Aside from the obvious shit, like the fact that each one is covered in two fucking tons of SpectraShield polycarbonate armor, there are a lot of other little things. Little things like the GPS locators, so if the car swerves over the yellow line, cops can be there faster than you can shit your pants. Little things like the NIJ-tested ballistic glass windows, or the undercarriage armor designed to withstand Iraq-style roadside bombs. Those are the little problems.

The bigger problems are logistical. The drivers don't usually have access keys to the back, so even if you manage to get one of them out of the cockpit, which you can't, and got them to talk, which they wouldn't, you still couldn't get into the storage vault. Speaking of drivers, there are always two. There's the guy behind the wheel, and a guy riding shotgun. They're usually armed, and if they're not armed then the truck you're trying to take down isn't worth the effort anyway. Some of the new trucks even have gun ports, so the guys inside the cockpit can stick their guns out and shoot you before you even tap the glass. But say you somehow manage to get both of the guards to sing. You'd still need one of the best screwmen in the fucking world to get into the back compartment. Blowtorch? Don't even think about it. That armor is as thick as a double cheeseburger. Shoot out the tires? Not gonna happen. They're designed to take a 10-gauge at point blank. Blast off the doors? Not even. That SpectraShield armor is ten times stronger than steel. But that's not the worst thing about taking down an armored car.

The worst part is: you never know what's inside.

The armored car companies who run this shit keep the transport records locked up even more securely than the cash in the trucks. One day, they might be driving around with three million dollars in fresh Ben Franklins. The next, they're driving eight large in five spots to a convenience store. The following day, they're transporting forty antique clocks no fence would ever touch. Not even a junkie would get so desperate as to take down an armored car, because you never know what's going to be in there.

Now, I *don't* know this because it's my job to take down armored cars. Trust me, I'm not retarded. In the entire history of Portland Oregon, there has never been a single armored car heist, successful or attempted. I've seen people go after banks and ATMs by the dozen. I've known people who'd knock over a half-dozen convenience stores in a night while on a meth bender. Nobody, not even a strung-out junkie with a .22 and a dream, has ever taken on an armored car in this city. In fact, the last time someone

successfully took down an armored car mid-transit anywhere in the Pacific Northwest was back in nineteen-ninety-fucking-six, and then it was an inside job.

But even if I had the complete cargo manifold in my fucking lap, I would still never want to heist an armored car. I'd rather try to take down a bank with only a forty-five and a cell phone then take down a three-million-dollar armored car convoy in broad daylight.

But last Tuesday it wasn't three million dollars. It was Marcus Fairlan, the best jugmarker in the Pacific Northwest. He's also my husband, and worth a good deal more than three million bucks.

Okay, he isn't really my husband, but we're as close as we can get in the States. When you come out in this part of the country people expect you to be a princess or a queen. Marc wasn't the first person to say "fuck you" to that, but he certainly was one of the loudest. We met at The Lucky Devil a few years ago when he was gearing up for the Portland World Trade Center job. As soon as I shook his hand I knew that he was a great guy, and by the time we were kicking it in Vegas on the down-low I knew he was the one for me. He had this great intensity to him, like watching an explosion in slow motion. He was my jugmarker and I was his button-man, and our whole crew was rolling in it.

You see, he was a heister for the ages. He was the kind of guy who would just take what was there for the taking, and most of the time his jobs really were as easy as that. Heisting pays well and the hours are great, and working for him was like being in the movies. We stole shit and lived fat for it, and let the chips fall where they may.

Until the Pacific Solutions job. It was a simple enough take. Snip some wire, disarm an alarm, pick some locks and keep the on-site guard busy while the rest of the crew made it off with a hundred large in computer chips. It wasn't any highlight-of-my-career sort of takes, but it was more than enough to keep all five of us in silk and bon-bons for a year while Jack the Fence fed the chips to eBay at forty a pop. That's the way it was supposed to be, and as Alton drove us away from the crime scene I thought it really was. It took twelve hours for the world to turn to shit, because that's when we found out the place was protected by the Elkins, and we had royally fucked ourselves.

