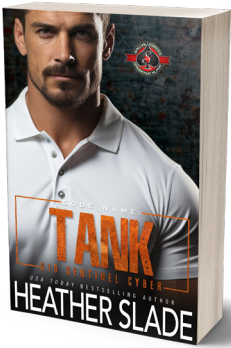


heather SLADE

USA TODAY BEST-SELLING AUTHOR OF
SHAMELESSLY SEXY EDGE-OF-YOUR SEAT ROMANTIC SUSPENSE



Code Name: Tank

Book four in the K19 Sentinel Cyber Team One series

He sees past her walls to the woman beneath.

She's terrified he'll leave like the last man she trusted.

Together, they'll discover that real love is worth the risk.

TANK

I've spent a year respecting Dragon's boundaries, watching K19's brilliant communications specialist avoid me like I'm radioactive. When we're finally partnered to investigate cyber attacks on defense contractors, I get my chance—until the case explodes into government corruption and her CIA ex-partner emerges from witness protection, claiming he's here to help. Now, I'm fighting to expose a conspiracy that threatens American lives while proving to the woman I'm falling for that not every partnership ends in betrayal.

DRAGON

After my former partner at the CIA chose saving himself over our mission—and me—I rebuilt my life at K19 Sentinel Cyber with one rule: no workplace relationships. But investigating coordinated financial attacks with Tank Abrams is breaking down every wall I built. His steady competence and protective instincts make me want to trust again, just as my past literally walks back into my life. When the case turns deadly and government officials start dying, I have to decide if what Tank and I are building together is worth risking my carefully guarded heart.

1

Tank

The sharp buzz of the emergency briefing notification cut through the predawn quiet of my camp when it hit my phone at zero five hundred hours. Muscle memory had me rolling out of bed without hesitation. Coffee could wait. Whatever had Admiral Kane calling an all-hands meeting before sunrise on a Tuesday meant K19 Sentinel Cyber was about to earn our retainer fees.

Twenty minutes later, I was walking through the doors of Kane Mountain Great Camp's multi-level boathouse that had been converted into a high-tech, ultra-secure command center. The scent of the perfectly brewed coffee I'd anticipated would be waiting had me salivating.

The deep hues of civil twilight filtered through the floor-to-ceiling windows, casting long shadows across the mirror-still waters of Canada Lake. Under different circumstances, it would have been peaceful. The kind of morning that reminded me why I'd agreed to live and work in a remote setting in the Adirondack Mountains rather than return to the frenetic pace of a place like DC or New York.

However, the tension radiating across the open space that housed work stations in multiple configurations, suggested there'd be nothing peaceful about the day ahead.

“Morning, Tank.” Admiral’s tone carried the same control that had made him legendary during his FBI days. “Have a seat.”

I settled into my usual chair, automatically cataloging who else had made it in this early. Alice, Admiral’s wife and the co-leader of the newest division of K19 Security Solutions, was already at the area we referred to as her digital hub, multiple monitors showing data streams I couldn’t interpret from this distance.

Mason “Atticus” Finch who, like me, joined the unit at its inception, was positioned across from me, alert and engaged—the same way he’d been during our Air Force days when the mission briefing was about to get interesting.

And there, two seats down from Atticus, was Dragon.

Piper Drago looked like she’d been here for hours, which knowing her dedication to the job, she probably had. Her honey-blonde hair was pulled back in a neat ponytail, and she wore dark jeans and a fitted navy sweater that somehow managed to look both appropriate and distracting. She didn’t glance in my direction when I sat down, but I felt the shift in her posture that told me she was aware of my presence.

It had been like this for nearly a year now. Ever since that first day when Admiral had called another all-hands meeting to introduce our new communications analysis specialist. I still remembered watching the command center door open, expecting another tech specialist like Atticus. Instead, Dragon had walked in with the kind of situational awareness that immediately marked her as former agency, scanning exits and cataloging threats in the thirty seconds it took her to survey the space.

But it wasn’t her sweep of the room that had first drawn my attention. It was everything else about her. The way her clothes hugged curves that her composed demeanor couldn’t hide. The confident stride that somehow managed to be both graceful and purposeful. How she carried herself with confidence that drew every eye in the room, including mine.

When Admiral introduced her as Piper Drago, she’d stepped forward with a nod that was both direct and guarded, her hazel eyes meeting each team member’s gaze directly. “I handle communications analysis and encryption,” she’d said, her tone carrying just enough authority to establish credibility without seeming arrogant. “I’m looking forward to working with all of you.”

Simple. Direct. No unnecessary personal details or attempts at charm.

I’d found myself watching her throughout that first session—the way she absently tucked a strand of hair behind her ear when she was listening intently, how she’d bite her lower lip when she was thinking. When she leaned forward to examine something on Alice’s screen, I’d seen the elegant line of her neck and how, as if she felt me watching, a pink flush appeared on her cheeks.

Within an hour, she’d identified three security vulnerabilities in our communication protocols that Alice had missed. Impressive as hell, and somehow that made her even more attractive.

Professional evaluation of a colleague’s expertise, I’d told myself.

That lie had lasted all of one week.

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