

Chapter 1
At Home in Lake Almanor

March 15, 2016, Lake Almanor, California

Recently married, Elliott and Stef now lived on the shores of Lake Almanor in Northern California, just shy of a 5,000 foot elevation. They loved the location. It looked like they were in the middle of the Rocky Mountains somewhere in Montana or Idaho. The forest was thick all around them and their back porch looked out on the east side of one of the largest lakes in California. The closest town, Chester, was ten miles away on the north shore. The town was barely big enough to be called a town. This was country living at its finest; relaxed and scenic.

Elliott and Stef had always been a team, working together as agents and assassins for the International Order of Mercenaries (IOM), a branch off-shoot of the New Templars, now headquartered in Alice Springs, a remote location in the heart of Australia. The Templars dated back to the days of the Crusades and were a sub-group of the Masonic order, which in turn dated back to the building of King Solomon's temple.

During their last assignment with the Templars, Elliott had proposed to Stef when they were in the heat of one of their operations. Sometimes he wondered if the proposal was too rushed, if it wasn't just emotions taking over. At other times he was happy about his decision. During this operation, his fears that Stef may have been killed catapulted his emotions into a decision, forcing him to make a martial commitment. Shortly after the proposal, Elliott nearly lost his life several times, and Stef laid down the law. She wasn't going to get married to someone whose life was constantly at risk. She didn't want to spend every day wondering if she would ever see him again. In the end, Stef and Elliott realized they wanted to be together more than they wanted the excitement of the job. They retired from their IOM positions and purchased their current home in the picturesque mountains of California.

The living room of their new hideaway home looked out through an enormous picture window to a beautiful view of the lake. Mount Lassen, a snowcapped volcano, was the backdrop on the other side of the lake. Their house was built on two levels against the side of a hill. The forward, street side level contained the garage, which was level with the raised street. The main house, back behind the garage, was a separate building which stepped down half a floor height toward the level of the lake. Behind the house, the backyard sloped down to a sandy and rocky beach front, where they had their dock and their ski boat. Near the lake end of their property, on either side, was a grove of bushes, which had become home to birds and other wildlife, and which semi-separated their location, hiding it from their neighboring properties. The location couldn't have been more ideal.

Stef pulled open the bedroom window shade looking out at the view of the lake. "It's beautiful, isn't it," she said to Elliott who was sitting up in bed reading a book on his Kindle.

"Absolutely," he replied.

"Look! There's a deer walking down to the lake to get a drink?"

Elliott jumped up and walked to the window. "How cool."

Stef loved the large variety of birds that were on the back part of her property. They seemed to prefer camping out in their backyard. There was a large clump of brush over twelve feet high along the edge of the lake. It was large enough to hide ducks, geese, and other birds, and give them a nesting area. Stef loved watching the mama geese meander around the yard looking for bugs or worms with their small goslings slowly stumbling behind.

“I used to love waking up to the chatter of those geese,” Stef explained. “But now that I’ve had a few months of it, it’s not so much fun anymore. Sometimes, when I want to sleep in a little, that noise can be quite annoying.”

“I know what you mean. Sometimes it seems like what had previously been music to my ears now feels like painful squawking.”

“Next time you’re in town can you pick up a bb gun so I can put an end to some of that noise?”

Elliott looked at her in surprise. Stef wasn’t the type of person who would hurt a fly unnecessarily, let alone a goose. Ironically she had no problem ending the life of a person she felt needed to be eliminated.

“I’m just joking,” she said defensively. “But the noise isn’t the only problem. The geese seem to favor our backyard over any of the neighbor yards which means they also leave behind traces of their presence. There is goose poop everywhere. Walking down to the lake in bare feet is out of the question. Sitting down in the grass is out of the question. Being in love with nature can have its down side. It’s not all glamour and beautiful scenery.”

Elliott just laughed. There were times when he felt the same way. “The geese were here first, and they will probably be there after we’re gone. The only remedy is patience and learning to love both the negative as well as the positive aspects of ‘nature’.”

