CHAPTER 1

Chapter 1: The Drawer Full of Gear That Never Stopped Anyone

You know the drawer. It might be a closet shelf or a plastic bin in the garage. Inside there's a door-wedge alarm still in its blister pack, a "tactical" flashlight with dead batteries, and a portable door lock you tried once and never trusted. There's a fake camera with a blinking red light, pepper spray you never checked the date on, and a stun gadget that looked serious in the ad.

Add up the receipts and the total gets uncomfortable. Then ask the harder question. If somebody put a boot into your back door tonight at two in the morning, which of those items would do a single thing to stop him?

For most of us, the honest answer is none of them. The door would hold or fail based on things you never bought, never looked at, and could fix for less than the price of one gadget in that drawer.

How Fear-Driven Buying Fills Closets, Not Defenses

I'll own my part first. In our house, the drawer sat in the hall table by the front door. At one point it held three flashlights, two wedge alarms and a motion sensor that went off every time the furnace kicked on. All the while, our back door was held to its frame by a strike plate I had never once taken off to look at.

That is how fear-driven buying works. Something scares you, like a news story, a neighbor's rumor or a noise in the night. The fear wants action, and a purchase feels like action. You click "buy," the package arrives and the fear goes quiet for a while. Then the item goes in the drawer and the fear comes back, because the house is exactly as weak as it was before.

You see the same pattern at the gun counter, and I say that as a gun owner. On AR15.com, a long-running thread collects members' purchase regrets, page after page of men describing gear they wanted badly and later wished they hadn't bought (AR15.COM forum). The details vary. The shape of the story doesn't: strong feeling, fast purchase, slow regret.

Market swings show the same thing. NSSF-adjusted background checks, a rough stand-in for retail gun sales, came to 14,612,314 for 2025, down 4.1% from 2024[33]. Then the federal tax stamp on suppressors and short-barreled rifles went from $200 to $0 on January 1, 2026. Registration and background checks are still required[33]. NFA-related checks jumped about 121% that January over the year before[33]. By August 2026 they were up 201.6% year over year[1]. On ArizonaShooting.org, owners describe finally buying the items they'd put off because of the old $200 stamp (ArizonaShooting.org forum).

None of that is foolish on its face. We'll look at that rush in Chapter 22. For now, notice what it shows. People buy when something changes the feeling or the price. They rarely buy because they measured a weakness in their own house.

> **-12.4%**: FBI data estimate that property crime fell 12.4% from 2024 to 2025[7]. The fear in the drawer often runs ahead of the risk at the door.

The Receipt Test: What You Own Versus What Actually Holds

This book runs on one rule. I call it **the Receipt Test**, and every chapter comes back to it.

> For every item you own or plan to buy, ask one question: *what does this hold, and for how many minutes?* If the honest answer is "nothing" or "I don't know," it goes to the bottom of the list, however good it looked on the shelf.

The test sorts gear into three piles.

- **Holds.** It physically slows a man trying to get in. A door that stays shut under force is the main example.
- **Warns.** It tells you, or him, that something is happening. Alarms, sensors, lights and cameras belong here. Warning has real value, and we'll see how much.
- **Soothes.** It makes you feel better and does little else. Most of the drawer lives here.

Warning gear deserves fair treatment. In a UNC Charlotte study of 422 incarcerated burglars, about 60% said an alarm or surveillance cameras would affect their choice of target. Roughly 40% or more said cameras would lead them to pick a different house[35]. That is a real effect. But it works on the man deciding *whether* to try your house. Once he has decided, only the "holds" pile stands between him and your hallway.

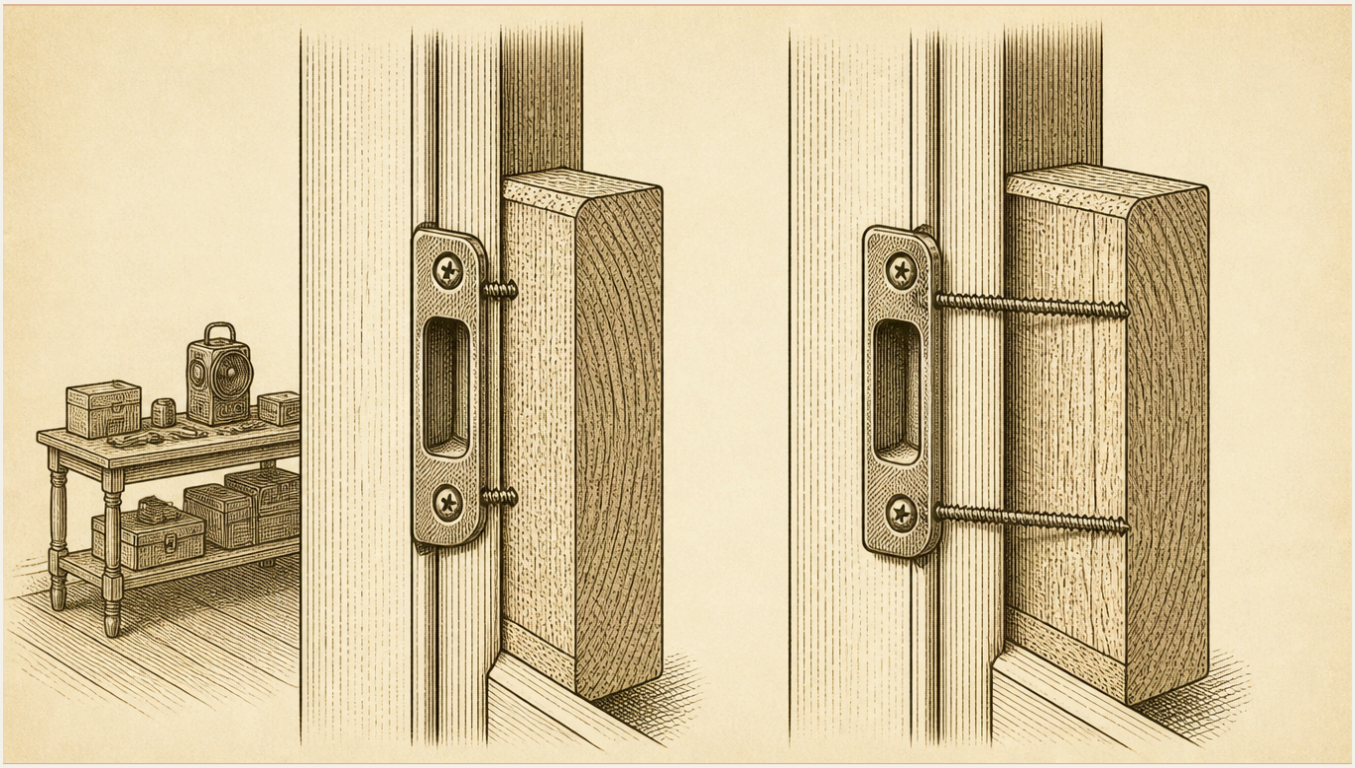
> **Case (illustrative):** Picture a man in his sixties who spends a few hundred dollars over two years on wedge alarms, a doorbell camera and a portable lock he finds awkward. Then he runs the Receipt Test. Only the camera lands in "warns." Nothing lands in "holds." His front door's strike plate is fastened with the short screws it came with, and he never checked.