Jim Elkins owns the Pacific Northwest. From the Lincoln Park Bloods to the Pearl District Five, anybody who ever got his dick whacked in a corner store smash-and-grab had to deal with Elkin, and his son-in-law owned the factory we knocked over. Their retribution was faster than fucking lightning thrown by God. By the time we were supposed to meet up after the job, Marc was already gone and the hundred large was back in the factory. Elkin had jacked it all and thrown Marc to the feds like steak to a fucking dog. That was three months ago, and since then my Marc has been rotting in the pen without a friend in the world. But last Tuesday was his pre-trial, and that was our time to strike.

Normally prisoners are transported between the Federal Detention Center and the courthouse using a decommissioned RDV, or Rapid Deployment Vehicle. This thing has about two inches of steel armor on it and a diesel engine that sounds like a fuckin' helicopter. Now, if you gave me three days prep time and seventy large, I could bust anybody out of that wrap. But if you're a special prisoner, like a veteran heister with a mafia grudge and a murder rap, the government fucks the RDV and calls in a Loomis.

The Loomis trucks are the best armored cars in the world. They are equipped with five inches of high-hardened ballistic steel armor on all sides, and the windows are

made with three inches of UL-752 polycarbonate glass capable of stopping a Kalashnikov round at point blank. The two guards each carry a forty-five high-cap which they can fire through any one of four gun ports, and the tires are not only puncture proof, but they can run while completely deflated for up to thirty miles. The rear lock requires three keys, one held by each driver and the third by the receiving officer, and each lock is a virtually unbreakable Modeco Smart Cylinder with RFID hybrid technology. The battery, gas tank and radio each have an additional half inch of SpecraShield around them, and the onboard computer system streams video of everything that happens on the road or in the cab directly to the dispatch. There is only one in-transit hijacking of a Loomis on record, and that was for twenty-two million bucks, left three men on ice, two in federal, and was an inside job.

So I was going to need a team. Alton Hill was the wheelman. He could do things with a Volvo S80 that professional drivers couldn't do with a Corvette. Wanted to disappear? He could blend in like a fucking chameleon. Wanted to put some distance? He could floor it like a motherfucker.

Cora White was our bag-girl. At night she was a waitress at The Lucky Devil. During the day she slept in late, chain-smoked American Spirits and drank more whiskey than Hemingway on a bender. She was the devil on roller skates, and perfect for what I had in mind.

Jack the Fence would get us supplies. He always wore this black raincoat, even in the summer. He smoked cigars like Cora smoked cigarettes, and he lost his life a few days back on a rainy street corner to some pissed off coffee-house photographer. Back then he was the guy who could get you fucking anything. Machine gun? Yours for a grand. Fake ID? Two kinds. Brand new Mercedes-Benz? With the pink slip for less than the sticker.

Michael Donahue was the screwman. If it remotely involved a key, he could open it. I used to watch the man boost cars so fast it looked like he was driving to the office. He had an expensive taste in beer and knew every good burger place on the continent. If anyone could pick a Loomis, it was him.

And then there was me, the button-man. I don't suck my own dick much, but if you give me a gun and a pair of pliers I could make Helen Keller sing. I can be a convincing motherfucker if you piss me off. I was fucking pissed off.

Marc was scheduled for transport on a Tuesday morning to a pre-trial holding cell next to the courthouse for potential federal inmates. The Loomis would be sent over from its garage on 9th and Willow to the prison way out in fucking nowhere. It would then take the highway back to city limits, get off at the downtown exit, and drive directly to the courthouse without stopping. This convoy was a crook's worst nightmare.

We couldn't snatch Marc away from the loading area, because the only thing more retarded than taking down an armored car is breaking *into* a Federal Prison. We couldn't get him at the courthouse, because he'd be surrounded by downtown cops. Doing it on the highway was out of the question too, because the truck would have police escort all the way to Clackamas. That means we'd have to take down the truck sometime between seven and eight-thirty in the morning after it got off the East Portland Freeway but before it would cross the Ross Island Bridge. I liked the way Alton put it when he spat in my face and said: "It would be like playing bumper cars with the cops out there."