Still looking out toward the lake, Stef continued, “Today is another beautiful sunny day, like nearly every day.” There were some scattered clouds, and there would probably be a short rainfall later in the day, but for the most part, the weather would be perfect.

Stef had risen up early to make breakfast for the two of them. She thought she would give Elliott one of his favorite “nature” treats for breakfast. It wasn’t the food he enjoyed. It was watching the way she made breakfast that made it a special treat. The focus of his attention was on what she wore: an apron. Nothing else. Just an apron. It wasn’t really the apron he was watching. Stef would work at the counter or over the stove with her backside completely bare except for the apron string and Elliott was captivated by the view. He often told her that he loved her perfect butt. No sag. No droop. Just a perfect sexy, athletic butt. He also mentioned her faultless sexy back which had beautiful long hair draped about one third of the way down. Then there were her ideally shaped and athletic legs. Based on the view from behind she could easily have been in her twenties, even though in reality she was significantly older.

Occasionally she would turn sideways intentionally giving Elliott a peek at her breasts and nipples. It wasn’t long before Elliott was up behind her, feeling around on her butt and slipping his hands under her apron so he could fondle her nipples.

Stef would shake back and forth giving the impression that she wanted him to keep his hands off. “I’m trying to cook here. Can’t you back off for even a minute?” she pretended to complain. In reality Stef didn’t mind Elliott’s attention. She would have been disappointed if she wasn’t successful at getting a rise out of him.

“You’re expecting too much out of me,” Elliott responded as he held on even tighter. It wasn’t long before Elliott was turning off the stove, swooping Stef up, and carrying her to the bedroom. Then, laying her on the bed, he removed the apron and proceeded to indulge in dessert before breakfast. It was the inevitable and unavoidable result of Stef’s wearing only an apron. She knew it and she loved having an effect on him and he was ecstatic. After dessert, breakfast seemed anti-climactic. However, to Elliott this was the perfect start of what he hoped should now become a perfect day.

After breakfast, Stef normally got dressed in her gym clothes. "I'll be taking my usual exercise stroll along the edge of the lake," she said.

Normally Elliott would have gone with her, but he was desperate to become a better fisherman. It had become an obsession with him. As a Templar he had done battle with some of the most notorious villains around the world. But he was losing the battle with the Lake Almanor fish and, for Elliott, giving up was out of the question. "I can't take it anymore. Everyone I talk to in town brags about how good the fishing is on the lake. They hang pictures on their walls showing off their victory over some enormous trout. And over the last several months I still haven't bagged my first fish. I think I'll head into town and talk to some of the 'expert' fishermen there." He was convinced that there had to be some secret he hadn't tried. There had to be some trick he hadn't learned. He was going to learn it, and he was not only going to catch a fish, but catch the biggest fish, bigger than the ones displayed in any of the pictures.

Stef knew she could never dissuade Elliott from his fishing obsession, so she didn't even try. She hadn't realized how obsessed he would become with fishing. Now that it had become critically important to Elliott, trying to change his mind would be impossible. She considered it as a fairly harmless obsession. She just kissed him condescendingly and said, "I understand. No big bad fish is going to be tougher than my Elliott."

After he departed she spent about thirty minutes cleaning the house and the breakfast dishes. Then she changed into her tight fitting, sporty hiking outfit, and headed for the back door.

Bo, their small, somewhat cautious dog, stuck close to Stef's heels. He was afraid of the geese, or pretty much anything that moved, unless Stef was there to help him scare them away. Then, as the geese were running off, he could act brave and tough and chase after them. Otherwise, Bo was very careful not to challenge anyone or anything.

Stef climbed down the stairs from the back deck and started for the lake. Plugging her iPod into each ear, she blasted the music of Bond instrumentals which she loved. The shore along the lake was sandy and an easy path to follow. It meandered across other backyards. Most of the cabins were small occasional vacation homes, so she seldom came across anyone. She seemed to have the lake to herself.

