

Bethnal Green

Security Novels Series Episode XVIII
John M Upton



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Bethnal Green

Preparation is everything and for the Commander, this was one important task he was determined to be absolutely ready for.

Walking carefully around the brand new, fully marked and equipped Ford Mondeo patrol car of the National Security & Police Service where it was parked in a side street near Bethnal Green Underground Station in the east end of London, he took his time to check that all was in order from the condition of the tyres to the mountings that fixed the light bar across the roof.

“All right” the Commander then declared once he was satisfied that all was in order before he proceeded to put on a pair of leather driving gloves “Let’s do this shall we?” he suggested.

“Yes Sir” Garage Sergeant Andy Pascal of the Advanced Driver Training and Assessment Section of the Service duly agreed whereupon they both got in the vehicle with the Commander taking the wheel.

Once comfortable in the driver’s seat, the Commander looked around the interior of the car for a few moments before looking across at Pascal.

“Let’s get this party started shall we?” he suggested as he started up the cars powerful and specially tuned turbocharged two litre engine.

“Quebec Tango Two Seven to Control” Pascal duly proceeded to call over the radio, “Eagle One is ready to go” he confirmed.

“Control receiving” confirmed Divisional Commander Tracy Caverner, the Commander’s wife from her seat at the main console in the Greater London Control Room at New Scotland Yard “Would you remind my darling husband that the car is brand new and I don’t want a scratch on it please?”

“Judging by the wry smile he just proffered in my direction” Pascal confirmed “I think your message has been received and understood.”

“All right ladies and gentlemen” Tracy called over her headset to the rest of the Control Room personnel “Let’s make sure everyone is awake and paying attention and that all recorders are active.”

“X-Ray Nine Nine is approaching final position now Maam” one of the Control Room personnel confirmed “Just awaiting your word to proceed.”

“Nigel, tell them the word is given” Tracy confidently confirmed.

Back in Bethnal Green, the Commander pulled the car slowly forward a few feet so as to give them a better view down the main road as they awaited their target that formed the subject of this operation.

“Are you sure you wouldn’t like me to drive Sir?” Pascal asked, more out of curiosity than anything else as it was indeed extremely unusual for the most senior Police officer in the country to be waiting in an ordinary patrol car for what to him seemed like a fairly straightforward operation.

“Its fine” the Commander reassured him “I have been driving since I was ten years old.”

“Blimey...” Pascal responded.

“My old man taught me to drive in his Mk 2 Jaguar” the Commander explained “bombing around North Weald airfield, learning the delicate art of the double handbrake turn.”

“Was he a Police officer your father?” Pascal asked.

“Nope” the Commander confirmed with a wry grin “He was the best wheelman in East London, if you wanted to get away from a sticky situation quickly and without any law enforcement entanglements, he was your man.”

“This should be interesting then...” Pascal remarked with an apparent sense of apprehension.

“Oh yes” the Commander readily agreed “and I do believe here comes our target” he motioned down the road where in amongst the traffic coming towards them was a silver Jaguar saloon car, it sidelights on and maintaining a steady pace so as not to be noticed.

“Buckle up” the Commander suggested as the traffic lights changed and the car they were targeting approached ever closer until it reached the junction parallel with them whereupon it stopped again at the head of the traffic as the signals reverted to red once more.

Through the tinted driver’s side window of the Jaguar, it was possible to see the driver look across at them and then realise that he was in trouble as, without waiting for the lights to change, he suddenly accelerated away amid screeching tyres and the sound of a highly revving engine.

In an instant the Commander responded by accelerating quickly away with the sirens and lights of the patrol car in full cry.

“Control from Quebec Tango Two Seven” Pascal immediately called into his radio “Have made contact with target vehicle, making off at speed against the lights heading east. Target is a silver Jaguar saloon, registration number Lima X-Ray Six One Zulu Oscar Delta.”

“All received” Tracy confirmed from the Control Room as the high speed pursuit got under way “X-Ray Nine Nine” she then called to the helicopter “Do you have eyes on the prize?”

“Confirmed Control” the spotter aboard the helicopter following the pursuit overhead responded as he looked down on the silver Jaguar and the patrol car weaving themselves expertly at high speed through the traffic below “Live camera feed should be coming to you now.”

“Got it” Tracy confirmed as she took a look up at one of the large screens that dominated the front wall of the Control Room which was now showing the live camera feed from the helicopter both in conventional view and also infra-red format which showed the two fast moving vehicles very clearly with the excessive heat being given off from the tyres and exhausts showing as a bright white.

“This guy is good” the Commander remarked as he was forced to replicate the Jaguar driver’s double handbrake turn around a sharp corner, skilfully avoiding a collision with a couple of oncoming buses.

“He is going to kill someone in a minute” Pascal responded.

“Oh I am not so sure” the Commander confirmed “This guy definitely knows how to handle a car at high speed, he has been well trained. Unfortunately for him, so have I.”

With the sound of loud piercing sirens and revving engines coming up behind them, the traffic in the way of the pursuit needed little persuading to move aside as the two cars came rushing through with speeds touching ninety to a hundred miles an hour in places.

Even though he was an experienced and fully licensed high speed pursuit driver himself, Pascal could only look on extremely impressed with the Commander’s driving as he accurately and precisely guided the car at high speed taking into account numerous external factors all at the same time whilst his hand on the gear lever was at times a blur with the speed with which he was changing up and down through the gears.

As the Commander continued to concentrate intensely on the vehicle he was pursuing, his mind flashed back to when he was but a youngster, driving his father's Jaguar under his instruction, a vision made all the stronger as the roads that the pursuit was traversing was not all that far from where he took those somewhat unorthodox first driving lessons all those years ago.

“Control from Quebec Tango Two Seven” Pascal called into his radio as the Jaguar ahead turned sharply off of the main road onto a narrow country lane with the Commander quickly responding to continue to pursue “Target vehicle has now left the main road, we are on a side road, speed nine five, repeat nine five miles per hour.”

“I hope there is enough fuel in this thing” the Commander remarked as he accurately negotiated the narrow rutted lane at the break neck speed they were travelling with apparent ease.

“I think I would be more worried about the tyres wearing out first Sir” Pascal admitted “We are giving them a hell of a hammering here.”

“Looks like we are heading for familiar territory” the Commander remarked as he skilfully executed a handbrake turn around a tight narrow bend and noted a slightly rusty sign semi obscured in the adjacent hedgerow.

Up above them, the Security Service helicopter was easily keeping pace with the pursuit as it continued below, the whole thing being captured on the aircraft’s array of cameras for evidential purposes later on.

“Looks like they are heading towards North Weald Airfield” the pilot remarked whereupon the Observation Officer in the back monitoring the situation through the screen in front of him immediately proceeded to notify the Control Room back at New Scotland Yard.

“I think we can safely say we found the right man for the job” Tracy proudly declared as she intently watched the pursuit continue on the large screen at the front of the Control Room “If it were me driving I would have collected half a dozen lamp posts, a bus, two litter bins, a couple of angry cabbies and nine points on my licence by now!”

The rusty gates that guarded a side entrance onto the old former World War Two RAF airfield gave way easily when the Jaguar smashed through it, there being just rusty splinters strewn across the road by the time the Commander followed through only moments later.

“We could really use some back up here” Pascal remarked as the speed of the pursuit continued and even increased still further with the advantage of the wide open space of the old concrete runways and no traffic opposing them being taken full advantage of by their quarry.

“Relax” the Commander reassured him “It’s all under control...”

With the helicopter continuing to circle overhead, the driver of the Jaguar swerved right across the full width of the runway with the patrol car still closely behind, constantly occupying the view in his mirrors.

“All right old friend, let’s wrap this up” the driver remarked as he braced himself before slamming on the brakes and turning sharply sending the car into a power slide with a huge amount of smoke from the tortured tyres.

Quickly seeing the change of direction of the Jaguar, the Commander responded just as fast, swerving right around until moments later he came to a halt, the front of his patrol car just a couple of feet away from the now stationary target.

“Thanks’ Dad” the Commander remarked, looking upwards for a moment before calmly getting out of the car and walking over to the drivers side door of the Jaguar, his left hand on the holster of his old six shot revolver just in case.

As he reached the car, the driver’s side window slowly opened and the driver looked up from his seat with a wry smile.

“You have to admit it little bruv” the driver remarked taking off his sunglasses “our old man certainly taught us to drive didn’t he?”

“He did indeed” the Commander agreed as he opened the door before holding his hand out and helping his older brother James Garforth from the car “Right now I think he is probably looking down on us right now thinking ‘What the hell is going on?’”

“Quite probably” Garforth readily admitted.

“Eagle One to Control” the Commander then proceeded to call into his radio “I think that’s a wrap” he confirmed.

“Message received and understood” Tracy confirmed “I’ll see you two renegades back at the office.”

At that moment Simon Fuller arrived in the Control Room whereupon Tracy nodded at him and beckoned him over.

“I take it we have our little surprise in the can?” Fuller asked.

“Let’s just say I think our latest submission for The World’s Wildest Police Chases is going to be a big hit” Tracy confirmed with a wry smile “Get the footage together and do what you do best, then let the news organisations have our carefully crafted story.”

“Then what happens?” Fuller asked.

“We wait and see who takes the bait” Tracy confirmed “One thing is for certain, our little fake chase is bound to get someone’s attention.”

“To dad” Garforth raised his glass in a toast.

“To the old man” the Commander readily agreed as they chinked their glasses together.

“You know, as ideas go, this one was a doozie” Garforth remarked before supping from the pint of Guinness in the saloon bar of the Red Lion public house a few miles from where he had been 'captured' half an hour earlier.

“You wouldn't believe the hoops I had to jump through to get International Operations to release you for this job” the Commander admitted “Fortunately your new boss Hoskins owes me a favour or three so I cashed a couple of them in.”

“I still don't know what this is all about though” Garforth admitted.

“My Flying Squad guys have had a very reliable source bring them some very interesting information” the Commander explained “There is a man in town who is

apparently looking at putting together a team for some kind of high stakes armed robbery and they are looking for the best talent that they can get, money no object.”

“Which presumably would include the services of a wheelman?” Garforth suggested.

“Exactly” the Commander confirmed “The best driver in town was our old man, unfortunately he is long gone, I am somewhat well known, not to mention otherwise occupied so that leaves you.”

“The black sheep of the family” Garforth agreed “So what was the purpose of our little drive through the countryside this morning then?”

“A little advertising to help embellish your CV” the Commander explained “After it has been through a little judicious editing and tarring up of course.”

“So I just sit in one of your cells somewhere and wait for someone to come calling?” Garforth asked.

“That angle is being worked on by another Department” the Commander reassured him “Suffice it to say that some point in the very near future I hope that you will suddenly find yourself liberated by your prospective employer.”

“You know there is never a dull moment with you around is there little brother?” Garforth commented.

“You can say that again” the Commander readily agreed.

“The National Security & Police Service has tonight released this amazing footage of a dramatic high speed pursuit of a robbery suspect that took place through the north east of London earlier this morning” the presenter on BBC London News announced, backed up by some sequences from the helicopter camera footage, now carefully edited together to hopefully give the desired effect.

Studying the video from the comfort of an old leather sofa was Henry Villiers, a thoughtful looking man in his late fifties with neatly trimmed moustache, tailored suit and ever present pipe in his hand.

The leather sofa creaked a little as with his attention attracted, he leaned forward a little; putting down the glass of brandy he had been holding and replacing it with his spectacles that he proceeded to put on before taking a closer look at the news report.

If there had been anyone else in the room, they would have seen a concentrated look of extreme interest from Villiers as he watched the news footage, obviously impressed by the quality of the high speed driving that was being shown on the screen.

As soon as the news report ended and the presenter moved onto the next item, Villiers reached for the television remote control to mute the sound before thinking to himself

for a few moments and then leaning forward towards the low coffee table on which were neatly set out a number of documents, files and diagrams.

Being the extremely well organised type that he was, Villiers quickly found the piece of paper he was seeking and consulted it before turning to his briefcase which was lying open on the sofa alongside him.

From the case he took one of a number of seemingly identical mobile telephones that were mounted in a rack set into the lid and proceeded to make a call which after a few moments of patient waiting was answered.

“Garry, it’s Henry” Villiers declared “This guy on the news just now, driving the silver Jaguar, do we know who he is?”

Garry Hansell, a well know ‘fixer’ in London’s organised criminal community looked across the River Thames from his vantage point in a flat on the south bank near Westminster before closing the blinds as a precaution.

“Not sure Sir” Hansell answered “But I can certainly find out before the morning.”

“I like what I see” Villiers explained “If he is as good as the news footage suggests I think we may have found our wheel man.”

“One problem though” Hansell responded cautiously “Whoever he is, he is in custody.”

“And that is a problem because...?” Villiers asked.

“Well not a problem exactly Sir” Hansell then responded, quickly picking up on the suggestive tone that Villiers was expressing “Just means a bit more money into certain pockets that is all.”

“I am sure our mysterious driver will be worth every penny” Villiers confirmed “Get him for me, money no object.”

“Yes Sir” Hansell agreed “Goodnight Sir.”

As soon as the call was concluded, Villiers turned off the mobile and proceeded to dismantle it, taking out the SIM card which after giving it a brief look, he casually tossed into the roaring fireplace nearby, destroying it instantly.

It being an early morning in the middle of November, the streets of central London were still dark and cold and there were few people around to take any notice of the black Mercedes saloon car with its bullet resistant glass as it made its way through Westminster and on past the Abbey into Victoria Street.

A couple of minutes late once the car had come to a stop, Sir William Devane, the newly appointed Secretary of State with responsibility in Her Majesty's Government

for Policing & National Security swallowed somewhat nervously as he got out of the back of the car immediately outside the front entrance of New Scotland Yard in central London.

“How do I look?” Devane asked his driver, Divisional Commander Jennifer Caverner as she looked on and realised just how apprehensive he was looking.

“Don't worry” Jennifer tried to reassure the Minister “He's not God, the Prime Minister or the Lord High Executioner.”

“Them I can handle” Devane admitted “I know he is your brother in law Ms Caverner but I have to admit the thought of meeting the Commander is scaring me somewhat. Apparently my Secretary has lost count of the number of political heads he has allegedly had stuffed and mounted on his office wall over the last few years.”

“A couple words of advice then” Jennifer recommended “Be yourself, be honest, don't try and bluster him with bullshit because believe me, he will see right through you.”

“Right...” Devane took the advice on board but he would be the first to admit that it did little for his confidence “Thank you, I will send for you when I am ready, assuming I survive that is!”

“I will see you later Minister” Jennifer confirmed with a smile before getting back in the drivers seat of the car and moving off as Devane took a deep breath, brushed himself down a bit and then stepped forward towards the main entrance.

The Receptionist looked up from her desk as Devane arrived through the automatic sliding doors and looked around inside the main reception area with some obvious apprehension and nerves as this was his first time visiting New Scotland Yard.

“Are you all right Sir?” the Receptionist asked.

“Err yes” Devane replied as he regained his composure and went over to the reception desk before introducing himself “Sir William Devane to see the Commander, I am expected I believe.”

“Ah, yes” the Receptionist duly confirmed having looked at her computer “take the lift to the top floor, then down the corridor and third left, you can't miss it.”

“Much obliged” Devane responded before turning and making his way towards the lifts but paused when the Receptionist called after him.

“By the way Sir” she advised “I advise you not to look like you are your way to your execution, he's not Attila the Hun you know?”

“Thanks, I will bear it in mind” Devane confirmed with a wry smile before entering a vacant lift car and pressing the button for the top floor.

During the few moments he was alone in the lift car as it ascended to the top floor, Devane took the opportunity to try and get his composure together, checking and adjusting his tie, wiping the fronts of his already highly polished shoes on the backs of his trouser legs and brushing his suit and coat down once again just in case. This was a meeting he had been nervous about ever since he was told by the Prime Minister the previous day that he had been appointed to his new position in the Government.

All too soon for him the lift car slowed to a stop as it arrived at the top floor and the doors opened whereupon he stepped out into what was of surprise to him a completely empty corridor which considering this was the Command floor of one of the busiest law enforcement organisations in Europe seemed to him at least somewhat unusual.

Notwithstanding, Devane proceeded as directed down the corridor and quickly found the Commander's office, confirmed by the engraved brass plaque on the door.

Once again he took a deep breath before stepping forward and knocking.

“Come in!” came a female voice whereupon Devane opened the door and entered the outer office where he met the Personal Assistant who looked up and smiled in greeting.

“Go straight through, you are expected” the PA confirmed whereupon Devane continued through the next door.

“Ah, Sir William” the Commander called as he got up from behind his desk and greeted Devane in the centre of the office with a warm handshake “pleasure to meet you at last.”

“I have to admit Sir Edward...” Devane began.

“Oh just call me Commander” the Commander insisted.

“...err Commander” Devane continued, now just a little more at ease as the Commander showed him to a seat before resuming his previous position behind his desk “I was somewhat nervous about this meeting.”

“So Jennifer told me just now” the Commander wryly admitted “anyway you can relax, you have nothing to fear from me.”

“You pulled my file or something?” Devane jokingly remarked.

“As a matter of fact, yes I did” the Commander admitted with a knowing smirk as he duly produced a thick folder from his desk drawer and placed it in front of him to which Devane looked on with a slight sense of shock.

“Don't worry, there was nothing too juicy in it” the Commander reassured him “I like to know all about who I am working with; in fact I like what I read so I think we can do business together.”

“So no chance of me winding up with my head mounted on your office wall then?” Devane asked momentarily looking around the office just in case.

“Anything is possible my old man used to say” the Commander admitted.

“Actually I was wondering” Devane inquired “is it normally this quiet around here, only there seems to be nobody around on the Command floor.”

“Oh, everyone's erm...” the Commander tailed off when he realised he did not know the answer to the question, either that or he had forgotten it “Hang on a second” he then declared before getting up and going over to the door whereupon he opened it and called to the PA working outside.

“I know this is going to sound like a stupid question but where is everyone?” the Commander inquired.

“All senior level staff are on their bi-annual survival training course day Sir” she reminded him “speaking of which, I just got a message for you from the Head of Internal Training Services, he wants to know why you are not with them.”

“I've got the flu” the Commander dismissively responded, adding a very false cough on the end of his response which failed to convince.

“I don't think he believes you Sir” the PA admitted “but I will see what I can do.”

“Thank you” the Commander replied before coming back to his desk and resuming his seat.

“Isn't Jennifer Caverner also a Head of Division?” Devane asked out of curiosity.

“Yes” the Commander confirmed “but she is excused on the grounds part of her lower right leg is now made of plastic and she has a two month old baby at home to look after” he explained “besides, running around some forest in deepest darkest Surrey lobbing cans of paints at each other in the rain is not exactly my idea of a fun day out.”

“I thought they used little paint pellets?” Devane asked.

“They do but if I were there I would want proper big cans of emulsion” the Commander wryly admitted “far more effective, fun too.”

“I see your point Commander” Devane agreed.

“On the plus side however if we ever have to arrest everyone in Surrey whilst they are hiding in a forest with a decorating problem then we will have no trouble” the Commander wryly added with a knowing smirk.

“Indeed” Devane agreed “which brings me to the subject of our meeting” he continued “The Prime Minister, Lord Hainault and the Home Secretary have briefed

me on some of what has gone on and also investigations currently still ongoing but I must say that some of it is just a tad confusing to say the least.”

“Let me bring you up to speed then” the Commander responded “since that trouble last year with the ISA, Sir John Haliford and Lord Forsyth” he leaned forward as he explained “there has been a thorough and in depth purging of those who either were playing to their own agendas or affiliated to those of the likes of Haliford and others of the same ilk that seem to have been popping up all over the place like bindweed over the last five or six years.”

“I am told that the amount of press coverage that continues to be generated from Lord Forsyth's suicide live on national television is still causing problems” Devane commented “Doesn't help that it is still a top ten hit on YouTube either.”

“We still haven't managed to get anywhere in finding out what the mysterious 'Pyramid Project' is that he so triumphantly and loudly declared before blowing his brains out either” the Commander confirmed “Tracy has been heading the co-ordinated efforts between us and certain other agencies but so far bar a few rumours and rumblings we have turned up next to nothing.”

“Perhaps it was just the inane ramblings of a lunatic who knew his end was at hand?” Devane suggested.

“In most cases I would agree with you” the Commander responded after a momentary pause for consideration on the matter “however something about his tone plus my gut feeling combined with bitter experience tells me that there is a meaning to it and that one day we will find out what it is and what their intentions are.”

“Let's hope we don't find out the hard way then” Devane remarked.

“I wholeheartedly agree” the Commander readily responded.

“There is one matter I would like to bring to your attention Commander” Devane then continued as he opened his briefcase and extracted a file from it “My predecessor left this on my desk for me” he explained as he passed it across for the Commander to look at “and I am afraid to say I don't have a clue what it is about.”

“Interesting...” the Commander mused upon opening the rather ominous looking red card folder and examining the summary page at the front.

“I tried reading through it but it was all a bit above me” Devane admitted.

“It would appear to have all the hallmarks of one of Sir Richard Crowthorne's little pet projects” the Commander began to explain as he leafed through the pages of information and photographs with an experienced eye “Usually the sort that gets us into trouble I hasten to add.”

“I thought Sir Richard had retired?” Devane asked.

“Officially yes” the Commander confirmed “although in reality old hands such as him never truly retire from the field completely, they like to keep their hand in, dip in and out from time to time whenever something interesting pops up, or just to get out of the house when he has been getting under the wife's feet all day.”

“So what is it about?” Devane inquired.

“Seems to be a scrap book” the Commander explained “A collection of bits and bobs from no doubt numerous and varied sources, some of them probably a tad dubious and it all seems to centre on the Bethnal Green Bullion Robbery in 1978.”

“Not one I recall” Devane admitted “Mind you I was only two years old at the time.”

“Bit of a brutal case” the Commander confirmed “Security guards shot, safes cracked, supposedly impregnable security systems overridden way too easily, rather an embarrassment for all involved, well except the perpetrators that is, they managed to waltz off with about twenty five million in coins and bullion.”

“Not bad for an afternoons work” Devane remarked “So why has this crossed my desk thirty years later may I ask?”

“It was one of the last cases investigated by the Flying Squad of the old Metropolitan Police before they became reformed as the current National Security & Police Service” the Commander explained “Certain key figures in the Home Office wanted the whole sorry mess buried as soon as possible but Sir Richard always maintained a secret 'open file' on the matter.”

“Well anyway I thought I would pass that on to you” Devane confirmed “I doubt you will be able to do anything with it mind.”

“I'll file it with all the rest of the dark secrets we have stored around here” the Commander declared “We have plenty of them believe me; another to add to the collection will hardly be noticed.”

“There is one other matter I need to raise with you Commander” Devane then slightly hesitantly continued “I have a feeling that you won't like it though but this comes from the top floor.”

“I am all ears” the Commander responded, bracing himself for the worst.

“The Joint Intelligence Committee is concerned about you” Devane began to explain.

“I'm touched” the Commander feigned noticeably fake admiration “I hope they are not going to start sending me flowers though, sets off my hayfever.”

“I think it is more your own personal safety that they are growing increasingly concerned about Commander” Devane continued to explain, “It has been identified that both you and your wife are key lynch pins in the core infrastructure of the justice and security system in this country. As a result they want you to have...”

“A holiday?” the Commander wryly asked more out of hope than anticipation.

“An official driver” Devane confirmed.

“Well, better than having annual leave forced upon me I suppose” the Commander admitted “Do I get someone forced upon me or can I choose?”

“Oh it will be entirely your choice” Devane reassured him “I believe the Joint Security Committee admitted defeat on everything else that was proposed except this.”

“I’ll look into it” the Commander reluctantly agreed “Eventually...”

“Well, thank you Commander” Devane remarked as he stood up and again they exchanged a warm hand shake “Sorry our meeting had to be so brief but I seem to have been sent on the grand tour of the numerous different agencies we have. I never realised there were so many?”

“As long as they are all playing from the same hymn sheet then it usually runs pretty smoothly” the Commander tried to reassure him “mainly because they know that if they don’t then they will have me to answer to!”

“Please do give my regards to your wife when you see her” Devane requested as he began to leave accompanied to the door by the Commander “I was hoping to meet her as well.”

“Well she is busy plastering everyone with paint balls” the Commander remarked with a wry smile.

As soon as Devane had left, the Commander quickly returned to his desk and pressed the button on the telephone that connected him with the main secure switchboard downstairs.

“Hello, it’s the Boss” the Commander declared as soon as his call was answered “Have Amber McWilliam paged with a Code Twelve alert straight away please” he requested before hanging up again and returning to his seat behind the desk whereupon he looked once more at the file Devane had given him a few minutes earlier.

“How the hell did he find out about this?” the Commander asked himself, an unusual underlying sense of frustration apparent in his voice clearly signifying that something had most definitely gone wrong.

“End of exercise!!!” came the loud call across the densely wooded forest which signalled the end of the simulated operation, something that came as a blessed relief to all the participants as the weather they had spent the last couple of hours battling through was utterly appalling with incessant heavy rain and cold gusty wind.

“How do you feel?” Tracy Caverner asked as she helped Bob, the head of the Specialist Firearms Unit back to his feet from where he had landed on his face in the mud a few moments earlier.

“Like I have been in the midst of an explosion in a paint factory” Bob admitted as he looked down at the various differently coloured blobs of paint on his overalls.

“So I can see” Tracy remarked before smirking as Bob then noticed that she had absolutely no traces of any hits on her at all “Privilege of being the boss I guess” she admitted wryly.

“Whose bright idea was this again?” Simon Fuller asked as he joined them as they made their way back to the shelter of the nearby training centre building.

“Blame our new Home Secretary” Tracy confirmed “She is trying to encourage team building.”

“I bet the Commander loves that” Fuller responded with a wry smile as they proceeded inside, thankful to be finally out of the rain that was hammering down outside as it had been for the last week seemingly non-stop.

As the thirty officers, mostly of senior rank from Divisions of the Service across London and the South East of the country made their way to the main meeting hall, Tracy was forced to pause and step back for a few moments when her mobile rang.

“Ah, the office” Tracy remarked after taking out her mobile and looking at the display before taking the call “Hello dear.”

“Hello love” the Commander called from his office as he looked out of the window across the cityscape outside “How is the weather down there?”

“Utterly awful” Tracy admitted “Rain with additional showers of rain followed by rain with rain to follow.”

“The sun is shining up here” the Commander admitted as he noted the glint of sun reflecting off the tall Shard building over on the other side of the River Thames.

“It would look kind of silly running through Hyde Park waving paintball guns though” Tracy reminded her husband.

“Given what has happened in these streets over the last few years, would anyone really notice?” the Commander remarked “Listen love, would it possible for you to get back here as soon as possible?”

“Uh-oh...” Tracy responded “What's happened?”

“Apart from the fact I am missing you” the Commander admitted “I just had a visit from our new friend Sir William Devane, the National Security & Policing Minister. He just dropped a copy of Sir Richard Crowthorne's Bethnal Green Bullion Job records in my lap.”

“Does he know anything?” Tracy asked with a sense of concern and looking around at that point to ensure she was not being overheard even despite the senior and trustworthy nature of her colleagues in that building at that time.

“I got the impression he was just the messenger boy” the Commander confirmed, all be it with a little apprehension in his voice “Someone I think threw it into his briefcase with instructions to make sure I got it.”

“Christ...” Tracy expressed a sense of exasperation “This operation is barely forty eight hours old and the missing information we have been looking for which has been missing for twenty years just walks in through the door without any invitation or expectation?”

“Smells like a trap, looks like a trap, feels like a trap...” the Commander responded in mutual agreement with his wife’s obvious concerns at this development “I think we need to convene a meeting of the group as soon as possible.”

“I’ll be back as soon as I can” Tracy agreed “I might still be a tad damp mind.”

“That’s all right” the Commander agreed “you can drip dry on Mr Hewitt’s plush Axminister when we go and see him later.”

“See you later” Tracy confirmed “Love you.”

“Love you too” the Commander responded before somewhat reluctantly hanging up whereupon he returned to his high backed chair behind his desk and looked once again at the file he had been handed earlier with some obvious concern.

“You see Sir” Jennifer Caverner reassured Devane as she drove him through the streets of London in the official ministerial car “I told you he wouldn’t bite your head off.”

“He didn’t respond too well to the Committee’s request he have an official driver though” Devane admitted.

“He’s has always been something of a free agent” Jennifer explained “Doesn’t like being tied down to a desk or suffocated by officialdom. He tends to be a kick doors in first and ask questions later type of guy.”

“So I am aware” Devane agreed “His not inconsiderable reputation most certainly precedes him.”

“As long as you always work with him and never against him” Jennifer explained “you will have nothing to worry about until the next merry go round when the Prime Minister changes his mind again and has another of his reshuffles.”

“Knowing the way my luck runs I will get Northern Ireland next” Devane wryly remarked “Still, at least the Commander seems to like me, he pulled my file apparently.”

“Oh he does that for everyone he winds up working with” Jennifer explained “Trust me when I say you would not have got your current job without his nod of approval somewhere along the way in the selection process.”

“Wow...” Devane responded, suitably impressed and surprised in equal measure.

“So, where to Sir?” Jennifer asked.

“Canary Wharf” Devane confirmed “Another round of depressing meetings await.”

“Don't worry Sir, I am sure things will get more interesting before long” Jennifer confirmed.

Tracy was the first to alight from the Security Service bus once it had pulled up outside the main entrance of New Scotland Yard quickly followed by Fuller.

“I'll go and check on our little project” Fuller confirmed as he quickly headed inside “If my theory is correct, our system should be getting a visitor or two by now.”

“Keep me updated” Tracy requested as she was joined entering the main reception area by Bob, the head of the Specialist Firearms Section.

“Shall I put my best intercept team on standby?” Bob asked, his years of experience already meaning he had sensed where events were beginning to move towards.

“Yes, put them on standby” Tracy agreed “I think we may need them before the day is out.”

“I'll give them the good news” Bob confirmed “They will be happy to trouser a little overtime what with Christmas coming up and all.”

“Just to be on standby” Tracy added as she entered the lift car, holding her arm across the opening to prevent the doors from closing before she had finished delivering her orders “Don't tell them any details for the moment, the less people we have knowing the full facts the better.”

“Yes Maam” Bob readily agreed before Tracy nodded and allowed the lift doors to close whereupon she ascended on her own to the top floor.

A few moments later she exited from the lift and made her way straight down the corridor to the Commander's office where as soon as she arrived, they embraced and kissed.

“Blimey, you are damp aren't you love?” the Commander remarked.

“I do believe that since six o’clock this morning the entire contents of the Atlantic Ocean have been poured over me through a sieve, even my best uniform is damp and that spent most of the time hanging on a coat hanger indoors.

“Perhaps a change of outfit is in order” the Commander suggested “I have called for a emergency meeting of the group in forty five minutes and I am inviting the Home Secretary along as well, it is time we put her in the picture before things get lively.”

“You trust her?” Tracy asked as she took off her slightly damp uniform tunic and carefully hung it over the back of a chair.

“You know me” the Commander admitted “She is a politician and I never trust them fully, however having had a say in who was appointed to the role and gone through her file very carefully before she got the job, let’s just say for now that I am happy enough that she is safe to be let in on our little party.”

There was a polite knock at the door where once the Commander had called for them to come in, Fuller appeared with a piece of paper in his hand which he passed across.

“Our system just had guests” Fuller duly confirmed “They accessed the arrest sheet, detention record, prosecution report and our specially created little CV for our guy.”

“Notify Bob and prepare the paperwork for the prisoner transfer, first thing tomorrow morning should be ideal” the Commander instructed “Let’s dangle some bait in front of them and see what happens.”

“I am on it Sir, Maam” Fuller readily confirmed before quickly departing again.

“Is it my imagination or has he become even more of a workaholic since he and Jenny had the baby?” Tracy asked out of curiosity.

“Must be the thought of changing all those nappies I guess” the Commander admitted “Would scare me too.”

Tracy merely responded with a wry smirk as she put on a fresh and dry uniform tunic.

“What?” the Commander then responded upon seeing her reaction.

“Nothing...” Tracy replied “Just the look on your face at that moment was priceless!”

“Thanks love” the Commander remarked “I think...”

“Speaking of the kids” Tracy then asked “What’s Jack doing today?”

“He is taking his young lady, Megan...” the Commander began.

“...who of course is not his girlfriend, at least that is what he wants us to believe” Tracy reminded him.

“...out to dinner” the Commander duly finished to a look of somewhat bewilderment from Tracy.

“There is where parental influence is judged” Tracy remarked “If he is influenced by me it will be the full romantic candle lit dinner for two at a top central London restaurant, on the other hand if he is influenced by you...”

“...it’s the shared portion of fish and chips on the south embankment of the Thames” the Commander agreed.

“At the very least, you cannot fault the view” Jack admitted to Megan as they sat on the public bench on the south side of the River Thames at Lambeth Embankment looking out across the water at the dominant sight of the Palaces of Westminster directly opposite them, the very centre of Government in the United Kingdom.

“Indeed” Megan agreed as she helped herself to one of the last chips from the packet they were sharing “Never let it be said you don’t know how to show a girl a good time.”

“Well I figured as this is the first day in weeks the sun has come out in London, why not spend it outside?” Jack explained.

“Plus it was cheaper” Megan added with a wry smirk.

“Well...” Jack was forced to respond in admission as between them the last of the chips were consumed and he then proceeded to screw up the wrappings before expertly tossing them over into the waste bin nearby.

“So, what dastardly plots do you think are being dreamed up over there right now?” Megan asked as they once again looked out across the river towards Westminster.

“As long as it does not involve you or I getting shot at” Jack admitted “Who cares?”

“Sounds like a good philosophy” Megan readily agreed as Jack then got up and proffered his arm to her.

“Shall we take a walk by the river?” he suggested “I’ll even throw in an ice cream for dessert.”

“Sounds good to me, why not?” Megan agreed as she took his hand and got up before they duly proceeded to walk slowly arm in arm westwards towards Lambeth Bridge.

The recently appointed Home Secretary Jayne Grey stood with her hands clasped in front of her, nervously wiggling her fingers as she waited in the main reception area of the Home Office building in Marsham Street.

Despite being the duly appointed Minister in charge of one of the largest and most complex Government Departments in the country responsible for overseeing everything from policing and security through to prisons and immigration, she was still somewhat nervous at what was about to happen.

She had received the call just ten minutes earlier from the Commander's office, be ready to be collected from the main entrance in fifteen minutes was all the message read, no indication whatsoever of what it was about or where she was about to be taken.

Given the record of events that had taken place between the predecessors of her position and the senior levels of the Security & Police Service in general and the Commander in particular, her well hidden but still none the less present apprehension was fully understandable.

Also unusually there was no one around her, none of the usual attendant assistants, bodyguards or advisors as she had also been informed to come alone, devoid of the usual ministerial entourage.

A few quiet moments went by as Grey looked around the reception area until her attention was taken by the arrival of a large black Mercedes minibus outside, the main thing that grabbed her attention being the alighting from the front passenger side of the vehicle of Tracy Caverner who immediately proceeded inside and joined her.

"Home Secretary, you got the message I see" Tracy enquired as the two of the most powerful women in the country met face to face for the first time.

"I did indeed Divisional Chief Superintendent" Grey formally confirmed "and as per instructions I come to you completely free of flunkies, which actually is a bit of a blessed relief, they were starting to really get on my nerves."

"In which case I think we should get going" Tracy agreed as she duly escorted Grey to the front door and then went over to the minibus where she opened the side door and allowed her to enter the rear of the vehicle before returning to the front passenger seat.

"Why, Mr Collins, fancy meeting you here" Grey remarked as upon taking her seat in the rear of the vehicle as it moved off she found herself sat next to David Collins, head of operations at MI5 who, like her was also blissfully unaware of why he was there as well.

"I see you got an invite to the Commander's magical mystery tour as well Maam" Collins remarked as the vehicle then slowed down again to make another pick up just a short distance from the Home Office building they had just left.

"All very mysterious" Grey admitted "Which probably means whatever it is, it is going to cost me or at the very least my Department money."

It was then that she noticed to her surprise that it was the Commander himself driving and not Jennifer Caverner as she had expected.

“Doing a little moonlighting as a chauffeur on the side are we Commander?” Grey inquired as they waited for their next passenger to join them.

“Jennifer is currently somewhere in Docklands with your man Devane giving him the unintentional scenic tour” the Commander explained “This little party is strictly by closed invitation only.”

“And here comes our next guest” Tracy confirmed as from a seemingly non-descript doorway a young woman in her late twenties appeared, looked around briefly before heading over to them and getting in the back.

“Afternoon” the new arrival declared in a very distinctive Irish accent “Dave, a pleasure to see you again” she then remarked as Collins reached across and they shook hands.

“I don’t believe we have been introduced?” Grey suggested.

“Amber McWilliam” the Irish accented lady duly introduced herself as the two women exchanged a welcoming handshake “I am err, with another agency shall we say” she explained ever so somewhat evasively.

“Beyond the fact she was trained by the legend in his own lunchtime that was Sir Richard Crowthorne, it’s probably best not to ask” Collins suggested to Grey “Plausible deniability and all that.”

“Oh, that old chestnut” Grey remarked as the vehicle continued its journey proceeding to the end of Horseferry Road and across the roundabout onto Lambeth Bridge.

“So where are we going?” Collins asked “Only this little party seems to have been organised so fast I never found out.”

“Legoland” the Commander called back “also known as the hallowed halls of MI6 over at Vauxhall Cross, we have a meeting with John Hewitt, the new Head of Operations there in his office in fifteen minutes.”

“So when do we get to find out what this magical mystery tour is all about then?” Collins inquired.

“Very soon” Tracy confirmed “Think of it as a big adventure” she wryly suggested.

“I am a bit surprised Sir Richard Crowthorne hasn’t shown up yet” Collins commented “This is the sort of cloak and dagger type stuff he usually revels in, assuming he hasn’t created it in the first place that is.”

“Let’s just say for now that his name will be cropping up in the conversation” the Commander admitted “In fact it is thanks to one of his little pet projects suddenly appearing unexpectedly that our little party has hit a few minor bumps in the road, hence this hastily convened meeting.”

“Where is that old fossil anyway?” Grey asked.

“Soaking up the sun and the local delicacies on a cruise ship somewhere in the Pacific I believe” McWilliam confirmed “I think he is has become rather surprised exactly how much retirement has suited him.”

“Ah, here we are” the Commander remarked as they arrived at their destination and he pulled the vehicle into a lay-by immediately outside the imposing but highly secure main entrance to the headquarters of MI6, the country’s primary overseas counter intelligence agency.

