

the specialists

< down to
the wire >



Shannon Greenland

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the SPECIALISTS

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speak

An Imprint of Penguin Group (USA) Inc.

SPEAK

Published by the Penguin Group

345 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, U.S.A.

Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4P 2Y3 (a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)

Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland

(a division of Penguin Books Ltd)

Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia

(a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd)

Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre,

Panchsheel Park, New Delhi - 110 017, India

Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Mairangi Bay, Auckland 1310, New Zealand

(a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd.)

Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue,

Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196, South Africa

Registered Offices: Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

Published by Speak, an imprint of Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 2007

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Greenland, Shannon.

The specialists : down to the wire / by Shannon Greenland.

p. cm.

Summary: GiGi, a sixteen-year-old computer genius living undercover with a group of teen-aged prodigies, goes on a mission with Wirenut, the electronics specialist, when a deadly neurotoxin is stolen and hidden in a small Mediterranean country.

[1. Espionage--Fiction. 2. Orphans--Fiction.] I. Title. II. Title: Down to the wire.

PZ7.G8458Sod 2007

[Fic]--dc22 2006102666

Speak ISBN 978-0-14-240917-6

ISBN 978-0-14-240917-6

Printed in the United States of America

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Uncorrected Proof

THE SPECIALISTS
DOWN TO
THE WIRE

SHANNON GREENLAND

ISBN: 978-0-14-240917-6

September 2007

Ages: 12 up

224 pages (tentative) — 5 x 7

Rights: W00

\$6.99 (\$8.99 CAN)

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An Imprint of Penguin Group (USA) Inc.

The final book will feature a teaser chapter from the next book
in The Specialists series, coming in Spring 2008!

one misstep and the mansion explodes....

In our wet suits, we flutter kicked our way through the dark ocean. Wirenut first, me second, and TL brought up the rear.

Water plugged my ears, permitting me to hear only my heart-beat and slow deep breaths.

Through my night goggles, I kept my vision focused on Wirenut's fins. *One misstep rigs the mansion to explode.*

Talk about pressure.

We made it through the fence and continued underwater around the island to the east side.

We exited the water and stripped our diving gear.

Still in our wet suits, we jogged over the flat rocks to the mansion's east wall.

Wirenut gazed up five stories to the roof.

From his vest he pulled four pressurized suction cups. Two he strapped to his knees and two he held in his hands. TL and I did the same. Air release controlled the suction, allowing for silent attachment and release. They worked on any surface.

Wirenut turned to us, touched his eye, and held up one finger. Watch closely. One at a time.

TL and I nodded. Wirenut suctioned onto the stone and began a spiderlike crawl. I scrutinized his form, memorizing his technique and rhythm.

He made it to the roof and signaled for me.

One misstep rigs the whole mansion to explode.

With a deep breath I suctioned onto the wall.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to all the girls who gave their critiquing brilliance: Glen McGafferty, Tara Greenbaum, Mari Lacroix, and Courtney Nighbert.

Tons of hoorays for my fab plotting group: Shelly Gilchrist, Tara Greenbaum, and Britta Harris.

A toast to you, Nadia Cornier, for being the coolest agent ever.

And one for you, too, Karen Chaplin. You are, hands down, the dream editor.

To all my young adult friends at Teen Lit Authors, you gals are the best group.

And to all my family in alphabetical order, so none of them will complain I've left them out: Bill, Jason, Jim, Mark, Max, Melinda, Naomi, Sharie, and Susan. Thanks for being the best support group a gal could ask for.

[prologue]

using his homemade, hand held computer, the HOMAS B28, Frankie flipped through prescanned floor plans.

Impenetrable. That's what all the suppliers, media, and tech journals were bragging about the Rayver Security System.

We'll just see about that.

He tucked the B28 in his zippered thigh pocket and pulled out a granola bar.

Unwrapping it, Frankie studied the dark New Mexico Museum of History from the sidewalk. Easy enough to get in the front door. Standard nixpho lock with a keypad. Any kindergartener with half an IQ could do it, too.

He folded the chewy bar in half and shoved the whole thing in his mouth. Apple cinnamon. Not his favorite, but it was all the corner store had.

The true challenge of this job lay in the triple-sealed, flex-steel vault. Protected by the oh-so-impressive Rayver Security System.

Frankie didn't know what was in the vault. Didn't care. He

was here to crack the impenetrable Rayver System. No more, no less. Just to prove he could do it.

Tossing the wrapper in the already full garbage can, he crossed the shadowed street.

The two-story brick museum stood at the end of a long dead-end road with woods along the back and sides.

It was deserted. Too good to be true.

Frankie pulled his hood down over his face as he neared the entrance.

Five-five-six-four-three-zero. He punched in the code he'd seen the museum manager use every night this week. Anybody with binoculars and enough patience could've retrieved it, too.