As she approached the grove of twelve foot high brush, which was also the home to the geese, she barely heard a muffled humming sound over the lake. The iPod music had blocked most sounds and she had missed hearing the early-warning sounds of a helicopter approaching. Unfortunately, by the time she reacted to the humming sound and looked up to identify the source of the noise, it was too late. All she saw was the reflective glare of a missile buzzing past just ten feet above her head. The missile was headed directly for her house.

It all happened so suddenly. All Stef could remember was a loud noise, being lifted off the ground, flying through the air, and being unceremoniously dropped into the midst of the goose grove. Then everything went black.

Chapter 2

Chester

March 15, 2016, Chester, California

Elliott was off on his early morning drive to the big city of Chester, population 2,200. This was the quintessential tourist town; bustling in the summer and dead in the winter. The tourists poured in during the summer for the water sports and the fishing. But during the winter, when the snow could be several feet high, the tourists avoided the town like a plague. The ten restaurants that were opened during the summer numbered two in the winter and so it was with hotels, gift shops, and everything else.

But Chester had personality. It was friendly; much more so than the neighboring small towns. It had a main street on which you could feel the pulse of the town. During the summer there seemed to be some type of event every weekend. Either there was a festival, farmer's market, art show, or a car show, something to draw in the tourists, which was the financial backbone of the town.

Elliott made his usual stop at the local grocery store, Holiday Quality Foods, which was the only grocery store in town. He replenished the egg supply and grabbed some bread. Then he drove over to the Ace hardware store where he hoped to get some additional pointers on fishing at the lake. He was committed to conquering Lake Almanor's fish. They had become the enemy and he wasn't about to let those dumb little fish win. His battle with the fish was beyond obsession. It was war! Elliott was unaccustomed to loosing.

As he drove to the hardware store, he heard a helicopter overhead. He looked up to see what looked like a military helicopter fully loaded with weapons. That seemed curious to him since there wasn't any real threat or a reason to carry weapons here in the middle of Northern California. They weren't close to any national borders. Most communities had restrictions on carrying live weapons, so he reasonably guessed that the weapons were mock-ups for training purposes or for some kind of exhibition. Elliott assumed it must be a drone used for an air show or for display. But he found it curious that the helicopter was missing the required registration markings. That made him feel uncomfortable, more so than the mock weapons. It seemed completely out of place to have a military aircraft being used on a training exercise or as a drone and not have the marks of the military on it.

The helicopter moved forward quickly, heading south-east and Elliott quickly put it out of his mind. That wasn't the mystery he wanted to solve today. Today's war was with the fish and that was a battle he was going to win. Entering Ace, he went to the counter and started engaging in loose conversation, hoping to gain a little trust so that eventually he could get around to the real point of his visit.

"You're new around here," commented the clerk to Elliott. "I've seen you around a lot over the last few months. Did you move here or are you just visiting?"

"My wife and I moved in a few months back and we're here for the long haul. We bought a home on the east shore. We love it here and plan to stay forever." Elliott wanted to get the word out that they weren't just tourists.

Elliott continued making small talk. He talked about the weather, about the calmness of the lake, about the number of tourists, and about the scenery. He was finally getting around to the subject of fishing when all conversation stopped. They all heard an enormous explosion off in the distance. Everyone in the store jumped up and ran outside to see what had happened. Off in

the distance they saw a puff of smoke. Elliott recognized immediately that it was in the vicinity of his house. A rush of adrenalin surged through his body. He thought, *Was it possible that the helicopter was actually carrying live weapons? Was it possible that it was targeting me? No! That couldn't be!* Stef and Elliott had put a lot of effort into secrecy.

Then Elliott's thoughts turned to Stef. *Was she safe?* he wondered. *Hopefully she was on her walk and hadn't returned. Yes, she was safe because her walks lasted about one hour and it hadn't been an hour since he left. She would be okay.*

But the concern for her safety was not pushed aside that easily. The cloud of smoke became a cloud of concern and despair which hung over him. In the blink of an eye, his war with the fish had become utter nonsense. His only concern was for the safety of Stef. He had to know that she wasn't in trouble. He ran and jumped into his reliable "man-car," his Toyota Tundra, and sprayed gravel as he tore out of the Ace parking lot. He broke every speed limit as he raced out of town toward the east side of the lake. He was on a desperate mission to make sure the love of his life wasn't harmed.