As soon as the vehicle came to a stop, two identically suited and sunglasses wearing security guards stepped forward from the entrance and opened the doors to allow the Commander and the passengers to alight before they accompanied the group inside.

Once inside they were escorted past the security checks without any question or delay and went straight to the lift which was soon taking them up to the top floor.

“You can tell they have got a bigger budget than us” Tracy remarked “Classical music in the lift.”

“Indeed” the Commander agreed “Did we ever get that lift in the Cardinal Place building to stop spouting floor numbers in Spanish by the way?”

“Jenny said it is now spouting them in French instead” Tracy confirmed “The engineers cannot get the thing to shut up apparently, despite several attempts.”

A few moments later the lift doors opened and the group was greeted with the sight of two more security guards who politely indicated the way ahead before escorting them closely to their final destination, an office at the far end of the corridor where one of the guards knocked before opening the door and showing them inside.

“Ah, the moment has arrived” John Hewitt, the recently appointed head of operations at MI6 declared as they arrived in the room “The Commander himself and distinguished guests” he remarked before coming over to exchange handshakes, firstly with the Commander and then the others.

“Pleasure to meet you at last” the Commander agreed “So far all we have done is spoken on the phone.”

“Help yourselves to a drink ladies and gentlemen” Hewitt indicated the rather well appointed drinks cabinet nearby before returning to his seat behind the desk “So, now that everyone is comfortable, to what do I owe this pleasure?”

“Our little project, Operation Icarus” the Commander began as he reached into his briefcase and extracted the file that Devane had given him earlier before passing it across “This just turned up, it is Sir Richard Crowthorne’s extensive and presumed missing and/or destroyed notes on the Bethnal Green Bullion Robbery.”

“Where did the hell did these turn up from?” Hewitt asked with a noticeable sense of concern as he took a cursory look through the old and tatty card file with its apparently shambolically organised contents.

“That file arrived in my office three hours ago courtesy of our new Policing & Security Minister Sir William Devane” the Commander explained “He gave the appearance of being the messenger having been given it to pass to me though so I don’t think he was totally aware of its significance.”

“I don’t believe it” Hewitt responded with an obvious sense of shock and disbelief.

“Even Sir Richard did not know where that file was” McWilliam added “He had not seen it in over twenty years.”

“And that makes me more than a little nervous” the Commander admitted “The crucial information we have been looking for all these years suddenly walks in the front door uninvited and out of the blue?”

“One also has to consider the timing given our little operation” Hewitt added “and I have already been told your opinion on coincidences.”

“Exactly” the Commander readily agreed “Perhaps now would be a good time to bring Mr Collins and the Home Secretary up to speed only they are looking somewhat confused at the moment.”

“You can say that again” Collins responded in clear agreement whilst Grey just looked on equally puzzled.

“Friday the 15th of December 1978” the Commander began to explain “an armed robbery occurred in Bethnal Green in the east end of London during which two security guards and three members of the public were shot and over twenty million in gold coins and bullion was taken, never to be seen again.”

“The exact nature of what was taken and how much the total haul amounted to was kept secret” Tracy added “The Security & Police Service as we know it today was only a few weeks old and in the process of transition when this happened and the public story that was put out was that it was a wages snatch that went badly wrong.”

“The story doesn’t end there of course” the Commander continued “The Security Service may have been in an embryonic state back then but that didn’t stop a thorough and full scale investigation from taking place.”

“A specialist team from MI5 were brought into this investigation very early on in the process led by Sir Richard Crowthorne” McWilliam went on to explain “Unfortunately most of the team that was led by Sir Richard are either retired, missing in action or pushing up daisies now.”

“Now admittedly at the time I was otherwise occupied” the Commander admitted “Some damn fool had shot me three times and pushed me off a roof about a week earlier so I was in hospital but I do recall at the time the Government was in a total

shambles with a poor credibility rating and plunging popularity not to mention a uselessly small majority.”

“Not much changes there then” Grey remarked with a smirk.

“The investigation went so far, principal suspects were even identified but suddenly from on high came an order to cease and desist all investigations” the Commander continued “then the evidence, what little there was of it vanished without a trace and even Sir Richard’s extensive personal notes and files that he always kept on anything he was involved with just disappeared.”

“Until today” Hewitt indicated the old and battered file lying in front of him on the desk.

“Two weeks ago, Lieutenant Commander Adam Barwell of the Flying Squad got a tip off from a very reliable source within the East London organised crime scene” the Commander carried on the story “The word was that a man by the name of Henry Villiers, a Dutch national but of Afrikaans descent had arrived in London and his representative, a man we only know as, erm...”

“Hansell” Tracy confirmed “Probably a false name though as we have nothing on him, not even a first name.”

“That would be the fellow” the Commander agreed before continuing “This Hansell guy is apparently on a recruitment drive, looking for top talent for an upcoming big job we think may be going down sometime in the next few days.”

“The reason why this has peaked our interest in particular is because the name Henry Villiers has come up once before” McWilliam added “in the list of prime suspects for the Bethnal Green Bullion Job.”

“Villiers has become one of organised crime’s great untouchables” Hewitt explained “He has strong links to groups in South Africa, friends in the Italian Mafia and reputedly political connections in Eastern Europe and the Middle East.”

“A world class pain in the arse with a lot of connections” Collins concluded “So I take it no one has ever managed to slap a pair of handcuffs on this guy then?”

“According to my Section Chief for the Balkans” Hewitt confirmed “We came fairly close last year but all we got for our trouble was two dead agents and a useless body formerly the property of one of his middle men.”

“Barwell’s old man was also a Security Service Officer and as soon as his contact mentioned the name Henry Villiers, he recalled the Bullion Robbery from what his Dad had told him about it years ago” the Commander continued “He then did the sensible thing and came straight to me.”

“That is when we got around a table and hatched our little plan” Tracy carried on “We know from a reliable contact we have down in the East End of London that the team

Villiers through his middle man is putting together has all the components of a top spec snatch and grab team.”

“They’ve got their draughtsman, muscle, and all other key personnel on board from what we have been told” the Commander explained “The one thing we know they don’t have as of yet however is a wheelman.”

“So we hatched a plan” Tracy announced “We are going to provide them with the best getaway driver in London if not the country.”

“There was that pursuit on the news yesterday” Grey ventured as she began to see where this was going “the guy who was being chased seemed to be quite a driver, so did the pursuit officer from what I saw.”

“A little advertising for our driver’s extensive CV” the Commander confirmed “We set the whole thing up and then made sure the news agencies got the edited together version that shows our guy in a very positive light, right up to the moment we ‘arrested’ him of course.”

“We also made sure that the pursuit went right through the east end of London so that we drew the correct target audience” Tracy added “Lots of helicopter and in car footage thrown in, some video captures from onlookers on YouTube, the whole nine yards.”

“Then we embellished our guy’s record a little” the Commander continued “added some extra achievements to further sweeten the invitation plus we have made sure that his bank account shows large payments from certain organisations and individuals who would have employed his services behind the wheel for various nefarious not to mention illegal purposes.”

“All transferred from our special account in the Cayman Islands of course” Hewitt remarked “Or as we call it around here, the National Bank of Bullshit. Seems genuine to anyone snooping around but in reality it is just electronic numbers, no real money behind it, bar any interest we happen to accrue of course.”

“Who was the pursuit officer in that chase?” Grey asked out of curiosity.

“I was” the Commander confirmed “You can thank the teachings of my old man, widely regarded as the greatest wheelman in the City back in the 1960’s.”

“And our man you are setting up as our driver is?” Collins asked.

“My brother” the Commander admitted.

“There are two of you?” Collins responded in shock as he reacted to this revelation by drinking the entire glass of brandy he had in his hand in one gulp before reaching across to the decanter for a rapid refill.

“Technically” Tracy remarked with a wry smile “There are three of them.”

“After you with the brandy” Grey remarked aside to Collins who passed the decanter over.

“Don’t worry” the Commander reassured them “The third member of the infamous Regent trio is currently on a very big boat in the Indian Ocean having fun blowing Somalian pirates out of the water and knowing her, probably thoroughly enjoying it too.”

“So what is the plan?” Collins asked.

“We are going to let this Villiers and his organisation hire our man as their driver and transport consultant for this little enterprise of there’s” the Commander went on to explain “However first in order to acquire his services he is going to need to organise a little jail break.”

“Which we are going to set up” Tracy added “Which is why you are here Home Secretary, we need you to authorise a high security prisoner transfer. We already know that someone has since nine o’clock this morning been hacking into the Home Office and CPS systems to get the gen on our man so we know they are interested.”

“The escape will be allowed to happen” McWilliam confirmed “I will have specialists in place who will ensure that there is only one possible place it can happen and we will have the area discreetly sealed in a security bubble to ensure no one gets hurt when they spring him.”

“All we need is your nod of approval before we send out the invitation” the Commander remarked.

“I will agree to it” Grey confirmed after a few moments of consideration “But there is a condition” she then added “I want to be kept fully informed of everything that is going on in relation to this operation and if at any time I feel there is too great a risk then I reserve the right to shut it down, understood?”

“Agreed” the Commander confirmed which was backed up by nods of heads from the others present “I should reiterate that it is my brother who we are dropping in the middle of this potential mess and I for one most certainly do not want to see him hurt. Us Regents have been getting a bit thin on the ground lately.”

“So once this Villiers guy has his team together by acquiring his driver for the operation” Collins asked “What happens then?”

“I have a specialist team headed by Commander Cassini, whom I have seconded to my Department for the duration, on standby” McWilliam confirmed “Once we have the credible intelligence from our man on the inside as to where and when the job is going down, we will spring the trap and catch them in the act.”

“We have to be careful however” the Commander cautioned “Villiers has many political connections overseas, hence why we are here at MI6.”

“My people will be keeping an eye on his overseas interests, contacts and areas where we know he has influence” Hewitt confirmed “You see not only do we want Villiers but we also want all of his network as well.”

“Especially any connections he has in this country” Tracy added “We have had enough politically connected scumbags around here lately throwing their weight around; the chance to nip this in the bud must not be lost.”

“And hopefully into the bargain we can get the Bethnal Green Bullion Job case finally solved as well” the Commander remarked “It is one of the few cases that has escaped Sir Richard during his long and colourful career.”

“I take it from all the cloak and dagger routine that those who know about all this makes for a very small group indeed?” Collins asked.

“Those in this room” McWilliam confirmed “plus Simon Fuller who is busy somewhere monitoring any electronic snooping that the bad guys are performing, a couple of my trusted staff and one or two others, not necessarily fully briefed but with enough to know to pay attention and keep schtum.”

“Now you see why I requested you ditched the hangers on and the usual entourage before coming to this meeting” the Commander explained.

“I do indeed Commander” Grey admitted “You suspect that there may be compromised personnel even in my own Department?”

“It’s the Home Office, of course there is” the Commander replied.

“Well I think that is our business concluded for now” Hewitt confirmed “I must say it has been a pleasure meeting you all.”

“Always nice to see how the other half live” Collins agreed, raising his glass in salute.

“Err Commander” Hewitt then called as the group started to get up from their seats prior to departing “Could I trouble you and your good lady to remain for a few moments?”

“Certainly” the Commander agreed, a sentiment shared by Tracy as she also nodded in agreement before the others duly departed, escorted once again by the two security guards who then closed the office door behind them leaving the three of them alone to continue their conversation.

“I wanted to take this opportunity to thank you both personally for my anointment” Hewitt then continued “I gather you both had a lot of input into recommending me for this job.”

“You’re welcome” the Commander responded.

“I was somewhat surprised to get the call” Hewitt continued “and even more surprised when I found out that it was upon your personal recommendation. I don’t think I have ever been regarded as a member of the establishment.”

“Which is exactly why Tracy and I felt you were perfect for the job” the Commander explained “After the great Haliford disaster earlier this year we wanted someone in the position who was guaranteed to be free of any influence from those who have previously sat in that chair or any of their former supporters.”

“Speaking of which” Hewitt remarked as he remembered something he needed to do “Would you excuse me for just a moment” he asked as he picked up the telephone on his desk.

Tracy and the Commander looked on as Hewitt made a telephone call with some surprise at how it unfolded.

“Jim, how are you doing on number five?” Hewitt asked “Ah, good. Give him the usual revolver and glass of whisky and let him get on with it then, oh and Jim, make sure it’s the cheap stuff, we are on a budget around here don’t you know.”

“One of Haliford’s former allies by any chance?” Tracy asked.

“Indeed” Hewitt confirmed “The process of removal continues, I think we are down to the last few now. Soon the last of my infamous predecessor’s influence will be safely exorcised from the building and the Service.”

“Did you get an opportunity to take a look at our closing report on the Haliford and Forsyth debacle?” the Commander inquired.

“Most interesting” Hewitt admitted “Our overseas assets have managed to identify and close down most of the ISA’s financial supports and other connections; the only major question mark is over Lord Forsyth’s infamous farewell speech.”

“Ah yes, the YouTube hit of the moment when he blew his brains out live on national television in the middle of Downing Street” Tracy recalled “The main question mark being over this ‘Pyramid’ thing he goes on about.”

“Aside from the obvious stone built structures in Egypt and a double glazing firm in Dagenham we have come up with zip” Hewitt admitted “Same goes for our colleagues over the river at MI5.”

“Could have been a bluff” Tracy ventured “Final crazed farewell speech by a desperate man who knew his end was at hand?”

“I am not so convinced” the Commander responded “Something about his tone, the way he announced it. Then there is why he blew his brains out in the first place, even with the truck load of charges we were about to prosecute him with, his legal team would have had him serve less than three years in a low security Open Prison, it just doesn’t make sense.”

“Did your guys manage to get anything out of Haliford?” Tracy asked.

“That man wrote the book on anti-interrogation techniques” Hewitt replied “Our best interrogators worked on him for weeks, not a dicky bird out of him.”

“Where is he now?” the Commander inquired.

“Spending plenty of quality time in isolation in one of our most secure funny farms” Hewitt confirmed “We won’t be seeing him around again for a very long time.”

“Oh, what a pity” the Commander mockingly responded.

“You know I am going to miss him so much” Tracy agreed with an equal level of amused sarcasm.

“I am going to keep working on this ‘Pyramid’ angle” Hewitt informed them “As you say it could be a hoax but just in case it isn’t I will keep it on what one of my Section Chief’s calls his ‘niggling little problems’ pile.”

“Can’t argue with that” the Commander agreed but at that moment both his attention and that of Tracy as well was taken by something suddenly passing by outside the window heading down at a rapid rate.

“What the...?” Tracy exclaimed.

Outside, on the south bank of the River Thames, approaching the frontage of the MI6 building, Jack and Megan were walking along, tucking into ice creams when Jack momentarily looked up as something caught his eye.

“Look out!” Jack then suddenly called, grabbing Megan and pushing her to the ground out of the way just moments before a body crashed into the pavement immediately in front of them right where they would have been standing were it not for his quick reactions.

“What the hell was that?” Megan asked, still understandably stunned and dazed by this sudden development, a few moments later as, assisted by Jack she picked herself up off of the pavement only to then see the messy sight of the broken and bloody body of a man in front of them.

“Well that wasn’t in the weather forecast this morning” Jack remarked as he turned Megan away to shield her eyes from the horrific sight before looking up at the MI6 building to try and see where this body had come from.

“Does trouble follow you and your adopted family around or something?” Megan asked now that she had managed to recompose herself.

“It seems to generally know where we are most of the time” Jack admitted as in the distance the sound of approaching emergency service sirens could be heard, “Here comes the cavalry.”

A few moments later they were joined from around the corner by Tracy, the Commander, Hewitt and a number of MI6's internal security guards as they came running to the scene.

"Well what do you know" Jack remarked as he and Megan saw who it was who was joining them "Is this anything to do with you guys by any chance?" he asked indicating the dead body, the pool of blood it was lying in increasing rapidly across the pavement.

"We were just in the neighbourhood" Tracy admitted as she took a closer look at the deceased, kneeling down to double check that he was not only dead but also to attempt to find some form of identification on him.

"I did tell you there was never a dull moment being in this family didn't I?" the Commander remarked to Jack and Megan as the three of them left Tracy to deal with the body, the Commander not being very good at the sight of anything squeamish.

Quickly the MI6 internal security along with Security Service officers who had now arrived on scene made swift work of sealing off the area and removing the onlookers who attracted by the incident and the sound of emergency service sirens had begun to gather in significant numbers.

"Well I think we can safely say death was instantaneous" Hewitt remarked as he and Tracy joined the Commander and the others by the river parapet wall "Death by trauma injury due to collision with pavement."

"One of your guys?" the Commander asked.

"Alistair Court" Tracy confirmed the identification as she proffered the blood stained official photographic identification card she had found on the body to her husband "according to this works in MI6's South African section."

"Did he jump or was he pushed though?" Hewitt wondered as he looked back at the scene where a blanket was now being placed over the body.

"Full autopsy job I would wager before we find that out" the Commander remarked "I do hope he jumped though, life is complicated enough around here as it is."

"Well whoever is responsible, they owe me an ice cream" Megan remarked as she looked at the melted and mangled mess that was now down the front of her coat where it had been smashed against her when Jack had pushed her out of the way of the falling body.

"I think we can sort something out" the Commander readily agreed, leaving the scene for a few moments whilst Jack chivalrously passed across some tissues to help Megan out.

"I take it you two know each other?" Hewitt asked, slightly confused by the situation.

“John Hewitt, new Head of Operations at MI6” Tracy did the introductions “Jack Regent, our adopted son and his good lady friend Megan.”

“Pleased to meet you” Hewitt responded as they shook hands “So does this sort of thing happen to you very often?”

“More often than you might think” Jack wryly admitted “Something to do with being part of the family I guess.”

“Look on the bright side” Megan remarked as the Commander returned with fresh ice creams for everyone “At least you haven’t been shot at for at least six months.”

“The day is still young” the Commander remarked “and in this town, believe me anything can happen.”

“And usually does” Tracy added.

By the light of an antique brass desk lamp, Henry Villiers was studying a whole host of paper plans, diagrams and other documents. Despite being a modern villain, he preferred the old fashioned methods when it came to preparation and planning, no computers or digital technology for him, just good old fashioned pencil, paper and brain.

When there was a knock at the office door, he waited until he had discreetly closed the folders he had in front of him to ensure their contents were not visible to casually glancing eyes before calling for the person knocking to come in.

“Sir” Gary Hansell called as he entered the office and went up to the desk “The on site information you requested from our people on the inside” he confirmed as he handed across a file of photographs with accompanying notes to his superior.

“Oh this is excellent” Villiers remarked as he looked through the file he had just received “Exactly what I was looking for, our contacts are to be commended.”

“Regarding the other matter” Hansell continued “I have spoken to my contact in the Security Service and he confirms that the extensive CV of our potential driver is genuine.”

“Do we know where he is being held?” Villiers asked.

“He is in custody in Leytonstone nick” Hansell confirmed “Tomorrow morning at 08:30 hours our man is due to leave in an ordinary prisoner van, minimal standard escort for an appearance at Stratford Magistrates Court at approximately 10:00.”

“Go get him” Villiers calmly requested.

“Yes Sir” Hansell agreed before respectfully departing.

"Looks like we are in business" Fuller confirmed as he examined his laptop which was set up on the briefing room table in the King William Street centre located deep below the City of London in the former station platform tunnels of the old Underground Station of the same name.

"I am astounded" Garforth remarked.

"It is a very colourful and detailed CV that we have put together for you" the Commander admitted "but you will find that all the information can be fully back checked in all the right and, most importantly reliable places."

"It pays to advertise I guess" Garforth remarked as he took a look through the briefing document containing his carefully created history with which he had just been presented "and it would appear I have been a very naughty boy."

"Your driving skills are the main reason why you are in demand" the Commander confirmed "that has been put beyond doubt thanks to our little set up yesterday."

"Most of the rest is just attractive window dressing" McWilliam added as she joined the others in the briefing room "plus we have ensured our contacts in the organised crime scene have provided you with exquisitely impeccable references."

"So what is the plan?" Garforth asked.

"Sometime tomorrow morning during your transfer from Leytonstone to Stratford Magistrates Court where you are scheduled to appear on various driving charges" McWilliam explained "you will be liberated from custody and spirited away we presume by representatives of your prospective new employer."

"We will have the area discreetly sealed in a moving bubble so that when it happens, we can control the situation and ensure no one gets hurt" the Commander added "all of the surrounding vehicles in the street will be driven by plain clothes officers of the Security Service, resistance from the standard escort guards will be realistic but minimal, to all intents and purposes it will look as real as possible."

"This will help us keep an eye on where you are" McWilliam indicated a minute capsule loaded into an injection gun that she then proceeded to place the tip of behind Garforth's right ear before pressing the trigger to inject it beneath his skin.

"What's the range of this thing?" Garforth asked as he rubbed the area behind his ear for a few moments where the capsule had been inserted.

"Using a specially modified Blackberry" McWilliam produced the mobile telephone and showed him the application on the small screen "About twenty five miles."

"Unfortunately we can't wire you for sound or provide you with a mobile telephone" the Commander reminded his older brother "when they grab you, you are going to be

in custody and it would look very odd if they found anything on you other than the clothes you are standing in and a set of hand cuffs.”

“I would estimate it would be a very short job interview” Garforth admitted “almost certainly terminal.”

“The tracking device is the only link we will have to you initially” McWilliam agreed “Once we have traced you to the location of Villiers and his people then whatever buildings and vehicles they are using can be wired for sound and vision by my best covert technical team within the hour.”

“Primarily we need to know what the target is” the Commander reiterated “when and how they plan to carry it out.”

“So you can catch them in the act” Garforth presumed.

“We are going to let them do the job” the Commander explained “For this whole thing to work it is vital we capture them after the fact and with the loot in their possession and that we can prove Villiers was behind the whole thing as I very severely doubt he will be on site when the job actually goes down.”

“So who else knows about this little subterfuge of ours?” Garforth asked, sensing where this was all leading to already.

“Us here in this room, a couple of others but none of the regular officers in the Service” the Commander confirmed.

“So when this all kicks off, your guys are going to be pursuing me for real” Garforth concluded “This could get interesting.”

“You are going to have to drive your socks off” the Commander agreed “I know you can do it though, just remember what our old man always taught us.”

“Just keep calm and drive the car” Garforth recalled with fond memory.

“In the meantime various minions will be busy trying to find our elusive Mr Villiers and his associates and shut them down with enough evidence to ensure that they are closed for business permanently” McWilliam added with intense sincerity.

“Do you really think he is linked to the old Bethnal Green Bullion Job?” Garforth asked.

“Oh I am certain of it” the Commander confirmed “and so was Sir Richard if his extensive scrap book was anything to go by. Whether we will be able to prove it is one thing, whether we can recover any of the gold quite another.”

“Even if we can’t” McWilliam added “The opportunity this presents us to shut down one of the most dangerous, intelligent and well connected players in the organised crime scene cannot be allowed to go to waste.”

“How well connected is this guy?” Garforth asked.

“He has people who can access our I.T. systems with ease” Fuller remarked as he continued to work intently on his laptop “and we know he is politically connected in certain overseas territories which by default will mean he has friends inside our own Government.”

“I am beginning to see why this is a strictly by invitation only party” Garforth admitted “and why you rushed me in from overseas operations for the job.”

“That and your not inconsiderable driving skills” the Commander confirmed.

“In which case I think I had better get a good nights kip” Garforth remarked as he stifled a yawn “my body clock is still on Japanese time and it I have feeling it is going to be a very busy day tomorrow.”

“Good luck mate” the Commander shook his brother’s hand before leaving.

“Thanks little bruv” Garforth confirmed.

“Always a pleasure doing business with you” Hansell remarked as in a well practised move a brown envelope was discreetly passed to his contact beneath the table in the saloon bar of the Rose & Crown public house which was busy with evening drinkers from around the local area.

The crowded and jovial atmosphere in the pub meant that Hansell and his contact plus what they were discussing prior to the exchange went completely unnoticed as did the fixer’s departure when after finishing the remains of his pint of Guinness he made for the exit into the damp street outside where the drizzly rain that had dominated much of the day across Greater London was continuing into the evening.

After a few moments of looking up and down the street, Hansell saw a black cab approaching with its light on and duly hailed it, causing the driver to pull into the side of the street immediately in front of him whereupon he duly got in the back.

“Evening” the cab driver called back as they set off “Where to Guvnor?”

“Bermondsey Tube Station please mate” Hansell called before settling back in his seat as the cab made its way through the rain sodden streets of the east end of London.

During the journey, Hansell took the opportunity to take a look through the documents he had received a little while earlier in exchange for the discreet cash payment he had made in the pub to his contact.

Amongst the documents in the file were surveillance photographs clearly stamped with ‘Eyes only’ warnings and paperwork marked with the logos of both the National Security & Police Service and MI5 which immediately signified just how well connected Hansell and his boss Villiers really were.

“We have our man...” Hansell remarked to himself as he looked through the information in front of him with a noticeable sense of admiration before closing the file and placing it inside a briefcase he had with him and closing it firmly.

For the rest of the journey, Hansell merely looked through the window at the rainy street scene of London streets as they passed by outside until a while later the cab was pulling into the side of the street outside the main entrance to Bermondsey Underground Station.

Passing over money that was more than the required fare with the customary instruction to the driver to keep the change, Hansell got out of the cab and immediately made for the main entrance of the Underground Station.

Inside the ticket hall, he went unnoticed as he went over to the row of automated ticket vending machines where as he stood at one of them, he was joined alongside by another individual.

“You are a hard man to catch up with Mr Hansell” the mysterious stranger remarked, his identity being further obscured by the hat and tall full length heavy coat he was wearing, a deliberate choice.

“I’m in the book you know” Hansell wryly reminded the mysterious contact.

“This is not the sort of thing you discuss over the telephone though” the stranger responded “It would appear your boss’s little project is attracting the attentions of some very important people.”

“Not entirely surprising news” Hansell remarked “Anyone in particular we should be worried about?” he asked.

“All I will say is it may be a good idea to take a closer look at who was driving the patrol car that chased down and apprehended your potential wheelman” the stranger slightly evasively explained “then ask yourself if everything is all that it seems at first glance.”

“I’ll look into it” Hansell agreed with a thankful nod of the head “Does the group think we can still use our intended driver or do we need to look at alternatives?” he asked.

“You stick to the plan we agreed” the stranger instructed “This is not so much a problem as an opportunity.”

“I don’t understand” Hansell responded.

“Oh don’t worry” the stranger reassured him as he turned to leave “You will my friend, you will...”

“Bob, you look like a man with a problem” the Commander remarked as he and Tracy, on their way home met the Divisional Commander of the Service's Specialist Armed Response section in the Reception area of New Scotland Yard.

“I think I am getting old” Bob admitted as together they made their way out of the main entrance and approached the public pavement outside in Broadway “I was reviewing the members of my ARU teams and realised how young they all are.”

“It is a new generation” Tracy admitted “The future of the Service rests with our newest and youngest members.”

“Speaking of recruits” the Commander remarked as they all crossed the street heading for the nearby St James' Park Underground Station “I still haven't done anything about finding a driver?”

“I'm sorry Sir?” Bob asked, not aware of this.

“The Joint Intelligence & Security Committee or whatever they call it this week has decreed that apparently I am too important to be wandering around alone on public transport all day so they want me to appoint an official driver. Can you believe that?” the Commander explained.

“Apparently I don't count” Tracy remarked “which given how good I am on four wheels is probably not all that surprising really.”

As they entered the main entrance of St James' Park Underground Station and passed through the ticket barriers at the far end of the ticket hall, it was clear that Bob was thinking about something.

“You know I may have an idea about that Sir” Bob remarked with an obvious sense of deep thought “Tell me Sir, do you know an officer by the name of Terry Kinderley?”

“Lieutenant Commander Kinderley?” the Commander recalled “If it is the same guy, I worked with him some years back, top notch traffic section driver, last I heard of him he was over in Thames Valley Division.”

“That is the chap” Bob confirmed “we came through the academy together.”

“Haven't heard from him for a few years” the Commander remarked.

“I was chatting to my opposite number over in Reading yesterday” Bob continued “Apparently Kinderley has been off for almost a year now, compassionate leave.”

“Never thought I would hear those words associated with a tough nut like Terry” the Commander remarked “What happened?”

“Just over a year ago he was single crewed in a Traffic Section unit one Saturday night when he gets a call to a road traffic collision somewhere out in the sticks” Bob explained as, after making their way down the stairs, they arrived on the westbound District & Circle Line platform just as a train of 'D' type sub-surface Underground

stock was arriving with a Richmond bound service which once the alighting passengers had been allowed to disperse, they proceeded to board.

“Anyway” Bob continued as they sat down together inside the carriage “Terry is the first on scene, turns out someone well over the limit with no insurance, licence, etc has lost control on this remote country road and smashed into a car coming the other way.”

“Nasty...” Tracy remarked.

“It gets worse” Bob then carried on “the car that the drunk collided with was being driven by his wife with his two year old daughter in the back.”

“Oh God no...” the Commander responded.

“His wife died at the scene” Bob confirmed “his daughter died on the way to hospital and the drunk driver wound up with a broken jaw, not from the accident but more to do with the slightly over enthusiastic slam of his head into the bonnet of the car when he was being arrested.”

“Can’t exactly blame Terry for that” Tracy remarked.

“I hadn’t heard anything about this” the Commander confirmed “So what happened?”

“Terry got compassionate leave but returned a few weeks later” Bob explained “Then his Guvnor saw the state he was in and from what I hear he really was a mess, so put him on unofficial extended leave until he got himself sorted out, that was nearly a year ago.”

“The rules say that after a year you get let go” Tracy remarked “Perhaps there is something we can do for him?” she suggested.

“Chances are the Watford psych tank would not allow him to resume full front line duties” the Commander agreed “but he could easily fulfil a driving duty, he was one of the best drivers in the Service and it would be a pity to see twelve years on the job go to waste.”

“I’ll see if I can get his details to you Sir” Bob confirmed as the train arrived at Victoria Station whereupon Tracy and the Commander prepared to alight.

“Thanks” the Commander responded “I might see if I can go around and see him in the morning.”

“Meantime” Tracy suggested “I suggest we all go home and get some rest, it’s going to be a very busy day tomorrow I reckon.”

“How the hell did I let myself get talked into this?” Garforth jokingly remarked as McWilliam, dressed in full Security Service uniform escorted him in handcuffs through the custody area of Leytonstone Police Station and towards the cells.

“You are doing this for Queen and Country” McWilliam reminded him “Well at least that is what Sir Richard always used to keep saying to me every time I asked about a pay raise,”

“Never met the fellow” Garforth admitted as they arrived at the cell door, his accommodation for the night “Sounds like he is a right bundle of laughs.”

“He has been known to have his moments” McWilliam freely admitted as she opened the heavy cell door and allowed Garforth to step inside whereupon she proceeded to remove his handcuffs much to his relief.

“Thank you” Garforth responded as he regained the use of his hands, rubbing his wrists from where the handcuffs had just been removed “So what should I do when my impromptu taxi arrives tomorrow?”

“Go with them, look very bloody surprised and disorientated about it and don't ask any stupid questions” McWilliam confirmed “Simple really when you think about it.”

“That's the problem, I am not a very good thinker” Garforth admitted “Eddie is the brains of the family.”

“You will be fine” McWilliam reassured him as she stood by the cell door “Just watch your back all right?”

“I'll try” Garforth agreed.

“Good night” McWilliam then called before closing the cell door and after briefly checking through the viewing flap that its occupant was fine, she proceeded to depart.

Once outside the Station, she got in her car and reached for her mobile telephone whereupon she proceeded to make a call.

“The cuckoo has been put to bed for the night” McWilliam confirmed as soon as she was answered “Let the boss know.”

“You all right lad?” the Commander asked as he entered the front room and found Jack sat on the sofa looking somewhat distant and distracted.

“Hmm?” Jack asked, looking up “Oh, err yes” he then confirmed none too convincingly as the Commander sat down alongside him clearly sensing something was troubling him.

“I erm reviewed the external CCTV feeds from MI6 before I left the office” the Commander remarked “Your quick and decisive actions when that body came

crashing down almost certainly saved your lady from serious injury if not possible death.”

“Just instinct” Jack remarked as he tried to dismiss the point “Anyone else would have done the same” he casually responded.

“Nice try” the Commander responded with a knowing look “You my little friend are head over heels in love with that young lady.”

“Does it show?” Jack wryly remarked, effectively giving up all pretence that Megan was just his friend.

“You might as well have a large flashing sign over your head, it is that obvious” the Commander confirmed.

“Rumbled...” Jack declared in surrender.

“So what was the other thing you wanted to talk to me about” the Commander asked “You have had two things on your mind for some weeks now I can tell and discounting Megan, that leaves one thing that must be a right doozie.”

“Well I guess I cannot keep it from you any longer” Jack reluctantly admitted “and I would appreciate if Tracy was not told about this as I don't think her reaction will be all that positive.”

“All right then” the Commander agreed “This is strictly between you and me.”

“As soon as I leave school next year” Jack announced with obvious reluctant apprehension “I wish to apply to join the Security & Police Service” he then declared, speaking quite quickly to get the words out as fast as possible as if to get this, for him dreaded announcement out of the way quickly.

“Okay” the Commander agreed with a nod of the head after a pause for thought.

“It is?” Jack asked with an obvious mix of surprise and relief at the Commander's response now that he had finally revealed his secret.

“To be honest I have been expecting this conversation for a little while” the Commander revealed “It is what comes of having friends and contacts in unusual places.”

“Like for example the careers officer at school?” Jack ventured.

“She contacted the Service recruitment office at the Yard after your little chat the other day” the Commander went on to explain “and the paperwork trail duly finished up arriving in my office yesterday morning.”

“Oh...” Jack responded.

“I was just waiting to see how long it would be before you told me” the Commander confirmed with a smirk that made Jack smile with a sense of relief.

“And Tracy doesn't know?” Jack asked, his concern about the secrecy of his decision obvious.

“I haven't said anything” the Commander confirmed “and until you decide otherwise, it will remain strictly between you and me” he reassured “Of course I cannot guarantee she won't find out through some other channel though.”

“That is something I will have to take a chance with” Jack admitted.

“I do ask one thing however” the Commander requested “When the time comes to tell Tracy, let me know first and I will be there to back you up.”

“Thank you” Jack responded with sincerity.

“One other thing” the Commander then asked “If you ever have anything else you wish to discuss in private or just need someone to talk to, you can call me anytime all right?”

“What makes you think we will have anything to talk about?” Jack asked.

“Nature of the job that I do and the world you, I and Tracy inhabit” the Commander admitted “We are made of secrets and every so often a few must be let out or it will burn at our very soul from the inside out.”

“Ouch...” Jack responded.

“So” the Commander asked “Have you told Megan yet of your career choice yet?”

“Yes” Jack admitted “I tell her everything.”

“Have you told her you are in love with her?” the Commander then asked with a knowing smirk.

“Well actually not exactly” Jack then admitted slightly sheepishly “I was trying to drum up the courage, not my area of expertise this relationship stuff.”

“Believe me I know the feeling” the Commander thoroughly agreed “Anyway I can tell, she already knows, hell most of the Security Service and just about everyone else knows.”

“Oh, I was rather hoping it wasn't that obvious...” Jack looked across with a slightly dumbstruck look.

“Oh dear” the Commander chuckled in response.

“I'm going to bed” Jack decided to surrender to his tiredness “Goodnight Dad” he declared before getting up and departing.

“Goodnight Jack” the Commander called after him, stifling a bit of a giggling fit.

Once Jack had gone and his bedroom door was heard to close, Tracy came in and sat down alongside her husband on the sofa.

“So I was right then” Tracy remarked.

“About the impossibility of keeping anything secret around here, Jack being hopelessly in love with Megan or his plans to follow us into the same career choice?” the Commander asked.

“All three” Tracy confirmed “Rule of Life Number Five - Tracy is always right.”

“He’s a tough kid” the Commander concluded “He will be all right.”

“I can understand his reluctance in wanting me to know about his decision though” Tracy admitted “He has seen us injured in the line of duty, in my case near fatally, Jennifer lost the lower part of one leg, it is a violent world out there.”

“In which case can you think of a better profession for him to enter?” the Commander suggested “We will be there to watch over him and the Service is like an extended family watching one another’s back.”

“Speaking of family” Tracy changed the subject “Any regrets about bringing your brother into this little project we have on the go at the moment?”

“To be honest I didn’t want him to do it” the Commander admitted “I hoped that he would say no but as soon as he saw the mission and what would be required of him he was on the first plane back to the UK as soon as his Guvnor gave him the official nod.”

“Another member of this infamous family steps into the arena of battle” Tracy remarked.

“It’s a good plan” the Commander reassured her “As long as everyone involved is careful and doesn’t slip up, we should be able to nail Villiers and his people once and for all.”

It was with the care of a master craftsman that Villiers finished his work for the evening and carefully packed away his research paperwork and associated material into designated folders before placing them in his vintage leather briefcase and then securing it shut using the brass lock buckle on the front.

Once he was satisfied that all was well and secure, he got up and proceeded to place his briefcase into a wall safe which he then secured firmly with its combination lock. Once this was done, he took his long overcoat from the coat rack and put it on before departing, carefully closing the office door behind him.

A couple of minutes later he emerged from the building and immediately proceeded to get into the rear of a black saloon car that was waiting for him.

“You have the appearance of a woman with a problem” Villiers remarked to the other occupant of the rear of the car who had been waiting for him.

“I had a meeting earlier today with certain high profile individuals in the area of national security if you get my drift” Jayne Grey, the Home Secretary confirmed as she leaned forward, her face coming into the limited light for the first time as the driver proceeded to drive off down the street.

“A lady of your position should expect to be mixing it with the hoi-polloi of the law enforcement industry” Villiers remarked “What did the Commander and the rest of the no doubt distinguished company you were keeping have to say?”

“Your name was a key part of the discussion” Grey confirmed “I don’t think the Commander likes you very much.”

“We are both representatives of the pinnacle of our respective fields” Villiers calmly admitted “Fields of expertise that are diagrammatically opposite to each other yet also complement each other in equal measure. One cannot exist without the other.”

“They know you are planning something” Grey continued “and they see an opportunity to ensnare both you and anyone else connected with you.”

“Only I know what I may or may not be planning” Villiers responded with a strongly enforced air of confidence “and let me reassure you that if at any point my operation is compromised, I will ensure that certain members of the press receive in the post details of certain business dealings with your name and that of certain others in your political party and its affiliates very prominent in the list of facts.”

“They were right” Grey remarked as she looked across at Villiers with a certain hint of disgust visible in her expression “you really are a ruthless bastard aren’t you?”