Our first job was to test the emergency response. Jack the Fence had Cora knock over a convenience store a block and a half from our takedown site at eight in the fucking morning, and he timed how long it took for the police to arrive in force. I would have come along myself just to see the look on the cashier's face when Cora pulled some iron over the pre-cooked breakfast sandwiches and the lottery tickets to demand the contents of the register. We sent Cora because she was the only one psycho enough to do it.

Nobody robs convenience stores mid-morning, so I figured the emergency response time would be fucking glacial. A good crew could do what I had in mind in less than three minutes, so a five-minute response time would be a gift from the fucking Christ. That morning, it took less than a minute and fifty seconds for the first cruiser to pull up like a fat kid to an ice cream parlor. Cora burst through the doors with thirty bucks and a creamsicle and almost knocked the pig on his ass on the way out. Jack the Fence buried his head in his hands. It was a fucking pinch route, and no crew east or west could do this job in less than two minutes.

So we needed a distraction. We needed every spare cop in the city to be busy that morning, so that's where I came in. At six in the morning I left a brand new shiny metal suitcase in the downtown coffee shop where the mayor gets his espresso. The bomb threat came twenty minutes later from an airport pay-phone where Michael left an identical suitcase. The cops cordoned off six square blocks of downtown and the entire airport for three solid hours. If there was a cop left in the city, he was at his desk in central eating jelly doughnuts and doing confiscated coke off his quota blotter. At least, that's what I hoped. If we were lucky, the distraction would buy us an extra thirty seconds.

Our takedown spot was as good as we were going to get it—right on the corner of 9th and Southeast Powell, under a pedestrian overpass and next to a Jack-in-the-Box. It was the only part of the route that wasn't going to be a crowded two-lane fuckfest, so it would make the getaway tight and we had to move fast.

So there we were, on the morning of the job, waiting in our positions for the armored car to turn the corner and come down Powell towards the Ross Island Bridge. Alton and Michael were in a stolen Volkswagen in a parking lot a half-block down. Cora was in the Jack-in-the-Box, and the Fence was on the lookout a block away. I was on the pedestrian overpass, waiting for that sickening feeling in my stomach to settle down. When Jack radioed me to tell me the truck was turning the corner, I felt like I was gonna lose it.

When I caught sight of the truck I gave the signal. A second later Alton careened out of the parking lot and smashed the car into the concrete divider hard enough to make it skid across the asphalt. There was that familiar wrenching sound of overpriced metal crumpling like a can of beer. God bless Alton Hill. He really knew how to make it look real.

Now, Loomis trucks need explicit radio instructions if something prevents them from driving their prescribed route. So, just as I hoped, when Alton's car wiped out across the entire road, the Loomis rolled slowly to a stop so the driver could radio to confirm a route change. This is exactly what I wanted to happen, because it meant the truck would be standing still for at least twenty seconds, just long enough for Cora to do her thing.

She was a blur of rollerblades as she turned out of the Jack-in-the-Box. She rolled around the Loomis and screamed in Alton's direction: "You deserved that, you drunken capitalist pigs!"

Michael and Alton got out of the crumpled car and started screaming back at Cora as she skated as far away as she could get. The guys in the Loomis were already on the radio, calling for assistance. I covered my ears.

Then, the armored car exploded.

You see, there's a weakness in every car, no matter how outwardly invincible. If I needed to bust somebody out of a prison-run RDV, I'd threaten to shoot the driver, because the windshield isn't made of bulletproof glass. If I needed to take down an Armand F550, I would blow out all four tires with a shotgun. Even the invincible Loomis has an exploitable weakness: It has exposed tailpipes.