Elliott raced east past the Peninsula golf course to Highway 147, and then headed south toward his home. As he traveled closer to where he lived he also came closer to the smoke and he slowly began to realize they were one and the same. But the house, like his obsession with fishing, became irrelevant. All that mattered was Stef and her safety. He had to find her. He couldn't lose her now. The whole reason for leaving the IOM was so the two of them would be out of danger, and instead the danger now followed them. Elliott arrived at the house and found it in shambles and flames. It looked like it had erupted from the inside out. It reminded Elliott of the destruction that a twister caused. The missile from the helicopter must have exploded in the middle of the house and thrown it apart. The damage was unbelievable.

Elliott pulled up to the front of the garage so quickly he almost ran into the wreckage. He jumped out of the pickup without putting it into park and the truck kept rolling. It almost ran over him as he tried to run across the front of it and head down the hill in search of Stef. Luckily the pickup was stopped by the wreckage.

Elliott searched everywhere for Stef. First he scoured through the wreckage of the house. Even the scattered flames couldn't keep him away. Feeling relieved that he couldn't find her, he started searching the back side of the property toward the lake, again finding nothing. Next he looked up and down the lake shore to see if she was on her usual path along the lake. He even ran slightly up the shore in the direction she would have walked and again he found nothing.

He headed back up from the lake toward the burning wreckage when off to the side he beheld an eerie sight. There, along the edge of the property he found the shape of what looked like a small white-haired dog. Rushing over, he found that it was indeed Bo, the dog that Stef loved. Sadly the puppy looked as if it had been sliced through by boards that had been thrown out from the explosion. Elliott realized Stef would have been with Bo when he was killed since a second purpose for her walk was to give Bo exercise. In order for Bo to have been torn apart by the rubble, he must have been close to house when the missile hit. Stef and her dog must have been coming back from their walk at the time of the strike. But where was Stef? She must have been hurt as well. But why wasn't she around? Why couldn't he find her?

The place was so completely destroyed he couldn't find any sign of her anywhere. He thought she may have crawled away, but he couldn't find any signs of that either. He thought she may have been thrown by the blast, but she seemed to be nowhere on the property. He even checked the lake to see if she had been thrown out into the water, but found nothing. After a continued futile search Elliott came to the conclusion that Stef must have been killed. She and

Bo must have been in the house when it exploded. Bo was thrown out of the house and Stef was left inside somewhere in the rubble, possibly even being consumed by the fire.

Elliott returned to the ruins of the house and stumbled through the burning wreckage, hoping for any sign of Stef, but he found nothing. He started to frantically rummage through the burnt rubble. The boards were hot and there were small fires burning at various parts of the building. He tried to lift a small portion of a wall and found it too hot to pick up. He grabbed a two-by-four that hadn't been burnt and used it as a wedge to lift the wall. But there was no Stef underneath. He kicked at boards and planks trying to make sure Stef wasn't buried somewhere underneath. He was frantic and desperate, but found no sign of her.

Where was Stef? What had happened to her? He was left with the realization that she must be buried somewhere in the burning rubble. He frantically tried to move more of the rubble and burned his hand in the attempt. He knew there was no hope that she could have survived. As badly as Bo was torn apart, she must have been similarly torn apart. But why was there no sign of her anywhere?

Elliott was about to give up the search. He was exhausted and frustrated. Then he heard the sound of sirens off in the distance and there was no doubt they were heading his way. Frustrated and angry with tears welling up in his eyes over the loss of his new bride, he resigned himself to giving up the search. He ran up the incline to his pickup, jumped into the truck, and started driving south on Highway 147 away from the sound of the on-coming sirens from the north. He didn't want to do a lot of explaining to the authorities. He knew they would investigate his background, and once they discovered his connection with the IOM, they would detain him and the questions would be never ending. He didn't want to be held up for hours while the police investigated the explosion. He knew finding Stef was hopeless and meaningless. She was gone. Now Elliott had a different purpose. His priority had shifted from catching the biggest fish on the lake to revenging the death of the love of his life.