“I prefer to use the term efficient myself” Villiers responded with a proud smirk “It goes with the territory.”

“Whatever you are doing you should maybe consider suspending operations for a while” Grey suggested “At least until sufficient time passes for the authorities to lose interest in you.”

“No deal” Villiers quickly but calmly responded before turning his head to look at Grey direct “I didn’t know you cared my dear.”

“About you?” Grey scoffed “Not a chance but I do care about those who I do cherish who may be hurt by your little schemes.”

“The plan does not change” Villiers confirmed “I will handle it my way as per the agreement I made with your group, cash payable upon delivery of the goods.”

“All right...” Grey reluctantly agreed before leaning forward and tapping on the dividing partition to indicate to her driver to pull over.

“Well it has been a pleasure seeing you again Home Secretary” Villiers remarked as the car stopped by the side of the road and he opened the door, preparing to get out “We must do this again sometime, dinner perhaps?”

“I never mix business with pleasure Mr Villiers” Grey advised the man as he got out of the car and stepped onto the pavement.

“Neither do I” Villiers confirmed with a knowing smirk “Good night” he then declared before closing the door and disappearing off into the night leaving Grey to let out a huge sigh of relief.

“Sorry we had to put you through that Ms Grey” came the voice of David Collins as he lowered the partition window and it was revealed he was the driver of the car.

“Remind me in future that the next time either you or the Commander rings up with one of these little ideas of yours to book a very long last minute holiday a very long way from here” Grey admitted.

The grandmother clock in the hallway chimed the hour as three o’clock in the morning as the Commander in his dressing gown came into the kitchen as quietly as he could so as not to wake up either Jack or Tracy.

For a few moments he contemplated making some tea, even getting as far as picking up a tea bag and hovering it over the empty cup before changing his mind and returning it back to the box.

Looking up at the kitchen window, he could see his own reflection in the darkness and was looking at himself in the eyes with such a concentrated intensity that he jumped when suddenly he felt a hand land on his right shoulder and looked to see Tracy standing there.

“Don’t tell me love you can’t sleep?” she asked with a wry smile.

“Nope” the Commander admitted.

“The man who fell asleep during the Olympic Games opening ceremony?” Tracy reminded him “If I recall the Duke of Edinburgh had to poke you in the ribs to wake you up twice.”

“And the Mayor did at one point as well” the Commander admitted with a wry smile.

“So” Tracy concluded “Considering you managed to remain asleep in the midst of a fireworks display that was the largest and loudest series of explosions the east end of

London has seen and heard since the war, I think I can safely assume you have something troubling on your mind then?"

"It's this operation we are embarking upon" the Commander admitted after a few moments silence as he gathered his thoughts "History has shown that every time we have one of these cloak and dagger jobs and it involves at least one member of my family it usually winds up in disaster, or worse."

"You've survived" Tracy reminded him with a comforting tone "The Evening Standard has had you declared dead at least twice so far that I know of and you have come back both times."

"Yes" the Commander agreed "But at what cost?" he then asked her "I still can't go through a metal detector without setting it off thanks to the various bits of metal I have stuck in me thanks to various escapades over the last twenty years."

"I got one as well" Tracy reminded "You have a point though love; it seems a bit of internal metalwork has become something of a badge of honour in this family."

"To be honest I didn't want to bring James in on this" the Commander admitted "I did hope that when Dave Howell asked him if he wished to be recalled to help us out he would say no."

"They do say blood is thicker than water" Tracy remarked.

"Water is easier to clean up when it is spilt though" the Commander honestly retorted "easier to replace too."

"Doesn't make quite such an unsightly mess either" Tracy added.

"And now Jack wants to join what seems to have become the family business" the Commander remarked.

"Even though I am not his natural mother" Tracy responded, her concern obvious "I can't pretend that I don't have reservations about it because I do. Must be something to do with natural protective mothering instinct I guess" she admitted.

"He is a tough kid" the Commander reassured her with backing it up with a hug "Jack's already been through a lot in his fifteen years already, just don't be angry with him when you do officially find out about his career choice."

"Don't worry, I won't be" Tracy promised "I can't promise there won't be subtle disapproving looks of extreme worry though."

"I'll settle for that" the Commander agreed as he finished off the last of the tea in the mug "Come on" he suggested as he took Tracy's arm in his "Let's at least try and get some sleep, I have the distinct feeling that tomorrow is going to be an interesting and busy day."

“You do realise there are still about a hundred things that could go wrong with this little side show of ours?” Dave Collins remarked to Amber McWilliam as they entered the main entrance of Leytonstone Police Station where they both proffered their identification to the desk officer on duty who immediately let them through the security door and into the main building.

“It's a risk yes” McWilliam agreed “but one worth taking I feel.”

“What if Villiers doesn't buy into this or we develop a leak somewhere?” Collins asked as they made their way down the corridor to the custody area.

“Then we will probably wind up in the middle of the biggest intelligence led disaster since the Watergate scandal” McWilliam admitted “However may I remind you that our man Garforth did volunteer for this assignment and he was made fully aware of what he was getting into before we brought him on board.”

“I still got a bad feeling about this though” Collins remarked.

“I will admit there is a bit of apprehension on my side as well” McWilliam confirmed as they reached the cell door and the duty custody officer duly proceeded to open the door to allow them to enter.

“Good morning Mr Garforth, this is your wake up call” Collins declared as he and McWilliam entered the cell where they found Garforth looking up at them from the fairly rudimentary bed with a wry smile.

“Room service in this place is terrible” Garforth remarked as he tried to stifle a yawn “Remind me to write a very strongly worded e-mail of complaint to the Manager of this place when all this over.”

“I don't think your brother does e-mails” Collins admitted “He doesn't seem to have progressed much beyond carrier pigeons.”

“I saw him send a fax once” McWilliam remarked.

“People still use faxes?” Collins responded with some surprise.

“He managed to send it the wrong way around so that all Sir Richard got was a blank piece of paper at the other end mind” McWilliam then admitted “Dickie spent three hours pouring over it trying to find some sort of secret hidden message on it until the Commander rang him up to admit his mistake.”

“It would seem some things never change” Garforth wryly remarked as he got up off the bed and brushed himself down “So, how do I look?”

“Like a getaway driver on his way to Court” Collins confirmed “Which is exactly how we want you to look.”

“What happens if this little charade or ours goes pear shaped?” Garforth enquired with all seriousness “Do we have a plan 'B' by any chance?”

“There are a couple of contingencies in place” McWilliam confirmed “Your brother has been taking care of those” she reassured him.

“Let’s just hope we don't need them” Collins added.

“Time to go then” McWilliam then declared as she produced a set of handcuffs and indicated to Garforth to turn around so that he could secure his wrists in place behind his back.

“We are good to go?” Collins asked.

“Yep” McWilliam duly confirmed having checked that the cuffs were secure.

“In which case, lets get to work” Collins then declared.

It was with a look of some surprise that Terry Kinderley responded to the sound of his front doorbell as it sounded at a little after eight o'clock that morning.

It was too early for the postman and since the tragic death of his wife and daughter almost a year ago, visitors to his humble but meticulously maintained home in Lavender Hill near Clapham in South London were uncommon, particularly that early in the morning.

His surprise was increased substantially when he went to answer the door a few moments later to find no less a figure than the Commander himself standing there on his doorstep.

“Good morning Sir” Kinderley declared, somewhat astonished.

“Morning Terry” the Commander responded “It's been a long time.”

“That it has Sir” Kinderley quickly agreed “Won't you come in?” he asked.

“Thank you” the Commander responded as Kinderley held the front door open to allow him to step inside.

“So to what do I owe the pleasure?” Kinderley asked as he showed the Commander into the kitchen and offered a cup of tea which was willingly accepted.

“I only just heard yesterday about your wife and daughter” the Commander informed him “I'm very sorry.”

“Thank you Sir” Kinderley responded.

“I understand you have been signed off duty for almost a year now?” the Commander asked.

“Is it really that long?” Kinderley remarked “The psych tank in Watford has helped a lot but I got the distinct impression I won't be back on the front line ever again.”

“A shame for certain, you were, still are as far as I am concerned one of the best drivers in the Service” the Commander confirmed.

“I expect you have looked at my psych evaluation reports Sir” Kinderley responded.

“Yes” the Commander admitted “but I have never really put a lot of faith in them, too much box ticking, supposition and form filling and not enough knowledge and understanding of the person whom it is about.”

“So what if I may ask is my future?” Kinderley enquired.

“I'm no crystal ball gazer” the Commander wryly admitted “one thing I do know for certain however is that the rules say that after a year signed off, the Service either has to let you go or re-evaluate you.”

“I guess then that I had better dig my uniform out and prepare to hand it in” Kinderley responded with a reluctant sense of impending defeat.

“You can get it out and take it to the dry cleaners” the Commander responded “I am here to offer you a job.”

“I'm sorry Sir, I don't understand” Kinderley admitted with an obvious sense of confusion.

“The Joint Security Committee in its infamous wisdom, a contradiction in terms if ever there was one” the Commander began to explain “has decreed that I need an official driver.”

“Oh, I see” Kinderley responded although he was still not entirely sure where this was going.

“Fortunately they have given me the choice of who it is to be” the Commander continued “so when your name and current circumstances came to my attention yesterday I figured we could help each other out. What do you think?”

“You want me to become your official driver?” Kinderley asked with a sense of bewildered disbelief.

“Exactly” the Commander confirmed “You won't be front line, well not officially anyway, I will see to it you are reinstated on the books at the full rate and you can keep your pension and other benefits topped up.”

“I must say Sir that is a very tempting offer” Kinderley agreed.

“The way I see it” the Commander explained “it helps both of us very nicely, the only down side I can see is that I need a decision right now.”

“In which case” Kinderley responded after briefly looking across at a framed photograph of his late wife and daughter as if seeking guidance, he leant forwards “I am honoured to accept” he confirmed as they shook hands on the deal “Thank you.”

“My pleasure” the Commander agreed “Time to get that uniform down to the dry cleaners I reckon.”

“Stuff it, I will go down to the Quartermasters Office and get a new one instead” Kinderley confirmed “maybe it is time for a totally fresh start” he admitted.

“Seven a.m. tomorrow morning, my place” the Commander confirmed as he handed Kinderley his official card with his home address written on the reverse “Meantime I would like you to sort out a set of wheels, something not too flashy but with a decent stereo and plenty of poke.”

“Should make for an interesting conversation with the Garage Superintendent” Kinderley wryly remarked “Is Andy Drover still at Hendon garage?”

“He is practically an institution” the Commander responded “What he doesn't know about motors isn't worth knowing.”

“That's good” Kinderley remarked “He owes me a few favours which I think I can cash in.”

“In which case I will see you tomorrow” the Commander declared.

“Ah William, I was hoping to catch up with you” called the Home Secretary as upon leaving her office she saw Sir William Devane down the other end of the corridor.

“Good morning Home Secretary, what can I do for you?” Devane responded having initially let out a momentary silent curse before turning around to face her.

“I have had a request from my opposite number in the State Department in the United States” Grey explained as she walked up to Devane who was trying to maintain as interested an expression as possible “They want a copy of all our information we have on that US Senator who was over here last year causing chaos.”

“William McAllister” Devane recalled “Rather unpleasant lump of lard with delusions of grandeur if I recall.”

“His trial is coming up next month” Grey continued “and the State Department's best prosecution team need everything we got on him to seal the case as they feel it could make a difference on the outcome.”

“The outcome being?” Devane asked out of curiosity.

“Regular or extra crispy I believe” Grey confirmed with a wry smile “They want to be absolutely sure he gets found very, very guilty.”

“All of the information we have related to the McAllister matter should be in our secure archive” Devane agreed “The Security Service should have more on him though.”

“That angle is being taken care of by another agency I am informed” Grey confirmed.

“I’ll get right on it Home Secretary” Devane confirmed.

“Thank you William” Grey confirmed and then began to turn to leave before pausing and turning back “Erm there is one other thing” she then added slightly hesitantly “It might be a good idea if the Joint Security Committee were not to be told about this.”

“Interesting...” Devane remarked “You think we have a leak?”

“This is the Home Office” Grey reminded him with more than a hint of ironic sarcasm “Of course we have leaks, it’s implied in the description.”

“I’ll get right on it Home Secretary” Devane confirmed.

“Good, thank you” Grey responded “Keep me informed will you?” she then called as she left, making a brisk pace down the corridor as she was now a bit late for an important meeting.

“I’ll see what I can do” Devane responded to himself as Grey was by now out of sight.

Around the corner, Grey paused and after nodding at her assistant to leave her alone for a few moments, she took out a mobile telephone from her pocket and quickly wrote a text message upon it.

As soon as the text was sent she returned the phone to her pocket and then moved on, rejoining her assistant.

As Garforth was led in handcuffs from the rear entrance of the custody suite to the waiting Security Service prisoner van, his emergence was observed by three groups of people observing the scene.

From an office window overlooking the scene were Amber McWilliam and Dave Collins, parked up across the road from Leytonstone Police Station in a tatty Ford Focus were Hansell and one of his colleagues whilst observing the whole area both in the immediate vicinity and beyond were Tracy and Fuller who were watching via numerous CCTV feeds from the dedicated special operations control room at New Scotland Yard.

“Eyes down for a full house” Tracy declared over the dedicated radio channel as the screens in front of her showed Garforth being shown into the rear of the transport van before the door was firmly closed and secured.

“It’s show time” the Commander declared as he and Bob finished their takeaway beverages and along with two of Bob's Armed Response Unit colleagues got into the unmarked car that was, along with several others vehicles of varying makes and appearances, parked in a side street approximately one mile from where the prisoner van was just starting to commence its journey.

“How are we doing with those rolling road closures?” Tracy asked as she briefly looked down at her mobile telephone for a moment to make a note of a text message she had just received which she quickly deleted.

“The traffic lights in the area are fully under my control” Fuller confirmed as he rechecked the computer displays “also we have our little caravan of vehicles ready to go.”

“Let's get this party started then” Tracy declared before reaching for the radio headset and putting it on “Operation Cuckoo Control to all units” she then called “Ready to roll.”

On Tracy's command, the prisoner van commenced its journey, being let out through the security gates and out onto the main road where it was initially joined only by an ordinary Security Service marked patrol car.

As soon as the two vehicles had gone around the corner onto the main road however, they were discretely joined by Hansell and his associate in their non descript tatty Ford Focus which maintained a manageable distance behind keeping them in touch with their target without, at least they thought attracting any unwelcome attention.

“And here come the party crashers” Fuller remarked as he observed Hansell's car via his vast array of available CCTV feeds.

“See if you can get a name on that thing” Tracy motioned to indicate the car.

As the prisoner van and its accompanying escorts, both official and unofficial approached the Commander's location, he observed it in the rear view wing mirror as he reached down to the ignition keys and started the car.

“Okay ladies and gentlemen” the Commander called over the radio “Let's close up, smoothly and by the numbers.”

A short distance ahead of the prisoner van, a couple of unmarked cars and a small white van appeared from a couple of side streets, all driven by plain clothes Security Service officers who had all been carefully selected for this operation due to their advanced driving skills.

To the normal eye it appeared as if the prisoner van was amongst normal traffic but in reality and with the knowledge of its driver, it was in fact now in the middle of a

carefully controlled bubble with only vehicles being driven by Security Service officers all around it.

For the next couple of miles of the journey some of the vehicles involved left the scene and were replaced by others in order to maintain the illusion of ordinary general traffic.

Towards the rear of this scene, the Commander driving an unmarked metallic blue Ford Mondeo was keeping a discrete but close eye on the battered Ford Focus a short distance ahead.

“Have we got any identification on this rust bucket with the questionable MOT yet?” the Commander asked over the radio.

“Sierra Three One Seven Juliet Echo Hotel” Tracy responded reading from Fuller's display in front of her “Metallic green Ford Focus showing as in trade since last year, no tax or MOT recorded.”

“Manky old Ford that's in trade” the Commander remarked “Straight out of the East London Crooks handbook that.”

“You think it is our surprise guests?” Bob asked.

“Advanced observation team, absolute text book” the Commander agreed “I wouldn't be surprised if our mystery man Hansell isn't in that checking out the S.P.”

“I'll see if I can get some shots of the occupants Sir” Fuller was heard to call over the radio.

“Would be appreciated, thanks” the Commander confirmed.

The bubble of vehicles continued for another couple of miles with little change and no sign of anything happening which only served to add to the apprehension that the Commander and the others were feeling.

“Hello, looks like we have got something here” Fuller then declared as his CCTV feeds showed something of interest “You have two white Mercedes Sprinter vans paralleling you on adjacent streets, they appeared from a disused builders yard about thirty seconds ago.”

“Can you get any identification on the occupants?” the Commander asked.

“Three up in the front of both vans” Tracy confirmed “No way of telling who or how many are lurking in the back.”

“Or what they are tooled up with” Bob added with an obvious note of caution.

“We still have to let this play though” the Commander confirmed “Just be ready for anything though.”

“I always am” Bob gleefully confirmed as he took out his pistol and with a characteristic double click checked it.

“Oscar Three Five to Group” one of the drivers of the various vehicles was then heard to report over the radio “Got an articulated lorry, blue Scania high cab about five hundred yards ahead of our prisoner van parked up just sticking out of a side street that looks a bit suspect.”

“The registration numbers on those two vans are straight bananas” Tracy confirmed from the computer database “What have you got on this blue truck?” she then asked.

“Drawing a blank here so far” Fuller confirmed as he continued to work quickly on his computer terminal.

“This is getting ready to go down I reckon” Bob remarked to the Commander.

“Time for the main event” the Commander nodded in agreement as he noticed that the two occupants of the battered Focus ahead appeared to be doing something that, although he could not confirm it, seemed to be something akin to the putting on of balaclavas or masks of some kind.

“All right everyone” the Commander called over the radio “this is about to go off. Remember that our job here is containment, we want this to happen but to keep collateral damage to a minimum and non combatant injuries and involvement to absolute zero.”

“Contact expected in approximately thirty seconds” Tracy called as she watched her overview of the situation and estimated the time it was going to take before the prisoner van reached the parked truck which was clearly now going to be the intercept point where it would all happen.

There was a definite nervous silence amongst all those involved who were looking on, both at the scene itself and like Tracy from some distance away as the moment of inevitable contact drew ever closer.

It was only half a minute, maybe not even that but it seemed like an age to the Commander, almost as if everything was proceeding in slow motion before events took a dramatic turn when the lorry that had been identified a few moments earlier suddenly and without any warning whatsoever, moved off and charged at high speed across the road blocking everyone’s path ahead.

Within moments there was shouting and activity all around, the first thing occurring after the interception by the articulated lorry being the appearance of a couple of masked and armed men from vehicles that were parked by the side of the street who proceeded to deploy from each side of the road spiked ‘stop sticks’ of the type used by law enforcement agencies to stop speeding vehicles.

The driver of the prisoner van could not stop in time and neither could the officer in the marked Security Service patrol car immediately behind as they both went over the

spiked stop sticks and immediately their tyres were punctured bringing them to a stop and disabling both vehicles.

The Commander's first instinct on seeing the scene unfolding ahead was to get out of the car and intercede but then he remembered the purpose of this mission and against his better instinct and judgement, remained in the car feeling a deep sense of helplessness.

As soon as the prisoner van came to a halt, over a dozen masked men, all armed with prominently displayed semi-automatic firearms appeared from both vehicles as well as surrounding shops and premises.

"Okay let's get him out of there" Hansell called as he organised the operation with brutal efficiency "Deal with that will you?" he then indicated one of his men to restrain the uniformed officer in the patrol car.

"Ouch, that's got to hurt" Bob remarked with a grimace as he and the Commander saw right in front of them the patrol officer dragged from his car and rendered unconscious with a strike of the butt of a gun to the back of the head which saw him collapse onto the bonnet of his vehicle.

There were screams from onlookers as the situation escalated alarmingly quickly with the ear splitting crack of an explosion which was a small explosive charge detonating that blew the lock on the rear of the prisoner van, allowing them to easily open the door.

Whilst a number of the masked men continued to form a perimeter all around the prisoner van to prevent any unwelcome attention or interference, Hansell and one of his men climbed inside and a few moments later emerged with a very surprised looking Garforth whereupon his handcuffs were quickly dealt with by means of a set of bolt croppers that they had brought with them.

"Today is your lucky day mate" Hansell called to Garforth as he escorted him to the car "My boss would very much like to meet you."

"I'm honoured I am sure" Garforth responded, still not aware exactly of what was going on thanks to the sudden and unexpected nature of it and this was despite the fact he was very much in and fully briefed on what was an elaborate set up.

"In you get" Hansell duly showed Garforth into the rear of the car before closing the door and moving to the drivers door whereupon he gave a shrill whistle to his men "All right lads, job done, let's go."

"Looks like they have their prize" the Commander remarked "I guess that guy is probably Hansell, pity we can't see his face through that hood though."

It was then that something extraordinary happened that left the Commander looking on in some shock. Hansell, having issued the retreat order to his men calmly turned around, removed the mask from his head and smiled directly at the Commander who was still sat in the drivers seat of the car immediately behind.

“What the hell...?” Bob remarked.

“See you around Commander” Hansell then called with a mock salute from his temple before making a gun shape with his hand and ‘firing’ a couple of shots. Then with a wry smile he calmly got into his car.

The Commander was stunned by what had just happened, so much so that initially he failed to register the fact that the white reversing lights on Hansell’s Ford Focus had come on and suddenly the car accelerated in reverse towards him at speed.

“Commander!!” Bob called out but it was too late, by the time the Commander had realised what was happening and managed just to put the car into reverse, they were rammed at high speed forcing their car back into the vehicle behind with some force and setting off the airbags.

A few moments later Hansell accelerated away from the scene, the rear of his car badly wrecked from the collision and before anyone really knew what had happened he was off and away.

“Our boy and his new friends are clear” McWilliam called over the radio as she arrived on the scene on foot moments after Hansell and his men with Garforth had departed “Send in the clowns and we are going to need a couple of paramedics as well” she confirmed.

“Are you okay Sir?” Bob asked across to the Commander who looked somewhat shaken up as a result of the collision.

“I feel like I have been head butted by a weather balloon” the Commander admitted as he looked down at the now deflated air bag lying in his lap along with the crystals of glass from the windows which had shattered upon impact “What about you?” he then asked.

“I’ve had better days if I were to be honest” Bob admitted.

Gingerly the Commander reached down and released his seat belt before carefully opening the now somewhat mangled door to get out whereupon he was helped by McWilliam.

“Are you all right Sir?” she asked.

“That could have gone... better” the Commander admitted as he shook off some of the granules of broken glass as all around the sound of approaching emergency service sirens filled the air.

“Garage Superintendent is going to be pissed” Bob remarked as he took a look at the badly mangled front of their car.

“We did what we needed to do” the Commander admitted before looking ahead at the paramedics who had just arrived and were busy working on the patrol car officer “Is he okay?” he asked.

“Bumps and bruises” the paramedic confirmed as the Commander joined them “Going to have a bit of a headache for a day or two I reckon.”

“Nothing a couple of weeks leave won’t fix Sir” the officer confirmed slightly groggily.

“Deal” the Commander readily agreed “Once the hospital gives you the all clear, go home and rest” he ordered.

“Yes Sir, thank you” the officer very quickly agreed.

“Well it looks like they got our man” McWilliam remarked as she went over and looked inside the now empty prisoner van.

“It does indeed” the Commander agreed “Now comes the tricky bit, the waiting...”

Tracy’s next task was going to be a little tricky; she now had to pretend she knew nothing about the escape incident as she entered the main Control Room at New Scotland Yard where she arrived amid a scene of much activity.

“What’s happening?” Tracy asked as she entered the room and took over the seat at the main command console before surveying the bank of large screens that dominate the front wall of the Control Room.

“We have had a prisoner escape Maam” one of the Control Room operators confirmed “Fifteen minutes ago one of our prisoner transport vans was attacked about half way between Leytonstone and Stratford by a group of armed men numbering about a dozen.”

“Have we got the scene contained and sealed?” Tracy asked as she put on a communications headset and plugged herself into the main circuit.

“About a mile radius in each direction Maam” the Control Room operator confirmed “three of our people injured in the incident, reported to be only bumps and bruises though.”

“Well there is something to be thankful for I suppose” Tracy responded “Do we have any descriptions of the assailants?”

“Sketchy reports coming through at the moment describe about a dozen men, all armed with semi-automatic firearms wearing black outfits and balaclavas” another Control Room operator confirmed “They escaped in three vehicles, two of them unidentified white panel vans of some kind, the principal leader and our escaped

prisoner left the scene in a green Ford Focus after ramming another vehicle that was immediately behind them.”

“London Fire & Rescue Service Control reporting that they have just been called out to a burning car on waste ground about two miles from our escape incident” came a call across the Control Room “Reported to be a green Ford Focus registration Sierra Three One Seven Juliet Echo Hotel, three males seen running from it just before it went up in flames.”

“They’ve changed vehicles then” Tracy concluded “No real surprises there, wash that Ford Focus through everything we have, I want to know everywhere it has been from the day it left the factory” she requested.

“Maam” came a call from over the other side of the busy Control Room “Call for you on Line Three, Sir William Devane.”

“That was quick” Tracy remarked as she reached over to the telephone on the desk in front of her in order to take the call “Mr Devane, good morning.”

“Is it?” Devane responded “Word reaches me that a prisoner has escaped?”

“I am afraid so Sir” Tracy confirmed “My people are all over it right now, he won’t be out in the wild for long.”

“Good” Devane responded “I must say it does look rather bad when a prisoner who the Commander himself slapped the cuffs on just two days ago escapes amidst an armed raid.”

Tracy paused for a brief moment before she responded as she realised the implication that was being raised by Devane’s comments “Unfortunately in this business unpredictable things happen.”

“I want to be kept fully informed of all developments in this matter, no matter how trivial” Devane requested with a strong note of insistence.

“Indeed Sir” Tracy agreed “You will have to excuse me Sir as we are rather busy right now on this matter.”

“I’ll let you get on with it then Commander Caverner” Devane agreed “Remember what I said about keeping me updated” he reminded her.

“Will do so” Tracy confirmed “Goodbye” she then declared before hanging up.

She took a few moments to think carefully about what had just occurred in that brief but now very significant conversation before returning to the matters in hand.

“How are we doing?” Tracy asked around.

“Officer in charge on the ground confirms area secure and a team is on the way to the site of the burning car to seal that off as well” one of the operators called.

“Borough Commander at Leytonstone has deployed everything she has into the area” another operator called.

“Let’s make sure that she is backed up to the fullest extent” Tracy commanded “Alert neighbouring boroughs, let them know what has happened and have them prepare to send additional resources into the area if they are needed. Do we have helicopter support on this?” she then asked.

“Two of them Maam” came the confirmation “and Essex are scrambling theirs as well just in case.”

“Right, well done everyone” Tracy then called before withdrawing back out into the corridor and taking out her mobile telephone in order to make an urgent call.

“I’m not looking forward to this” the Commander admitted to the Security Service recovery truck driver as with his wrecked car now loaded onto the back, they began their journey back to the Service’s central vehicle garage in Hendon.

It was as their journey was commencing that the Commander was distracted by his mobile phone ringing and looking down at the display, he smiled upon seeing that it was his beloved Tracy calling.

“Hello love” the Commander answered “Everything all right?” he asked.

“Go secure” Tracy immediately requested.

“Evidently not then” the Commander concluded as he looked down at his mobile phone and pressed a button in order to encrypt and secure their conversation “All right my love, I am secured at this end. What’s wrong?” he asked.

“I just got a call from our new Minister for Security & Policing, Sir William Devane” Tracy explained “He was inquiring about our little prison van escape” she confirmed.

“Hardly surprising” the Commander admitted “Whenever something of this nature happens it is usually someone in the Home Office who gets told to deal with the flak from the press.”

“Normally I would have thought the same” Tracy agreed, a certain element of apprehension apparent in her voice “however he called less than three minutes after the main Control Room were notified of the escape and here comes the clincher, he knows who escaped.”

“Ah...” the Commander responded now seeing the significance of Tracy's concerns “Did he mention Garforth by name?” he then asked.

“Just said it was the guy you arrested the other day after the high profile chase” Tracy explained “Pretty impressive for a middle ranking Civil Servant with no connections within the inner circle.”

“You mean no 'apparent' connections” the Commander remarked, “How the hell did he find out and find out so fast?” the Commander asked with a sense of frustration.

“I hate to say it but I think we have a leak and a pretty big one” Tracy admitted as she looked around the deserted corridor to ensure she was not being overheard “Do you we think we should abort the operation?” she asked.

“No, lets run with it love” the Commander responded “It's too late to call it off effectively now anyway as the proverbial horse has bolted and we won't be able to contact him for a while.”

“It racks up the risk level though” Tracy warned “Should we inform the others?” she asked.

“No, let's keep this between us just for the moment” the Commander concluded “However I do think tonight Simon should go and take a sneak and peek at Devane's office and give his drum a discrete spin.”

“I'll get him onto it right away” Tracy confirmed.

“We need to know everything he has seen, heard and read in the last six months” the Commander responded “He is getting information from somewhere or someone so if we can identify who, how and where it is coming to him from then we may be able to nip it in the bud before any serious damage is done.”

“I'll get his tree shaken and see what falls out” Tracy agreed “The trick will be to ensure we go about it without leaving any trace we were ever there or attracting any unwanted attention.”

“If you hear anything else love give me a call” the Commander urged “I'll see you later assuming I survive my encounter with the Garage Superintendent, I don't think I am going to be his favourite person today...”

“All right then love” Tracy confirmed “See you later” she then declared before hanging up.

For a few moments she remained in the corridor motionless as she gathered her thoughts before taking a deep breath and then making off down towards Fuller's office whereupon opening the door and entering she found him and Jennifer, both having only just arrived.

“Morning you two love birds” Tracy remarked.

“Hi Sis!” Jennifer responded to her identical twin sister with a gleaming smile.

“If you don’t mind me saying so Maam” Fuller remarked upon seeing Tracy’s expression “You have the appearance of a lady with a problem.”

“That would be a fair estimation” Tracy was forced to readily agree “I need you to do something for me” she then asked with an obvious hint of hesitation in her stance and her voice as she made the request.

“And I am not going to like it am I?” Fuller asked as his experience and his senses combined told him where this was inevitably leading.

“Probably not” Tracy admitted “We need you to do a little sneak and peek at someone, office, e-mails, computer files, the works” she confirmed “Also give his place a going over but leaving no trace that you were ever there.”

“Anyone we know?” Jennifer asked.

“Sir William Devane” Tracy confirmed.

“The newly appointed Secretary of State for National Security & Policing, that Sir William Devane?” Jennifer asked with an understandable sense of disbelief.

“I ran the official bio on him a few weeks back when he was appointed” Fuller remarked as he turned to his computer terminal and called up an archived secure file he had compiled on the man which then displayed on the screen in front of them “It was pretty thorough and nothing came up that rang any alarm bells.”

“Yeah well” Tracy responded “alarm bells are well and truly ringing now” she confirmed “Less than five minutes after the prison van escape our new friend Sir William here was on the phone to me asking what had happened and he knew exactly who it was that had escaped.”

“Could have been a fishing expedition” Fuller commented “Someone using him, feed him a few titbits of information and then dangle him outside to see what they can get through him from us?”

“Maybe” Tracy agreed “however someone has leaked information from within the inner circle somewhere and we need to find and plug that leak as soon as possible before any major damage occurs.”

“Didn’t you mention that you were driving Sir William around yesterday?” Fuller then asked Jennifer as he recalled something she had mentioned the previous day.

“Oh yes” Jennifer confirmed “I was giving him the ‘scenic tour’ of London’s docklands to get him out of the way for an hour whilst the rest of you were in sneaking about mode again.”

“What did you think of him?” Tracy asked.

“Seemed like a sensible fellow” Jennifer commented “He was initially somewhat apprehensive about meeting the Commander that morning...”

“Hardly surprising” Fuller remarked which was reflected in the wry smile from Tracy.

“...but overall he struck me as an honest hard working type with a few things on his mind” Jennifer then concluded “Rare thing to find in politicians these days, most of them seem to aspire to be poster fodder, beaming for the cameras at press junkets as they launch Government initiatives, flashy websites, glossy leaflets and take the credit without actually doing any work.”

“I suppose it is possible he is being used and may not even realise it” Fuller suggested “It’s been done before.”

“That it has” Tracy agreed “Even still we need to maintain extreme vigilance and caution.”

“Jenny, can you get me an itinerary for Devane?” Fuller asked “I need to know when he will be out of his office this afternoon.”

“Easily done” Jennifer confirmed “There is a big Home Office pow-wow this afternoon down at the Cabinet Office so the top floor at Marsham Street should be virtually empty after about two o’clock.”

“Good” Fuller remarked “In which case I will go in at two thirty and see what our friend has really been up to and with whom.”

“Thanks” Tracy remarked as she was about to leave when something else occurred to her “Oh by the way, did we hear anything more about that body that flew out of the window at MI6 yesterday?” she asked.

“Oh yes, I had forgotten about him” Fuller remembered and proceeded to search around on his desk amidst the disorganised clutter in search of his notes on the subject.

“Was this the guy that nearly flattened Jack and his girl on the way down?” Jennifer asked.

“That’s the one” Tracy confirmed as Fuller, with a look of triumph managed to locate the notes he was seeking.

“Alistair Court” Fuller read from his notes now that he had found them and got them into the right order “A Level 2 specialist in Southern African politics with a degree from Oxford University in business ethics and procedures. Recruited by MI5 six years ago, transferred on temporary loan to MI6 last month.”

“Background?” Tracy asked.

“Patchy at best” Fuller confirmed “Bit of a workaholic with not a lot of family or social life to speak of.”

“So is there anything to indicate what made him jump out of a window?” Tracy asked.

“Initially, no” Fuller confirmed “The official report from our friends at Vauxhall Cross confirms for public consumption that he did indeed commit suicide by jumping from a balcony, the impact with the ground resulting in immediate death by severe trauma.”

“The ‘official’ report” Jennifer picked up on a key point “So what does the ‘unofficial’ report say, knowing how MI6 are fond of the old smoke and mirrors trick?”

“He died as a result of a broken neck” Fuller explained “Which considering his high speed impact with a solid concrete pavement is not all that surprising, what is surprising is that he managed to jump to his apparent death despite the fact his neck had in fact been broken a good half an hour earlier.”

“Which means either he was a very clever boy, a zombie in his spare time or this official report from MI6 stinks to high heaven of a cover up job” Tracy concluded.

“I’ll keep digging around” Fuller confirmed “It may be nothing but I can’t help feeling this guy and or whatever he knew or found out is connected in some way to what we are currently involved in.”

“It is an uncomfortable thought” Tracy admitted.

“Would you like me to have one of my best drivers give Devane the scenic tour on his way home tonight?” Jennifer asked.

“If you would be so kind, thanks” Fuller agreed “I think the more time I have to work my magic undisturbed the better.”

“In which case we had better work on a plausible cover story to get you and your bag of tricks into the marble lined halls of Marsham Street” Tracy remarked “The one thing we most definitely do not want is any awkward questions.”

“I have an idea about that” Jennifer confirmed with a knowing smile.

“Is this one of those ideas that would be better if I didn't know anything about it by any chance?” Tracy asked.

“Oh I expect so” Fuller agreed “and you my love” he then turned to his wife Jennifer “are doing the driving.”

The rendezvous location was not exactly warm or welcoming but it served its purpose of providing a suitable meeting place that would be free from prying eyes and ears.

As the car arrived onto the site, its wheels crunched upon the uneven and weed strewn surface whereupon the driver proceeded to drive around behind the huge mountain of

pulverised rubble that had until fairly recently been the industrial buildings that had once occupied much of the vast and now desolate site.

In the shadow of the vast mountain of rubble was another vehicle, a metallic gold Range Rover from which emerged Villiers in his customary expensive tailored long overcoat and trilby hat as they arrived.

“Welcome” Villiers declared as he stepped forwards and greeted Garforth as he got out of the car and they met for the first time “It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance.”

“Thank you” Garforth responded as the two men shook hands whilst at a discrete distance Hansell and three minders looked on “You would be Mr Villiers I presume?” he then enquired.

“Indeed” Villiers confirmed.

“And I have you and your associates to thank for my sudden, welcome and somewhat surprising release from incarceration?” Garforth asked.

“You do indeed” Villiers responded “you see I want to hire your services for a little driving job I have in mind.”

“Seeing as you strike me as a studious gentleman who likes to plan carefully” Garforth remarked “would I be correct in thinking you have already checked me out and that what you have in mind is potentially the wrong side of legal?”

“You have a problem with that?” Villiers asked.

“Not at all” Garforth confirmed with a wry smile “Wouldn't have it any other way” he agreed.

“I see already that you are a man with whom I can do business” Villiers remarked with a chuckle as he proffered a cigarette from his silver case which Garforth gratefully accepted with a nod of thanks.

“Of course my services do have a price tag attached” Garforth remarked as he lit up the cigarette “although a substantial deposit has already been paid thanks to your associates efforts at achieving my freedom so efficiently.”

“For what I have in mind, provided you agree of course” Villiers confirmed “You will be handsomely rewarded I can assure you.”

“Which leaves the important question” Garforth got down to the matter at hand “Why me?”

“In addition to your extensive and indeed impressive record which I can assure you I and my associates have checked most thoroughly” Villiers explained as the two men walked over to his Range Rover “a number of reliable witnesses saw your driving

through the east end of London the other day and all of them report that they were very impressed.”

“Thank you” Garforth responded as they got in the back of the Range Rover.

“You have a real talent behind the wheel it would seem” Villiers continued “Where did you learn to drive like that if I may ask?”

“My old man, God rest his soul” Garforth admitted “He was a wheel man back in the day, pretty good one too.”

“Anymore like you at home?” Villiers asked out of curiosity, completely unaware of the Garforth’s significance or that of his more famous younger brother.

“No, not any more” Garforth confirmed convincingly “I did have a younger brother but he died long ago.”

“It must be said however” Villiers remarked as he signalled to his driver to move on and they then had to brace themselves as the vehicle jumped around a bit as it made its way over the uneven ground “the officer who pursued you was pretty impressive as well. Haven’t seen the plod put up a chase like that for a very long time. Do you know who it was driving the squad car by any chance?” he asked.

“Some Traffic Division copper” Garforth confirmed “I didn’t get a name though, I was err exercising my right to remain silent” he then remarked to a mutual chuckle of understanding between the two men as the Range Rover reached the main road and the ride became somewhat smoother once more.