Run the Test Tonight

Do this before you read Chapter 2. It takes about thirty minutes.

- ✓ **Empty the drawer, closet and bin onto a table.** If any firearm is in that pile, handle it first: point it in a safe direction, unload it, check the chamber twice, and put the ammunition in a different room before you go on. Leave pepper spray capped. Never test-fire it indoors.
- ✓ **Sort every item into Holds, Warns or Soothes.** Be strict. "It might scare him" means Soothes.
- ✓ **Write down what each one cost,** from memory if the receipt is gone.
- ✓ **Go to your most-used exterior door in daylight while you're home.** Open it and back out *one* screw from the strike plate, the metal plate on the frame where the bolt goes. Look at its length, then drive it back in snug. Don't overtighten into soft wood or you'll strip the hole. Never leave the door with the strike loose overnight.
- ✓ **Write that screw length next to your gadget total.**

Most men who do this find two numbers that don't match. One is the money spent. The other is the size of the screw holding the door shut.



Why the Cheapest Fix Is Usually the One You Skipped

Here's why the drawer fills up while the door stays weak. Gadgets are sold, and hardware is not. Nobody runs a heart-pounding ad for a box of long wood screws. No package on the shelf shows a shadowy intruder next to a strike plate. The fixes that hold have no marketing budget, so they never reach the part of your brain that makes fear purchases.

There's a second reason. The real fixes ask you to look closely at your own house and admit it isn't as solid as you thought. Buying a gadget skips that step, which is part of why it feels good.

A door is a system. The bolt goes into a strike plate. The plate is screwed into a wooden jamb. The jamb is fastened, or not, to the framing of the house. A strong lock set into a weak frame only moves the failure point a few inches. Chapter 6 walks through exactly how that failure happens. Chapter 10 shows the screw fix step by step, with what it costs and how to test it. I won't make those promises here with numbers I'll prove later. I'll only tell you where I'm headed. In most houses, the biggest gain per dollar is in the frame, not the store's security aisle.

> The best door hardware is the kind nobody ever notices, because it just keeps holding.

What This Book Will and Will Not Ask You to Buy

Let me set the terms plainly, since you've been sold to enough.

This book will ask you to:

- Spend a weekend walking your own house with a notepad before spending anything (Chapters 7 and 8).
- Make one trip down the hardware aisle with a short list (Chapter 23).
- Put money into warning gear only where it deters or wakes you, not just where it records (Chapters 14 and 15).
- Buy things in a set order: **house first, hardware second, guns last** (Chapter 22).

This book will not ask you to:

- Buy a new gun to fix a door problem.
- Buy any product because it's on a "must-have" list. Chapter 16 takes those lists apart one by one.
- Pay a monthly subscription before you know what it does for you.
- Treat the evening news as your threat assessment. Chapter 3 puts your real odds on the table.

We'll also talk about guns, and about crossbows, pepper spray and the "no license" gear sold online. We'll look at famous outlaw guns and what they teach about buying on track record rather than legend. Firearms get a fair and serious look in these pages. They just don't get to cut in line ahead of the front door.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Run the Receipt Test on everything you own.** Sort it into Holds, Warns or Soothes, and write down what each item cost.
- **Pull one strike-plate screw this weekend** and learn what's actually holding your door shut.
- **Treat cameras and alarms as deterrents, not barriers.** They can turn a burglar away, but they won't stop one who has decided to come in.
- **Wait a day before any fear-driven purchase,** and ask what it holds and for how many minutes.
- **Follow the spending order:** house first, hardware second, guns last.

You now know what's in your drawer and what's in your door frame. That leaves the other side of the question. When a stranger walks up your driveway, what is *he* looking at? Burglars don't run the Receipt Test. They run a different one, and they run it fast. What do they check in those first ten seconds that decides whether your house is worth the trouble?