Have you ever been to a wedding where the best man puts a firecracker in the groom's tailpipe? It was like that, except what Cora slipped in the tailpipe was no firecracker. It was a three-pound composite of high-yield nitro and sawdust-TNT. The vehicle's engine was instantly scrap-metal and the rear-axel was junk. The interior electronic system fried itself from the inside out, and a black smoke billowed from the undercarriage. I jumped down from the overpass onto the roof of the truck. The guards were panicking when I put the business end of my fucking Smith and Wesson Model 500 up against the windshield and said something like: "Hand over the keys or I will fucking blow you away!"

Also there's one more thing about Loomis trucks. The windshield might be able to withstand an AK-47 shot at point blank, but a fifty caliber magnum firing fifty-dollar platinum-coated armor piercing bullets is a whole different story. I put a slug through the dashboard and the windshield shattered like a baseball through crystal. The guards handed over their keys without complaint.

Michael was already working on the third lock, and we still had thirty seconds left. Cora skated behind the Loomis with a Colt Action Express and told the oncoming traffic to fuck off. Alton was in the parking lot getting the getaway car ready, so in another thirty seconds we could be history. We were pulling off the heist of a fucking lifetime.

But there's a thing about armored cars. You never know what's inside.

Things hit the fan when the doors opened and Michael's brains splattered against the pavement. I panicked and a half second later I heard the gunfire. On reflex I blew both of the guards away with the Magnum and drew my sidearm. I didn't expect there to be more guards in the back of the truck. I wasn't exactly right about that, but I had to hit the pavement to know it.

What came out of that armored car was like a thousand bats flying out of a fucking cave. It was a man, but more like a demon than a man. His hands were handcuffed and he wore an orange jumpsuit, and his hair was a wild tangle of blood-matted braids. He dragged the body of an armed guard as a shield, and behind him he left a trail of blood. In his left hand he clutched the guard's forty-five like a fucking broadsword and unleashed a hailstorm of bullets at everything in sight. Cora returned fire for maybe a half a second before getting the fuck out of there, and I swallowed hard. That moment, nobody needed to tell me the name of the person on rampage. I knew instantly the prisoner was Bryant McCall.

Bryant McCall, the greatest cocksucker in Portland criminal history. They say he couldn't feel pain. They say he would kill a man's entire family. They say he only ate raw meat and never slept. They said a lot of things, and, when that thing jumped down from the truck and hit the pavement, I believed every word.

I lifted my gun and took a bead. When I had a shot, I didn't just take it—I pissed bullets. I blew out the windows in the Jack-in-the-Box. Each time I hit his human shield chunks of flesh blew off, and I put at least six bullets into the bus stop behind them. It was like shooting into a brick wall. I ducked behind the armored car and the bullets came in like a water fountain.

That was the point where I should have gotten the fuck out. I was out of bullets and if I ran quickly, I could have ditched and sped off in the getaway car with the rest of my crew. Instead I grabbed the Model 500 from the shards of glass on the pavement. If I missed, I'd be dead before my body hit the ground.

I ran to the other side of the armored car and prayed. I only had one shot at this, so I had to make it good. When I ducked out onto the asphalt, I had never had such a long moment in my fucking life. The gun was like a brick in my hand, and when I aimed it my arms were like pudding, and the blast was like a thunderbolt running down my arms.

The bullet went right through the human shield like a hot knife through soft butter. McCall went down with a cavity the size of two fists in his chest, and I dropped to my knees.

Sirens.

Marcus stepped out of the truck like a man just back home from a vacation in Vegas. He was still handcuffed, but he didn't look like he cared. He stepped over Michael's body like it was roadkill and said, "Now that's what I call a fucking takedown!"

The sirens were getting louder, and Alton peeled the getaway car into the street like a professional. Marcus ran towards it when Cora kicked open the back door and shouted: "Come on, get the fuck in!"

When we got in the car Marcus grabbed me and patted me on the cheek saying, "That's my boy, the one man massacre! How does it feel, being the only man to take down a Loomis and a mass killer on the same day?"

I whispered, "How, how did I do that?"

And Marcus said, "It's an armored car, honey. You never know what's going to be inside."

Roger Hobbs lives in Portland, Oregon. His work has appeared in The New York Times, Hit-and-Run Magazine, and the People's Weekly World.