“I’ll see if I can find out” Villiers mused “It may be wise to see that he his not around when my little party that I have in mind takes place, we don’t want any uninvited gatecrashers.”

“Absolutely not” Garforth readily agreed although deep inside he could not help but feeling this was the first indication of a major problem ahead.

“We got something here!” Fuller called from his desk which caused Tracy and Collins to come over “Garforth’s tracer just went live and he is currently doing about forty five miles an hour right there” he then indicated on the screen in front of them.

“Right then” Tracy declared as they were joined by McWilliam who also took a look at the screen “Let’s see where this takes us.”

“Regrettably I am going to have to leave you guys to it” Fuller declared as he got up from his seat and handed control over to McWilliam “I have another appointment with my bag of tricks.”

“Remember, no residual presence” Tracy reminded Fuller as he picked up his briefcase which contained the tools of his trade “Only the last time you and Jennifer

tried something like this your van got blown up and my Husband had to come and rescue you two from a bus shelter somewhere off the M4 if I recall.”

“They will never know I was there” Fuller reassured them “Trust me.”

With that declaration Fuller duly departed, making his way down the corridor to the lifts where Jennifer was already waiting for him.

“Are you ready for this?” Jennifer asked as they entered a waiting lift car and she pressed the button that saw the lift proceed down to the basement level car park.

“Probably not” Fuller admitted “Where is Emma by the way?”

“I left her with my mother for the afternoon” Jennifer confirmed “It was either her or Jack.”

“Yeah...” Fuller recalled the last time they had asked Jack to look after their baby daughter “He didn’t look too keen last time did he?”

“Looked positively mortified at the mere suggestion if I recall” Jennifer remarked “He is getting more and more like his adopted father every day.”

“Not necessarily a bad thing” Fuller remarked “Then again...” he added as he thought about it a little more as the lift reached the basement level and the doors opened allowing them to exit.

“So how long do you think it will be before Jack joins the family business?” Jennifer asked.

“He already has” Fuller confirmed as they reached their car “Filled in the application form online last week, it flashed up on my system.”

“Tracy won’t like that” Jennifer responded.

“Which is why the Commander has issued the request that we keep quiet on the subject” Fuller explained “Tracy is not to find out under any circumstances until Jack tells her.”

“Message received and understood” Jennifer confirmed as she opened the drivers door and got in with Fuller joining her in the front passenger seat of the standard VIP Protection Division car.

“All right then” Jennifer asked as she started the car “Where to?”

“Devane’s flat in Islington first” Fuller confirmed “If he has a standard set-up then he should have a central parliamentary computer network terminal or laptop there. After that we go and take a shuffy through his office at Marsham Street by which time everyone should have gone home.”

“Islington it is” Jennifer agreed as she proceeded to drive off.

“Oh yes...” Kinderley remarked as he finished looking under the bonnet before lowering it and securing it shut “That should do very nicely I would have thought.”

“Just got these in” Garage Superintendent Andy Drover remarked as he closed the passenger side door of the brand new top of the range specification Ford Mondeo saloon car, its metallic silver paint gleaming in the sunshine “Bit of a buyers market at the moment so when we buy four or five the local dealer chucks in another one free of charge to sweeten the deal.”

“Will the Commander like it, that is the question” Kinderley asked as he sat in the drivers seat and placed his hands ahead firmly on the wheel “Only apart from his legendary reputation and the odd case I have worked on with him in the dim and distant past, I don’t really know that much about him.”

“I’ll tell you this” Drover confirmed as he joined Kinderley by the drivers side door and knelt down “The Commander likes a decent motor in general and a Ford in particular so trust me on this one, you are going to be fine.”

“I hope so” Kinderley responded with an obvious sense of apprehension.

“It’s good to see you back behind the wheel of a company motor once again” Drover remarked “About time we saw you back.”

“Thanks” Kinderley responded but at that moment both he and Drover’s attention were distracted by the approach of a recovery truck which had arrived through the main gates of the Security & Police Service Vehicle Services Section premises near Hendon in North London and was now coming towards them.

“Oh dear...” Kinderley remarked as he got out of the car and together with Drover they saw the state of the vehicle that was on the back of the flatbed type recovery truck and also who was sat in the front passenger seat of the truck as it came to a stop in front of them.

“We erm...” the Commander sheepishly explained as he stepped down from the truck and looked back momentarily at the remains of his car on the back “Well there was an incident” he admitted.

“What did you do Sir; pick a fire fight with a steam roller?” Drover asked as he went over to the truck and saw in close detail the wrecked car thereupon which was smashed in badly at both the front and rear with many of the windows either cracked or completely broken.

“Things didn’t go quite according to plan” the Commander admitted as he handed over the front right indicator assembly and the keys from the car he had been carrying in his hand to Drover who merely responded with a slightly disapproving look.

“You don’t say” Kinderley agreed “That’s a write off I reckon.”

“We only had it delivered last month” Drover mumbled to himself as he continued to examine the damage in detail with his expert eye.

“I am beginning to see why the powers that be have insisted you have an official driver” Kinderley remarked as in front of them Drover indicated to the recovery truck driver to take the wreckage away whereupon he followed it to the nearby workshop.

“Maybe they have a point” the Commander wryly admitted “Speaking of which, found a motor yet?”

“Right here” Kinderley introduced his superior officer to his new official vehicle which was still parked immediately behind them “Meet Lima X-Ray Six Five November Hotel Kilo” he declared referring to the registration number displayed on the shiny brand new number plates that had only just been fitted for the first time front and rear less than ten minutes earlier.

“Oh very nice” the Commander remarked in admiration “My old man would have approved very much.”

“Thank you” Kinderley remarked “Would you like a lift back into town Sir?”

“Sounds like an excellent idea” the Commander admitted as they both got in the car and Kinderley duly started the engine.

“Effectively it is the standard top spec model but with the usual refinements that Andy Drover and his boys here at Hendon put on” Kinderley confirmed “There is the usual communications equipment plus there are hidden blue flashing lights behind the front grille and we can go all Starsky & Hutch with this if the mood takes us” he produced the roof mounted blue flashing light unit that he then proceeded to place through the side window onto the roof for a moment before retrieving it again.

“In which case I think it is time we went for a ride” the Commander declared “Let’s see what this thing can do.”

“Yes Sir” Kinderley enthusiastically agreed as they then set off.

“I’ll say this for you love” Fuller remarked as they entered Devane’s flat in Islington “Your lock picking skills are improving.”

“Took some lessons off sis whilst I was having this damn plastic foot fitted” Jennifer explained as she carefully shut the door behind them “So, where do we start?” she asked.

“A study or office of some kind is usually the best starting point in my experience” Fuller remarked “Through here looks promising” he then led the way ahead through a door off the main hallway and sure enough they found Devane’s study.

"I'll give Sir William his due, this is one meticulously maintained looking office" Jennifer remarked as she looked around the room whilst Fuller made directly for the seat behind the antique desk that dominated it "You should see the state of the Foreign Secretary's place, looks like a whirlwind has hit it most of the time I go to pick him up."

"Ah here we go" Fuller declared as he managed to activate Devane's computer terminal on the desk "Perhaps you could give his filing cabinet a look through?" he then suggested.

"Why not" Jennifer readily agreed as she stepped over to the fairly uniform looking metal four drawer cabinet and opened the top drawer to reveal fairly standard looking suspension files that she then proceeded to meticulously look through.

"So, what is it we are looking for again?" Jennifer asked as she began to look through the files carefully.

"A needle in a haystack I reckon" Fuller admitted as, thanks to his expertise he quickly managed to access the computer and was already scanning through the files stored thereupon as well as downloading a copy of the contents along with useful access logs and any other potentially relevant data.

"Oh, naughty boy" Jennifer remarked upon seeing one receipt she found in a file as she worked her way through the third drawer of the filing cabinet "Looks like Sir William owes two hundred and forty seven pounds and eighty pence on the bar bill at his golf club."

"Nowhere near Sir Richard's record" Fuller mused.

"You got anything?" Jennifer asked.

"Lots of access logs that I will need to filter through back at the office but nothing stands out so far" he confirmed as he finished downloading the computer's contents and prepared to shut it down "What about you?"

"Two unpaid bar bill receipts, a London A to Z dated 1978 and a bottle of finest thirty year old single malt in the bottom drawer" Jennifer confirmed.

"In which case I think we are done here for now" Fuller confirmed "Anything really juicy would most likely be on the secure system in his office at Marsham Street I would have thought."

"Our next stop I presume?" Jennifer asked.

"Indeed my love" Fuller agreed "and I do hope your cover story to get me in there is a good one."

"Oh don't you worry" Jennifer confirmed as she took her husband by the arm and they proceeded to leave "I have it all taken care of."

The Commanders return to his office on the top floor of New Scotland Yard coincided with Tracy coming up the stairs having attended and chaired the daily Section Chief's briefing which as usual she had kept short and to the point.

"Anything I should know love?" the Commander asked as Tracy followed him into his office.

"The usual run of the mill stuff really" Tracy confirmed "MI6 have declared and taken jurisdiction over their defenestrated dead guy so that is us officially out of the loop although John Hewitt has promised to copy me in on anything interesting they come across."

"I am hoping that is just a coincidence and an internal matter" the Commander admitted "We have enough problems clogging the place up around here at the moment as it is."

"Amber McWilliam reports that Garforth's tracking device is still on the move" Tracy reported "Seems he is being given quite the scenic tour."

"I expect that this Villiers bloke is trying to ensure we are not following him" the Commander remarked "Probably paranoid that we are following him."

"Which of course we are" Tracy confirmed with a wry smile but she then noticed that her husband was definitely distracted "What's wrong love?" she asked.

"It's probably nothing" the Commander responded semi-dismissively.

"That is what you usually say about an hour before all hell breaks loose around here" Tracy reminded him.

"I am wondering just exactly how deep our leaks run" the Commander explained the reason for his nagging concerns "At the break out scene, the driver of the car, the guy who appeared to be in charge knew who I was and that I was there right behind him."

"Are you sure?" Tracy asked.

"He loaded James into the car that was just in front of mine" the Commander recalled "Then he calls his guys off as their job was done but before he gets back in his car he turns in my direction, smiles and then does a gun firing gesture at me with his hands."

"Did you recognise him at all?" Tracy asked her concern obvious.

"Well I assume it was that Hansell guy but although I have never come across that name before I swear I have seen that guy somewhere" the Commander confirmed "it may have been a long time ago mind."

"Someone you crossed swords with, someone you put away?" Tracy suggested.

“Possibly” the Commander admitted “I just can’t place the face but I would swear on your life I know him.”

“Doesn’t exactly narrow down the list very much” Tracy remarked “The list of people you have had dealings with is pretty long.”

“That it is” the Commander agreed “but it is clear these guys are getting information from somewhere deep within the inner circle, someone is talking.”

“Which reminds me” Tracy informed him “Simon and Jennifer have apparently finished over at Devane’s flat and are on their way now to the Home Office to give his office a sneak and peek.”

“The more I think about it the more I reckon Devane is just a middle man in all this” the Commander remarked “Someone could be using him to get to us and feed us duff information and he may not even be aware of it.”

“We will soon know one way or the other” Tracy confirmed “Once Simon and Jenny are back it shouldn’t be long before we find out what secrets our new friend Sir William is hiding.”

“I am going to go over his file again, see if there is something I may have missed” the Commander confirmed “The Home Secretary’s as well. I know she has been fully vetted and Dave Collins vouches for her but that still doesn’t mean she may not have been got at somewhere in between.”

As the Commander was reaching down to his lower desk drawer to extract some files, the P.A. outside buzzed him.

“The Home Secretary for you on Line 3, urgent” the P.A. informed him.

“Thank you” the Commander responded before picking up the line and putting it on speakerphone so that Tracy could also listen in easily “Home Secretary, good afternoon.”

“Good afternoon Commander” Jayne Grey called “Is this line secure?” she then inquired.

“Indeed” the Commander confirmed although it took Tracy to show him the correct button to press on the telephone to make it so “What can I do for you Home Secretary?”

“I wanted to bring to your attention something that may be of relevance in your little secret operation that you are conducting” the Home Secretary confirmed “Only you seem to be causing some ructions in otherwise quiet, dusty and undisturbed corners of the corridors of power.”

“Oh really?” the Commander leaned forward with renewed interest “Do tell” he prompted.

“My opposite number in the Foreign Office just received a communication from the South African Consulate” the Home Secretary explained “Apparently someone has tipped them off that our National Security & Police Service are conducting covert investigations into a South African national that they have a vested interest in and, to put it mildly, they are a bit upset about it.”

“Did they mention a name by any chance?” the Commander asked, already sensing where this was going.

“Our friend Henry Villiers no less” the Home Secretary confirmed which caused the Commander to look on at the telephone with an unimpressed look and Tracy upon hearing this to roll her eyes skywards.

“What is he to them?” the Commander asked.

“They were not that specific” the Home Secretary responded as she looked at the copy of the South African Consulate message that she had received from the Foreign Secretary half an hour earlier “but I got the distinct impression he is very important over there with lots of powerful friends.”

“We definitely have a leak” Tracy declared with an obvious sense of frustration.

“It would appear so” the Home Secretary reluctantly agreed “I will back you all the way on this Commander but I hope to God you know what you are doing.”

“So do I” the Commander admitted “What of our friend Sir William Devane?” he then asked.

“As requested I have asked him to dig up files relating to that Senator McAllister case from late last year on the pretence that the US State Department want copies of everything we have on him” the Home Secretary confirmed “If he is loyal that is all he will do, however if he also accesses the other files in that section of the archive then we will have him by the proverbial dangly bits.”

“As a courtesy” the Commander informed her “I should inform you that I have authorised a couple of my people to have a sneak and peak at Devane’s office and home, discreetly of course.”

“Good idea” the Home Secretary agreed “I’ll keep an eye on him as well, see what he gets into over the next day or so.”

“Much appreciated” the Commander confirmed.

“I best leave you to it, I know how busy you two usually are” the Home Secretary remarked “Please keep me informed on developments though” she requested.

“Will do Home Secretary” the Commander readily agreed “Goodbye.”

“You believe her?” Tracy asked as soon as the call was disconnected.

“Seems convincing enough” the Commander confirmed “Still, I think it would be wise to limit what we release to her to just the essentials, suitably edited if necessary of course.”

“Don’t we do that anyway?” Tracy remarked “I believe Sir Richard used to call it his ‘mushroom theory’ didn’t he?”

“Oh, you mean keep them in the dark and feed them on...” the Commander responded.

“Precisely” Tracy confirmed with a smirk.

“Meantime whilst we are immersing key politicians in eternal darkness” the Commander continued “I shall proceed to rack my little grey cells and see if I cannot locate our mystery face from the past.”

The Receptionist behind the desk in the main entrance lobby of the UK Government Home Office building in Marsham Street in the heart of Westminster instinctively looked up from her computer when the automatic sliding doors glided open and she witnessed the arrival of Fuller with Jennifer escorting him.

"Got a delivery for you Margery" Jennifer confirmed to the Receptionist, indicating Fuller who was standing alongside her looking as official and serious as he could.

"Afternoon Jenny" the Receptionist responded "And your friend here is...?"

"Richard Thornberg from the Information Integrity Inspection Service" Jennifer explained as Fuller produced the convincing yet fake identification card that he had been supplied with for this little bit of subterfuge.

"Right..." the Receptionist responded as she examined the identification proffered before noting down the details "All right, if you could just sign in please" she then requested as she could find nothing out of place and duly concluded that all was well.

"There you go" Fuller replied as he handed back the visitor book once he had signed it, remembering to use the false identity he had been supplied without giving anything away.

“Thank you” the Receptionist confirmed as she then handed them visitors badges which they both pinned to their lapels “If you could return those when you leave I would appreciate it” she instructed.

“Will do” Jennifer confirmed before they both departed, making directly for the lifts over on the far side of the lobby.

"So tell me" Fuller asked as they ascended in the lift to the top floor "Is there such a thing as the Information Integrity Inspection Service because I for one have never heard of it."

"Nope" Jennifer confirmed with a wry smile as the lift came to a stop and the doors opened "but don't knock it, it got us in here didn't it?"

"Can't fault that" Fuller agreed.

"The trouble is every time members of our illustrious family tread the hallowed Axminster carpet of the Home Office it usually results in quite a mess" Jennifer reminded her husband whilst they headed down the corridor towards Devane's office located at the far end "Both politically and often physically as well."

"Relax my love" Fuller reassured her "It's all under control."

"If you say so" Jennifer remarked as she proceeded to fiddle with the lock on the office door whilst Fuller checked up and down the empty corridor to ensure they continued to remain unobserved.

"Are you all right?" Fuller asked as he could see Jennifer was having some difficulty with the lock.

"I think so" Jennifer strained as she applied further force to the lock that then suddenly gave way with a crack as part of the internal mechanism snapped "We're in" she then declared and they wasted no further time in entering the office.

"Ohhh dear..." Fuller remarked as once he and Jennifer were inside, they saw the state of the office which had been clearly heavily ransacked with filing cabinet drawers left open and documents discarded all over the place.

"Assuming it isn't the cleaning lady's day off" Jennifer remarked "I think it is fairly safe to say we are not the first to arrive."

"And I thought my office was a mess" Fuller agreed as both he and Jennifer carefully made their way around the office trying to disturb as little as possible.

"So much for a sneak and peek with zero residual presence" Jennifer admitted but then paused mid step as something specific caught her eye.

"Found something?" Fuller asked seeing Jennifer kneel down to take a closer look at a pile of files that were discarded all over the floor near the end of the desk.

"Would Devane have access to MI6 files by any chance?" Jennifer asked as she put on a latex glove before carefully picking up the file that had attracted her attention the most.

"Possibly" Fuller concluded "Briefings, minutes, threat assessments, that sort of thing."

"So I guess the personnel jacket of one of their officers would probably be a tad unlikely to be in his possession then?" Jennifer asked as she held up the file and Fuller came over to take a closer look at it.

"Definitely not" Fuller agreed "Hang on a minute" he then exclaimed when he noticed something in particular about the file "This is the dead guy that jumped out of the window."

"You mean the one that managed to hurl himself off the top of MI6 headquarters despite the fact he had already been dead for a while?" Jennifer asked.

"That's the fellow" Fuller confirmed.

"There's more MI6 files over here" Jennifer then pointed over to the other side of the office floor where the distinctive crest of MI6 could be seen on more files in amongst the generally strewn clutter.

"All right, this is what we will do" Fuller opened his case and produced a digital camera which he passed to his wife "Photograph every detail of this office with everything in place, make sure you get good close ups of the files and don't disturb anything yet."

"What are you going to do?" Jennifer asked as she began to photograph the room and its contents.

"I am going to check the computer logs" Fuller confirmed as he began to work on the laptop that was on the desk "See if our friend Sir William has been accessing anything electronic he shouldn't have in addition to this lot, also get his e-mails as well."

"We can't leave these files here though" Jennifer remarked.

"Correct" Fuller agreed "The highly classified stuff we will take with us, we have a duty of care under the Official Secrets Act and other more obscure legislation to secure any loose data we find in the course of our duty."

"And reporting this little incident?" Jennifer then enquired as she completed her photography and handed the camera back.

"We are not here remember" Fuller reminded her "We can do an official investigation once someone reports the break in here but by then there is every chance the scene will have been cleansed of anything of interest or that could be potentially inflammatory."

"Including this little lot" Jennifer agreed as she began to carefully retrieve the MI6 files and place them in an evidence bag.

"Whatever the outcome" Fuller remarked "It isn't looking too good for Sir William Devane that is for certain."

"When the Commander finds out about this I think it is a fairly safe bet that he will be asking for a little chat" Jennifer agreed.

"I wouldn't want to be in Sir William's shoes when that happens" Fuller confirmed.

Garforth had been travelling for about two hours in the back of the Range Rover with Villiers sat alongside him when the driver turned off the narrow country lane they had been following and onto a rough gravel track that quickly tested the vehicle's four wheel drive off road capabilities to the full.

As they passed through a gateway, visible ahead in the gloom of the mid winter sunset was a large farm manor house of some kind whose silhouette Garforth could just make out but little else.

It was as they drew closer that he momentarily felt a click in his neck somewhere close to the area where he had been injected with the tracking device.

Garforth thought nothing of it as what little he had felt passed away very quickly and he was unaware of the fact that his tracking device had now been remotely disabled.

But someone was aware of what had just happened...

"Bastards!" McWilliam called out in rich full Gaelic fury, an unusual outburst of anger as she pulled off her headset and threw it onto the desk in front of her.

"That didn't sound good" Tracy remarked to herself as she was passing by in the corridor outside at that moment, causing her to stop in her tracks upon hearing the very heavily Irish accented outburst.

"God dam it!" McWilliam then exclaimed in fury as Tracy's curiosity got the better of her and she put her head around the door to see what was going on.

"Bad day at the office?" Tracy politely enquired.

"I think your husband once summed it up as being up the proverbial waterway without the proverbial propulsion equipment" McWilliam admitted "We just lost Garforth's tracker, looks like it has been neutralised by some sort of electronic dampening field."

"Drat" Tracy responded "Is there any way we can re-establish contact?" she asked.

"No" McWilliam confirmed, by now slightly calmer but still angry within "The carrier wave is gone; it looks like the microelectronics within it have been fried by some sort of anti-surveillance system."

"Where would Villiers get something like that from?" Tracy asked.

"Most of what was at one time considered restricted technology that would only be available to the likes of covert intelligence agencies is freely available on the open market these days" McWilliam admitted "if you know the right people to go to of course, oh and have a very large bank account to pay for it, preferably in cash."

At that point they were joined by Jennifer and Fuller who had returned from their trip to the Home Office and as soon as they arrived in the office Tracy could tell from their expressions that they were not in possession of good news either.

“Hi” Fuller declared “Do you guys want the bad news or the bad news?”

“You mean in addition to the already existing bad news?” McWilliam asked.

“Devane’s office was completely ransacked when we got there” Jennifer confirmed “and we found these” she held up the evidence bag with the MI6 files inside clearly visible.

“I think we need to talk to the Commander” Fuller admitted “and quickly.”

“Eagle One from Angel One” Tracy called into her radio “Code 7R, ultraviolet priority, five minutes.”

“Good grief” Garforth exclaimed as he entered the large dining room with Villiers and Hansell and saw the social gathering in progress where approximately fifty men were drinking, smoking and chatting “It’s like the Who’s Who of European organised crime in here.”

“It has taken a lot of hard work and money to put all this together” Villiers admitted “Welcome to the team.”

“I don’t doubt it” Garforth agreed.

“Knock yourself out” Villiers showed the way ahead to the bar “I am sure you are already familiar with many here, just try not to drink too much as our briefing will be at six o’clock sharp and we will need at least reasonably clear heads all round.”

“Understood, thank you” Garforth responded as Villiers then left, leaving him to mingle amongst what was probably one of the biggest gatherings of criminal talent that had been seen in many years. Firstly however he decided to head straight for the bar.

“Gin and tonic please” Garforth called to the barmaid “plenty of ice if you have it” he requested.

As he waited for his drink, Garforth looked around the room and in a few moments managed to recognise over a dozen of those present as being well known and very talented career criminals whose services most certainly do not come cheap.

“Jimmy Garforth, been a long time” a strongly North American accented voice called causing him to look around behind him as his drink was delivered to see a very tall thin man with greying goatee beard there.

“Sam Wallace” Garforth greeted the man with a warm handshake “What brings you to this illustrious gathering?” he asked.

“It seems my services are required in exchange for a very large sum of money” Wallace admitted as he indicated to the barmaid for a refill of his now empty glass with the same again.

“Still the patron saint of shooting things then?” Garforth asked, referring to Wallace’s legendary reputation as a weapons expert, both acquisition and usage thereof.

“Semi-retired now” Wallace admitted as he received his fresh drink with a nod of thanks “I still take the odd job on the side to keep my hand in though.”

It was at this point that Wallace, seeing that Garforth was now looking directly at him, silently mouthed the words ‘The whole place is wired for sound’ to which Garforth nodded in understanding before their vocal conversation continued.

“So what are you bringing to this little party?” Wallace asked.

“I’m the transport” Garforth explained.

“I had a feeling you might be” Wallace admitted “That wasn’t you on the news the other day was it?”

“That was me” Garforth admitted.

“See you haven’t lost your touch then” Wallace remarked “So what do you think this Villiers guy has in mind then?”

“I don’t know” Garforth responded as he looked around the room “but judging by the talent he has put together here it must be a very big job.”

“With a lot of up front finance to fund it as well” Wallace confirmed “Most of these lads don’t come cheap by any stretch of the imagination.”

“I guess we will find out soon enough” Garforth admitted.

“I am going outside for some fresh air” Wallace declared as he took out a pack of cigarettes and a lighter from his pocket “Want to tag along?” he suggested with a look that meant it was more of an insistence than a suggestion.

“Sounds like a good idea” Garforth agreed, getting the message as he finished his drink and left the empty glass on the bar before accompanying Wallace towards the exit.

A few moments later they were stepping outside where the late winter afternoon was getting increasingly dark as the sun slipped below the horizon in the distance.

“No ears out here, we can talk freely” Wallace reassured.

“So” Garforth began as he gladly accepted a cigarette from Wallace and they proceeded to light up “What is the FBI doing here?”

“I might ask the same of you” Wallace responded “Last I heard you were out in the Far East somewhere doing some freelance work for MI6.”

“I got recalled back to Blighty last week” Garforth explained “Courtesy of a certain high ranking member of the National Security & Police Service of our mutual acquaintance.”

“No prizes for guessing who that might be” Wallace admitted.

“They needed someone who could provide a convincing criminal record, was reliable and most importantly can drive” Garforth continued to explain “So here I am.”

“The FBI is very interested in this guy Villiers” Wallace explained his involvement “so when we heard about his little recruiting campaign, the Fed’s gave me a call and here I am.”

“Do you have any communications capability by any chance?” Garforth asked.

“I have a micro radio set up in my room but it doesn’t work” Wallace confirmed “There seems to be some sort of dampening field or something in operation around this place, you can’t get a signal in or out.”

“I feared as much” Garforth responded “I have a tracking device inserted behind my ear but as when we approached this place I could feel something go wrong with it as if it had been zapped by some sort of electronic pulse to disable it.”

“Someone around here is being very paranoid” Wallace reluctantly agreed “and I don’t think it is the supposedly top man Villiers either.”

“You think someone else is behind all this?” Garforth asked.

“It is just one of my little theories based on the available facts, nothing more” Wallace admitted “but someone is putting up a hell of a lot of money for this little operation. Villiers is a planner, dealer and facilitator whilst his boy Hansell is a fixer, a gopher, neither of them really have the financial clout that is needed to put a team of this experience and expense together.”

“Time to rejoin the party I reckon” Garforth suggested as he finished his cigarette and stubbed out the remains beneath his foot, Wallace following him in doing the same.

“Might as well” Wallace agreed as they went back inside “Nothing quite as satisfying as indulging in free drink and debauchery on the company’s time is there?”

“Indeed” Garforth agreed.

“Would I be right in assuming that this is going to cause me grief?” the Commander asked as he sat down behind his desk and then looked around the office at Tracy, Fuller, Jennifer, Dave Collins and Amber McWilliam.

“I think it is fairly safe to say that Sir, yes” Jennifer admitted.

“All right” the Commander declared before taking a gulp of his mug of freshly brewed tea “Let’s hear it” he called.

“As per your request Simon and I went on our little sneak and peek this afternoon” Jennifer explained to the group “Firstly we went to Sir William Devane’s place in Islington and found nothing of consequence, everything very neat and tidy and by the numbers.”

“So far so good” the Commander agreed as he took a milk chocolate digestive biscuit from the packet he had retrieved from his desk drawer and took a bite out of it before offering the packet around the room.

“Then we went to the Home Office building in Marsham Street” Fuller continued the story “under the guise of a routine inspection by a Data Integrity Inspector from the Information Integrity Inspection Service...”

“Who?” Tracy, the Commander and Collins all responded amid mouthfuls of biscuits at exactly the same moment.

“One of Sir Richard’s little creations” McWilliam explained “Handy for certain contingencies such as this.”

“Well anyway” Fuller continued “we gained access to Devane’s office and that as they say is when the plot thickened, considerably.”

“The place had been turned over and very thoroughly” Jennifer confirmed as she produced the newly printed photographs of the scene for everyone to look at.

“Anyone we know?” Tracy asked as she studied some of the photographs of the scene.

“It looked like a comprehensive search had been done” Jennifer confirmed “don’t recognise the handy work so I would wager it was not done by any of the regular suspects for this sort of thing as they traditionally tend to leave little if any trace they have been there.”

“Great” the Commander responded with a sigh “A break in on Parliamentary property and the office of a senior member of the Cabinet as well, you know what this means.”

“Hello to the sense of humour failures from the Parliamentary Ombudsman Committee” Tracy concluded.

“Oh great...” Collins remarked “Just what we don’t need.”

“If they start poking around then they there is a danger they could find about our little party” McWilliam ominously warned.

“I’ll talk to Lord Hainault” the Commander responded “Get him to sit on the Committee for a few days at least, citing National Security requirements or something, they won’t oppose his wishes.”

“That should give us enough time to ensure any cover stories we need to come up with are watertight” McWilliam agreed.

“Do we know what was taken?” Collins asked.

“Nothing obvious” Jennifer confirmed “There was stuff strewn all over the place as you can see from our holiday snaps.

“My people will get called in on this as soon as the break in is reported” Collins confirmed “I should be able to control the investigation and feed you back anything that turns up.”

“I would appreciate it” the Commander responded.

“However” Jennifer then continued “That isn’t the end of it, in fact it was more what was there that should not have been than what may have been taken that is the most interesting feature of this little turn of events.”

“Is this the point where I casually toss my pen onto the desk in surrender and declare that I just want to go home and hug my wife?” the Commander asked, already sensing what was coming.

“In amongst the mess on the floor of Devane’s office we found these” Jennifer opened the briefcase she had brought in with her and extracted the evidence bag containing the files she and Fuller had retrieved earlier before placing them on the desk.

“Whoa...” Collins commented as he saw the files and their significance thanks to the crest of MI6 being present upon them, a feeling shared equally by the others in the office at this revelation.

“That’s it” the Commander casually tossed his pen on the desk in surrender “I just want to go home and hug my wife.”

“What the hell were these doing in Sir William’s office?” McWilliam asked.

“I dread to think” the Commander confirmed as he duly began to carefully look through some of the files whilst Tracy also picked one up and looked at it.

“Hang on” Tracy then called out as something occurred to her “What was the name of the flying dead guy from MI6?” she asked.

“You mean the guy who flew out of the window at Vauxhall Cross yesterday?” Fuller asked, already aware of the significance of Tracy’s inquiry “Alistair Court” he then confirmed.

“This is his personnel file” Tracy confirmed.

“What the hell...?” the Commander exclaimed.

“Well, there goes the neighbourhood” McWilliam casually remarked.

“What level of security access is Sir William cleared for?” the Commander asked.

“Briefings, Intelligence Committee reports, threat assessments, that sort of thing” Collins confirmed “Basically the sort of edited highlights and well embellished bullshit that we cook up and leave to simmer on gas mark four before we serve it up to the Joint Intelligence & Security Committee.”

“So definitely not this level of stuff then?” the Commander inquired, seeking an absolutely clear and definitive answer.

“Most of these should not have even left the room at Vauxhall Cross where they are supposed to be locked up let alone wound up in the office of a middle ranking Government Minister in the Home Office on the other side of the Thames” Collins agreed.

“Eddie love” Tracy called as she had noticed something in the Court personnel file that had caught her attention.

From her expression and the rare calling of her husband by his first name in the presence of others, it was clear that she had found something that was to her a serious cause for concern as she got up and went over to him to show the Commander the file “Take a look at this” she indicated a particular part of one page.

“Something wrong?” Collins asked as he like the others sensed the tension in that office was rising noticeably with Tracy’s discovery and her subsequent reactions to it.

Tracy and the Commander exchanged deeply concerned looks and silently both nodded in agreement with each other before she stepped back.

“Would you excuse us both for a few moments” the Commander declared as he got up “Tracy and I need to discuss something, we will be back in couple of minutes.”

With that ominous sounding announcement, the Commander followed Tracy through the connecting door into her office and then closed the door behind them.

“Has anyone else here got a sudden urge to book a last minute holiday on a sunny island a very long way from here?” Fuller asked.

“We’ve got to tell them” Tracy declared as she and the Commander stood facing each other in the middle of her office “We have no other choice.”

“I wish it wasn’t the case” the Commander admitted before looking once again at the file in his hands to make sure that what she and now he had seen really was correct and that there was no chance that they had both misread it.

“That file has a distribution list on it with that codename” Tracy reminded her husband “and assuming it is not coincidence of codenames...”

“...which is extremely unlikely, especially given the circumstances in which these files came into our possession...” the Commander admitted.

“...then this whole Pyramid thing is even bigger and deeper connected than we first suspected” Tracy concluded.

“If we tell them then we could be potentially opening up a whole Pandora’s Box of problems” the Commander ominously warned “So far only you, I, Hewitt over at MI6 and the Prime Minister know about this.”

“We can trust them, you know that” Tracy reassured him “and if this is going to explode in our faces, hopefully not in the literal sense then we are going to need all the reliable help we can get.”

“I always knew this day was going to come eventually but I will admit that I was hoping to keep this off the radar for a bit longer until we had more information and intelligence to work with” the Commander admitted “I know we have dealt with plots, shady dealings and conspiracies at the highest level before but there is something about this whole thing that makes me very unsettled.”

“As long as we have each other” Tracy reminded her husband with a loving look straight in the eyes “We will be all right.”

“Should we give them the edited highlights or the whole story?” the Commander asked.

“Total truth is always the best weapon” Tracy confirmed “We tell them everything we know, that way the trust we already have from them will only be strengthened further.”

With that thought in his mind, the Commander reached across the desk to the telephone and picked it up before pressing a number to make an internal call.

“Hello, can you have Bob paged to my office immediately, thank you” the Commander requested before hanging up.

“I was wondering if you would bring Bob in on this” Tracy remarked.

“If this is going to go pear shaped in the future I want to be sure our biggest gun in the box is fully informed of what is at stake” the Commander admitted.

“Oh” Bob remarked as a couple of minutes later he arrived in the Commander’s office and was surprised to find the distinguished company already in there when he entered “Is someone throwing a party?”

“That is a very good question” Jennifer admitted “I take it the Commander invited you up here as well?”

“Got a call a few moments ago” Bob confirmed as he duly joined the others and took a seat “So what is this all about?” he asked.

“Believe me mate” Collins remarked as he passed the biscuits over to him which he gratefully accepted “at this point your guess is as good as ours.”

It was then that the connecting door opened and Tracy and the Commander came back into the office, noticeably holding hands as they returned to the desk and sat down together facing their audience.

“No doubt some of you” the Commander began as he looked around “No, actually it looks like all of you” he then corrected himself “are probably wondering what the hell is going on.”

“The thought had crossed my mind” McWilliam admitted.

“Along with suggestions we start booking last minute holidays very far away as we have the sneaking suspicion the proverbial brown stuff is heading for the proverbial ventilation equipment” Fuller added.

The Commander looked across to his left at Tracy who nodded in understanding and produced a small electronic contraption that she switched on with an audible double bleep before placing it on the desk in front of her.

“Oooohh, one of Sir Richard’s little toys” McWilliam remarked as she recognised the device “Sourced from the KGB closing down sale if I recall correctly, this must be serious.”

“What is about to be disclosed in the next few minutes must never be discussed outside of this group and certainly not outside of these four walls” the Commander ominously began “You cannot even discuss this with your other halves, your pet goldfish or whatever God’s and other deities you may worship. Do I have your explicit understanding on this?” he then asked.

The Commander could tell from the responses he was receiving from the others in the room in front of him that he had universal understanding and acceptance of the terms and conditions he had just set out which merely added further tension to the atmosphere in the room.

“As most of you will probably recall, a little under a year ago the newly deposed acting Prime Minister Lord Forsyth blew his brains out live on national television

outside Ten Downing Street as a couple of our lads were taking him away in custody” the Commander began “His farewell speech mentioned something called the ‘Pyramid Project’.”

“I remember that” Collins recalled “It was put down to the ramblings of a loony who knew his time was up if I recall.”

“Which is exactly what we want everyone to keep thinking” Tracy confirmed “Bear that in mind please” she insisted.

“Okay” McWilliam then asked “Aside from making the YouTube hit of the year, what else was significant about Lord Forsyth’s admittedly quite satisfying demise?”

“The Haliford and McAllister bandwagon that rolled into town last year and created such a huge mess was, as you may be aware one of a number of various attempts that have arisen in the last ten years or so to destabilise and take over either the instruments of Government, the Security and Police services and or both, this being the most potentially successful one yet” the Commander continued “Fortunately every time these bunches of power crazy loonies has shown up we have managed to identify who they are and show them the door fairly sharpish.”

“I think I am beginning to see where this is going” Collins concluded “You are saying there is a new player in town?” he suggested.

“Sir Richard Crowthorne and ourselves” the Commander indicated Tracy and himself “have over the last couple of years come into possession of a number of whispers and rumours about a group calling themselves the Ramses Group who operate what has been described as the ‘Pyramid Alliance’ or ‘Pyramid Project’ but up until Lord Forsyth’s demise, no one had ever mentioned those words out loud in any form.”

“What concrete evidence do you have for these people existing?” McWilliam asked.

“Absolutely nothing, not a shred of evidence whatsoever” Tracy admitted “A few scraps of paper, some whispers from some normally very reliable sources and a lot of theories that happen to fit the facts.”

“Not much to go on” Fuller remarked “Who are these people of which you speak?”

“That’s the major problem” the Commander confirmed “We don’t know. All we do know for certain is that this group exists, we believe but cannot confirm that they have recruited friends in all areas of Government, the Civil Service, big business, the press and organisations such as ours, their aims are unknown and the stretch of their influence is equally undefined.”

“Who knows about this?” Collins asked.

“Tracy and myself” the Commander confirmed “the Prime Minister and John Hewitt over at MI6 plus a couple of others but that is it.”

“Hewitt was specially selected by us and the Prime Minister for the vacancy at MI6 as we needed someone who we could trust implicitly to remove Haliford’s influence from there which could be connected to and still feeding information to this Pyramid organisation” Tracy explained “Aside from that we have up until now kept this a very closely guarded secret.”

“You can say that again” Collins remarked “It is not often I as head of Operations at MI5 hear about something that comes as a complete surprise to me.”

“The scary thing about this organisation” the Commander continued “is that we believe they have been active for some years now, encouraging those who seek to oppose us and seek power illegitimately but unlike those publicity seeking agenda wavers, these guys have remained silent and anonymous.”

