

CHAPTER ONE Casper and C-Dog “It was just like wildfire. Everyone was jumping into the game.”

In the early afternoon of November 29, 1983, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Los Angeles office received reports of a bank robbery in the Melrose District. Agent Linda Webster first learned of the incident involving a polite young man wearing a New York Yankees hat, later dubbed the Yankee Bandit. This robber had been active since July, executing multiple heists flawlessly—with his trademark baseball cap becoming a defining feature. In a span of just four hours, the Yankee managed to rob six banks, leaving the FBI overwhelmed and scrambling for leads in a rapidly escalating crime wave.

The narrative unfolds against the backdrop of a significant rise in bank robberies across the U.S. from the 1960s, with Los Angeles emerging as the epicenter. As crime surged, FBI agents coined nicknames for various robbers to track their operations—its cultural resonances echoing figures like Bonnie and Clyde from the past. Yet, amidst this chaos emerged new, determined players like the West Hills Bandits, who escalated the violence with more sophisticated tactics; Casper and C-Dog represented a further evolution of bank robbery, utilizing younger recruits and manipulating tactics with chilling organizational prowess.

Robert Sheldon Brown, alias Casper, and his partner Donzell Thompson, or C-Dog, capitalized on the bank robbery boom by orchestrating a staggering 175 heists—outsmarting not only police but also exploiting the youth and desperation of their team. They taught recruits to aggressively storm banks, terrorizing staff and stealing cash, all while remaining at a distance to evade detection. Each successful caper strengthened their brand of chaos, drawing in more criminals eager to share in the profits of this lucrative endeavor.

The chapter assesses the epidemic-like spread of bank robberies as fueled by a few exceptional individuals, capturing a moment in time when relentless ambition transformed ordinary theft into a social phenomenon. The growing notoriety of criminals like Casper inspires others, creating a mobile network of crime in which fear swept through Los Angeles communities. Ultimately, the FBI painstakingly tracked the duo, culminating in arrests that, when completed, led to a notable drop in bank robberies, reflecting the connection between key figures in the crime wave and larger societal consequences. The chapter closes by hinting at the lessons this tale holds concerning social epidemics and contagions in human behavior, preparing the reader for a broader exploration of these themes throughout "Revenge of the Tipping Point."