Click. The door unlocked, and he slipped inside.

Standing in the entranceway, he scanned the dimly lit interior, recalling the layout. Left. Two rooms. Stairwell down. One room to the right.

"Okay, Frankie," he whispered to himself. "Game's on. Don't get too confident. Never know what might happen."

He closed his eyes and blew out a long slow breath. Then, with quiet feet, he shuffled left into the African Bone Room. A glass display case ran the center's length.

With his back to the west wall, he watched the corner camera. From his last visit to the museum, he recalled that it scanned in two-second intervals, moving a fraction of an inch to the right with each scan. He needed to make it across the room before it scanned back. No prob.

Staying in its blind spot, Frankie baby-stepped on each two-

second interval and made it safely to the other side.

He entered the New Zealand Hat Room. No display cases here. No cameras either. Strange-looking hats hung on the walls, each rigged with an alarm should one be removed.

He squashed the mischievous urge to take one down just to prove it could be done and crossed the carpet to the stairwell on the other side.

Suddenly, he stopped in midstep. Cold prickles crawled across his skin. *Somebody's in here.*

Slowly, he pivoted, searching every corner, shadow, and inch of space.

Nothing.

A good solid minute ticked by as he listened closely. Soft air-conditioner hum. Nearly inaudible camera ticks. Quiet laser alarm buzz.

Nothing else. No shuffle of a person's feet. No breath.

Funky imagination. That's all. Although he really didn't believe himself.

From his vest pocket Frankie pulled out a wad of homemade gray putty and a six-inch length of bamboo he used as a blow-gun. Balling the putty, he fit it in the end of the bamboo.

The stairwell's camera hung catty-corner near the bottom. He rolled his black hood above his lips. Sighted down the length of the bamboo. Took a breath. Put it in his mouth. And blew.

The putty flew like a dart and plunked right on the lens.

Yeah, that's what I'm talking about.

He tiptoed down the stairs and hung a right, and his pulse

jumped like it did every time a new security system challenged him.

The impenetrable Rayver System.

Impenetrable, his big toe.

He pulled his fiber-lit goggles used for laser detection from on top of his head and fit them over his eyes.

Bingo.

Yellow lasers zigzagged the room preceding the vault. Onetwothreefourfivesix . . . twenty ankle high. The same at waist. Six on the ceiling.

Child's play. Except for the yellow, skin-sizzling color. Whatever happened to the reliable red set-off-the-alarm-but-don't-fry-the-burglar color?

Leaning to the left at a seventy-degree angle, he spied a tunnel-like opening void of lasers. *You'd think the tech geniuses would've figured this out by now.*

Frankie unbuttoned a pocket in his cargo pants and pulled out the remote-control expander. Pointing it toward the opening of the tunnel, he pressed the expander button.

A skinny metal wire snaked out, becoming stiff as it left the remote control.

Steady, Frankie, steady.

One slight movement and the wire would collapse into the lasers.

It made it through the small tunnel void of lasers, across the room, and straight into the tiny hole below the vault's lock.

The lasers flicked off, and he set his watch. One minute and

seventeen seconds until they turned back on.

Reeling in the expandable wire, he ran over the open tile to the vault. He yanked the tool kit from his vest and laid the triple-folded leather pouch on the ground. He took nitrox, a metal adhesive release, and squirted the control panel.

It popped off, and Frankie caught it before it clanged to the ground. Anything over twenty-five decibels would set off the alarm.

Multicolored wires crisscrossed and tangled with one another.

A diversion.

He reached in, grabbed the clump, and ripped them right out. Red lasers immediately flicked on, filling the control panel opening.

Frankie took the extra-long needle-nose wire cutters from his tool pouch and, leaning to the left at a seventy-degree angle, found his opening.

Carefully, he inserted the wire cutters through the opening surrounded by lasers and snipped the one remaining white wire at the very back.

The vault clicked open. The control panel lasers flicked off. Frankie checked his watch.

Twenty seconds.

Snatching up the tools, he flung the vault door open. A small wooden man, an artifact of some sort, sat on a stand.

A weight-sensitive stand.

Crud.

He hadn't expected that.

Frankie estimated the artifact at three pounds and took three one-pound pellets from his tool pouch. Holding his breath, he slipped the artifact off and the pellets on all in one smooth motion.

And froze.

Nothing. Only silence.

No alarms. No lasers.

He checked his watch.

Three seconds.

Frankie sprinted back across the room. His watch alarm dinged. He dove the last few feet and whipped around to see the yellow lasers flick back on.

Whew.

Smiling, he did his victory shoulder-roll dance.

Oh, yeah. Frankie got it going on.

Go, Frankie. Go, Frankie. Go. Go.