“So why this sudden announcement, what has changed?” Jennifer asked.

“These files you found in Sir William Devane’s office” Tracy indicated the pile of papers and files lying on the desk in front of them before picking one of them up and opening it to show the group something “None of these should have been in Devane’s possession and in it is a file distribution command which clearly states ‘For secure Ramses Level 1 circulation and action’ here” she showed them the official looking markings.

“Hang on Commander” Collins remarked “Didn’t you have a part in approving Sir William’s cabinet appointment as Security & Policing Minister?” he asked.

“Yes” the Commander simply confirmed.

“So did you suspect him of being linked to this Pyramid lot before you made that recommendation?” Collins then asked.

“We had our suspicions” the Commander responded “so in conjunction with the Prime Minister we hatched a little plan, a little bait was laid and then we waited to see if Devane or his controller bit.”

“You are going to turn him aren’t you?” Fuller concluded.

“I am going to be having a little one to one chat with him, that much is for certain” the Commander agreed “If his involvement, even if it is only as an outer circle messenger boy for this group is true then we may finally have a way in.”

“Of course there is another possibility” Jennifer proposed “Those files could have been planted for us to specifically find, they were after all conveniently lying on the floor in full view waiting for us to find them as soon as we walked through the door.”

“True” the Commander agreed “and yes this could be the bait in a trap for us but somewhere along the line someone told them you guys were coming yet only four of us knew of your visit to his office so somebody somewhere with a very sensitive ear has talked.”

“You may have had a point about booking a last minute holiday mate” Bob remarked aside to Fuller who responded with a wry grin.

“So what do you want of us?” Jennifer asked.

“We would be asking you all for your trust and loyalty but know we already have that” Tracy confirmed “What we do need is your understanding and your vigilance” she then went on “It could be days, months, maybe even years before these Pyramid people make some form of aggressive move but when that does happen we need to be ready.”

“There is one thing I need you to do Bob” the Commander continued “I need to you vet your people very carefully and put together for us a dedicated team of four of your best and most dependable ARU officers led by yourself.”

“No problem” Bob readily agreed.

“Ideally we need to have a small specialist team ready to handle anything and on call twenty four hours a day to scramble at a moments notice” the Commander confirmed.

“I can have something together within twenty four hours” Bob confirmed with a thoughtful look “What about communications between us?” he asked.

“This sounds like the point where I come in” Fuller remarked.

“Indeed” the Commander confirmed “I need you to put together a secure communications network for us, completely independent of all other systems, encoded and protected even from our friends at GCHQ.”

“Nothing like a challenge is there?” Tracy remarked.

“You can say that again” Fuller agreed “All right, I’ll get to work on it right away, should have something in place within a couple of days but we need office space if you are planning to make our little army of light a more official outfit.”

“King William Street?” Tracy suggested.

“Already known about by too many outside our little group and besides Section Fourteen use it for various little operations now in addition to the X-Ray Section” McWilliam confirmed.

“Don’t worry, I’ve got just the place for us” the Commander clicked confirmed “May need a little decoration though and the bathtub will need shifting.”

“Huh?” Jennifer asked but looking across at her husband she could tell Fuller knew what the Commander was talking about.

“I’ll get right on it” Fuller confirmed “Hope you don’t have a problem with spiders love” he remarked to Jennifer “We may have a little dusting to do.”

“Meantime” the Commander continued “We continue about our everyday business just like normal, we still have our various Departments to run and a City to protect and secure.”

“Is there any connection between this Pyramid organisation and our current operations with Villiers and company?” Collins asked.

“Your guess is as good as ours” Tracy admitted “However it is becoming clear that Mr Villiers seems to have access to some sophisticated counter surveillance technology which means lots of money and influence in high up places so we cannot rule anything out.”

“Furthermore, despite our cloak and dagger operation” the Commander added “The Home Secretary has received a missive from the South African Consulate earlier today demanding that any law enforcement investigation of Villiers ceases and desists with immediate effect.”

“Friends in high places by the sounds of it” Collins remarked “I don’t like the feel of any of this at all.”

“Any questions?” Tracy asked as she looked around the room.

“I am almost too afraid to ask” Collins admitted “Do you have any other little surprises for us?”

“No, I think that will be all” Tracy confirmed “for today at least.”

“All right everyone” the Commander concluded the meeting “Thank you all for coming and also thanks again for your patience and understanding.”

With that declaration the meeting broke up but just as they were leaving, the Commander called up.

“Bob, could you wait a moment” the Commander requested.

“Yes, certainly Sir” the tall man confirmed as the others left leaving just himself with Tracy and the Commander.

“Got a little job for you tomorrow” the Commander explained as soon as the others had left and the office door was closed “Sir William Devane, I want him picked up and delivered to me for a little chat.”

“I take it we are not dealing with subtleties here” Bob asked.

“I think we can safely say the gloves are off” Tracy agreed.

“He is to receive an invitation that he can’t refuse” the Commander confirmed as he handed Bob a piece of card on the back of which he had written a note “then I fully intend to find out if he is a messenger, a gopher or a true believer.”

“Good evening gentlemen” Villiers declared as he walked into the room whereupon the several dozen men who were sat in the room awaiting his arrival duly stood up in respect.

“Be seated” Villiers then called as soon as he reached the front of the auditorium and took his seat along with Hansell and another man.

“May I take this opportunity to express a very warm welcome to you all” Villiers then continued “It is a pleasure to be in the presence of the greatest collective of criminal talent that this country has seen in at least forty years if not longer.”

There were a few murmurs and nods of approval amongst the audience for a few moments before Villiers raised his hand for silence.

“You have all been carefully selected and brought here, many at considerable expense” Villiers continued “so that we can pull off what will be one of the biggest jobs this country has ever seen.”

“Each one of you brings to this team a specialism, an area of expertise in which you are the top of your field” he carried on, now standing up and pacing up and down the stage like a military General briefing his troops prior to going into battle “you have also been chosen after careful vetting by myself and my associates for being reliable, dependable and above all loyal, a value I hold highest above all others.”

“The job that I am proposing to you this evening will be difficult” he continued “There will be a number of obstacles to overcome which I hope your considerable talents, resources, contacts and expertise will help us to conquer, and there will be big risks but by way of appropriate compensation there will also be big rewards as well.”

“Some of you already know me and the way I do business as we have worked together on previous enterprises” Villiers then reminded his attentive audience “Others here are new to this little outfit of ours” he confirmed “Be in no doubt gentlemen that I run a tight ship and I expect not only loyalty and hard work but also results.”

“For your efforts each of you will have received first thing this morning the sum of one hundred thousand pounds sterling which has been paid into an account of your choice in your preferred currency” Villiers continued “You will each receive a further one hundred thousand pounds by the same method specified by yourselves upon completion of the job plus six months later an exactly equal share of the proceeds of our little endeavour.”

“Anyone who has doubts and wishes to back out now may do so” Villiers then informed his audience “No questions will be asked.”

Not entirely unsurprisingly, everyone remained seated, their only real movement being to look around to see if anyone else took that opportunity to leave.

“Very well then gentlemen” Villiers declared “Let’s get to work shall we?”

At his signal, Hansell started a digital projector which began to show images on the huge screen at the front of the auditorium.

“I will now give you an overall brief on what we shall be doing” Villiers announced “Then afterwards I shall see each of you individually to discuss what I need specifically from each of you in order to make this work.”

He waited a few moments for the audience to take in his words before Villiers cleared his throat and continued with the briefing.

“Gentlemen, may I present to you the Codmore Hill bullion processing site near Haychester” Villiers declared as he showed a number of observational photographs on the screen of his intended target including some overhead shots taken from an aircraft “A top secret high security installation which at any one time houses the largest concentration of gold, platinum and other precious metals in northern Europe.”

“You will be forgiven gentlemen for not having heard of this facility” he then remarked “It’s existence is highly classified due to the nature of its business, so much so that you will not find it on any maps or road signs, even Google Earth has had it erased from their image library and the exact specification and significance of this place is known only to a couple of high ranking members of local law enforcement.”

At that point Villiers indicated to Hansell to continue the briefing before taking a seat over to one side to watch.

“Despite the secretive and unknown nature of these premises” Hansell began “be under no illusion that the security on the site is state of the art with knobs on.”

He indicated at that point for one of his men to pass out some briefing notes he had compiled before continuing.

“The facility is located in what Google Earth will tell you, is a field in the middle of nowhere that just happens to have a very good road leading to it and a ten metre high electrified barb wire fence running all around it. Quite a bit over the top for a patch of grass with a few sheep on it I think you will agree.”

Hansell let the chuckles amongst the audience die down before continuing.

“The site itself covers over fifteen acres with a surface building that to the casual eye looks like a modern farmers hay barn as its main entrance point” Hansell indicated on the screen some diagrams he had managed to draw up based on information he had received “The majority of the facility however is underground and that is where our pay dirt is waiting for us.”

“Gold is our primary target” Villiers interjected at that point “Although it is heavy, the price on the world markets has never been higher, it is very easy to spirit away and fence so that it is completely untraceable and the rate of return is considerable.”

“Furthermore” Hansell continued “We have reason to believe that sometime in the next forty eight hours a large consignment of gold will be passing through this facility, far more than they would normally hold in their vaults and we gentlemen are going to steal it.”

Both Villiers and Hansell could tell from the murmurs going around the room that they had the approval and undivided interest of their audience.

“Allow me gentlemen to bring you up to speed on what we will find on the premises” Hansell continued, pointing a remote control at the screen that changed the images being displayed “In addition to the already mentioned fence, we have CCTV covering every angle, both visible cameras and hidden ones. Furthermore at any one time there are no less than thirty armed guards on the premises, some on the surface, some down at vault level and others patrolling the perimeter with dogs.”

“What sort of weaponry are they packing?” Wallace asked from near the front of the audience.

“All of them carry as standard nine millimetre automatic hand guns with two spare clips” Hansell confirmed, backed up by some more images which showed close ups of a couple of the guards, their accompanying dog and their equipment “in addition inside the facility, we believe located on the surface level near the main entrance there is an armoury which contains MP5’s, stun grenades and gas canisters which could be deployed inside of two minutes as soon as the alarm goes off.”

“Which in itself triggers an immediate lock down, bringing down a series of bulkhead doors throughout the complex made of steel which is over two feet thick” Villiers added “Not to mention summoning every single Security Service officer within a thirty mile radius.”

“So as you can see gentlemen we have got quite a challenge on” Hansell confirmed “However with your combined talents and Mr Villiers’s plan I am sure we can overcome these hurdles with ease and together pull off what will almost be certainly called the crime of the century.”

“A lot to think about, a lot to discuss and a lot to do I am sure you will all agree” Villiers remarked as he got up once more and proceeded to resume his pacing up and down in front of the audience “Some of you are here as individuals, some here as teams, all have your own speciality. Over the course of the next few hours I shall be calling each of you individuals and team leaders into my office to discuss specifics and what we can do to overcome the obstacles we face in the coming days.”

“Should be interesting” Hansell remarked.

“Very well, if there are no further questions” Villiers declared “Then I thank you all for your time and attention and I look forward to talking to you all later.”

“Good evening Commander” Lord Hainault remarked as he and the rest of the members of the Joint Intelligence & Security Committee looked up as the door opened and he came in looking slightly embarrassed at being late for the thrice weekly briefing meeting of the country’s major security and law enforcement representatives and their political masters.

“Evening” the Commander responded as he took his seat at the large oval table that dominated the centre of the committee meeting room in the Cabinet Office in the heart of Whitehall.

“Don’t usually see you here at our little soirees” Lord Hainault commented.

“Not really my scene” the Commander admitted “That is usually why I send the wife” he confirmed before looking at the centre of the table with disdain “Good God, are these best biscuits you could come up with.”

“Blame the bean counters in the Civil Service” the Home Secretary confirmed “We are all on tight budgets now.”

“I’ll remind them of that the next time one of their cost cutting exercises means I can’t stop their office windows getting blown in by some passing nutter with a bomb” the Commander retorted as he resigned himself to eating one of the inferior biscuits on offer and made the best of it.

“We were just finishing the Political Security Brief before your arrival” Lord Hainault informed the Commander “Apparently there has been some sort of incident at the Home Office this afternoon?”

“Oh yes” the Commander recalled “I just got the paperwork on that thrust into my hand by Tracy as I was leaving the office to come here” he proceeded to produce a file from his briefcase.

“Nice of someone to tell me” Grey remarked “It’s only my Ministry office building after all.”

“I only just found out myself” the Commander admitted.

“If you would be so kind as to brief the Committee on this incident Commander” Lord Hainault prompted.

“Very well” the Commander began; consulting the file in front of him to make sure of the facts “Approximately an hour ago New Scotland Yard received a 999 call from the Home Office building in Marsham Street, Westminster” he began “The report was of a break in within the building.”

“A general break in or something more specific?” Grey asked.

“It seems to have been a targeted break in” the Commander confirmed “The office of Sir William Devane was ransacked by person or persons unknown. Two patrol

officers initially attended and sealed off the scene immediately upon arrival and MI5 sent in a team from the Political Investigation Section shortly afterwards.”

“Rather worrying development” Lord Hainault remarked.

“Indeed Sir” Collins agreed.

“Initial findings indicate that although there was some disturbance to the contents of the office” the Commander continued “Nothing appears to have been taken and it appears to be a random burglary gone wrong.”

“I’ll get my people to vet everyone who was in the building at the time to see if we can track who may have been responsible” Collins confirmed.

“Seems to have been a domestic incident” the Commander concluded “Nothing of any concern has shown up in initial investigations but I will keep the Committee informed of anything else that comes up as a consequence.”

“Where was Sir William Devane at the time?” John Hewitt asked.

“He was in the House of Commons all afternoon and went straight home from there” Grey confirmed “I saw him leave earlier just before I came here.”

“I’ll have the investigating officers speak to him first thing in the morning” the Commander confirmed “By then we should also have a forensic scene of crime report which may or may not throw any light on this incident but overall I believe this to be an isolated incident and nothing to get too worried about.”

“In which case” Lord Hainault called “Unless there is any other business then I declare this meeting adjourned, thank you.”

As the meeting broke up, the Commander looked across and to his left at Hewitt as he was rising from his seat.

“Uh-oh...” Hewitt remarked to himself as their eyes briefly met and he could see the Commander was not happy with him about something.

They were the last two to leave the committee meeting room and as Hewitt was about to precede him through the door, the Commander placed his hand on the man from MI6’s shoulder causing him to pause in mid step and look back with a worried expression.

“You and I need to talk” the Commander quietly called with clear and undeniable insistence “Ruth & Harry’s bench in twenty minutes, come alone.”

“I’ll be there” Hewitt quietly agreed with a sense of resignation before leaving the room.

A couple of minutes later the Commander emerged from the main doorway of the Cabinet Office in Whitehall where he found Kinderley waiting for him with his official car into which he quickly got in the front seat of.

“Everything go all right Sir?” Kinderley asked as he started the engine.

“To be honest Terry, I am not entirely sure” the Commander admitted “I do believe that I now have to accuse one of the country’s most senior security and intelligence officers of being economical with the truth.”

“One thing you have never been noted for is subtlety” Kinderley remarked which brought a wry smile from the Commander in response “So I don’t think it will come as any great surprise.”

“You have a point” the Commander agreed.

“So, where to Sir?” Kinderley asked.

“Lambeth Embankment” the Commander confirmed “It is time for one of those awkward conversations...”

“Come in” Villiers called in response to the knock at the office door whereupon it opened and Garforth entered.

“Good evening” Garforth greeted Villiers, the only occupant of the office who indicated for him to sit at the large desk which was covered with files and documents.

“I wanted to thrash out our transport requirements with you my boy” Villiers explained the reason for this private face to face meeting “We are going to need quite a few vehicles for this operation and part of your remit is to source and where necessary modify appropriate transport for our requirements.”

“How many, how much and where to are usually the starting points of any logistical operation such as this” Garforth remarked “I need to know the numbers involved.”

“The team will be made up of two groups” Villiers explained “The strike team of thirty men under the direct command of Mr Hansell and the support group, the drivers being your responsibility.”

“Understood” Garforth agreed “So ideally we are looking at, give or take forty men overall plus equipment going in and add to that our cargo going out.”

“Sounds about right” Villiers agreed “So, what would be your best solution?” he asked.

“The ever faithful Transit van, probably Luton type, long wheel base with tail lifts” Garforth confirmed “Bit of customisation work might be wise, add a little extra poke,

I know a couple of mechanics who can help, good and reliable for cash and no questions asked.”

“Excellent” Villiers agreed “How many vans do you think?”

“Three, maybe four” Garforth confirmed “We use two or three in the job itself and have the other as a backup should we need it. On top of that we should also have some decent fast cars on standby to get us out of there quickly if anything goes wrong.”

“Cars I can supply” Villiers responded as he made some notes “Anything in particular?”

“Manual gearbox, at least two litre and good handling” Garforth requested “Jag's, Merc's, BMW's, that sort of thing.”

“Is there anything else?” Villiers asked as he finished making his notes.

“We should also have a truck of some kind” Garforth confirmed “Light goods or twenty tonner with curtain sides parked somewhere discrete and handy to transfer our cargo and equipment to before we ditch the vans.”

“I shall leave the details of that in your capable hands” Villiers confirmed. “How do you propose to acquire our vehicles?” he then asked.

“Auctions are usually best” Garforth explained “Purchases made in cash a couple of days before the job goes down, takes about a week for the paperwork on change of owner to go through you see, by which time I sincerely hope that we and our liberated bounty will be long since gone.”

“Smart, real smart” Villiers remarked as he sat back in his chair and relit his pipe “How long do you need to get all this together?” he asked.

“I reckon with a bit of good old fashioned hard graft and calling in the favours of some reliable contacts” Garforth considered his response “Should be possible to have it all together in forty eight hours.”

“You will be needing this then” Villiers remarked as he got up and went over to the safe which he then opened and extracted from within it a large brown envelope which he then passed across to Garforth.

“That should cover it” Garforth admitted as he looked inside the envelope and saw it was tightly packed full of wraps of banknotes.

“I would appreciate it if you kept a record of your expenditure please” Villiers requested “Even entrepreneurial criminals such as myself have to keep accounts, for tax purposes of course.”

“Getaway cars tax deductible” Garforth remarked “That's a new one.”

“You would be surprised what I can classify as a legitimate business expense in the eyes of the Inland Revenue” Villiers remarked with a chuckle.

“In which case it looks I had better go shopping” Garforth confirmed as he got up.

“I have put a lot of faith and investment in you my friend” Villiers remarked “I do hope that you prove to be as worthwhile investment as you make out to be.”

“I can assure you Sir that I will be worth every penny” Garforth agreed.

“Just pull into the side there Terry” the Commander indicated a point by the side of the road at the south end of Westminster Bridge.

“Here Sir?” Terry asked as he pulled the car to a stop.

“That will do nicely” the Commander confirmed as he picked up his briefcase and then opened the door “I’ll be back in ten minutes, drive around for a bit.”

“Yes Sir” Terry confirmed before driving away as soon as the Commander had got out and closed the door leaving him alone on the pavement looking across the river from the bridge parapet for a few moments in deep thought.

A buffeting cold breeze greeted the Commander as he proceeded down the steps from Westminster Bridge onto the wide footpath that runs along the south side of the River Thames towards Lambeth Bridge in the distance.

Pulling his overcoat in around him as he briskly walked, the Commander soon arrived at one of the many public benches which lined the path at regular intervals facing the Palace of Westminster on the opposite bank of the river.

"So, tell me" the Commander asked as he sat down on the bench before looking across at the other person already sat there waiting for him "Why have I just lied to Joint Intelligence & Security Committee?"

"Because everybody else does?" Hewitt remarked wryly but his expression soon changed to one of a more serious and business like nature when he looked across and could instantly tell that the Commander was not in the mood for any kind of humour.

"Sorry, secret intelligence service humour" he then apologised "So can I assume from this that the break in of Sir William Devane's office is not nearly as straightforward as it seems?" he asked.

"That's putting it mildly" the Commander confirmed "I sent a couple of representatives to take a sneak and peek at Devane's office" he explained "When they got there they found it had been in their words 'comprehensively turned over' by someone."

"Sounds like someone beat your people to it" Hewitt remarked "or at the very least had the same idea."

"Someone knew they were coming" the Commander agreed "but that was not all."

"I had a feeling that it was not going to be as simple as all that" Hewitt admitted.

"Amongst the strewn contents, most of which were all over the floor were a number of high security files which are the property of a certain Intelligence Service of our mutual acquaintance" the Commander explained "namely yours."

"Bloody hell..." Hewitt remarked under his breath "What were they doing there?"

"I am not yet ruling out the possibility that they could have been planted for us to find" the Commander remarked "however there is an additional factor to this rather complicated equation, they all had a Pyramid Organisation style distribution code on them."

"So your suspicions about Devane were right then?" Hewitt asked.

"Maybe" the Commander agreed "Let's not jump to any firm conclusions just yet but so far I am not taking anything for granted, we have been carefully led up mythical garden pathways before."

"So what has happened to the files?" Hewitt inquired.

"They are safely locked away in my safe back at New Scotland Yard" the Commander confirmed "all except this one" he then proceeded to open his briefcase and took out one file.

"What's so special about that one?" Hewitt asked, somewhat uncertain and more than a little apprehensive about where this might be going.

"This just happens to be the personnel jacket of your dead guy" the Commander informed him "You remember, the analyst you had on loan from MI5 who jumped out of a window which was pretty impressive considering the fact he had already been dead a good half an hour beforehand."

"The plot thickens..." Hewitt remarked.

"Oh I will say it does" the Commander declared as he proceeded to put on his reading glasses before opening the file in order to study it more closely "This makes for very interesting reading you know."

"How so?" Hewitt asked.

"Because reading this reveals it to be full of more fiction than the average branch of Waterstones bookshops" the Commander declared "It's a fabrication, a legend, it's got 'Made in Vauxhall Cross' stamped all over it."

"Are you sure Commander?" Hewitt responded although he already knew that there was probably going to be little if any chance of arguing the point successfully.

"Don't take me for a fool" the Commander politely advised him, emphasising his point by staring across at him over the top of reading glasses before returning to the file "This has all the hallmarks of something dreamed up by a trainee analyst, and not a very good one I might add, sprinkled with a flavouring of half truths and guesswork, baked at gas mark four for a couple of months and then served up for someone's specific consumption."

"You put your point as subtly as ever Commander" Hewitt responded as he clearly admitted defeat.

"So shall we ditch the bullshit cover story and cut to the truth?" the Commander suggested.

"You are right, it's a fake" Hewitt admitted "We invented both the analyst and his entire life history."

"In quite a hurry it would appear" the Commander once again flicked through the file briefly "judging by the rushed nature of this mess."

"We had to assume that all of our pre-created legends we had available could have been compromised" Hewitt began to explain "About six months ago we had a leak, a big one."

"I assume we are not talking about dodgy plumbing here?" the Commander asked.

"I wish it were that simple" Hewitt admitted "The problem came up as part of our ongoing purge of anyone connected with or under the influence of Haliford's regime."

"I was wondering how long it would be before the name of Sir John Haliford returned to this little story" the Commander remarked.

"Our operations in southern Africa were suffering too many losses" Hewitt continued to explain "Agents in the field were being identified by the enemies they were infiltrating or watching and being picked off at an alarming rate, particularly in the areas of organised crime and weapons dealing."

"Nasty" the Commander agreed.

"I got Commander Barrett over at Section Fourteen to come in and do an audit of our systems and she discovered that there had been a barely detectable incursion into our computer systems both here in London and in our offices in consulates and embassies around the world" Hewitt confirmed.

"I thought I had not seen her around lately" the Commander admitted.

“She managed to identify that whoever had breached our system had downloaded everything we had on southern Africa, certain politicians here in the UK and crucially all of our legends” Haliford explained the seriousness of the leaks.

“Potentially blowing the cover of every deep cover agent across the globe” the Commander concluded “I can see why this was kept quiet.”

“If the Joint Intelligence and Security Committee had found out there would have been hell to pay” Hewitt remarked “and I am still not convinced whoever is behind this does not have some kind of presence or influence on that committee.”

“So you invented our fake analyst” the Commander concluded “Someone who was not on the system and in theory at least could not be identified or compromised.”

“Yes” Hewitt responded “and all was going well, we had plugged the leaks as best we could and even managed to identify not only where this data was being routed through but also managed to identify a couple more of Haliford’s minions along the way that had managed to sneak beneath the radar.”

“And then someone kills him and throws him out of a window” the Commander added “nearly flattening my son and his lady in the process I might add.”

“There is something you should know in light of these developments” Hewitt continued with a noticeable hesitation in his voice “Many of the files that were compromised were low level stuff seemingly randomly selected but I think that was deliberately done to hide the specific nature of the ones they were really after.”

“Old school thinking” the Commander remarked “If you want to hide something specific, stick it in plain view in amongst a lot of very similar yet largely irrelevant items.”

“Barrett managed to identify the core of crucial files that they were after and where they were routed towards” Hewitt continued “they were going through a data processing centre in South Africa which is owned by a conglomerate that lists as executive chairman and major investor one Henry Villiers.”

“Oh hell...” the Commander “That could very well mean that not only does Villiers have connections within the Joint Intelligence and Security Committee, he could also be connected with this Pyramid organisation and may very well be aware of our little party.”

“In the light of what you have told me about Devane and the contents of his ransacked office” Hewitt was reluctantly forced to agree “that is a very distinct possibility.”

“Are there any other nasty surprises you may have overlooked, nothing you want to share with me right now before this turns any uglier?” the Commander asked.

“Apart from the rather unpleasant case of mould we discovered in the MI6 staff canteen yesterday, I think that is pretty much it” Hewitt admitted “So what are you going to do?”

“I intend to have a nice little chat with Sir William Devane in the morning” the Commander confirmed “Just he and I.”

“Should be interesting if your reputation and past record of dealings with Home Office representatives is anything to go by” Hewitt remarked with a wry smile.

“I am going to make him an offer he can’t refuse” the Commander offered by way of some explanation “Then we see exactly where his loyalty really lies.”

“And supposing he proves to be completely compromised and untrustworthy?” Hewitt asked.

“Then I get the Prime Minister to transfer him to a nice new posting, a fact finding mission in a very remote corner of the Falkland Islands for a few weeks should suffice whilst we decide what to do with him” the Commander confirmed.

“Remind me never to get on the wrong side of you Commander” Hewitt requested.

“That would be a very wise philosophy to follow” the Commander agreed
“Meantime, stay in touch; this isn’t over yet, not by a long way.”

“Have a pleasant evening” Hewitt agreed as the two men got up and shook hands
“Goodnight.”

“Something wrong Sir?” Terry asked as the Commander got back in the car and he could tell instantly by his superior’s general demeanour that all was not well straight away.

“Terry” the Commander admitted “I think I have just seen four weeks of careful preparation and hard graft go up in smoke right before my eyes.”

“My old grandmother always used to say that anything worth doing was never easy” Terry admitted “So, where to Sir?” he then asked.

“Home sounds like a winner” the Commander admitted as he looked at his antique pocket watch “and don’t spare the horses.”

Garforth was relaxing in his room at the manor house with a glass of single malt and watching a bit of television when there was knock at the door.

“It’s Wallace” came the hushed call from the other side of the door.

“Come in” Garforth called whereupon his American counterpart duly entered and closed the door quietly behind him “So what brings you here on such a cold and dark night?” he asked as he proffered a drink.

“Thanks” Wallace accepted the drink “I just had my little face to face with our glorious leader” he admitted “I am trying to work out whether he is a genius or a certifiable lunatic.”

“A little bit of both with a good dose of eccentricity thrown in I reckon” Garforth remarked “What did he ask you to get?”

“A veritable shopping list of weapons, explosives, etc.” Wallace confirmed “There is some pretty sophisticated stuff on this list.”

“Just make sure I have a Service Issue nine millimetre semi-automatic pistol and some spare clips” Garforth requested “Just in case you understand...”

“I will see what I can do” Wallace agreed “I have a contact who supplies both covert Government operations and also more freelance outfits who should be able to come up with the goods but I will need some transport, he doesn’t do deliveries.”

“I’ll add another truck to the list then” Garforth confirmed as he made some additional notes on the notepad on the table in front of him “I am going off to the vehicle auctions tomorrow morning to spend a little money.”

“Are you going to try and make contact with your superiors tomorrow whilst you are out there?” Wallace asked.

“That is the plan” Garforth confirmed “Do you want me to let them know you are here?” he asked.

“If you wouldn’t mind” Wallace responded “I still have no access to external communications and I am having a couple of Villiers minders along for the ride tomorrow which makes it kind of awkward to phone home.”

“The sick mother routine sometimes works I find” Garforth admitted.

“Your mother is sick?” Wallace asked.

“You could say that” Garforth admitted “She died thirty years ago!”

“Sorry” Wallace apologised.

“Don’t worry about it” Garforth reassured him “I shall however be calling one member of my family though, it is time I brought them up to speed on this little enterprise.”

“Do you know this Codmore Hill installation Villiers is planning on hitting?” Wallace asked.

“No” Garforth responded “First I had heard of it but I think I know a man who does...”

“Cheers Terry” the Commander called as he got out of the car outside the apartment block in Vauxhall Cross where he lived “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Right you are Sir” Kinderley confirmed before he drove off into the night across Vauxhall Bridge.

A few moments later the Commander was arriving in the front hallway of his apartment to be greeted by Tracy waiting for him.

“You are a sight for sore eyes” the Commander admitted before they embraced and kissed.

“I was beginning to wonder when you would get back” Tracy admitted before she stopped the Commander from entering the front room whereupon he looked at her with a confused expression.

“Jack has got company” Tracy explained which caused the Commander to peer through the narrow opening of the ajar door and see Jack was on the sofa with Megan watching a film on the television “He has just told her he intends to join the family business.”

“And how did she react?” the Commander asked as instead he followed Tracy through to the kitchen.

“Seemed fine about it” Tracy confirmed “Very supportive about it, in fact I think she was already expecting it.”

“It is always important to have someone to support you through thick and thin in this job” the Commander admitted “Sort of gives you a foothold back in reality when all around you is going crazy.”

“How crazy are things getting?” Tracy asked.

“I had a little riverside chat with our man from MI6” the Commander explained “I think the Pyramid problem may go a lot deeper and may be a much more serious problem than even we have feared so far.”

“Will it ever stop?” Tracy asked “All the conspiracies, the secret meetings, the power struggles?”

“As long as greed, deception and the thirst for power continue to be the dominant driving force in the corridors of power then I am afraid so love” the Commander reluctantly confirmed.

“Tea?” Tracy then suggested.

“Excellent idea love” the Commander readily agreed “as my Dad used to say, when the going gets tough, the tough put the kettle on.”

The sun had yet to rise above the horizon but the sky was already aglow with a deep red hue reflected against the low cloud cover as the morning began.

Garforth was amongst the first in the manor house to be up and about that morning as he took a moment to watch the impending sunrise from the balcony of his room before he headed out and down the corridor to the small communal kitchen where he proceeded to fill the coffee percolator.

It was as he was making himself a drink that he was joined to his surprise by Villiers.

“Good morning my boy” Villiers greeted him as he arrived “Up early aren’t we?”

“The early bird catches the decent motors Sir” Garforth responded “Coffee?” he then offered.

“Ah, thank you” Villiers readily accepted his offer.

“I always like to take a good look around well before the auction starts, see what is up for grabs for myself” Garforth explained “Make sure that what is advertised in the catalogue is actually a decent runner and not just a polished up old shed.”

“That is how I made my first fortune” Villiers recalled “buying and selling used cars.”

“When I was growing up I think half the east end of London cut their teeth in the motor trade” Garforth remarked.

“You have a shopping list worked out?” Villiers asked.

“Pretty much” Garforth confirmed “I am going to go for one more of each type of vehicle as a precaution” he explained “I don’t want to leave anything to chance.”

“Sounds like a good idea” Villiers agreed “What about the heavy trucks?” he then asked.

“I have got a mate in the trade who can supply those at a good price for cash” Garforth explained “He mostly deals in trucks that are about five to ten years old with life left in them, refurbishing them for export. The beauty being he can dispose of them undetected overseas for us when we are finished with them.”

“I like the way you think” Villiers remarked with a satisfied grin “You have proven to be a very useful man already.”

“And the fun has barely begun yet” Garforth agreed as he finished his coffee “Speaking of which I think it is time I got going.”

“Your car awaits you outside” Villiers confirmed “Have fun” he instructed.

“Oh I intend to Sir” Garforth responded before taking his leave and departing.

A few moments later he was stepping outside and getting into the front seat of a car that was waiting for him, one of Hansell's men doing the driving.

"Where to Sir?" the driver asked.

"Sudbury" Garforth issued the directions "Keep heading for the west end of London and I will direct you from there."

"You're the boss" the driver agreed before setting off, the wheels of the car momentarily spinning with a crunch on the exquisitely maintained manor house gravel driveway.

They had been driving for approximately half an hour when Garforth looked ahead and motioned to his driver to stop.

"Pull over just up here" he indicated a short distance ahead to a bus stop outside a newsagents store near to Sudbury Hill Underground Station "I need to grab a pack of smokes."

"Yeah sure" the driver agreed and pulled into the side of the road where indicated.

"I'll only be a minute" Garforth confirmed as he got out of the car "You want anything mate?" he asked.

"Bottle of Coke would be nice thanks" the driver responded.

"Okay" Garforth agreed "I'll be right back" he then confirmed before shutting the door and proceeding into the newsagents whereupon he went straight up to the counter, pausing only to pick up a newspaper and two bottles of Coca-Cola on the way.

"Morning" the shopkeeper behind the counter called.

"Morning" Garforth responded "These and a pack of regular Marlboro please" he indicated his preferred choice of cigarettes on the rack behind the counter."

"Six forty please" the shopkeeper confirmed after quickly ringing up the total cost of the purchases on the till.

"Here you go" Garforth proffered a ten pound note that was folded over lengthways to the shopkeeper who placed it in the till and handed back the appropriate change.

"Thanks" Garforth then called before departing.

The shopkeeper took a few moments to observe as Garforth left the shop and got back in the car parked outside before it departed off up the street.

Once out of sight, the shopkeeper withdrew to the back of the shop and opened the folded ten pound note he had received moments earlier to reveal tucked inside it a note which he read.

Having read the note and understood both its meaning and importance, the shopkeeper proceeded to the nearby telephone and made a call.

“This is Mr Patel, could you please inform Mr Regent that his magazine has come in, thank you” he announced before hanging up.

Many miles away in Vauxhall in the centre of London, the Commander was emerging from the stairwell exit into the underground car park of the apartment block where he lived, to be greeted by Kinderley waiting for him with the official car.

“Morning Sir” Kinderley greeted the Commander as he joined him at the car.

“Morning Terry” the Commander responded “I hope this thing has a full tank as I have a feeling it is going to be a particularly busy day.”

“Brimmed to the top Sir” Kinderley confirmed as they both got in the car and he started the engine.

At that point the sound of a motorbike coming towards them caused them both to look to their left and see Tracy approaching, wheeling her red Security Service bike.

“Morning guys” she called “Fancy a race to the office?” she jokingly asked.

“I think even in this motor you would probably beat us hands down love” the Commander remarked.

“Yeah” Tracy admitted “I probably would” she grinned knowingly before putting on her crash helmet “See you later” she then called before getting on her motorbike and departing at some speed away and up the exit ramp.

“So, where to then Sir?” Kinderley asked as he started the engine.

“Well for a starter...” the Commander began but then tailed off as he noticed something on his mobile phone which had begun to bleep a few moments earlier “Ah...” he then remarked.

“Change of plan?” Kinderley asked sensing what was coming.

“Change of plan” the Commander confirmed “Tell me, how fast do you think you can get to South Harrow?” he asked.

“You would be surprised” Kinderley confirmed as he drove up the exit ramp and paused before he could drive out into the street outside.

“In which case put your foot down and don’t spare the horses” the Commander confirmed “I have to see a newsagent about a magazine.”

“All right then Sir” Kinderley responded somewhat bemused at the response but carried on anyway, switching on the lights and sirens before pulling out into a break in the traffic that opened up and speeding off across Vauxhall Bridge.

“Remind me, how good are you with spiders again?” Fuller asked as Jennifer parked up the van in Down Street near Piccadilly in central London.

“Better than you are” Jennifer reminded her husband.

“Good” Fuller responded as he got out of the van and walked over to deep red terracotta tile fronted façade of a building nearby, its ancient if neglected elegance standing out markedly from the other more non-descript buildings alongside in what was these days little more than a forgotten side street.

“Are we expecting any down there?” Jennifer asked as Fuller unlocked and opened the fairly anonymous looking door before holding it open to allow her to enter.

“The electrical and construction crew we have had down here for the last couple of months reports that there is quite a lot of them apparently” Fuller confirmed as, once he had switched on the lights they proceeded down a spiral staircase “but they did reassure me that the rats have now been dealt with.”

“Thank God for that” Jennifer responded “Where the hell are we anyway?”

“The former Down Street Underground Station” Fuller explained as they continued their seemingly never ending descent into the bowels of the Earth “Place has been closed since the 1930’s, it was used during the second world war and then pretty much left untouched until six months ago when the Commander managed to wangle a Special Operations Work Order out of someone to get this place re-commissioned for use in case of special contingencies.”

“Like the emergence of this Pyramid group for example?” Jennifer suggested.

“Exactly” Fuller confirmed as they at last reached the bottom of the stairs “We may have found out about all this just yesterday but I get the distinct impression Tracy and the Commander have been preparing little contingencies and other things such as this place for quite some time now.”

"Do we need a shilling for the meter?" Jennifer asked as they both looked head from the stairs into pitch darkness.

"No need" Fuller confirmed as he reached across to an electrical switch box on the adjacent wall and pulled the lever which switched on the power throughout the complex and illuminated the scene.

“Oh, Victorian tile work, very nice” Jennifer remarked upon seeing the interior of the tube shaped tunnels before them where the original tiling from its brief time as a station on the Underground’s Piccadilly Line had been carefully retained and restored almost certainly at the bequest of the Commander who was always very enthusiastic about that sort of thing.

“Looks like they have done a nice job on the place” Fuller remarked as in the background a tube train passed through the former platform tunnels further up ahead.

“So what does this place offer us that King William Street or indeed anywhere else doesn’t?” Jennifer asked as she followed Fuller who was using a paper plan to navigate his way around the complex network of tunnels down there.