The tears that were welling up in his eyes earlier were now flowing freely. Any macho manliness had completely disappeared. He felt a deep and frustrated sorrow which slowly converted to anger. Who had committed this atrocity? Who had destroyed his life? He was going to find out who was behind this attack and in the memory of Stef he was going to make sure they paid. The tears continued as his mind began formulating a plan of attack.

Near the southern end of the Highway 147, where it dead-ends into Highway 89, there's a scenic look-out point. Elliott pulled in and parked, he wanted to think. He leaned up on his steering wheel, wrapped his arms around the wheel, and rested his chin on the top of it. Then he closed his eyes and started crying in earnest. He didn't care that his reaction wasn't manly. He didn't care if anyone saw him. What he cared about was gone and now he just didn't care.

His thoughts continued to race. *How did this happen? How did someone find us? Did someone betray us? But no one knew where we had moved to. So how were we found?* Apparently they weren't as secluded as he had hoped. Someone had made a mistake opening the door to information which allowed them to be tracked. Now Stef had paid the ultimate price for his lack of caution.

He started thinking back to when he met Stef the first time; to when he kissed her the first time. He remembered all the things he loved about her like her smile, her laugh, and her sexy butt. He regretted not having gone for a walk with her this morning and he remembered her last words to him, mocking his obsession with fishing. He knew he would miss all of that so very much. He had lost the only person he ever cared about; the only person he truly loved. Their life together had just begun. He blamed himself. He should have never pulled Stef into his life. His

life was built on turmoil and filled with enemies and some of those enemies wouldn't easily forget. He suddenly felt the overwhelming blanket of depression. This was new to him. He was generally optimistic and could find the good in the worst situation. But he could see no good here. There was no way his positive attitude could make Stef's death meaningful.

The depression caused him to turn to the only thing he could think of which could help him. Still leaning on the steering wheel, tears streaking down his face, he closed his eyes and started praying. After all, Templars were Christians. So why not talk to Christ and his Father. If ever he needed their help, now was the time. He felt guilty that it took a tragedy of this magnitude for him to turn to his Heavenly Father. But then again, why not now? He had no idea what action to take, what to do or where to go. He needed help.

As he prayed for help, as if by a miracle, his mind became flooded with ideas. It was so sudden, he was a little surprised by what was happening. He had never experienced this type of help before. Then he remembered similar feelings when he was younger. Now he felt a little stupid for not having asked for help in the past. The ideas poured into his mind so quickly, he had to take a pencil and paper and start writing, making a list for himself of what he needed to do.

The spiritual guidance he received didn't cause him to lose his feeling of grief. But he now had a plan of action. He needed to find out what happened and why. It no longer seemed like revenge. It now felt he had a focused plan, more focused than any plan he had ever made. He knew what to do next.

He continued cuddling the steering wheel a little longer, as if it offered some level of comfort. But his sadness at the loss of Stef couldn't easily be erased. He still thought of her and all the hopes and plans they had for their future. It hurt that these plans would not be realized. He cried a little more. Then he sat back, started up the Tundra, backed out of his parking spot, and headed south down Highway 147 toward Highway 89 in the direction of Reno.

Chapter 3 *The Templars*

March 15, 2016, East Shore, Lake Almanor, California

The IOM, which stands for International Order of Mercenaries, is a fringe group from the historic organization previously known as the Templar Knights. Over the centuries, the Templars had become extremely wealthy. In the middle ages they acquired, owned, and controlled vast tracks of land throughout Europe. They controlled shipping lanes and trade routes. They had become wealthier than many of the kingdoms throughout Europe, and some records showed them to have even been wealthier than their host, the Church of Rome, which was acclaimed to be the wealthiest empire in the world at that time.

