

Simultaneously, the water heater and kitchen stovetop pilot lights went out.

A couple of seconds later, all four of the cooktop burner dials rotated from off to full-on.

As gas began to fill the empty darkened beach house, a man sat back in his seat in the crew cab of a late model pickup--he knew he had to wait about 20 minutes for the home to fill sufficiently with gas before he pressed the button.

The night was quiet aside from the small waves pushing each other up on to the remote Rhode Island beach about 30 yards from him. That was good, because he wanted neither to be disturbed nor observed. He had taken great care to select this spot.

His truck sat on a 300-yard long lane most people used to access the beach. It was mid-February. No one was spending the night at the beach.

He parked in the middle of the asphalt roadway to avoid leaving tire tracks. His location was far enough away from the little farm-to-market two-lane and around a couple of curves so that no passing car's headlights would pick up the reflectors on his truck.

It was likely no one would drive that stretch of road while he was there anyway since it was 2 a.m. Not even the people who make the doughnuts were up that early.

The man spent the preceding two months scouting his mission. He was a seasoned pro at what he did and left nothing to chance. That included determining access and departure routes with no businesses or residences that might have security cameras. He even drove different vehicles at different times of the day to avoid providing investigators a pattern they could use to find him.

He also mapped the origin points and approaches of all first responding agencies that might go see his handiwork. He didn't want a cop or firefighter to wonder why someone was out and about at that time of the morning and pass it on to the feds later.

All that was relatively easy. He had worked through those protocols for a hundred other jobs. Not in 25 years of doing this had he ever been caught. What wasn't easy was figuring out how to obliterate the house.

In turns, he had considered drone-launched missiles, a TNT-laden van parked in the driveway (a favorite among his middle eastern clients) and even training a convex lens on the building's roof so that when the sun reach a specific declination, it would set the shingles alight.

Not only did all that have a Rube Goldberg feel, it also had a tail; in that, it left evidence that could be traced back to him and his clients. Then, he went jogging along the beach in front of the house.

It was in summer as he was just beginning to ponder the challenge. He was very fit so it wasn't unusual for a tanned, shirtless guy to lope down this stretch of sand. He was about 50 yards away from the house when he saw a bright yellow utility van parked in the driveway. "Grisham's Technologies" was printed all over it in big black letters.

He recognized the company as one that installed and serviced automated appliances like garage door openers and household lighting.

As he neared the worn picket fence in front of the house, a guy exited the residence, turned and said goodbye to a lady in the doorway and opened the truck's back door. He was writing on what probably was a work order affixed to one of those metal clipboards.

Finished, the guy walked around to the driver's door and tossed the clipboard into the seat. Then, he thought of something else he needed to do before hoisting himself up into the cab.

He reached under the paper form, pulled out the bottom most sheet of paper—obviously an unnecessary copy—and wadded it into a tight ball he tossed into a garbage can at the end of the driveway.

Again at 2 a.m., he retrieved the wad of yellow paper from the big plastic can and took it back to his hotel room. There, he examined his treasure.

Apparently, the residents had a complete system installed that enabled them to remotely switch on and off almost every appliance in the house. It even allowed them to flush the toilet. "Why?" he thought. "I guess when you're that rich, what's left to conspicuously consume but a remote toilet flusher?"

He knew how to circumvent technology and hacking this system was not much of a challenge. He could actually reach into their house without being anywhere near it.

Time's up, he thought and leaned toward the laptop's screen. The system was doing its job, broadcasting an alert about the deadly natural gas accumulation. Showtime.

Three seconds after he pressed the Fn and F12 keys, both pilot lights relit and the spark igniter on one of the cooktop burners set off the gas. The truck rocked from the concussion two miles away. He looked in the direction of the blast and saw the beginnings of an orange glow rising above the tree line along the beach.

In the distance, sirens from different emergency vehicles filled the silence. The bomber moved out slowly and as unnoticeably as possible. By 5 a.m., his journey along remote backroads ended when he pulled out on to a frontage road next to I-95 southbound.

By the same time tomorrow, he'd be in Miami, the truck would be on its way back to Mexico for a refit and the laptop would be in a million useless pieces in a collection box under an industrial strength junkyard grinder.

For his part, he would be enroute to Fiji with another \$2 million added to his Swiss account.

Not bad for blowing up two uninhabited houses, he thought.

Yeah. The Rhode Island house was to make sure they didn't think it was a coincidence.