“As our friends from Grosvenor Square like to say, plausible deniability” Fuller confirmed as he found the room he was looking for, part of a large cross passageway that once linked the two platforms which was now almost completely converted into a sophisticated communications centre. "This is conveniently situated in Central London where the centre of power is whilst we also have ready to go a much larger facility out of town which is equally off the grid as far as the rest of the world is concerned."

“So if I look this place up on the Internet what would I find?” Jennifer asked as they both took a seat at the main communications console.

“Darkness, musty corridors, ghosts and Winston Churchill’s bathtub” Fuller explained “untouched since the war ended. The bathtub is still down here by the way.”

“Remind me to visit it on my way to the gift shop” Jennifer joked “Anyway, why are we here?”

“Two reasons” Fuller confirmed “One, to get this place fully commissioned ready for whatever may be coming and two” he reached into his briefcase and extracted some of the MI6 files that had been recovered from Devane’s office the day before “we need to find out as much about Devane as we can and the connections these files hold without attracting anyone’s attention that we are doing it.”

“If I recall last time anyone tried something like this” Jennifer reminded her husband “two sense of humour failures from the Data Security Bureau at MI5 turned up and kicked the door in.”

“That is the beauty of this little facility my love” Fuller explained as he powered up the workstation and began to access it “No one will ever know where we are or what we are up to.”

“In which case this is likely to be a long morning” Jennifer concluded “I’ll go and put the kettle on.”

Parked outside the newsagents in Sudbury, Kinderley looked around at the passing early morning traffic with the trained eye of a long time Traffic Division officer, even noting a couple of vehicles he would normally have pulled over for potential defects.

“Questionable MOT if ever I saw it” he remarked to himself before looking back across at the newsagents to see the Commander emerge and return to the car, a magazine in his hand.

“Amazing what you find in a copy of Railway Modeller these days isn’t it?” he remarked as he opened the magazine and extracted a message that had been inserted inside it.

“Do you normally travel some considerable distance out of town to pick up your periodicals Sir?” Kinderley asked understandably somewhat confused.

“Not normally no” the Commander went on to explain “We have a number of places across Greater London that we use as drop off points for messages which are used by officers working undercover, can be fun sometimes too.”

“So where to then?” Kinderley inquired as he started the car.

“North Harrow Car Auctions” the Commander confirmed from the message he had been left.

“Ah, Harrow” Kinderley confirmed as he pulled out into traffic to continue their journey “My old manor.”

About twenty minutes later they were driving through what was essentially an industrial estate on the outskirts of Harrow in the North West corner of Greater London.

"This looks like the place" Kinderley remarked as they arrived in the front yard entrance of the car auction premises where despite the early hour, the place was already busy with people looking over the hundreds of vehicles across the site that would be up for bidding in just over a half hours time.

"Park over there" the Commander indicated to the customer parking area "let's just hope no one buys the car whilst it is here" he added.

"Yes Sir" Kinderley agreed as he parked the car "Do you want me to wait here?" he then asked.

"Come with me" the Commander instructed whereupon they both got out of the car "I need an expert eye, make it look like we actually belong here on legitimate business."

"So what are we looking for?" Kinderley asked as they headed into the vast compound where row upon row of cars, vans and other vehicles of all different types, colours and conditions were available to be inspected in the smallest of detail by their prospective purchasers.

"I have absolutely no idea" the Commander admitted as they both looked over some of the cars in the row through which they were walking "but my contact certainly does."

"Do you know what he looks like then?" Kinderley asked as the Commander paused and briefly looked inside one vehicle out of curiosity more than anything else before moving on.

"Oh yes" the Commander confirmed before stopping again to look at another car which made him snigger a bit "Dear oh dear, this one is a bit of a shed" he remarked seeing the state of it.

"I've taxed worse" Kinderley admitted with a wry smile before they moved on but then paused as the Commander saw something ahead which had most definitely grabbed his attention "Now that is a thing of beauty."

"My dad had one of them" Kinderley remarked as they approached the car that had caught their attention whereupon the Commander made straight for the bonnet of the 1975 vintage Mark 3 Ford Cortina saloon to inspect the engine.

"Looks nice and tidy" the Commander remarked as he looked over the engine bay "What does the paperwork say?"

"Three owners, under sealed from new, seventy eight thousand recorded miles" Kinderley confirmed from the information sheet attached inside the drivers side window "Reserve starts at two and a half grand."

"And worth every penny I reckon" the Commander agreed as he reached inside and started the engine, "Oh that takes me back" he then remarked.

"Looks nice and solid, no surface rust" Kinderley cast an expert eye over the underside having knelt down where the Commander joined him on the other side also to take a look.

"I should have known I would find you scrabbling around under an old Ford" Garforth remarked as he joined them.

"Hi!" the Commander responded looking up from his position on the ground "What do you think?"

"I think you are getting to that age when you want to relive your childhood" Garforth commented.

"Given what happened to me when I was a school kid I think you will find that would require the services of armed backup and a bullet proof vest" the Commander recalled as he switched off the engine.

"Ah yes" Garforth then recalled "Not to mention a van load of diamond thieves and half the Metropolitan Police."

“Interior looks in very good nick” the Commander mentioned as he took another look inside the Cortina.

“Camshaft was always a bit dodgy on these though if I recall” Kinderley recalled.

“Looks like this one has been done” Garforth read from the information sheet “Oh, we haven’t been introduced” he then remarked.

“Terry Kinderley, this is my brother James Garforth” the Commander did the introductions “our man on the inside. James, this is my official driver Terry.”

“Pleasure” Garforth responded as he and Kinderley shook hands over the bonnet of the car.

“So what is on your shopping list today then?” the Commander asked.

“Vans mostly” Garforth admitted as with the Commander casting a reluctant look back they moved on to where the commercial vehicles were on display a short distance away “Light goods, Transits, that sort of thing.”

“Need to shift a lot of stuff pretty quickly then” the Commander concluded.

“That’s the idea” Garforth confirmed as he walked up to one Luton style Transit vans and immediately opened the bonnet to give the engine an expert look over.

“I reckon this one has had a bit of a hard life” Kinderley remarked as he too looked around it.

“It’s been hammered, there is more oil outside the engine than in it” the Commander agreed “What is the mileage on it?”

“One hundred and eighty five thousand” Garforth confirmed from the cab interior before getting out and closing the door “I think I will give this one a miss.”

“Good idea” the Commander agreed “If that thing ever hits the road again it is likely to get pulled over by our colleagues from Traffic Division.”

“Not the ideal scenario considering” Garforth remarked as they moved on “Now these look a bit more up to the job” he declared as he proceeded to look around one of a row of four identical vans nearby that all seemed to be even at first glance in far better condition than the run down wreck they had initially looked at.

“Bit scratched and shabby” Kinderley remarked.

“But solid where it counts” the Commander added.

“Exactly” Garforth continued “I would rather have slightly worn vehicles that blend in to the background than something shiny and brand new that stands out.”

“Sounds like it has plenty of life left in it yet” the Commander remarked on hearing the engine when Garforth turned the key to start it.

“Yes definitely” Garforth agreed as he then turned off the engine before proceeding to make a few notes “These will do very nicely.”

“Ladies and gentlemen” the announcement was made over a tannoy system throughout the site “bidding will commence on the first lot in fifteen minutes.”

“In which case I think we had better take our seats” Garforth confirmed.

“I’ll wait in the car Sir” Kinderley responded “Call me if you need me.”

“Thanks” the Commander agreed before he and Garforth departed in the direction of the main auction room in the distance.

"I think it is fairly safe to say that things are getting interesting" Garforth admitted as a few minutes later he and the Commander took their seats high up in the stands of the auction room.

“We have a target and a plan I take it?” the Commander asked.

“Oh yes” Garforth confirmed as they waited for the auction to commence “And boy is it going to be spectacular if we manage to pull it off. Err, why are you grinning?” he then asked the Commander upon seeing his reaction.

“I’ll tell you in a minute” the Commander responded with an obvious sense of knowing where this was going already.

“Why do I get the feeling there is much more to this than even I am aware of?” Garforth remarked.

“Probably because there is” the Commander admitted but without giving anything away "So have you met Villiers then?" he then asked as the auction got underway with the first vehicle up for bidding being driven up in front of the auctioneers stand whereupon the sale swiftly commenced.

"In the flesh" Garforth confirmed "He is planning a raid on some secret high security valuable metals depot near Haychester, Codmore Hill I think he said it was called."

"Christ..." the Commander exclaimed in response "Not exactly thinking small is he?"

"I take it from your general lack of overall surprise at this revelation that you know the place then?" Garforth asked.

"It's on my old patch near Haychester" the Commander confirmed "I am one of only about three or four senior officers in the area who even knows it exists."

"This Villiers guy is serious" Garforth continued "His gopher, a guy going by the name of Hansell has done a really class job on the intelligence and surveillance of the place, observation photographs, construction plans, the works and I know for a fact he didn't get any of that just by typing Codmore Hill into Google."

"That he most definitely did not" the Commander agreed "What did you make of Hansell?" he then asked as the auction quickly carried on in front of them.

"Efficient, ruthless, knows his stuff" Garforth concluded "Why?"

"It is just that I know him from somewhere" the Commander explained "I swear on Tracy's life that he and I have met before somewhere but I cannot for the life of me remember where."

"Considering the number of people you have crossed swords with over the years" Garforth remarked "I am surprised that there is anyone left you haven't met yet."

"You have a point there" the Commander was forced to agree but at that point Garforth became distracted as one of the vehicles he was interested in was wheeled into the auction room to be sold.

"Four year old Ford Transit Luton with tail lift, three litre turbo diesel engine" the auctioneer announced before the bidding commenced.

The Commander watched Garforth and all around the room as the bids were placed and in what seemed just moments the sale of the van was concluded with his brother showing his bidders' number as he was the successful purchaser before the auction moved swiftly onto the next lot.

"Reminds me of our old man" the Commander remarked "He used to love coming to car auctions, sometimes just to watch the excitement of it all."

"There are times when I wish I could turn the clock back to those childhood days I will admit" Garforth confirmed.

"So, what's the plan for Codmore Hill?" the Commander asked, returning the subject back to the matter at hand.

"He clearly has a plan but no one is being let in on all of it" Garforth confirmed "One thing though, this Villiers guy has put together a hell of an army of talent. I am talking about some of the best craftsman in the thievery business."

"Who's services don't come cheap that is for sure" the Commander remarked.

"One hundred grand each up front for just coming along and hearing what he has to say, another hundred grand upon completion of the job and a guaranteed equal share of the proceeds of the job six months later" Garforth explained "That is some serious money."

"How many personnel?" the Commander asked.

“Up to a hundred I reckon” Garforth did some mental arithmetic in his head based on what he had seen the previous evening “Mostly specialists along with some foot soldiers, drivers and the like. I am in charge of transport and acquiring the motors hence this little shopping expedition, oh speaking of which” he then tailed off as another vehicle he was interested in appeared for sale and the bidding duly commenced.

“Any familiar faces?” the Commander asked once Garforth had successfully secured his second van for his list of requirements.

“I recognise a few faces” Garforth confirmed, “Looks like the sparky on the project is an old school wireman by the name of David Bartlett.”

“Now there is a name I haven’t heard of for a while” the Commander remarked with a surprised look “His old man was linked to the Bethnal Green job if I recall.”

“Looks like he is handling the electrical side of the operation, alarms and so forth and ways to get around them” Garforth continued “Unfortunately without access to a digital camera and your extensive records I cannot put any names to the others but one thing is for certain, Villiers has certainly pulled out the family silver for this one, no expense spared.”

“Someone is expecting a big return on their investment then” the Commander concluded.

“There is one other interesting thing” Garforth then went on to mention “Did you know the Americans have an interest in this little venture?”

“Official or unofficial?” the Commander asked, clearly wondering where this was going.

“Official, well I think so anyway” Garforth went on to explain “A guy who I have worked with in the past, Sam Wallace is on the team.”

“Never heard of him” the Commander admitted “NSA, CIA or FBI?” he asked.

“FBI” Garforth confirmed “Specialist undercover expert, usually does organized crime, high value robberies, that sort of thing. He is a specialist in weapons and explosives, supplies specialist operations that are off the grid that need a cloak of realistic deniability.”

“A surprising little development” the Commander remarked “Have you made contact with him?” he asked.

“We had a little chat last night over drinks” Garforth explained “We had to be careful though as Villiers or whoever is running his operation has the whole place wired for sound, vision as well probably.”

“Where is this operation based out of?” the Commander asked.

“It’s a large manor house with attached extensive farm buildings which means we have storage and workshop facilities all contained on the one site” Garforth explained “Unfortunately I am not entirely sure exactly where it is as I have always been driven to and from it in total darkness and by roundabout different routes.”

“Do you think Villiers is in charge overall or is there someone pulling his strings?” the Commander asked.

“The impression I get is that there are five levels at work here” Garforth carefully explained his reasoning “Bottom level you have the shop floor, the drivers, the doers, the foot soldiers. Next level you have the section leaders like me in charge of sourcing and executing specific elements of the overall plan. After that you have your mystery man Hansell who is the overall supervisor, fixer and gopher which then leads you to Villiers, the mastermind and planner but above him I am sure there is some sort of group financing his operation and providing him with some top level information from very secret sources.”

“That figures” the Commander reluctantly concluded “You see there is a little fact about the Codmore Hill facility that no one except Sir Richard Crowthorne, Tracy and I know about.”

“And what would that be dare I ask?” Garforth inquired.

“It’s a fake, the place doesn’t exist” the Commander explained to Garforth’s rather stunned look which meant he almost missed his next auction lot he wanted to bid on.

“Say that again?!?” Garforth exclaimed as soon as his third purchase was then secured a few moments later.

“We made the whole thing up six months ago when we first got our suspicions about a little ongoing problem we are currently investigating” the Commander explained “The only place where Codmore Hill exists is in a convincing but completely fictional file lodged in a very specific place deep in a secret location.”

“Bait I presume” Garforth concluded “Very clever. But what of the intelligence that Hansell has put together for this?”

“Some of it has to have come from that file, it exists nowhere else” the Commander explained “The blueprints and plans for the subterranean levels of the facility in fact come from an identical real facility that processes banknotes down in Kent.”

“And the site itself?” Garforth asked.

“It’s an old Ministry of Defence training compound with a nice realistic security fence all around it and a couple of barn type building in the middle just like the file says” the Commander continued to explain “We have just garnished the illusion by hiring in a private contractor to secure and patrol the place around the clock and get a local lorry firm to drive a couple of their trucks in and out of the main gate a couple of times a day.”

“So when Villiers’s merry men and I show up in a few days time to rob the place we are going to find that we have been duped” Garforth concluded before pausing to bid on another van to complete his set which he successfully did.

“You are going to find when you try and head down into the non existent basement to steal the non existent precious metals that every single Armed Response Unit officer in South East England will be waiting for you” the Commander confirmed “In one stroke we get to detain most of the major villains in the business and best of all I can then haul Villiers and his buddy Hansell off to one of our specialist interrogation facilities and get them to tell us who is pulling their strings and paying the bills.”

“Clever” Garforth remarked “Very clever indeed.”

“By using the technical data of the real location down in Kent as the basis for this mock up facility” the Commander continued “It gives the appearance of being completely legitimate plus we can use it to trace who is leaking high level documents as that is the only possible place from which the information could have been obtained.”

“Now I remember why I never play poker with you” Garforth recalled with a wry smirk.

“Wise idea” the Commander agreed “Which reminds me, you still owe me twenty quid by the way.”

“Huh?” Garforth looked across.

“You can owe it to me” the Commander smirked in response “It has been thirty years, what will another few weeks matter.”

“Oh am I glad I didn’t go for that one” Garforth remarked as the tatty van they had first looked at earlier arrived in the hall to be sold with alarming amounts of smoke coming from the exhaust and having to be pushed along by four men to get it to shift.

“Definitely wouldn’t have got very far in that one” the Commander agreed as after a few moments the hammer went down on it, the bidding being very brief.

“Two hundred quid” Garforth remarked on the final hammer price “Next stop if anyone is sensible enough is down to the scrappy on the other side of the road to get it weighed in I reckon, might even pull a little profit on that as it’s fit for little else.”

“So now you have your vans, where next for you?” the Commander asked as the auction continued its noisy yet efficiently speedy progress.

“Going to need a couple of curtain side type trucks” Garforth explained “We need something to decant our now apparently non-existent bounty onto.”

“Any ideas on that?” the Commander asked.

“Does the Security Service still do business with that guy who reconditions old trucks for overseas use?” Garforth inquired.

“Yes” the Commander confirmed after a brief pause for thought “We use them for obtaining specialist unmarked vehicles for undercover work and the like, very useful they are.”

“I’ll give them a call then” Garforth agreed as the next vehicle came in to be sold, the Ford Cortina that the Commander had been looking at earlier.

“Ah, sod it...” the Commander remarked to himself as the bidding began and he duly raised his hand...

“Eagle One X-Ray from Control” the Control Room supervisor called over the radio whereupon Kinderley put down the newspaper he had been reading and leaned forward to pick up the radio set.

“Eagle One X-Ray receiving” he confirmed.

“Message for your Guvnor” came the response “Bob reports he is ready to send out the invitation and the welcome mat is rolled out ready for your arrival.”

“Understood Control” Kinderley confirmed although he was not entirely sure what the message was about “I will let him know, Eagle One X-Ray out.”

It was just starting to rain at that moment as Kinderley replaced the radio handset on the centre console between the seats and then switched on the windscreen wipers which cleared the screen to show the Commander approaching at a brisk pace.

“Starting to turn nasty out there” the Commander remarked as he got in the car and quickly closed the door before looking at some paperwork he had in his hand.

“You didn’t?” Kinderley asked.

“Oh yes I did” the Commander confirmed with a big smile as he put the sale and change of vehicle ownership papers away in his inside tunic pocket.

“Can I have a go in it Sir?” Kinderley asked as he started the car.

“Absolutely” the Commander agreed.

“Oh, message from Control just came through” Kinderley returned to the matter at hand as he prepared to drive off “Bob is apparently about to send out some sort of invitation and everything is ready. I presumed you would know what that all meant as I didn’t have a clue.”

“I do indeed” the Commander confirmed “This is where the fun begins.”

“So where to Sir?” Kinderley asked as he drove out of the vehicle auction site main gate and into the street outside.

“Straight to the Aldwych” the Commander instructed “It is time I got some straight answers to some awkward questions.”

“Who is going to be doing the talking?” Kinderley casually asked.

“A certain Mr Devane” the Commander confirmed.

“As in Sir William Devane, the Government minister for Policing and Security?” Kinderley responded with a surprised look.

“The very same” the Commander confirmed “I have very good reason to believe that he has been a very naughty boy...”

Villiers finished the last sip of coffee that was in the bottom of the antique bone china cup before returning it delicately to the saucer and then moving it across his desk to the breakfast tray so that was out of his way.

With breakfast finished it was time for the master planner to return to his work, the details of which were meticulously presented amongst the large numbers of documents, diagrams and plans that were carefully positioned on the huge desk in front of him.

Taking a magnifying glass from his pocket, Villiers proceeded to examine in detail one document in particular, a set of building blueprints and as he examined it closely, so closely in fact that his nose was almost touching the blue printed paper, he made some notes in pencil on a notepad alongside.

A knock at the door caused him to pause his thoughts for a moment and look up, putting the magnifier aside.

“Who is it?” Villiers called.

“Hansell Sir” came the response which meant that Villiers did not have to worry about concealing the documentation on the desk as his fixer was fully in on what was being planned.

“Come on in” Villiers formally called which saw Hansell enter the ornate office before discreetly closing the door behind him, a subtlety that Villiers quickly picked up on.

“Give me the good news” Villiers requested, taking the opportunity to sit back in the huge antique leather chair which creaked as he moved within it.

“All being well everything should be in place by the end of the day” Hansell confirmed “Garforth is organising the transport, the others are playing their part, it’s all good.”

“Excellent” Villiers responded before reaching for the decanter nearby “Drink?” he proffered.

“No thanks Sir” Hansell responded “Maybe later.”

“What else is troubling you my friend?” Villiers asked, sensing the slight reluctance in Hansell’s voice that despite his best efforts he had failed to totally disguise.

“Delta One wishes you to make contact at once” Hansell confirmed.

“What’s wrong with that?” Villiers inquired “They are our sponsors and financiers for this little party of ours and we are getting paid a hell of a lot of money.”

“It’s just that I come from a family and tradition of old fashioned villains” Hansell tried to explain “These people we are effectively working for, well to be honest I have some reservations about them.”

“Don’t worry” Villiers reassured his younger colleague “By this time next week we will be far away from here counting our ill gotten gains and they will be long forgotten.”

“If you say so Sir” Hansell agreed even though it was obvious he was nowhere nearer any form of reassurance on this matter “Channel Three scrambler” he then confirmed.

“I’d like you to stay for this” Villiers then instructed before turning in his chair to his right. Pressing a button on the desk activated a screen on the wall which came on and a few moments later displayed a silhouette of a head, lit strongly from behind so that no facial features were visible.

“A little theatrical isn’t it?” Hansell quietly remarked aside as he stood alongside his boss.

“An unfortunate necessity Mr Hansell” came the electronically disguised voice that echoed over the speakers set into either side of the large wall mounted flat screen “We live in perilous times and information integrity must be maintained if we are to be successful in our respective endeavours.”

“Of course Delta One” Villiers agreed.

“The Group requires a progress report Mr Villiers” the unsettlingly disguised, indeed almost alien like voice politely requested.

“Our people are working around the clock to get everything we need together for the operation” Villiers confirmed “The operation will be proceeding as planned and on time.”

“Excellent” the voice responded “You have done well.”

“All we need to know is the correct target” Villiers then added which caused a look of confusion to appear on the face of Hansell.

“What’s going on?” Hansell asked.

“A little game of cat and mouse Mr Hansell” the voice explained without really explaining anything.

“Only with a very big cat and a very significant mouse” Villiers added knowingly “So I take it our new friend is as connected as we thought he was?”

“Our sources have confirmed his identity and who his brother is” the voice confirmed “therefore it is vital that we continue to appear to be interested in the primary target for their benefit.”

“So that really was the Commander I saw the other day?” Hansell asked.

“It was indeed Mr Hansell” the voice agreed “Our new friend Mr Garforth is no lesser a mortal than the Commander’s older brother.”

“A tangled web isn’t it?” Villiers remarked with a wry smile.

“You’ve managed to confuse the hell out of me I will admit” Hansell confirmed.

“There is far more to our little co-operative plan than a simple heist” the voice went on to explain “Whilst you will understandably be interested in the financial rewards from your endeavours, it is just a small part of a much larger agenda to which through your efforts you are making a very significant contribution.”

“As long as I get paid and paid well, I don’t really care if I am honest” Hansell honestly admitted.

“An excellent attitude Mr Hansell, you are to be commended” the voice agreed “We need you to ensure that Mr Garforth and his contacts are kept fully in the dark. Maintain the deception and let them keep thinking that the primary target remains live.”

“It shall be done Sir” Villiers agreed

“Good” the voice responded “Keep the group informed and good luck gentlemen. Delta One out.”

With that sign off, the screen went blank leaving both Villiers and Hansell looking on for a few moments before either of them spoke again.

“Where is Mr Garforth now?” Villiers asked.

“I believe he has just left the vehicle auction place in North Harrow and is heading for a truck dealership outfit in Acton” Hansell confirmed.

“Keep him sweet” Villiers instructed “Ensure that he continues to play along so that we can be sure both he and his real paymasters continue to believe our little duck blind that we have so carefully created for them.”

“Perhaps a little drive around the country would be in order this evening?” Hansell suggested.

“To check out potential getaway routes from the Codmore Hill ‘facility’ perhaps” Villiers concluded “I like your thinking.”

“So how long do we keep up our subterfuge with him?” Hansell asked.

“Until he ceases to be of use to us” Villiers confirmed “Not only can we continue to use him to provide what we need and also to send the authorities up the wrong track, we can also use him indirectly to find out what the law enforcement powers that be know about us and our employers.”

“I’ll take him out on the reccie myself” Hansell agreed “What should I do if he begins to suspect all is not what it seems?”

“Make sure the body isn’t found until we are both a very long way from here” Villiers responded with an evil smirk.

Being the height of the morning rush hour in Central London meant that progress was slow going as Kinderley and the Commander headed in to the City on the Marylebone Road.

“I swear the traffic in this city is getting worse by the day” Kinderley remarked as they moved off again once the traffic lights controlling the junction had changed.

“You think this is bad” the Commander remarked as he looked into the rear view mirror as something had obviously attracted his attention “you should try the Circle Line right about now.”

“Always been a car man myself Sir” Kinderley admitted “Still, those Congestion Charge cameras must have come in useful over the last few years” he remarked as they passed over the road markings that indicated that they were now entering the central London charging zone.

“Oh you would be surprised at just how much useful information we have managed to get from those” the Commander admitted “In fact our friends from the Civil Liberties groups would probably have a coronary if they found out.”

“So what about the green Vauxhall Vectra about three cars back?” Kinderley asked “because unless my eyes are deceiving me, we are being followed.”

“Your eyes are not deceiving you Terry” the Commander agreed as it now became clear what it was he had been looking at in the rear view mirror for the last couple of minutes before reaching for a mobile phone he had in his inside pocket.

“Who are you calling, International Rescue?” Kinderley asked as they continued slowly onwards with the green Vauxhall maintaining its distance in the line of traffic a short distance behind.

“Nope, someone even more useful, my brother in law” the Commander confirmed with a wry smile.

Deep in the depths of the former Down Street Underground Station, the tiled tube tunnels began to echo with the sound of a telephone ringing which caused Fuller to put down the coffee percolator pot and look around with a slightly blank look.

“Where the hell is that?” Fuller remarked to himself as he abandoned thoughts of coffee and stepped out into the main corridor of the former platform level of the station and listened intently for a few moments as the ringing continued to echo around the otherwise deserted complex.

A few moments later Fuller realised where he had left the phone and walked briskly down the corridor, his footsteps echoing until he reached the new control room that he had spent the last few hours commissioning.

“Down Street Lunatic Asylum, how may I direct your call?” Fuller asked as he took a seat at his computer console with its semi-circle of four large flat screens in front of him.

“Simon, it's your boss” the Commander called over the phone “Have you or any of our friends put a tail on me on a just in case basis?”

“Not that I am aware of” Fuller confirmed “Where are you?” he asked.

“Just crossed the border on the Marylebone Road” the Commander confirmed “There is a green Vauxhall Vectra about three cars back that seems to be tailing us.”

“Hello there...” Fuller remarked as he easily accessed the live traffic camera feeds and managed to find the target vehicle “Tatty old thing, definitely not one of ours or the cousins and not one of Amber's little teams either. Looks like two up in the front and possibly a third in the back.”

“Do we have any resources available for a little meet and greet?” the Commander asked.

“Bob and his guys are about to intercept our ministerial friend in Whitehall” Fuller confirmed as he checked the status and whereabouts of various members of the combined Services on a location screen “I could put a call into your wife if you like? I am sure she would appreciate a chance to escape the morning briefing.”

“Patch me in” the Commander requested.

“What do you want me to do with our new friends Sir?” Kinderley asked as he turned right and looking in the rear view mirror confirmed that the green Vauxhall was continuing to follow.

“Keep them in touch” the Commander requested as he waited for Tracy to come on the line.

“All right darling” Tracy was then heard to call “What trouble are you in now?” she jokingly asked.

“Trouble? Me?” the Commander responded “I was wondering if you fancy spoiling somebody’s day with one of your trademark little meet and greets?”

“What have you got into now love?” Tracy asked as she stepped out of the meeting room where the various heads of section and borough commander's of the Metropolitan Branch of the Security & Police Service were having their weekly meeting.

“Seems we have picked up a tail” the Commander reconfirmed the car was still following by discreetly looking in the wing mirror “Green Vectra, looks like three individuals inside and they are most certainly not ours.”

“That car has no recorded insurance and they haven't paid their Congestion Charge either” Fuller remarked as he checked the registration number through the various motoring databases at his disposal.

“Definitely worthy of my special attention then” Tracy agreed as she headed towards the stairs to make her way down two floors to the basement car park “Would you like this done real quiet like or shall we ditch the subtlety and diplomacy?”

“Give them their moneys worth” the Commander confirmed.

“If it helps, I have hacked into the MI5 terrorist intelligence database and put that car reg number and description on their system if you are looking for an excuse to have a party” Fuller remarked as he finished working on the computer with a knowing smirk.

“In which case just tell me where to meet them and I shall pop down and say hello” Tracy confirmed as she headed down the stairs bound for the New Scotland Yard basement car park.

“They are still there Sir” Kinderley confirmed as he rechecked the rear view mirror whilst approaching Marble Arch “I take it we have a plan then?” he asked as he prepared to navigate the complicated traffic circulatory system in order to turn right into Park Lane.

“The missus is rounding up the welcoming committee as we speak” the Commander confirmed.

A little under a mile away from the Commander's position, a hastily assembled convoy of Security Service vehicles led by Tracy on her motorbike screeched to a halt in a side street whereupon a number of heavily armed officers deployed and joined her on the corner of the street, one of them handing her a MP7 type semi-automatic weapon so that she was now armed to the same level as the rest of the team.

“Right then ladies and gentlemen” Tracy declared “We have a green Vauxhall Vectra saloon which will be coming down this section of Park Lane in approximately two minutes” she explained.

“Anything special about it Maam?” one of the armed officers asked.

“It is on the terrorist hit list” Tracy went on to explain “at least it was as of five minutes ago. This is a Level One priority containment and detention; you are to assume that the three or four occupants of the vehicle are armed and dangerous.”

“You want us to put on the full show then Maam?” another officer asked.

“Absolutely” Tracy confirmed “The more spectacularly public the better, give something for the tourists to talk about when they get back home.”

“Do you think they are armed?” Kinderley asked as they began to proceed down Park Lane, the green Vectra remaining in touch a few vehicles behind.

“Oh probably. Unfortunately in this day age, who isn't?” the Commander remarked as he extracted his old six shot revolver from the belt holster and discreetly checked it.

“I hate guns” Kinderley remarked.

“Yeah, I am not too keen on the things myself” the Commander admitted.

“I could just try and outrun them” Kinderley suggested.

“The thought had occurred to me” the Commander admitted “However I would dearly like to invite our new friends back there in for a little chat over tea and biccies.”

“Very civilised Sir” Kinderley remarked.

“Only I will let the good lady wife tell them under caution that due to budgetary restraints, the tea and biccies are off” the Commander added.

“Speaking of whom” Kinderley remarked as they slowly advanced down Park Lane and he noticed a familiar figure standing on the street corner next to a telephone box “I do believe there is your good lady wife.”

“Show time” the Commander declared “keep driving normally and let her do the work” he instructed as he gave a little wave as they passed Tracy who smiled back before turning smartly on her heels and headed back into the side street where the group of armed officers were waiting to pounce.

“All right, let's get them wrapped up” Tracy instructed “Alpha and Bravo Teams” she then called into her radio “get ready to move on my mark.”

The occupants of the green Vauxhall Vectra had no idea whatsoever that they had been spotted or that they were in any danger until suddenly two Security Service cars emerged from a side street and blocked off their way ahead.

Looking back quickly they realised they were cut off as two more Security Service vehicles penned them in from the rear and within moments their car was surrounded by heavily armed officers.

“Get out of the car!” came the firmly shouted orders from four officers, each one concentrating on a different door of the car “Drop all weapons and come out with your hands in the air!”

With Tracy looking on, her MP7 gun in her hands ready in case anything went wrong, the occupants of the car reluctantly surrendered, the doors of the car opened and the three men got out, their hands in the air as instructed.

Within moments they were ordered to their knees before lying on the ground with their arms outstretched as per the standard procedure for taking suspected armed suspects into detention.

“Very nicely done” Tracy remarked as she watched whilst the three men were restrained with plastic ties securing their wrists behind their backs before they were helped back onto their feet to be taken to separate waiting vans.

“You got them?” the Commander asked, looking back out of the side window of his car just ahead of the scene.

“We got them love” Tracy confirmed with a thumbs up.

“Cheers my dear” the Commander responded “Have them laundered and pressed, I would dearly like to know who they are working for.”

“I'll see what I can do” Tracy agreed “See you later.”

“Cheerio” the Commander called before returning to the matter at hand and checking his antique railway pocket fob watch “Terry, burn rubber, all this unplanned excitement means we are running late.”

“You got it boss” Kinderley agreed as he accelerated away at high speed.

“Eagle One to Zulu One” the Commander called into his radio as his car reached Hyde Park Corner at the end of Park Lane and Kinderley checked the traffic to his right before turning left towards Piccadilly “Time to send out the invitation.”

“Here comes the choo choo train” Jennifer remarked to her six month old daughter as she was feeding her breakfast but just as the spoonful of food mostly went in her mouth, the telephone rang.

“We regret to announce the next train is delayed” Jennifer confirmed “Sorry, blame the RMT, I usually do” she declared before putting the spoon down and reaching across the kitchen table to the telephone.

“Hello, this had better be good” Jennifer called upon answering the telephone.

“Jenny, sorry to disturb you on your day off but I need a favour without going through your office” the Commander called from his car as it headed along Piccadilly.

“The last time I got one of these calls from you” Jennifer recalled “you wound up chasing the former Home Secretary through the corridors of the BBC.”

“Oh yes, I had forgotten about that” the Commander recalled rather fondly “Anyway, I need to know the location of one of your cars, who is driving and whether that driver will be a problem.”

“Who is getting the bad news?” Jennifer asked as she got up and went over to a laptop nearby that she opened and switched on.

“Sir William Devane” the Commander confirmed.

“Jesus Christ!” Jennifer exclaimed.

“No, Sir William Devane” the Commander responded “He has been a naughty boy and I want to have a chat with him.”

“All right” Jennifer replied as she tapped the keys on her laptop “It's your shit storm. He is due to leave the Cabinet Office in Whitehall in the next couple of minutes in one of my Mercedes, Lima X-Ray Six Zero Mike Romeo Oscar. It's Darren my second in command at the wheel so there shouldn't be any problems.”

“Right, thanks” the Commander responded.

“Oh and I would appreciate it if you didn't scratch the motor” Jennifer requested “You are not the only one on a tight budget these days.”

“I hear you” the Commander agreed “Thanks” he responded before disconnecting the call.

Jennifer placed the phone down and turned back to her daughter who was looking at her with a slightly perplexed look.

“Well it would appear your Uncle is about to put his undiplomatic foot in it once again” Jennifer wryly remarked “I suggest when you grow up you take a nice safe profession, do you fancy being a Librarian?”

“Bob” the Commander called “Black VIP Protection Division ministerial Mercedes index number ending in Mike Romeo Oscar due to leave the Cabinet Office within the next minute or two, bring him in” he instructed before hanging up.

Having just left the Cabinet Office and now proceeding along Whitehall seated in the back of his official Ministerial car, Sir William Devane was intently reading the newspaper when he became aware of the sound of an emergency service siren coming up behind him.

The sound of sirens through the streets of central London was nothing unusual and Devane was expecting the source to pass them by as his driver pulled into the side of the road.

It was only when a few moments later that the Security Service patrol car, the source of the siren came to a halt immediately behind his car that Devane put down his newspaper and turned to look out of the back window where he saw Bob and two of his ARU officers get out and approach.

"This looks ominous" Devane remarked, the seriousness of the situation being readily apparent as these were fully armed specialist officers and not regular patrol types approaching.

With understandable apprehension Devane lowered the side window when Bob knocked on it.

"Good morning officer" Devane called "I take it this isn't a social call?" he asked.

"Good morning" Bob responded "I am afraid not Sir" he confirmed as he produced a business card and handed it to him.

"Ah..." Devane remarked as he looked at the card in his hand. On the front was the full name and title of the Commander whilst written by hand on it were the ominous words 'Your presence is requested at once'.

CARD

"If you wouldn't mind transferring to our car please" Bob politely instructed as he opened the door and stepped aside to allow Devane to get out "We will escort you to your meeting."

"I must say you guys are nothing if not exceedingly polite" Devane remarked as he proceeded to the Security Service vehicle where one of the other officers opened the rear door for him.

"I don't suppose I could ask what this is about?" Devane then asked as he got in the car.

"We are just providing the transport Sir" Bob confirmed before joining Devane in the back of the car "and your security of course" he nodded down to his weapon.

"How reassuring..." Devane responded, the exact opposite of his true feelings on his current situation.

As the car moved off and merged into the traffic on Whitehall, Devane looked out of the side window as the rain began to fall with a look of extreme apprehension which he could see in his own reflection in the glass.

With the morning rush hour almost over and the traffic in central London beginning to thin out a bit, the progress of the car containing Devane was fairly swift and soon he was arriving at his unexpected destination, a seemingly disused yet still smartly maintained entrance into a red glazed terracotta tile fronted building located in a side street just off the Aldwych in the Strand.

"If you would follow me please Sir" Bob instructed once the car had come to a stop and he had got out before opening the door.

Devane merely nodded in agreement and stepped out onto the pavement, pulling his long coat in over him to keep out the misty rain and cold that appropriately reflected his mood and apprehension at what was to come.

The other members of Bob's team remained with the car as he led Devane to the doorway which was already open waiting their arrival.

Devane was somewhat surprised when he entered the building to find himself in a darkened former London Underground ticket office, the former Aldwych station which has been closed to public use since 1994, the dark interior making the scene even more mysterious as most of the lights were off.

"Am I about to get my ticket checked?" Devane asked in an attempt to lighten the mood

"I think to be more accurate, your card is going to get marked" Bob confirmed as he escorted Devane to the lift and opened the old lattice doorway before showing him inside the old wooden car.

"You are not coming with me?" Devane asked as he stood inside the lift car and saw Bob was remaining outside.

“You shall be continuing this journey alone” Bob confirmed “It's that lever there, proceed to the platform when you get down there” he explained before shutting the lattice lift door and stepping back.

Reluctantly Devane reached for the lever and pressed it down whereupon the lift began its ascent into the depths of the Earth.

Despite the noisy creaking nature of the ageing lift car, Devane could still hear his heavy breathing as his nervousness about what may be about to happen increased.

After what seemed like an ominous eternity but was in fact only about thirty seconds, the lift slowed to a halt and Devane opened the gates before stepping out into the dimly lit tube shaped tunnel with its slightly dusty and neglected tiled lining.

Feeling like a condemned man on his way to his own execution, Devane walked along the tunnel passageway, his steps echoing all around the seemingly deserted complex of subterranean tunnels until he reached the former platform where only about half the lights were working and there was a dusty seemingly abandoned tube train present which merely added to the ghostly atmosphere.

“They say keep your friends close and your enemies even closer Mr Devane” a familiar voice called out suddenly breaking the tense silence which caused Devane to turn around suddenly and look towards the far end platform entrance portal where he saw standing there in the gloom the familiar outline of the Commander.