Jealousy naturally sprung up. In an attempt by kings and rulers to confiscate some of the Templar wealth, the Knights were subjected to unwarranted attacks on their character and even numerous physical attacks. In the end the Knights were disgraced with their reputations unjustly tarnished. They fled Europe, initially staying within their traditional shipping lanes, and eventually they made their way to the newly discovered American continent. Numerous bands of the Knights found themselves unable to safely land at any seaports because of the threats on their lives. Often their ships would be burned or confiscated, and their cargo would be taken over by whatever crown was fortunate enough to catch them. In the end, the IOM Knights evolved into what everyone had initially branded them. They became mercenaries. Initially, their mercenary activities took on the form of pirates. Their inability to land in ports resulted in their no longer being able to trade, and they resorted to attacking Spanish, French, or British trading vessels and recovering the cargo off of these ships for the pirates' own use. They primarily targeted the ships that flew the flags of the countries that had evicted them. Eventually the Templar Knights set up their own island based communities, picking off and controlling most of the smaller islands around Europe and Africa. Additionally, as the Americas were discovered, they moved their pirating enterprise to the Caribbean islands and beyond where they found refuge in new home bases on the islands and along the coasts.

Some of the Knights realized their military skills had market value, and they made these skills available to the highest bidder. Ironically, the countries that were the quickest to hire their skills under the label IOM were also the same countries that had ousted them when they were called Templar Knights. In order to differentiate between the Knights involved in the IOM mercenary activities, from the non-IOM Templar Knights, and in order to keep from disrespecting their mother organization, the Masons, the IOM Knights became the International Order of Mercenaries. Nevertheless, any member of the IOM had to first be a Knight, and any Knight must first be a high ranking Mason in good standing. Hence, members of the IOM tended to be extremely elite.

Being a clandestine organization, hardly anyone had ever heard of the IOM. Only key individuals, like heads of state, or captains of industry, who had the money to pay for their services, even knew of their existence. Whenever clandestine activities needed to be performed, or when total secrecy was important, the IOM was brought in to do what they did best.

Elliott Schaffer had recently retired from his position as director of IOM operations. Elliott was about six feet one inch in height, and in his mid-forties. He knew IOM operations thoroughly and he had performed well in his role. Like most members of the IOM, Elliott didn't have an immediate family. Elliott was an only child, and his parents had been killed in an airliner

crash. Elliott had been married once, but he lost his wife to a car accident and he didn't have any children. He had developed a strong bond with his first wife. She was the eternal companion that he always dreamed of. Her loss affected him greatly and he wasn't in the mood to replace her. Losing her was what drove him toward becoming involved within the Masonic organization.

Elliott had joined the Masons under the pressure of an old college buddy. For him, the Masons became an escape from the tragedies that had occurred in his life, and from the complicated social relationships that dating created. The Masons were a relief. Eventually he worked his way to the 33rd degree and, like most others in the IOM, he became fascinated by the Templar Knights and the IOM organization and its functions.

After Elliott had spent several years working closely with his top assistant and companion agent, Stefanie Temple, "Stef" to her friends, he became afflicted with feelings of concern. This was unusual for him. He hadn't felt this way with any of the other agents he worked with. IOM missions tended to be dangerous and often life threatening and his feelings of anxiety grew worse and worse every time Stef was out in the field. Elliott didn't consider himself naive, but eventually he realized the feelings he had for Stef weren't normal and it started to affect his work. He would "protect" Stef from the more dangerous missions, even if she was the natural, most obvious choice. Eventually he woke up to the fact he had been smitten by Cupid's arrow. With that realization, he decided the only smart thing to do was to get married, retire from the IOM, and live happily ever after in some hidden paradise.

