

**Chris Ryan Extreme: Most Wanted**

## Also by Chris Ryan

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Chris Ryan



CORONET

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# one

**Almaty, Kazakhstan. 1901 hours.**

John Bald observed Memphis Hay from behind the wheel of a VW camper van. Headlights set to full dark, engine still tapping out its death song. The van was parked amid the yard clutter of a scrap-metal dealership forty metres due south of Hay and his Lada Niva 4x4, in the shadowy underside of a concrete overpass on the outskirts of Almaty.

Bald looked on as Hay popped the boot on the Niva and a goon from the local Tengir drug gang elbowed him aside, ran his bare-knuckled hands over the contents. The Tengir goon wore a pair of ball-hugging jeans and a white V-neck T-shirt, and he looked like a swollen testicle. He had rocked up to the drug meet a minute ago in a battered Mazda 6, parked eight metres further down the road from the Niva. Testicle's buddy was propped against the Mazda's hood. Guy was decked out in a Brazil national football team tracksuit. Six foot two of bright yellow and green douche bag.

Bald watched Hay lug a brown suitcase out of the Niva's boot, dump it on the ground in front of Testicle. The guy nodded, waved to Brazil, who retrieved a black gym bag from the back seat of the Mazda. Bald knew two very important facts about the meet. The brown suitcase belonging to Hay contained thirty keys of opium base, the shit that got processed into heroin for the street crackheads. He also knew the black gym bag contained the money: 120 grand in clean US

bills. And in roughly thirty seconds the money and the opium would change hands, and then Bald would strike.

Brazil carried the gym bag over to the Niva. Posters were lathered onto the walls of a derelict warehouse between the two vehicles, about the only strokes of colour in an otherwise monochrome landscape. Posters of the Kazakh and Russian presidents pressing the flesh, the Kazakh flashing a chummy smile at the camera, dumb-looking borik fur squatting on top of his head.

Brazil chucked the gym bag to Hay. The hippie caught it like he was catching a baby. He weighed it up for a moment. Then he stuffed the bag into the front passenger seat, and Bald sat up in his seat. He was inching closer to a big fucking payday. Now all he had to do was wait for Testicle and his mate to piss off. Then Bald would ambush Hay and make him an offer he couldn't refuse. The kind of offer best made with the business end of a semi-automatic handgun.

'Baby, do you think they have animal sanctuaries in Panama?'

The voice belonged to a Dutch blonde hippie Bald had been plugging called Saakje Wolfswinkel. Saakje was a tight package of slappable arse and punchbag tits, good enough to make Bald forgive her Marxist bullshit and dreadlocks. She was seated at a laminated folding table set way back in the camper van's living area, and she was sparking up a joint. Bald smelt the sweet fumes filling the cab.

'Yeah. No. Fuck should I know?' he said.

'I was thinking about it, and I'd like to run a sanctuary. Help the animals, you know.' Saakje paused and sucked hard on the joint. 'Baby? We're gonna live down on the beach, right? In a hut, just like you promised?'

'Just like I promised,' said Bald.

'And we'll grow old together? Like, for ever?'

'Nothing lasts for ever,' he said distractedly. 'But yeah, whatever lasts less than that.'



Bald tried to phase out the sound of her voice. He phased out, too, the constant drone of traffic roaring along the overpass. All his energy and senses were focused on the drug deal going down beneath it. Now Hay was parading around to the driver's door of the Niva while Testicle was lugging the suitcase back to the Mazda. Brazil had a hand wrapped around a shotgun shaped kind of like a clunky AK-47, a weapon Bald immediately ID'd as a Saiga twelve-gauge.

Almost time, Bald told himself. He tightened his grip around the TT semi-automatic pistol on his lap. The TT was a weapon way past its sell-by date, but he liked the heft of the grip. Could feel the eighty years of killing engrained in its moving parts.

'Tell me the plan again,' he said, keeping his eyes on the Mazda.

'But we've been through this, like, already,' Saakje replied, saying the last word like a child.

'Yeah. And now we fucking go through it one last time. So we get it right.'

Saakje shrugged and said, 'You're gonna block the road so Hay can't escape from the overpass. Then you're gonna get out and do things to him I don't want to know about. Then you're gonna get our holiday money, and I'm gonna take the wheel and put my foot to the floor.'

She was stroking Bald's arm the way other people stroked cats.

Bald hated it when she did that.

Up ahead Hay was flipping open the driver's door of the Niva. Was about to climb inside when he stopped short. For a cold second Bald wondered what the fuck was going on. Then he heard a noise, like ice being stabbed with a pick. Footsteps treading on broken glass. Bald couldn't see where the footsteps were coming from. Not to begin with. Then Hay spun

around and looked beyond the Niva, and Bald chased his eyes and saw it too. Movement in the gloom. Twenty metres south of the Niva. And in the same moment Bald realized his plan was fucking sideways.