“The question at hand of course is which are you?” the Commander then remarked as he proceeded to walk towards him along the length of the long disused platform until the two men came face to face standing just a couple of feet apart.

“You tell me Commander” Devane responded, his apprehension under control but still troubling him greatly.

“You see Mr Devane, I know things” the Commander explained with a wry smile “For example I know that you are a member of a mysterious group called the ‘Ramses Group’ or ‘Pyramid Organisation’ and have been for a couple of years now.”

“An interesting claim” Devane remarked “Do you have any evidence for this claim of yours Commander?”

“Oh I've got plenty” the Commander confirmed “and none, which leaves us with something of a paradox does it not?”

“I am not sure quite what to say Commander” Devane responded “I don't suppose it would help if I called for my lawyer right now would it?”

“Probably not” the Commander remarked as he proceeded to walk around Devane in a complete circle which served intentionally to unnerve him still further “You see I know that you are a member of this ‘Pyramid’ outfit or whatever it is they call themselves but the question I have is whether you are a true believer in their cause or

one of those who has been forced to join in so that your face fits within shall we say, certain circles?"

"Life seems to have suddenly got very complicated" Devane admitted "Where do we start Commander?" he asked.

"I think you have some very serious explaining to do Mr Devane" the Commander remarked, his tone remaining deadly serious which further unnerved him "so start from the beginning, don't leave anything out and acquaint me with these people" he instructed "I'm all ears."

"Is there anyone else listening in?" Devane asked, taking a moment to look around.

"It is just you and me" the Commander confirmed "No wires, no ears, no CCTV, no eavesdroppers. That is one of the advantages of this place."

"I don't have any specific central involvement with them" Devane rather feebly protested "There are aspects about them that scare me and if they find out I have talked..."

"You have my complete and unbreakable assurance that the existence of this conversation, its contents and revelations contained herein will remain strictly confidential" the Commander reassured him.

Devane stepped away for a few moments and looked down at the rusty rails in the track bed in front of the train below the platform edge, contemplating the various options he now faced and their potential consequences, none of which held any real positive appeal.

"All right" Devane turned back and returned to the conversation "What precisely do you want to know?" he reluctantly asked.

"Who are they? What do they want? Why are they here? Where did they come from and where are they going?" the Commander confirmed.

"From what I understand" Devane began "the origins of the group you refer to as the Pyramid Organisation goes back some twenty to thirty years. They started out as one of those Whitehall political 'think tanks' meeting in closed rooms and executive clubs to come up with policy ideas for Government ministers and those with high political ambitions."

"Now there is a blast from the past" the Commander recalled "Old Thatcher era Government idea was that."

"Things seemed so much simpler back then" Devane admitted "Over time most of these think tanks disappeared or become legitimate consultancies, focus groups and so forth."

"Or as my wife would put it, professional bullshit creators" the Commander added which prompted a smirk of agreement from Devane before he continued.

"The Pyramid Organisation were one of the lesser known of these groups which over time worked in their favour as they could keep below the political radar, letting others come and go, make huge blunders and leave them to cream off the best bits from the resulting wreckage" Devane explained "All that seemed to change however about three years ago as if some critical mass point had been reached which was when their agenda subtly changed from reactive to proactive."

"That roughly parallels the point where we became aware of their potential existence" the Commander confirmed "There have been a number of power crazed political agenda wavers over the last few years but this Pyramid lot always seemed to only exist in the background, their existence amounting to little more than hushed whispers and speculation."

"Oh they exist all right" Devane confirmed "and over the last few years they have taken advantage of the various political turmoil's that have occurred to recruit and place useful people sympathetic to their aims in key positions everywhere."

"How did you get involved with this Pyramid Organisation then?" the Commander asked.

"Like most political deals, it happened discreetly over drinks" Devane confirmed "I should think that at least two thirds of all deals and decisions made in the corridors of power involve the consumption of quality alcohol in significant quantities these days."

"What was the sales pitch they put to you then?" the Commander asked.

"Assist them with some information research, nothing security sensitive they reassured me" Devane explained "in exchange I get logistical and political support to advance my parliamentary career. You cannot do anything these days without some sort of sponsor in the background greasing the wheels and promoting your potential in the corridors of power unfortunately."

"A rather worrying scenario" the Commander concluded from that last statement "Leaves the mechanisms of democracy open to all sorts of potentially unsavoury influences."

"As if we needed any more" Devane admitted with a smirk.

"So what have you been passing them?" the Commander asked.

"Nothing overly sensitive" Devane responded "Committee minutes, reports, memos, that sort of thing. They did ask at one point for details of discussions that took place at Joint Intelligence & Security Committee meetings but I refused on principle."

"Good for you" the Commander congratulated "and have you received anything in return?"

"Certain useful documents have crossed my desk so to speak" Devane confirmed.

“Documents like these for example?” the Commander asked as he produced some of the MI6 originated files that had been recovered from Devane's office.

“What the hell is this?” Devane demanded to know, the sense of shock at what he was seeing obvious which told the Commander a lot in just a short few moments.

“Your office was burgled yesterday” the Commander went on to explain “a fact discovered a little while later when two of my officers arrived on an unofficial sneak and peak mission to discover that either you are very untidy or else you had been turned over by person or persons unknown.”

“I know nothing about this” Devane responded, completely baffled by the news of this development.

“Can't say that I am all that surprised” the Commander remarked “Despite the somewhat disaster area nature of your office when my officers arrived” he proceeded to show him some of the photographs of the scene that Jennifer and Fuller had taken “no one from either the Home Office or the Parliamentary Incidents Ombudsman Office has reported it. As far as both my people at New Scotland Yard, Special Branch and the Political Unit Section of MI5 are concerned, this never happened.”

“I swear to you that I have never seen those documents in my life” Devane defiantly defended himself, pointing directly at the MI6 files in front of him “I don't have the security clearance to see that kind of material.”

“You are right about that” the Commander confirmed as he returned the files to his briefcase for safe keeping “so that leaves two possibilities.”

“I had nothing to do with them” Devane insisted.

“Well they didn't arrive in your office by a carrier pigeon flying in through the window” the Commander responded “so either you received them from your Pyramid friends...”

“Absolutely not” Devane confirmed.

“All right, that leaves the alternative scenario” the Commander concluded “Someone is setting you up, either to get rid of you or to blackmail you.”

“Neither prospect exactly fills me with much enthusiasm I must say” Devane responded.

“I think someone wants me to use this planted evidence” the Commander indicated the briefcase containing the files “to crucify you, probably by way of some sort of official Political Ombudsman's Commission investigation.”

“Or trial by media” Devane remarked with a significant sense of depressed inevitability at his potential fate “I've seen it done before.”

“Oh yes” the Commander agreed “Get fed to the newspapers before whatever is left over is sufficiently mangled and disgraced in the courts and then thrown in an Open Prison for five years.”

“Only these days its trial by Twitter isn’t it?” Devane ventured.

“No good asking me” the Commander admitted with a wry smile “I have to get the wife to switch my computer on and do my e-mails!”

“So I had heard” Devane responded “A full briefing on what to expect when we encounter you and your good lady wife is now included as a standard part of the induction process for all new arrivals in the Home Office and the Justice Department by the way” he went on to explain.

“Can’t say I am surprised” the Commander remarked “I’m almost flattered in fact...”

“So what is the plan for me if I may ask?” Devane inquired with some obvious and understandable apprehension.

“We want you to stay good buddies with your Pyramid friends” the Commander explained “Only I and a few others on my side of the equation will be providing any information they ask of you, suitably doctored of course.”

“If they find out I am working for you then I fear for my life” Devane warned.

“In return for your co-operation” the Commander continued by way of reassurance “you have my personal word that you will be protected. This includes relocations and new identities for you and your family if the need arises which hopefully it won’t.”

“Let’s hope not” Devane readily agreed.

“If we play our cards right” the Commander continued “we can have this group identified, neutralised and closed down before they do any major damage and with them gone we can all return to our normal lives.”

“Until the next bunch of power hungry half wits come along that is” Devane added remorsefully,

“Well there is always that possibility I will admit” the Commander was forced to agree “Nature abhors a vacuum and it seems as soon as one group are sent packing it isn’t long before another pops up in its place to try and have another go at corrupting the system and seizing power.”

“How will I contact you?” Devane asked.

“We will contact you” the Commander confirmed “It is a fairly even bet that your communications through the Home Office and Ministry of Justice facilities are being monitored by everyone from MI5, the FSB, the NSA and everyone else through to the Tuffty Club and our Pyramid friends but we have ways around such things. They aren’t the only ones who can be sneaky.”

“Could I ask something Commander?” Devane requested with an obvious sense of hesitation.

“Sure” the Commander confirmed.

“My boss, the Home Secretary” Devane began.

“Ah, Lady Jayne Grey” the Commander recalled “I do hope she gave her parents hell for that one” he remarked.

“She seems to have been acting very oddly of late” Devane explained the reasoning behind his concerns “Would that have anything to do with what is going on?”

“She is a lady with a lot on her proverbial plate at the moment” the Commander confirmed “That includes some of the issues we have discussed here.”

“Does she know about this little meeting?” Devane asked.

“No” the Commander quickly confirmed and reassured him “The nature and existence of our little chat here today is known only to myself, Tracy and one other and I strongly suggest we keep it that way.”

“No problem with that here” Devane readily agreed.

“I must stress the need for absolute secrecy” the Commander then went on “These people who we are trying to identify and neutralise have access to the same tricks of the trade and toys we have, it is simply a case of who can outsmart who.”

“A silent war” Devane remarked “Sounds almost poetic.”

“There is a lot at stake here” the Commander continued “Not only are lives including yours and mine at risk but there is also the potential risk to the very fabric of the country’s justice and political systems themselves.”

“And all based on who controls the most information” Devane commented.

“Exactly” the Commander agreed “So let me issue you with a polite warning Mr Devane, if I or any of my colleagues find out you are betraying us in any way, I will require the name and telephone number of your dentist as by the time I and or my wife have finished with you, he will be the only person capable of identifying what little is left. Do we have a crystal clear understanding?”

“Absolutely” Devane firmly agreed after taking an understandably nervous swallow having been told his eventual fate if it went wrong.

“In which case I believe it is time you returned to the real world” the Commander announced shaking Devane by the hand “Thank you for coming and remember to keep in touch.”

Devane looked on with a slight sense of bewilderment as the Commander turned smartly on his heels and proceeded back up the deserted platform disappearing into the gloom in almost as mysterious a manner in which he had arrived.

"I'm finished..." Devane remarked to himself before with the slow foreboding footsteps of a man believing himself to be condemned, he departed.

In his study, Villiers was making the final adjustments to his plans which were meticulously laid out on the desk in front of him.

One thing he was known for most was his attention to detail and also his old fashioned methods of having everything hand drawn and written on paper. Also for security reasons he only ever kept the one original copy, if it were to be lost or destroyed however he had the photographic recall to reproduce everything from his substantial memory as well as his many years of experience.

Villiers took a few more moments to double check the last details had been recorded correctly before carefully folding the documents and placing them into their dedicated leather bound folder which he then proceeded to take over to a safe mounted in the wall into which he placed it for safe keeping.

Seeing that everything was now complete and ready to proceed, Villiers was able to afford himself a couple of well earned luxuries and reached to the antique glass decanter for a brandy along with one of the extremely expensive cigars from the adjacent box.

He had only just clipped and lit the cigar when the telephone on the desk rang to which Villiers gave a distinctly unimpressed look before reluctantly putting his brandy down and reaching across to answer it.

"Good afternoon" Villiers formally answered however it became quickly clear that whoever was contacting him was of the utmost importance as he then stood up as soon as he heard and instantly recognised the voice of the caller.

"Ah I see" Villiers then responded as he was dictated some instructions, the details of which he quickly jotted down on an open notebook on the desk in front of him "So we definitely go to the third phase?" he then asked for confirmation.

After a few moments more during which he listened intently it was clear had anyone been in the room at that moment that Villiers was taking this call extremely seriously and already his highly skilled calculating mind was getting to work on the permutations and variations he was now going to have to incorporate into his elaborate plan.

"Very well Sir" he then confirmed "it will be done. Goodbye" and hung up.

He allowed himself a moment to look straight ahead and then down at the notes he had just hastily scribbled before picking up his brandy and cigar once again and taking a sip of the strong drink as he thought carefully.

Being the expert planner that he was the solution came to him quickly and it would have the added bonus of checking exactly what connections and therefore the dependability and loyalty of one of his key recruits had. After taking a further few moments to enjoy the remainder of his brandy and take a deep inhale on his cigar, Villiers reached across the desk to the telephone and pressed a single digit to be instantly connected.

"I need to know where Mr Garforth is please" Villiers requested as soon as his call had been answered "We may have a Code Eleven scenario on our hands."

The drab 1970's concrete exterior of the Paddington Green High Security Detention Centre of the Security Service made for a distinctly cold and unwelcoming ambience for anyone arriving there which for most was usually against their will, this being the place that for many years has served as the dedicated purpose built facility for housing the most dangerous offenders and suspects detained for the most serious of crimes, particularly anything potentially terror related.

Kinderley approached the formidable building from the south east and drove directly into the entrance to the underground car park.

Thanks to the Commander being in the front passenger seat there was no question of identification or checks and the gate was immediately opened to allow them to enter.

"Do you want me to wait here Sir?" Kinderley asked as he applied the handbrake having brought the car to a halt in the designated space reserved for senior officials and high ranking officers of the Service and associated agencies.

"If you would yes thanks" the Commander confirmed before releasing his seat belt and getting out of the car "hopefully this shouldn't take too long" he commented.

"What if they don't feel like talking?" Kinderley asked.

"Oh I shouldn't worry too much about that" the Commander confirmed with a knowing smirk "They'll talk, I can guarantee it."

"Should be interesting..." Kinderley remarked to himself as he watched the Commander walk away from the car with a determined and purposeful stride towards the building entrance.

"Right" the Commander declared, practically rubbing his hands together with anticipation as he arrived in the Custody Area and approached the desk behind which was stood the duty Custody Sergeant "let's have a look at them then."

"They've all requested legal representation Sir" the Custody Sergeant reported with a slight sense of hesitancy as he knew the Commander would not like what he had to tell him "and that's all they have said."

"Ah..." the Commander responded "Do we have any identification on them at least?"

"All three have refused to identify themselves" the Custody Sergeant went on to explain "they all had identical possessions on them as well" he indicated the brown paper evidence bags nearby containing the prisoners effects "stolen UK driving licences, pay as you go Oyster Cards and two grand each in cash."

"Interesting" the Commander remarked as he took a moment to briefly examine the evidence bags "very interesting indeed."

It was then that the doorway from the high security cell area opened and Tracy appeared, quickly joining the Commander at the desk.

"Any joy love?" the Commander asked.

"These guys are never going to talk" Tracy confirmed with regret "My instincts tell me these guys have been professionally trained."

"Freelance hit team of some kind perhaps?" the Commander suggested.

"It fits" Tracy agreed but at that moment she had to pause as her mobile phone began to ring "It's Simon" she confirmed from the caller details displayed on the screen "secure line."

"Hello?" a somewhat echoey sounding Fuller was heard to call as soon as Tracy answered the call.

"We can hear you" Tracy confirmed "What have you got for us?"

"I washed those driving licences that have been recovered from the three suspects through the DVLA's hot licence database" Simon confirmed as he took a closer look at the details displayed on the screen in front of him in the operations room of the Down Street underground facility "Very interesting."

"Do tell" the Commander prompted.

"All three were reported lost or stolen by people who at the time were on holiday in Paris" Fuller confirmed "that's the one in France, not the one in Texas by the way."

"What about our three guest's dabs?" Tracy asked "talent like these guys must have a record on the system somewhere?"

"I tried cross referencing all the usual sources and came up with sweet Fanny Adams" Fuller continued "so I figured as we haven't done it for a while I would have a poke around the world's intelligence agency's internal secure databases and I came up trumps."

"Oh I wonder who it might be?" Tracy speculated.

"Well the most common entry and exit point on the system for their pay as you go Oyster cards was Holland Park which just happens to be the nearest tube station to where a certain Agency has a secret operating centre for its northern European operations.

"Oh you mean the one with the shooting range in the basement, the largest staff canteen in west London, a view that just happens to overlook the Russian embassy and the armoured glass windows all of which we are supposed to not know anything about?" the Commander cheekily responded.

"That would be the one" Fuller agreed.

"Now what are they up to?" Tracy asked.

"A question I most certainly intend to seek a definitive answer to before the day is out" the Commander confirmed with obvious determination.

"There is one other thing" Fuller then continued "It may be nothing but I thought you should know that the DVLA lost and stolen database records that not three but six UK driving licences were reported lost in northern France within the space of forty eight hours, there are three more of them out there somewhere."

"That means there could be a second team on the plot" the Commander concluded.

"Or a reserve team designed to step in and take over if the first one gets taken out of the equation" Tracy added.

"Which we can safely say has most definitely happened" the Commander indicated towards the cell block access door "Time for a chat methinks..."

"Mind if I tag along love?" Tracy asked.

"You are always welcome" the Commander confirmed.

Inside interview cell D3, one of the three men was sat bolt upright in a chair, his eyes fixed firmly on the solid steel door that was the only way in and out of the room, his hands were cuffed and the only other thing in the room was a small table in front of him with a bottle of water and a plastic cup.

The man maintained his look straight ahead when he heard the distinctive sound of the lock being released before the door opened and in walked Tracy and the Commander with a purposeful step.

"Morning" the Commander cheerfully called as behind them an officer came in with two chairs and placed them opposite on the other side of the small table before leaving again as the two senior officers sat down facing the detainee.

"Morning Sir, Maam" the man politely and respectfully replied as the cell door closed and the lock was heard to engage leaving the three of them alone to talk.

"So" the Commander began as he produced a pack of cigarettes and a lighter and placed them on the table before pushing them across to the detainee "What shall we talk about?"

"Let's see" Tracy summed up the situation "there is possession of concealed weapons, possession of false or fraudulent identification for criminal purposes and the one that will have the Mayor on the phone before the day is out, failure to pay your congestion charge on that scrap heap of a car we arrested you driving earlier not to mention probably half a dozen motoring offences as well."

"I am saying nothing without my legal representative" the man politely but firmly responded "but thanks for these" he then added as he took a cigarette and lit it up."

"You got your lawyer's number?" the Commander asked as he extracted his mobile phone "or shall I just go though the Grosvenor Square central switchboard?"

"Special Agent Christopher Applewood" the man then announced as he realised the Commander either knew exactly what he was or had just made an incredibly accurate guess "London office, Central Intelligence Agency on special assignment to an anti organised crime task force" he went on to explain.

"So what is the CIA doing with a three man team following little old me around town?" the Commander asked "and by the way I am extremely flattered that a three man team is felt necessary for me" he added.

"You need to speak to the London Section Chief" Applewood responded "All I know is that something you are personally working on has got some people in the US Government worried and they ordered the local CIA office to keep tabs on you and see what you are up to."

"And your other team?" Tracy asked "We know there were six stolen driving licences in a cluster together, three of which were with you guys so there must be a second team at work somewhere."

"I've not been made aware of a second team" Applewood confirmed "however I gather from what little we have been told that this is a big operation so it would not surprise me if there is another team on the plot."

"All right" the Commander concluded "I am going to hold onto you three just for a couple of hours whilst I make a couple of telephone calls" he confirmed "and I am going to be speaking to your boss so I suggest that when you are released, you and your team report back to your section chief as soon as possible."

"Thank you Sir, Maam" Applewood responded.

"Is it just me or do you also get a bit worried whenever the Americans are lurking in the background of one of our operations?" Tracy asked a few minutes later as she and the Commander were walking arm in arm back to the car

"It just tends to make life a little bit extra complicated, that is all" the Commander responded "however I do intend to have a word or two with my opposite number over at the Grosvenor Square lunatic asylum and find out just exactly what their angle is."

"They could hinder our plans" Tracy warned.

"And by the same token they could help us as well" the Commander added thoughtfully as they reached his car.

"Any luck Sir?" Kinderley asked as the Commander returned to his official car and got in the rear passenger seat.

"Let's just say life just got even more complicated" the Commander reported as Tracy got in the back alongside him "I do however know who they are working for so it is time to shake someone's tree and demand some answers."

"Anyone we know?" Kinderley asked as he started the car.

"The CIA" the Commander confirmed before reaching down for the telephone handset mounted in the lower dashboard of the car between the two seating positions "can I get a secure line on this?" he asked.

"Yes Sir" Kinderley confirmed "I think you have to press nine and then the hash key before dialling, at least that is what it says in the instruction manual."

"All right, I'll give it a try" the Commander agreed.

After fiddling around with the telephone set a bit he managed to dial through to the central Security Service switchboard back at New Scotland Yard.

"Eagle One requesting a secure line to Interpol London Office, Senior Section Chief, Code One priority" the Commander formally requested.

"I thought you were calling the CIA?" Tracy asked.

"They can wait for an hour" the Commander explained as he waited to be connected "gives our three friends a chance to report in and cook up something. Meantime I am going to try a different approach and pick Hoskins brain."

Such was the efficiency of the recently commissioned Inter-Departmental Secure Communications and Data System that the Commander was quickly connected to Christopher Hoskins, former senior CIA operative and the recently appointed Chief of Operation of Interpol Northern European Operations.

"Chris, its Eddie" the Commander briskly declared "meet me outside your office in twenty minutes and make sure you bring some decent tea for us."

"There they are" Fuller announced with delight as his extensive facial recognition search finally came up trumps with matches for the three detainees that had been following the Commander earlier "Now let's see where else you gentlemen have been poking your noses in of late."

The humming noise of the computers installed deep in the old station tunnels of the former Down Street Underground Station echoed around the deserted complex only occasionally suppressed by the sound of passing trains on the adjacent still very much operational London Underground Piccadilly Line between Hyde Park Corner and Green Park.

As the computer continued to search intently through databases located across the world the telephone on the desk rang and Fuller leaned forward to answer it, all the time not taking his eyes off the bank of screens in front of him.

"Simon" the Commander called from the phone in the back of the car as Kinderley drove them through the streets of Central London making use of the siren and lights to cut their way through the heavy traffic and ducking down bus lanes in an effort to make at least some decent progress.

"Commander" Fuller replied "I had a feeling you would be calling Sir."

"Our three in Paddington Green nick are CIA by the looks of it" the Commander confirmed "have you managed to find anything on them yet?" he asked.

"The computer is still chewing on it" Fuller confirmed as he rechecked the screens in front of him "however I can confirm two of the three you have in custody have been part of a semi freelance hit team for the CIA in Africa and southern Europe in recent years, one of them has even been seconded to our own MI6 once or twice in the last couple of years."

"Deniable assets" Tracy remarked "Someone is sneaking around on our patch without proper notification."

"I don't like it" the Commander concluded "I don't like it at all."

"I've got cross referencing across every database I can access happening right now" Fuller continued "If they have cropped up anywhere on our radar in the last ten years then I should be able to find them."

At that point Fuller was interrupted by a bleeping noise that had just commenced, originating from one of the computers he was working on off to one side.

"Is your dinner ready or have you found something?" Tracy asked as she and the Commander also heard the noise over the phone connection.

"Well, well, well..." Fuller remarked once he had slid his chair along the length of the desk to take a closer look "It's a small world."

"What have you got?" the Commander asked.

"Your freelance CIA team have been very busy" Fuller explained as he took a closer look at the screen in front of him which showed a number of frames from a CCTV surveillance recording "Unless I and several million quid's worth of technology are mistaken your three boys yesterday were paying a visit to the office of one Sir William Devane. I think we just found our burglars."

"Someone definitely has questions to answer now" the Commander responded with a determined look "Tell me Simon, have you got views of them both arriving and leaving by any chance?" he then asked.

"I have indeed" Fuller confirmed as he rechecked the footage available.

"What were they carrying when they arrived?" the Commander inquired.

"They are dressed as maintenance workers of some kind" Fuller went on to describe the contents of the images before him "Two of them are carrying tool bags of some sort, the third guy has what looks like a small briefcase."

"And when they left?" the Commander then asked.

"Tool bags are still there but no briefcase that I can see" Fuller replied "Yep, third guy left empty handed."

"They planted the MI6 documents?" Tracy ventured.

"If I were a betting man that would be my best guess" Fuller agreed.

"All right here is what I want you to do" the Commander instructed "Put together a dossier of all this evidence that you have amassed then meet Tracy and I outside that new place the CIA thinks we don't know about in one hour."

"I'll be there" Fuller confirmed.

"Looks like it is time for one of those interjurisdictional bun fights again" Tracy ventured as soon as the call was complete.

"I could just be all subtle like and arrest the head of the CIA London Area Office I suppose" the Commander jokingly ventured "then again the Foreign Secretary is still trying to sort out the mess from the last time I stepped on their diplomatic toes."

"And I think the time before that as well" Tracy reminded him.

Ten minutes later the car was pulling up outside the impressive modern glass office building in London's opulent Docklands business district which was home to the

Northern European Operations office of the International crime fighting force Interpol.

Waiting for them on the steps, a cardboard tray with three fresh cups of tea in his hand as instructed was the tall distinguished looking figure of Edward Hoskins, the recently appointed Northern Europe Chief of Operations for Interpol, looking a little apprehensive at the prospect of the meeting he was about to have.

"Hello Eddie, Tracy" Hoskins called.

"Afternoon Edward" the Commander responded as he got out of the car before holding the door open to allow Tracy to join him.

"Drinks as requested" he then declared as he handed Tracy and the Commander their beverages before the three of them set off to walk down a quiet side street towards the nearby dockside where apart from a few swans and a couple of sleepy ducks, they could talk undisturbed and without being eavesdropped upon.

"So to what do I owe the pleasure?" Hoskins asked as they leant forward together on the dockside edge parapet where one of the swans stared at the little group out of curiosity.

"I wanted to pick your brains on the subject of some mutual friends of ours" the Commander began to explain "and as my old man used to say, two 'Eds are better than one."

"Darling" Tracy remarked after rolling her eyes upwards in response "that joke is so old that Sir Richard Crowthorne translated it from Latin when he was at school."

"An oldie but a goldie" the Commander smirked in response.

"Our mutual friends being a certain intelligence agency from across the water by any chance?" Hoskins ventured.

"Exactly" the Commander confirmed "It would appear that the CIA have been running covert operations and specialist freelance teams on our manor without so much as a complimentary post-it note."

"I've discovered since I took this job that they have been lurking in some of my Department's business as well" Hoskins confirmed "however having come from that very same organisation myself I usually spot their little nuances and tricks pretty easily."

"I am afraid I am going to have to ruin the CIA's London Chief's day shortly" the Commander went on to explain "if he were anyone else I would be dragging them in on charges of obstructing the course of justice at the very least."

"The Foreign Secretary is going to have a coronary" Tracy advised.

"What can you tell me about the new Chief over there now in that shiny new office block of theirs?" the Commander asked.

"Adam Barwell?" Hoskins responded "Not a lot I am afraid" he admitted "I know he is career CIA, worked his way up through the ranks after being recruited from Army Intelligence originally and that he has family in this country but apart from that..."

"What about his staff?" Tracy asked.

"Of those who were there when I was stationed in London there are maybe two or three left" Hoskins admitted "the post Haliford fall out saw the Agency clear the decks of a lot of staff, similar sort of cleansing exercise John Hewitt has been doing over at MI6 over the last few months plus on top of that, what few good ones there were who survived I recruited for my own Department."

"If what I read from the evidence that is starting to surface is correct" the Commander remarked "Someone in the US Government through the CIA, maybe the Agency itself or some connected shadow operation is deliberately trying to influence one of our major investigations and make us believe that one particular individual who we have interest in is not what they seem and cannot be trusted."

"Spoiler tactics is my guess" Hoskins replied "Whenever interjurisdictional conflict occurs the CIA will sometimes employ little dirty tricks against the opposition where they feel that they are getting too close to one of their own cases or alternatively too close to someone or something they want to keep protected."

"That makes sense" Tracy responded "By planting those documents that we have found, we have been made to think that our man in the Home Office is in deep with the bad guys, deflecting us away from the real facts."

"You would be referring to the break in of Sir William Devane's office at the Home Office I presume?" Hoskins asked.

"How did you find out about that?" the Commander asked although in reality he was not that surprised that Hoskins knew something of what was going on.

"You two are not the only people in this town with friends in low places" Hoskins reminded them.

"What have you found out?" Tracy asked.

"Admittedly I and a couple of my trusted operatives have just been monitoring developments, back channel communications, discreet chats on benches on the south bank of the River Thames, etc." Hoskins admitted "one thing that does keep cropping up however is two words, South Africa."

"Any of your people down that way know anything?" the Commander inquired as he finished his tea and expertly tossed the empty cup in the nearby waste bin.

"Good shot" Hoskins remarked.

"Thanks" the Commander responded.

"You are investigating a case connected to an old bullion heist am I right?" Hoskins asked.

"Nothing secret about that bit" Tracy confirmed.

"It is nothing more than an educated hunch" Hoskins ventured "but I would consider two points, firstly what actually happened to the bullion that was stolen and secondly, why would someone from South Africa with many business dealings in that country be interested in gold bullion when that country practically floats on the stuff?"

"This is not about gold at all is it?" the Commander concluded "this is about something else."

"Now this is just speculation mind" Hoskins warned "however I would be curious to know, assuming that none of the proceeds from your Bethnal Green job were ever recovered, what did whoever stole it buy with it and subsequently what exactly are they interested in now because I would bet you any thoughts being broadcast of this plan being a simple snatch and grab of some precious metals is in fact a very elaborate smoke screen."

"We know they are planning to raid a secure facility with precious metals, particularly gold though" Tracy replied.

"A facility that is in fact empty mind" the Commander reminded her.

"So why are they going through with it?" Tracy asked.

"Because someone is paying them a lot of money to" Hoskins confirmed "and believe me money talks."

"Okay mate, left hand down a bit" Garforth loudly called to the driver of the truck as it was reversed into the large farm building which for the next few hours had become the vehicle workshop for the operation.

"And stop!" Garforth called out once the truck had reached the desired location within the building whereupon the brakes were applied with a loud hiss of escaping air and the large engine fell silent.

"Last of your vans is coming up the driveway now" Hansell confirmed as he came in and joined Garforth.

"Excellent" Garforth responded as he checked his clipboard "Should have any work required on them done by the morning which just leaves your boss to come up with the cars."

"They should be here this afternoon" Hansell confirmed "Do you think we need anything else?" he asked.

"These should be sufficient I would have thought" Garforth confirmed "Just need the time and space to work."

"Hint taken" Hansell agreed realising that he was probably just getting in the way "If you need anything or run into any problems, call me, I will be in the house."

"Will do" Garforth agreed, successfully hiding his real thoughts about Hansell and wanting nothing more than absolutely necessary to do with him.

Garforth waited until Hansell had left before clapping his hands loudly together to get everyone's attention.

"All right gentlemen" he called to the various members of his vehicle team, both drivers and mechanics "We have a weeks worth of work to do and less than twenty four hours to do it in, so lets give all these vehicles a thorough service, get them plates changed and I want load tests done on all the tail lifts. Any problems don't stay silent; tell me straight away all right, any questions?"

Looking around the group, Garforth could see that he had been fully understood by his team which made him smile.

"And please remember gentlemen, the right tool for the right job. All right then" Garforth declared like a race starter "Let's get to work shall we?"

It was about a half hour later amid the ongoing frenetic activity that Villiers arrived to inspect what was going on.

"Where is Mr Garforth?" Villiers asked one of the mechanics who pointed with a large spanner in the direction of one of the large curtain sided trucks nearby.

"He's working on that one Guv" the mechanic confirmed whereupon Villiers nodded in thanks and went over to the vehicle where he found Garforth lying on his back underneath the engine with just his legs sticking out.

"Are you all right under there?" Villiers asked in all honesty, kneeling down to see him.

"Oh yes" Garforth was heard to confirm from under the truck before a few moments later he slid out to reveal him dressed in overalls and grubby from head to foot with grease and oil.

"You look like you are enjoying yourself" Villiers commented upon seeing the state of him.

"Just tackling a slight oil leak on the transmission" Garforth explained as he stood up and then tossed the wrench he had in his hand to a nearby mechanic who caught it in his hands perfectly "Tricky one but I think it should be all right now" he confirmed.

"Excellent" Villiers responded as he took a few moments to look around the barn workshop which was busy with the accompanying sound of clanging tools and general banter and conversation "I must say this all looks very efficient."

"With the best mechanical team in the business I would be disappointed if you found anything less" Garforth remarked.

"Are we going to be on target?" Villiers asked.

"The basic cosmetic stuff, plates and identification is pretty straightforward" Garforth admitted as he took a moment to attempt to wipe some of the oil and grime deposit from his face and hands that in reality did little more than redistribute the layer of grime more evenly "The servicing is under way, found a few minor niggles and faults, nothing serious and certainly nothing that isn't easily fixed."

"I can see you are not exactly hanging about" Villiers admired the work going on all around him and took a look at the carefully laid out collection of replacement number plates for the vehicles which were already prepared in the correct format and ready to be installed.

"You asked for the best Sir and you got it" Garforth confirmed with a smile.

"Good, it would be most upsetting if our little operation were to fail at the first hurdle because one of our vehicles got pulled over by traffic cops because of a faulty tail light" Villiers admitted "There has been a lot of detailed, expensive planning leading up to this point, I would hate to see it all go to waste when we are so close."

"The fleet will be ready to go in full working order by this time tomorrow" Garforth reassured his boss "You have my word on it."

"There has been one late alteration to our plans I need to bring to your attention my boy" Villiers then moved on to an urgent matter "I have had to slightly alter a couple of aspects of the plan and I am going to need an extra vehicle, something rather specialist I am afraid" he handed a note across to Garforth who took it in his greasy hands and looked at it with a raised eyebrow of surprise.

"A little different" Garforth admitted upon seeing what was written on the note he had just received now already contaminated with oily fingerprints marking the paper "but not insurmountable by any means" he confirmed.

"When we go in" Villiers then went on to explain "I want you driving that particular vehicle so you will need to be correctly kitted out of course" he advised.

"Nothing a little discrete cash in the right pockets can't take care of" Garforth confirmed "It will be done."

"Thank you my boy" Villiers responded in just the sort of mannerism that Garforth really hated but he managed to hide his feelings successfully "I'll let you get back to work" he confirmed.

"Yes Sir, thank you" Garforth responded as Villiers departed.

"Problem boss?" one of the mechanics asked Garforth as he rejoined his boss and they returned to the truck they had been working on.

"I think I am going to have to call in some more favours" Garforth confirmed as he showed the young mechanic the now very oil stained piece of paper that Villiers had given him a few moments earlier "Our esteemed leader is getting some very strange ideas from somewhere all of a sudden."

"How did you find out about this place?" Kinderley asked as he parked the car immediately outside the seemingly anonymous modern building in Holland Park which gave no outward identification or indication whatsoever to its ownership or the business of those within.

"You don't go buying up a prime piece of real estate and then install a nuclear fallout shelter, firing range and electronic counter measures of the kind of quality you don't find on EBay without attracting our attention" Tracy confirmed as she opened the car door.

"Once we noticed that then I had Simon just follow the money and low and behold, a Cayman Island account used by a front company registered to the US Department of Defence stumped up the tax free readies to buy and fit out this place" the Commander added as the tinted glass doors guarding the main entrance slid majestically open and two men in identical suits with trademark ear pieces, sunglasses and noticeably concealed weapons appeared and met them on the steps.

"Park around the back next to the armour plated Lincoln's" the Commander instructed Kinderley at which point they were joined by Fuller who had walked to the site from the nearby Holland Park railway station, a dossier under his arm.

"Here you go Sir" Fuller declared as he handed over the dossier of evidence "Good luck."

"Thanks" the Commander replied "You had best get back to your bunker" he then advised "Things are likely to get a little bumpy in this immediate vicinity in the next fifteen minutes."

"Roger that" Fuller agreed.

"Whilst you are taking shelter" the Commander then asked "See if you can find out how my brother is getting on" he suggested.

"That's a point" Tracy remarked "we haven't heard from him for a little while. I hope he is all right."

"I am sure he has the situation well in hand" the Commander reassured her "I just like to be certain that is all."

"We are here to see your boss Adam Barwell" Tracy declared as she and the Commander, arm in arm approached up the steps towards the two guards.

"We don't have an appointment" the Commander added.

"Identification please" one of the men politely but firmly requested.

"Certainly" the Commander agreed as he and Tracy both produced their formal identification which the leading guard looked at very carefully before nodding at his colleague and then handing them back.

"If you will follow us please" the lead guard then confirmed before they led the way with Tracy and the Commander following closely behind through the tinted glass doors that ominously closed quickly yet silently behind then soon as they had stepped over the threshold.

Inside the impressive entrance foyer, unlike the exterior of the building visitors were left in no doubt who was in charge and ran the place with the crest of the US Central Intelligence Agency embossed into the large carpet on the floor and the United States flags behind the impressive marble reception desk that dominated the rear wall.

"You will have to leave your weapons here" the lead guard instructed as he led them over to a security desk to one side where another uniformed security guard stood waiting alongside a walk through metal detector.

"Here you go" the Commander carefully unfastened his belt mounted holster and retrieved his old faithful six shot revolver before placing it and his spare ammunition in a white plastic tray on the desk. Tracy then followed suit as she produced not only her service issue semi-automatic handgun with spare clips but also her back up weapon inside her uniform tunic and finally a third weapon, a miniature hand gun from inside her handbag.

"I think that's everything gentlemen" Tracy confirmed whereupon the Commander was invited to step through the metal detector which beeped alarmingly as he passed through it.

"Trust me mate" the Commander informed the guard "if I detail the various bits of metal in my body we are going to be here for quite some time."

"All right" the guard agreed whereupon he ushered Tracy through as well and then led the way to the lifts.

"Fourth floor" the guard instructed as Tracy and the Commander entered the lift car as soon as it had arrived and the doors had opened "You will be met there".

"Thank you" the Commander responded as the doors closed and they found themselves alone once more.

"Rather paranoid aren't they?" Tracy remarked as the lift almost silently ascended upwards.

"Nothing much changes with this lot believe me" the Commander replied in agreement.

A few moments later the lift slowed to a halt on the fourth floor and as the doors opened they stepped out to be greeted by a short thin man with thinning grey hair and small round framed spectacles in a neat suit and tie.

"Good afternoon" the man announced "I am honoured to be graced by such distinguished guests. Allow me to introduce myself, Special Agent Adam Barwell, Head of London Operations here" he announced.