Stef had a personality that brightened everyone's day. She had the unique combination of being good looking and not knowing it. Her long blonde hair and deep eyes acted like a vacuum, sucking up the attention of anyone she talked to. She was a breath of fresh air in this primarily all-boys club. Rarely was a female allowed to work with the Templar Knights brotherhood, but she was an exception. Elliott and his boss Malvika both knew, given the assignment, she could be ruthless. She hadn't been brought into the IOM by accident. She was an invaluable asset. Elliott liked having her around as his right-hand-person.

Stef had degrees in Sociology and Psychology. She also had an interest in martial arts and had become a master black belt in several art forms. But she wasn't pushy. She had a deep knowledge about relationships and how to optimize performance. She didn't drive her opinions on anyone. Stef just wanted to do her job, and do it well.

During their last mission together Stef had been kidnapped causing Elliott's emotions to peak. After saving her life, Elliott took the first opportunity to propose marriage to a completely stunned and surprised Stef. Overcome by emotion, it took Stef a few minutes to respond, but when she finally responded she eagerly agreed. After the accepted proposal sunk in, the two of them made plans to leave the IOM and escape to a dream hideaway where they could live out their lives in a fairy tale "happily ever after state." Anyway, that was the plan.

The only thing certain about life was that it would change. "Happily ever after" became a disaster. Stef was ripped out of Elliott's life by an explosion and Elliott's mission in life shifted rapidly from retirement to revenge. He needed help and where better to find help than by contacting the IOM, an organization with which he was intimately familiar. He knew their capabilities and their resources and he knew how to get the most out of them.

The IOM had numerous facilities throughout the world. Their headquarters were at Pine Tree Gap which was a six story (all underground) complex in the Australian desert, just south of the Alice Springs airport. The lowest floor level was reserved for IOM leadership. This level included an office area, agricultural / food storage, generators, and housing. It had everything

required in case the IOM team needed to stay underground for up to six months. The remaining floors were used for training, operations, a lab, and logistics planning.

The IOM also had a facility south of Elko, Nevada. The Nevada facility was a research lab which contained experimental, leading edge technology and equipment. For example, it housed the operational Stealth-1 or S-1 for short, a stealth remote flying drone that traveled at hypersonic speeds. It was used for spying and occasionally for attacks, whatever the mission required.

The S-1 aircraft was less than three feet long with a wing span of ten feet. It was nearly invisible from the ground without binoculars, and completely hidden from radar. It utilized the super quiet scramjet engines which had the ability to travel long distances at high speeds using very little fuel. The idea behind the scramjet propulsion system, or Supersonic Combustion Ramjet, was that the oxygen needed by the engine to initiate combustion was taken from the atmosphere as it passed through the vehicle. It didn't use an onboard fuel tank except for takeoff. This allowed the craft to be smaller, lighter, and faster. Scramjet speeds could reach fifteen to twenty times the speed of sound. For example, a trip that normally took eighteen-hours, traveling to Tokyo from New York City took about two hours with the S-1. This gave the S-1 the capability to perform reconnaissance missions from anywhere to anywhere in the world using its on-board GPS and Google maps.

Elliott was on the road traveling from Lake Almanor toward Reno. As he rolled down Highway 147 he rethought his strategy. Originally he planned to hop on to Highway 89 heading east. But he reconsidered, thinking it would be valuable to go past the Chester airport looking for a helicopter at that location, and then would go through the Susanville area and check the airport there.

Elliott turned right on Highway 89 heading up toward the west end of Chester where the airport was located. The drive took twenty minutes and ended into Highway 36 where Elliott took a right turn toward Chester. The airport was at the west end of Chester. He drove slowly past the airport to see if there was any sign of the helicopter he was looking for. He saw nothing. He went up a side street to get a closer look, but there was nothing anywhere.

Elliott continued east on Highway 36 through Chester and on to Susanville. After Susanville he would head south for a straight shot to Reno.

From Reno he would jump on Interstate 80 heading east toward Elko, about a total of six hours driving time. He hoped to use the Elko IOM resources, including the S-1 and their satellite tracking tools, to learn what he could about the mystery helicopter. He wanted to know who attacked his home and he wanted revenge.