He packed his stuff, slipped a yellow ribbon from his sock, and tied it around the artifact. It was his signature. He wished he could be here to see them discover it outside its *impenetrable* vault.

With a pat to its head, he stood.

"Cute," a voice spoke.

Frankie spun around. Another person stood behind him.

Pointing a gun.

His heart stopped. Then he saw the gun shake.

Why...he's nervous.

The other guy flicked it toward the artifact. "Give it to me." Something distorted his voice.

Frankie ran his gaze down the length of the other burglar and back up. He looked like a skinnier version of Frankie. Black cargo pants and vest. Black hood. Black martial arts slippers.

"I said, Give it to me."

Frankie shrugged. "Sure." Why did he care? He hadn't come for this silly thing anyway.

Behind the hood, the burglar narrowed his eyes, like he didn't believe it'd be that easy.

"It's all yours." Frankie stepped to the side.

The burglar paused. Shook his head. "Hand it to me."

Frankie sighed. "Oh, all right." He snatched it from the ground and tossed it to the burglar.

The burglar's eyes widened as he fumbled with the gun and caught the artifact.

Frankie watched him juggle the two things. He could totally take down this idiot. The burglar was *way* too amusing, though, and Frankie needed a good laugh.

Holding the artifact to his chest, the burglar scrambled to get the gun pointed back at Frankie. "You think you're funny don't you?"

He shrugged. Yeah, actually, he did.

The burglar backed his way up the stairs, still pointing the gun at Frankie.

"Can't fire that thing, ya know. You'll set off the alarms in this place."

The burglar paused in his backward ascent as if he hadn't thought about that. "You're the Ghost, aren't you?"

Frankie gave his best sixteenth-century bow. "The one and only."

"I...I've studied you."

The small admission pumped his ego. "Then you know I'm no threat. I did what I came for."

Seconds ticked by. The burglar slipped the gun inside his vest.

"Safety," Frankie reminded him.

"It's not loaded."

He laughed at having been tricked.

The burglar raced up the stairs toward the New Zealand Hat Room, and Frankie followed. With his back to the west wall, the burglar inched around the African Bone Room.

Frankie watched his fluid, timed movements as he kept pace with the camera that scanned in two-second intervals. Not such a novice. He'd been trained.

"Who are you?" Frankie whispered across both rooms.

The other burglar stopped and looked back.

"Keep moving!" Frankie hissed at the exact second the burglar missed his two-second step and set off the alarm.

Crud.

The burglar bolted from the room and up the steps to the second floor.

Frankie raced after him, through a narrow hallway into a huge room, and then disappeared behind the door to a janitor closet.

Staying right on his heels, Frankie flung open the closet door. The burglar snaked up a rope hanging fifteen feet from an open skylight.

Quick guy.

He'd rigged the skylight alarm with an eraser, a small piece of aluminum foil, and, although Frankie couldn't see it, he knew a dab of olive oil. That particular combination of three elements shorted out standard valumegal wiring. He'd introduced that five years ago, and criminals had copied it ever since.

Sirens filtered through the air, and his pulse jumped. Cops. About a quarter of a mile away.

Yeah, baby, thrill of the chase.

The burglar made it to the roof, and Frankie started his ascent. Halfway there he looked up to see the burglar holding a knife to the rope.

No.

"Sorry," the burglar mumbled, and sliced it clean.

Son of a— Frankie fell and landed on his back. "Umph."

Footsteps pounded outside the door. He jumped to his feet and leapt for the skylight.

The door flew open. "Hold it right there."

Frankie froze and squeezed his eyes shut.

Crud. Double crud.

"Put your hands up."

He stuck his hands in the air. *I'm going to prison for this.*

"Now turn around. *Real* slow."

Opening his eyes, Frankie pivoted.

Someone yanked off his hood and shined a light in his face. Frankie squinted.

"Well, look here. You're just a kid." The cop jerked Frankie's arms back and handcuffed him. "You have the right to remain silent...." The cop hauled Frankie through the museum and out the door.

As the cop shoved Frankie in the squad car, Frankie glanced toward the woods. The burglar stood in the shadows, watching.



FRANKIE SAT AT A TABLE in an interrogation room. He'd been there for hours.

"Where is it?" The red-faced, big-gut cop slammed his fist on the table.

For the trillionth time.

It scared Frankie the first, say, two times he did it. Now it just annoyed him. "I don't have it," he repeated. "The other guy took it."

The cop clinched his jaw so hard it made his puffy cheeks vibrate.

Calm down, man. You're gonna have a heart attack.

"Nice ballet slippers, fancy boy."

For your information, these are handmade, double-layered martial arts slippers. The outer coating slick for sliding. Peel away to the rubber underneath for climbing.

Frankie's stomach growled. "Can I please have something to eat?" They didn't understand. His metabolism ate calories fast.