"Pleased to meet you" the Commander responded "Sorry we don't have an appointment only this is rather urgent you see."

"Ah..." Barwell responded "in which case I take it this is not a social call?"

"We need a word" Tracy confirmed "and I think we all know exactly what about as well."

"In which case we should perhaps talk in my office" Barwell agreed "If you would follow me please."

"Remind me to get the name of your architect" the Commander remarked as he looked around whilst Barwell was escorting them down the central corridor "The lease is up on the Yard in a few years time and we are going to be looking for new digs."

"I can thoroughly recommend the area around here" Barwell announced "far better than central London and much, much more of a calming atmosphere than we had at the concrete monstrosity we shared with the Ambassadorial section in Grosvenor Square I can assure you."

"With Hyde Park almost right on your doorstep, nice" Tracy remarked as she looked out of a window as they passed by before they reached Barwell's office door.

"And here we are" Barwell declared as he opened the door and showed them inside "Won't you have a seat?" he then suggested before following them in and then proceeding to take a seat behind his ornate antique carved wood desk which was at odds with the ultra modern nature of the building and its interior in which it sat.

"So" Barwell declared with confidence although deep down he was actually feeling understandably nervous at this development and the arrival of two of the country's

most powerful law enforcement officers in his office without any prior warning
"What can I do for you?" he asked.

"I'll come straight to the point" the Commander began "I've got three of your guys locked up in Paddington Green nick who have all the hallmarks of being CIA deniable assets" he declared "not only do they have stolen driving licences and fake identification, I also have CCTV footage that shows them breaking into a ministerial office in Whitehall and planting there various stolen documents that originated with our very own MI6."

"We have the Polaroid's and their files if you are interested" Tracy confirmed as she opened the dossier they had been given by Fuller a short time earlier whereupon she duly produced various photographs and copies of the three detainees files and placed them on the desk in front of Barwell for him to examine.

"How did you manage to get these files?" Barwell asked with a thinly disguised sense of alarm as he cast his eyes over the evidence being presented before him.

"Easy" the Commander responded in a matter of fact way "we hacked into the CIA central computer" he admitted.

"You hacked into our Central Intelligence Agency high security mainframe?!?" Barwell exclaimed with an obvious sense of shock.

"Well not me personally, I can't even log in to my own email" the Commander admitted "my best computer genius did. Apparently you do it to us so on a fairly regular basis so we do it to you in return, it is a sort of a mutual arrangement I am told."

"My flabber is well and truly ghastrated" Barwell remarked.

"In a nutshell" Tracy continued "You are running covert operations teams on our manor interfering in our investigations and planting false evidence to implicate key people whom we are working with and I think that most definitely deserves some sort of explanation, don't you think love?" she looked across at the Commander.

"I wholeheartedly agree" the Commander responded "So what have you got to say Mr Barwell?" he asked.

"Well I can see there is no point denying our interests in this matter" Barwell began.

"None whatsoever" the Commander agreed "Please do continue and don't leave anything out including of course your man on the inside of an armed robbery crew that are currently putting together their dastardly plans."

"You know about him as well huh?" Barwell responded to which the Commander merely meekly smiled and Tracy tilted her head to one side in response.

"All right" Barwell began "We have for quite a while now taken interest in a top drawer planner in the criminal underworld by the name of Henry Villiers" he went on to explain "he did some work for our guys some years ago before he went freelance."

"Jesus Christ" the Commander responded "are you telling me Villiers is an ex CIA asset?"

"We set him up in business twenty years ago" Barwell continued "we used his skills and talent to pull off raids and heists against various organisations around the world until about two years ago when he announced he was retiring. Imagine our surprise when he then reappears on our radar planning a big heist."

"You are worried that if his little robbery plan goes wrong and we arrest him then the world could find out that the CIA has effectively been funding organised crime" Tracy ventured.

"Something like that" Barwell admitted "but there is more to this than just a bullion robbery" he then continued "We want to know who is paying his bills now."

"Doesn't explain your three amigos turning over the office of a prominent senior Government politician and leaving planted evidence for us to find, leading us potentially on a merry dance in the wrong direction" the Commander remarked.

"You had taken a great interest in a group which we have ambitions to disrupt" Barwell continued "we knew Sir William Devane had connections with this group but was just a paid advisor of little significance so we decided to boost your interest in and suspicion of him."

"Where did you get the files?" Tracy asked.

"Like you said" Barwell admitted "they hack our databases, we hack theirs" he confirmed "then all we had to do was mark them so that you would notice something far more significant than was actually there and we lead you a merry dance leaving us to go in and grab these guys and bring them to the US for questioning hopefully without you noticing."

"You put a tail on us" the Commander reminded him "If you were investigating the same thing as us there is such a thing as co-operation, they have invented this thing called the telephone you know."

"When we discovered your own brother was part of Villiers' gang we had to assume that you had been compromised by or possibly even part of this Pyramid organisation" Barwell replied "There is too much at stake to take any chance at any level so we put tabs on you and placed a man on the inside of Villiers' group to watch your brother as well."

"My brother is working in Villiers' gang because we put him there undercover" the Commander confirmed "he is our man on the inside we are using to track and stop these people."

"I cannot stress this enough" Barwell insisted in response "whatever Villiers and his gang are planning they must be allowed to carry it through."

"But we want to catch them red handed" the Commander responded "we have the crème de la crème of organised crime all in one place for the first and possibly only time in over forty years and the opportunity to take them all down in one single hit plus I would dearly like some answers to the small matter of the Bethnal Green Bullion Job as well."

"I sympathise Commander" Barwell responded "however I too have my orders and we need Villiers and his gang to grab what they are coming for so we can track down who they are moving it on to, that is where the real prize is in all this."

The Commander pondered for a few moments "I'll make you a counter proposal" he then suggested "how about we let them get away with the loot but when all this is over we get Villiers's and his merry men, you get whoever is signing their cheques?"

"A reasonable compromise" Barwell agreed after a few moments of considered thought "I will have to clear it with my superiors at Langley of course."

"In which case I suggest you start making phone calls" Tracy remarked "we don't have a lot of time."

"Yeah that will work I reckon" Garforth confirmed as he looked at the result of one of his mechanics welding on the rear of one of the vans "find some weight and test the tail lift and then I think this one is ready to go."

All around the workshop and immediately outside there was a frenzy of activity as the fleet of vehicles of various types, sizes and models were being modified, serviced and prepared ready for the heist operation which was due to commence in less than twenty four hours.

Looking around and seeing all was well and that everyone was busy, Garforth took the opportunity to slip away for a while, making his way from the barns that made up the temporary vehicle workshop area and heading across the grounds back towards the main house.

Approaching the side entrance to the large property Garforth noticed a couple of former Army type dark green Bedford trucks parked up, from the back of which a number of Hansell's men were unloading numerous crates of equipment and carrying them inside.

Garforth followed the trail of boxes inside and then after passing a large stack of them in a corridor, made his way up the old servant's staircase to the first floor where he approached a door and knocked.

"Oh, hello old friend" Wallace remarked upon opening the door and seeing Garforth standing there "Step into my little hobby room" he declared showing him inside.

"Good grief!" Garforth exclaimed when he stepped inside the room and looked all around its spacious interior where there were rows of tables upon which were neatly laid out multiples of weapons of almost every conceivable type and size along with their ammunition cases "are you sure you have got enough guns?" he then asked.

"You can never have too much firepower" Wallace responded "Mind you this is only part of what Villiers wanted, I had to persuade him to lower his ambitions a bit otherwise we would have needed a couple of trucks just to get all our gear to where we are going."

At that point Garforth tapped his ear twice and Wallace instantly picked up on what he was asking.

"It's all right, no surveillance in here" Wallace confirmed as he closed the door leaving them alone in the room "we can talk freely."

"Do we have any communications available yet?" Garforth asked.

"Try this" Wallace reached over to a table on the far side of the room and picked up a portable field radio set "Latest tech from the US, made by the Germans mind" he explained "I have managed to modify this particular one to get a message out on any secure frequency we choose."

"Including a direct line to the Commander by any chance?" Garforth asked.

"Indeed" Wallace confirmed "only keep it quiet" he then warned "Villiers and his cronies are still maintaining a complete communications black out or at least that is what they think anyway."

"I need to acquire some additional items and they may be a little tricky to get" Garforth explained "It's a sellers market out there."

"Anything I can help with?" Wallace asked.

"Not unless you can help me out with a fully functioning Security and Police Service patrol car with all the bells and whistles plus a complete uniform?" Garforth admitted to which Wallace looked on with a somewhat stunned expression.

"Well..." Wallace responded after a few moments thought before walking over to one of the tables and picking up a gun in holster with a batch of ammunition clips and passing it over "I can kit you out with a Service issue weapon, it's a start and I have a feeling you may need it."

The Home Secretary had just returned from what was in her experienced opinion another tedious and dull meeting in the corridors of power in Whitehall to her office to be greeted by a ringing telephone.

"Grey" the Home Secretary answered the telephone, obviously tired and with the early evening starting to draw in and cast its dark shadow over London, really just wanting to go home now.

She listened to the voice on the other end of the line and had anyone been in the office at that moment they would have seen the look of concern come over her face as she received the news.

"All right" the Home Secretary reluctantly responded as she took a look up at the clock and saw the time just passing four in the afternoon "My car should be downstairs now so I will come straight home" she confirmed before hanging up.

"Never rains but it pours" she then remarked as, grabbing her coat and briefcase, she left, gently closing the office door behind her.

A few minutes later the Home Secretary emerged into the gloom of early evening by way of the rear entrance to the Marsham Street headquarters of her Ministry where Jennifer Caverner was waiting with one of her ministerial and VIP cars, parked as close as she could to spare her intending passenger as much of the spitting rain that was now falling as possible.

"Good afternoon Home Secretary" Jennifer called "Home is it?" she asked.

"If you would be so kind" the Home Secretary confirmed "and with haste please, something urgent has come up on the domestic front."

"Right you are Maam" Jennifer confirmed before putting the powerful sleek black Mercedes saloon car into gear, checking her mirrors and then smartly accelerating away into the traffic flow.

As the car drove off, their departure was observed from above on the fifth floor by Devane who kept observing through the partially rain drop obscured window until its tail lights disappeared from sight when Jennifer turned left into Horseferry Road and away.

Once he was sure that the Home Secretary was gone, Devane put on his long overcoat and hat before proceeding from his office, down the corridor and then down the back stairs. A few moments later he emerged from the Horseferry Road entrance, a newspaper held to his head to try and keep the worst of the rain off him and immediately found a black taxi free and available.

"Westminster Ministerial Records Office please" Devane requested.

"Right you are Sir" the taxi driver duly confirmed, switching off his roof mounted orange light now that he had a passenger before pulling out into the traffic and heading south towards the River Thames.

It was a journey of just a few minutes along the north bank of the River Thames and past the Palace of Westminster before rounding Parliament Square and then heading down Whitehall.

The taxi duly stopped outside a fairly anonymous looking building in a side street well off the tourist trail despite being located in the heart of Government in the city. The small worn brass plaque alongside the heavy bronze door that guarded the entrance told little to anyone passing as to the nature of the building's contents or its purpose.

"Keep the change" Devane confirmed to the taxi driver as he got out, handing him a twenty pound note before stepping onto the rain sodden pavement and closing the door whereupon the taxi drove off.

Devane cast his eyes upwards for a few moments at the darkening skies above remarking on how it reflected his own mood so accurately before turning smartly on his heels and proceeding up the couple of ornate carved stone steps to the door whereupon he pressed the old style button to sound the door bell.

A few moments after the bell had been sounded somewhere deep inside the building, barely audible to anyone standing outside, the door opened and an official looking man, tall, thin with balding grey hair in his early sixties, looked out.

"Come in" the man then called whereupon Devane, glad to be out of the rain quickly stepped inside before the door was firmly closed behind him.

"My identification" Devane offered his official Government pass which the man merely glanced at as he knew full well who his visitor was and his importance "I need to review some files in your archives from the Ministry of Justice, late last year I think?"

"Those will be up on the fifth floor in vault room five one two" the man confirmed instantly from his experienced memory "Take the lift at the end there" he indicated down the narrow rather dimly lit corridor "and then turn left and left again when you get up there."

"Thank you" Devane confirmed as he handed the man his hat and coat before proceeding purposefully up the corridor to the elderly wooden panelled lift with its manually operated lattice gate across the entrance to the lift car within which there was barely enough room for more than a couple of average sized people.

Having closed the lattice gates Devane depressed the old brass lever to activate the lift's antiquated machinery and ascend amid much creaking slowly up to the fifth floor where upon opening the lattice gates he stepped out into a deserted corridor which diverged in three directions, left, right and straight ahead for some distance, either side having few notable or distinguishing features other than an identical locked wooden panel door every ten metres or so.

As he had been instructed Devane turned smartly on his heels to his left and proceeded ahead down to the end where an old decaying sash window provided the

sparse source of light into that unwelcoming gloomy corridor and gave him a view outside of the back of the adjacent building.

He turned left again and carried on until he reached the door marked with the number 512 etched onto a tarnished old brass plaque mounted thereon. There was a key difference however, this door had a security lock on it, its modernity contrasting markedly with the antiquated and slightly neglected setting in which it had recently been installed.

Devane knew the code to enter however and duly pressed the correct buttons to enter the four digit code whereupon his entry was granted by a little electronic beep that was then emitted and a clunk as the door lock was released.

The door creaked as it was opened and Devane stepped inside where he used the old style brass light switch just inside the door to switch on the lights and illuminate the room which consisted of rows of all but identical shelving with row upon row of seemingly identical files, boxes and bagged material, some of which looked like it had lain there undisturbed for many decades.

Reaching into his coat pocket, Devane extracted a leather bound notebook that he opened and consulted a list written therein before looking up at the markers on the ends of the shelves denoting their number and therefore the location of the files he was seeking.

It took him a few moments to find the correct section of this mysterious secretive archive which was located over towards the back of the room before proceeding along its dusty shelves running his fingers across the back of the files as he attempted to find what he was looking for.

"There you are" Devane declared as he finally located what he was looking for, one of a number of seemingly identical files which he then proceeded to pull off the shelf and hold in his hands before opening it and looking inside briefly.

A brief creaking noise somewhere a short distance away startled Devane for a few moments at that point causing him to look up and around him to see if anyone was there but he saw nothing of concern and so returned to reading the file in front of him.

Suddenly from out of the shadows immediately behind him and without warning a figure appeared and smashed a heavy book across the back of Devane's head.

He let out a yelp of pain and shock before collapsing to the ground unconscious, dragging some files off the adjacent shelf as he fell and causing them to scatter about on the floor.

Once it was clear that Devane was out cold the figure stooped down and picked up the file that his victim had been looking at just moments earlier before closing it and proceeding out of the room.

Outside in the corridor the assailant quietly closed the door and then disabled the security lock which meant it was now all but impossible barring the usage of brute force to access the room or rescue the unconscious Devane within.

The assailant, reaching inside their long black overcoat, produced a bottle containing some sort of flammable liquid, the contents of which after removing the cap was duly distributed liberally all around that end of the corridor before the now empty container was casually discarded.

The assailant casually walked away a short distance before lighting up a cigarette which they then inhaled for a few moments before tossing it away down the corridor and walking away calmly.

As the mysterious figure departed, their back became illuminated by a bright orange flickering light as the cigarette and the flammable liquid came together and ignited setting the corridor well alight.

As Jennifer drove through the streets of north west London, occasionally glancing back at the rear of the car where the Home Secretary had given up trying to read some documents and had instead elected to doze off for the rest of the journey, she became aware of something not quite right about the traffic behind the car, a feeling that had been growing for the last couple of minutes.

"Lima X-Ray Papa one to Eagle X-Ray Control" Jennifer called on the radio as she continued to drive along whilst maintaining an eye on the suspicious vehicle that was a short distance behind her.

"Control receiving" came the response from Fuller in the special control room he was manning in the depths of the former Down Street Underground Station.

"Hi love" Jennifer responded "Quick query, is there anyone on our radar at the moment that is likely to be tailing the Home Secretary by any chance?" she inquired.

"Nobody that I am aware of" Fuller quickly confirmed although he did do a double check both on his computer terminal and a clipboard alongside to be certain "Is there a problem dear?" he asked.

"I have got a silver Mercedes saloon car behind me" Jennifer explained "it's probably nothing but it has been there for the past three or four miles now and instinct tells me it might be dodgy, especially considering current events."

"Where are you now?" Fuller asked as he slid the chair he was sitting in effortlessly on its castors over to another computer terminal.

"About three quarters of a mile from the Home Secretary's place" Jennifer confirmed as she pulled away from a set of traffic lights and turned left, observing in her wing mirror the silver Mercedes she had identified do the same once the bus that was between them had departed in the other direction.

"Did I miss something?" the Home Secretary asked as she awoke from her dozy state with a start and looked around.

"What the hell is this idiot doing?!?" Jennifer then called out as a van that was parked by the side of the road suddenly pulled out in front of them as the car reached it causing her to hit the horn loudly.

"What was that?" Fuller asked over the radio when he heard the altercation or at least Jennifer's outburst indicating it.

"Some comedian of a delivery driver being an arse as per usual" Jennifer confirmed as she was forced to follow the ramshackle looking old van up the road.

"That doesn't look good" the Home Secretary remarked as she looked over the front seats out of the windscreen and saw the van suddenly stop and the roller shutter door go up to reveal a group of men, armed and dressed all in black including helmets emerge from the rear and force Jennifer to stop the car.

Immediately she reacted by pressing a button that not only activated the central locking but also a remote emergency alarm that would she hoped summon help quickly.

"Out of the car!" the man clearly in charge of the group ordered.

Jennifer ignored the order and instead put the car into reverse and looked back to see if she could escape this ambush but only managed to get a couple of yards before she impacted into the silver Mercedes that had penned her in from behind, crushing a couple of the armed men who failed to get out of the way quick enough in the process.

"I think we are in trouble" Jennifer was forced to admit as the men surrounding the car produced guns and aimed them directly at them.

"Let me rephrase the question" the leader of the group called "get out of the car or we will open fire."

"I think we should do as they say" the Home Secretary suggested.

"What the...?" Jennifer remarked upon looking around to see to her surprise her passenger had a gun herself that she must have had secreted in her briefcase and was now pointing towards her.

"I won't be needing you again this evening" the Home Secretary confirmed as she got out of the car before turning back "sorry about all this, all will be explained I promise" she then added with sincerity.

"This way please Maam" the leader of the group led the way and along with one of his men escorted the Home Secretary away to a waiting vehicle on the other side of the road.

At that point one of the men brandished a pistol and proceeded to shoot out two of Jennifer's tyres before they all retreated back into the van in which they had arrived and before anyone around was really aware of what had happened they had departed at speed and were soon out of sight.

"Great!" Jennifer called, thumping the steering wheel in sheer frustration "bloody great!"

"Is everything all right love?" Fuller was heard to ask with obvious serious concern over the radio.

"Yes love" Jennifer then confirmed "I'm okay, however the motor now has two flat tyres and someone has just made off with the Home Secretary, and she didn't leave against her will either."

"Stay there" Fuller responded with a new sense of urgency "I'll send the cavalry and alert the group."

"Cheers love" Jennifer replied having now got out of the car and regained her composure "Do let me know what the Commander's reaction is; I am willing to be it will be colourful."

With the sun starting to set over the hills that surrounded the manor house and associated buildings, Garforth took the opportunity to slip away from Villiers's men and head for the woodland a short distance away so that he could send a communication undisturbed and hopefully without anyone eavesdropping either.

The last few rays of light of that early winter evening were just about enough for him to make out the tree line to which he walked briskly once he had successfully dodged around one of the sentry patrols that continually circled the grounds on a twenty four a day watch.

Having reached the trees without detection he then decided to head into the plantation forest, dominated by neat rows of tall fir trees for a short distance until he reached a small clearing and knelt down before extracting the radio set that he had acquired earlier.

Using the light from a small pen torch, Garforth set up the radio on an old log that was lying on the ground and tentatively switched it on.

"I hate technology" he remarked quietly to himself as he struggled at first to work the device but after a few moments trial, error and perseverance he managed to select the correct frequency and then picked up the small handset and put it to the side of his face.

"Cuckoo calling Eagle One" Garforth called, barely whispering in case he was heard by anyone in the area patrolling the grounds "Ultraviolet priority message, over" he then declared.

The initial response was merely electronic static but soon there came three bleeps indicating that the call had been received and that the automated system that Fuller had set up was now connecting him through to the messages intended recipient.

Forty miles away in central London, the Commander was entering his office when the special mobile that Fuller had issued him with earlier began to bleep ominously.

"Is that...?" Tracy began to ask.

"Yep" the Commander confirmed as he took the phone out and looked at the screen "Secure line" he then added before proceeding to answer the call.

"Broadsword calling Danny Boy" the Commander responded "Sorry, I have always wanted to say that" he then admitted.

"An update and a favour" Garforth replied "Things are getting a bit tense around here, loads of weapons on the deck and I think I have also seen some specialist material carrying equipment but when I casually asked about it I got politely told to sling my hook as it were."

"Roger that" the Commander replied as he sat down behind his desk and Tracy joined him standing alongside, an arm placed lovingly around the back of his shoulders for moral support.

"I need to acquire some extra equipment and I think you can help me" Garforth then went on to explain "namely a fully marked up and operational Haychester area Security Service patrol car and two sets of uniform for officers allocated to the local Roads Policing Division."

"Is this your idea or has this come from elsewhere?" the Commander asked as he made a couple of notes on some paper on his desk.

"This comes from the old man Villiers himself" Garforth confirmed "Apparently there has been a last minute alteration to the plan and we need two fake officers in an official patrol car to pull it off."

"I'll give Al Longton at Haychester a bell and call in a few favours" the Commander confirmed "trouble is how am I going to get the items in question to you without arousing suspicion?" he then asked.

"I am going out on a reccie of the Codmore Hill site and the surrounding area late tonight" Garforth explained "If a patrol car just 'happened' to be parked up somewhere whilst its officers were away from the vehicle then I am sure they won't mind if I 'borrowed' it."

"There is a roadside cafe about three miles west of the turn off for Codmore Hill" the Commander strained to recall the area that he once knew so well "If I get Al to have it parked up there for say eight o'clock with the keys on the top of the front right tyre, will that work?"

"I think so" Garforth agreed "Look I had better go before they realise I have slipped away or they trace this call" he remarked.

"All right" the Commander responded "Keep in touch and be careful. We'll see you tomorrow night all being well."

"I'll be there" Garforth confirmed "and so will all my new friends. Cuckoo One out."

With that the line went dead and the Commander put the mobile away back in his pocket before raising the venetian blind and looking out of the window across the city towards Westminster.

"What the hell...?" he then remarked as both he and Tracy saw a large pall of smoke emitting from a building in Whitehall, a flickering orange glow and a cloud that obscured the surrounding street lighting clearly visible only a half mile away from their location.

"Either someone is having a very large barbeque or something is on fire" Tracy commented as she reached for the telephone on the desk and pressed the button that connected her directly to the area Control Room.

"Control, its Caverner" she formally declared as soon as her call was answered "What the hell is happening in Whitehall?" she asked.

"Fire in a Government building" the response from the Control Room Supervisor confirmed "Broke out on the fifth floor of some document archive place a couple of minutes ago. Fire & Rescue Service is on the way."

As Tracy was on the telephone, the Commander's mobile beeped with a message received which caused him to take it out and look at it.

"I think we had better check this out" the Commander announced as he stood up, showing her the message displayed on the mobile screen.

'Code Nineteen, Whitehall, Come immediately - Collins'

A cacophony of sirens greeted Tracy and the Commander when about five minutes later they arrived on the scene in Whitehall where a display of controlled chaos was in progress.

They had to stand to one side when they reached the hastily put up tape cordon to allow a fire engine to pass by and enter the area, joining several from across central London that were already on the scene.

"There's Collins over there" Tracy pointed out the MI5 man who was stood near one of the fire engines with Amber McWilliam, both looking up at the fifth floor of the building which was now burning fiercely with flames emerging from two windows

and smoke ominously beginning to emerge from the floor above and the roof indicating that the fire was beginning to spread rapidly.

"Got your message" the Commander declared as they met up "What's all this about?" he asked.

"It's an absolute bloody circus" McWilliam remarked as they all stepped back a bit when a loud bang and the crashing of glass accompanied the fire breaking through into another part of the building, showering the pavement below with burning debris.

"I can do something about that" the Commander confirmed as he reached for his radio "Control from Eagle One, on site at the fire in Whitehall. Get some back up down here, seal and evacuate the entire area and get the sodding tourists with their dam mobiles trying to get they You Tube moment out of here before someone gets injured" he requested.

"I'll go and get rid of the press" Tracy added as she looked across where several TV and newspaper journalists were trying to breach the cordon to get a closer look "One look from me usually sends them running" she explained with a wry smile before heading off towards them.

"So what's the excitement all about?" the Commander asked as they stood further back whilst another team of fire fighters hauling hoses came through.

"This place is a level three secure depository for documentation covered by the Official Secrets Act" Collins explained as another window blew out above, this time on the top floor whilst overhead a Security Service helicopter moved in and hovered above the scene.

"Anything particularly important?" the Commander asked.

"The fire seems to have started on the fifth floor and that is where we keep the really important and most secretive stuff" Collins explained "files, articles, miscellaneous bits and pieces, etc."

"That's the press sent away with their tails between their legs" Tracy confirmed with a smile as she returned to the group "Did I miss anything?" she asked.

"Dave was explaining that where this fire seems to have started is where some of the most security sensitive documentation is archived" the Commander explained.

"How sensitive?" Tracy asked.

"Well let's put it this way" McWilliam explained as another loud bang and the sound of descending debris crashing onto the pavement below filled the air adding to the cacophony of noise from sirens, the helicopter and the fire brigades machinery busy pumping water at an incredible rate through the myriad of pipes that were distributed all across the road "You know that there are only ten copies of the Hainault Report in existence? Well I think we can safely say that now there are only nine."

"Oh no, not that annoying pile of bog paper" the Commander remarked with a wry smile.

"Old place like this" Tracy commented as they all looked up at the building now burning fiercely on two floors and the roof which the fire-fighters on site were attempting to bring under control "must be dodgy old electrics I would have thought?" she ventured.

"If that is all it is then I for one would be relieved" Collins responded as he and the Commander both noticed some sort of urgent conversation begin involving the on site Fire Chief and one of the breathing apparatus wearing fire-fighters who had just emerged from the building.

"Andy!" the Chief Fire Officer then called across to a couple of Paramedics stood adjacent to their ambulance parked nearby "We got a live one, coming out now!"

"Wonder who the poor sod is?" the Commander remarked as the paramedics immediately responded to the call and grabbed their equipment and a stretcher whilst from the doorway of the building emerged two more breathing apparatus wearing fire-fighters who could be seen carrying an unconscious person between them.

"Good God" McWilliam exclaimed as despite the smoke blackened nature of the person being carried out, she and the others instantly recognised who it was with some surprise "That's William Devane."

"I think the odds on this being an accident just went out of the window" Tracy remarked as they observed Devane being carefully placed on the waiting stretcher whereupon treatment for smoke inhalation and any other injuries that he may have began immediately.

"Commander..." Collins began.

"Way ahead of you" the Commander confirmed having already reached for his radio "Eagle One to Control, Priority One" he called.

"Control, go ahead" the response quickly came.

"I need a fully armed protection team and a secure single bed ward made available in the High Security section of St Thomas' Hospital in the next five minutes" he ordered, making sure that he spoke clearly and that there could be no mistaking the seriousness, urgency or importance of his request.

"We had better gag the press" Tracy suggested "If they get wind of this there is going to be all sorts of cats escaping from bags."

"I can take care of that" Collins confirmed as he got on his phone "I will have a 'D Notice' issued within the next twenty minutes."

"I think we need to see exactly what has been damaged and what Devane may have been looking at" Tracy suggested as they looked ahead to see that the fire brigade

were now bringing the fire under control and had managed to stifle it on the sixth floor at least.

"That is a very good idea my love" the Commander agreed however at that point they were interrupted by the unexpected arrival of Fuller.

"I got some bad news" Fuller announced as soon as he reached the group.

"Well there's a change" McWilliam responded with more than a strong hint of sarcasm combined with tiredness.

"The Home Secretary has disappeared" Fuller announced "she was snatched from Jennifer's car about twenty minutes ago and..." he looked at the others and realised they were not showing any signs of shock or surprise "...why are you not reacting?" he then asked.

"Because we have been expecting it?" the Commander replied.

"But..." Fuller responded, somewhat confused "she left willingly, even brandished a gun which she had on her person."

"Excellent" Collins confirmed "I knew she could pull it off."

"I don't get it" Fuller replied looking around in complete confusion.

"No" the Commander confirmed "You are not supposed to but there are others in this equation whom I hope do" he went on to explain without really explaining anything at all.

"Surely not?" Fuller remarked having thought about it for a few moments and coming to a conclusion that seemed utterly wild but yet was the only one that fitted the situation.

"Lady Jane Grey, the Home Secretary whom I remind you we had a major part in ensuring she was selected for her current position is a fully trained MI5 undercover asset" McWilliam explained.

"Clever" Fuller responded "Very clever".

"Now we have to hope that she can work her magic in the heart of the so called Pyramid organisation" the Commander confirmed "she may be our only hope."

Despite the deserted nature of the roads in the vicinity of the Codmore Hill site and the lateness of the hour, Garforth still felt it prudent to maintain a steady pace as he turned off the main road and into a narrow country lane, the light from the car's headlamps being the only visible illumination for what seemed like miles around in every direction.

"Take the second left and then a right" Hansell instructed as he examined a map of the area "Err I think" he then had to admit as he was struggling with the poor light to navigate accurately.

"You had better be right" Garforth reminded him as he continued driving down the rough and narrow country lane "It is going to look a tad unexplainable if we have to summon help to tow us out of some muddy ditch."

"Down here, I am certain" Hansell responded as he pointed up ahead to an old finger post type road sign, partly obscured by adjacent untamed vegetation and indicating a hidden turn off.

"Where are we going, the Twilight Zone?" Garforth asked as he duly did as instructed and turned the car at the junction into what turned out to be an even narrower lane, the high hedges either side just brushing both sides of the car much to Hansell's obvious concern.

"This is never going to work as an escape route" Hansell declared, a conclusion that Garforth had already come to some time earlier "We can barely get the car down here let alone a sodding great van."

"I am going to pull in here" Garforth confirmed as he slowed and pulled over in a recess in the side of the road that marked a gateway to a farmers field "Let's see that map again" he requested.

"Be my guest" Hansell agreed as he passed across the map with a resigned sigh whereupon Garforth took it and promptly got out of the car.

"Shine me a light here" Garforth requested as he opened the map and laid it flat on the bonnet of the car so that he could study it "Now, where the hell are we?" he asked as Hansell produced a torch and shone it down onto the map.

"Somewhere down here I think" Hansell indicated part of the map that seemed to be little more than a network of narrow country lanes and farm tracks over a large area of remote open countryside and plantation forestry.

"You could get very easily lost in this lot" Garforth remarked as he surveyed the map.

"I think we already are..." Hansell remarked with a certain sense of resignation as he looked around across the adjacent fields into the near darkness, only the lights of the City of Haychester in the far distance being visible to the naked eye.

"Undefined road conditions and lots of hidden twists and turns, a complete and utter rabbit warren which makes it a nice place for a total cock-up or indeed a trap" Garforth concluded "We need a change of plan."

"Any ideas?" Hansell asked.

"Pass me the night vision binoculars" Garforth then requested "There may be a way we can turn this mess to our advantage."

Hansell went around the car and opened the rear offside door and took out a set of night vision binoculars that were in amongst various items on the back seat that they had brought with them and then passed them across.

"Thanks" Garforth responded as he took them and put them on over his head "Right, let's see what we have got" he declared as he adjusted them and proceeded to scan around the distant skyline as if in search of inspiration.

"Well there is Haychester" Garforth commented as he focused in on the city in the far distance "and just beyond that is Little Regis and there be the local fuzz, we don't want to be running into them."

"In which case we will just have to go around and approach from the North West instead" Hansell suggested "Westhurst is on a road from London I think."

"Over there" Garforth confirmed as he pivoted around and looked over towards the direction of the small town of Westhurst some twenty miles away with a few small sources of lights from the scattered small villages and farms that bridged the gap in-between just visible in the dark.

"What do you think?" Hansell asked.

"It means going around the houses a little bit" Garforth responded as he took the night vision equipment off and returned to the map to study this alternative possibility "but the roads in and out are better I think."

"Let's go and check it out" Hansell suggested to which Garforth nodded in agreement before they got back in the car and drove off.

Ten minutes of negotiating more narrow country lanes was required before, to the relief of both of them they emerged on to a more substantial main carriageway and headed north in the direction of Westhurst which would bring them to a small roadside cafe where Garforth noticed something of extreme interest.

"Do you see what I see?" Garforth asked as he drove past the cafe fairly slowly and acting surprised for the benefit of his passenger who of course was completely unaware that what was occurring at that point had been carefully set up with Garforth fully aware of what was going on.

"Security Service patrol car" Hansell confirmed as he too took a good look as they passed by "seems empty and parked up as well."

"Are you thinking what I am thinking?" Garforth asked as he carried on driving for a short distance before pulling off into a side road which led to a deserted old farm building.

"I wonder if they would mind if we - ahem - borrowed it?" Hansell remarked.

"Indeed" Garforth agreed as he parked the car in a spot that was well out of sight of anyone passing by on the road and additionally obscured by the surrounding vegetation.'

"How are we going to start it?" Hansell asked with a concerned look as they prepared to get out of the car.

"Trust me" Garforth explained "Not only do I know how to drive; I also know how to steal as well."

"Man of many talents" Hansell complimented him as they got out of the car and both of them quietly closed the doors before they headed off back to the main road.

What little traffic there was on the main road was sparse, just the occasional passing car and a local service bus running empty on its way back to the garage. They used the shadow of the roadside hedgerow to remain unobserved as they scuttled down the road to within sight of the lay-by where the roadside cafe was set and in which the patrol car remained, it's sidelights on and the radio bleeping inside the cabin but still no sign of anyone with it.

"Where the hell are they?" Hansell asked as they both looked around for any sign of the officers to whom the car belonged.

"Over there" Garforth indicated across the road where on the far side of a field a couple of torches could be seen, presumably with someone holding them, making their way along the back fence line some considerable distance away.

"Good ten minutes walking time I reckon, allowing for rough terrain" Hansell calculated.

"In which case we had better make a move" Garforth suggested as he took the lead and they moved out of the shadows across to the car before ducking down behind it, shielding themselves from the view of a car that passed by at some speed at that moment.

Whilst Hansell was watching the passing car, Garforth quickly ran his hand over the top of the front wheel and retrieved the key that had been deliberately placed there for him to find and palmed it across unseen into his pocket.

They waited for a few moments until the tail lights of the passing car had disappeared off into the distance before Garforth reached up to the passenger side door and tried the handle.

"Oh deary me" Garforth remarked as the door opened "No challenge at all."

"So much for security then!" Hansell commented as Garforth opened the door slowly before climbing inside and then shuffling over to the driver's seat whereupon Hansell joined him and quietly closed the door again.

"At least they didn't leave the keys in the ignition" Garforth confirmed "however unfortunately for them I brought my own" he then produced the key he had just retrieved a few moments earlier, passing it off as a master key he had brought with him rather than the specific one for that vehicle as Hansell would not know the difference and as a result would suspect nothing.

"Dam you're good" Hansell remarked.

"Come on old girl" Garforth spoke to the car, deliberately trying to make out that he was having a little difficulty in getting the car started, all an act put on for his audience of course "Ah here we go" he then declared and with a turn of the key the car duly started.

"Let's get out of here" Hansell wisely suggested.

"A very good idea" Garforth agreed as he proceeded to drive off calmly so as not to draw any unwanted attention. In a few moments they were off up the road and on their way.

As the tail lights of the stolen patrol car disappeared off up the road, a fully uniformed Security Service officer emerged from the shadows of the closed roadside cafe and stood where the car had been moments earlier watching it disappear before reaching for a radio.

"Hotel Charlie Seven One Two to Control" the officer called "Let Commander Longton know that the car is on its way as requested. Oh and you can tell those two rookies wandering around the field flashing their torches they can come back in now" he then confirmed.

"Don't these things have tracking devices?" Hansell asked as they proceeded along the main road.

"Yep!" Garforth confirmed as he reached down underneath the steering wheel and tore out a piece of wiring with an attached small circuit board which he then casually chucked out of the window "well, at least it used to have."

"Take a right up here" Hansell indicated a turn off up ahead "that should lead us straight to Codmore Hill."

"This is more like it" Garforth remarked as they turned onto the side road, a far wider and better maintained highway than the ones they had been looking at earlier.

"I think that is the place up on the right there" Hansell then pointed up a hill to a place visible a short distance away up a hill where despite the darkness, an area clearly marked with high security fencing and bright security spot lamps mounted high up on tall masts could be seen.

"I am beginning to see why Villiers wanted a Security Service patrol car" Garforth remarked as he drove along the road that ran along the outside of the site

"illumination like that they will see us coming from a mile or two away, indeed I would wager we are being watched even as we speak."

"That is where our screwsman and sparkies come in" Hansell explained "Their job will be to ensure the place is dark and blinded before the bulk of our people arrive to carry out the job."

"Well I don't think these roads will present too much of a problem" Garforth confirmed as he continued to drive on past the Codmore Hill main access road entrance and off into the night "Once the caper is over I and my driving team will have us out of there so fast it will be as if we were never there."

"You know what" the Commander remarked as he finished off the large baguette sandwich he had purchased "That's rather good that."

"I can't believe I just seen you eating something with green in it" Collins commented as he finished his coffee. He, Tracy and the Commander were sat around a table in one of the many coffee shops that can be found across London, in this instance this one was in Tothill Street, a stones throw away from Westminster and only just around the corner from New Scotland Yard.

"...and cheese" Tracy added "I have been trying to get my dear husband here eating just a little more healthily after the rather unpalatable report the Chief Medical Officer gave you a few months back."

"I think I might get another of these err.... what are they called?" the Commander asked.

"Chicken, Caesar, bacon and rocket on artisan bread" Tracy confirmed with a wry smile.

"Sounds a bit too complicated" the Commander responded "I'll settle for calling it a chicken and bacon roll."

They were interrupted at that point by the Commander's mobile going off which caused him to sit back down only a moment or two after he had got up and consult the device.

"Err, what does that say love?" he asked Tracy passing the mobile across to her "only I seem to have mislaid my reading glasses again."

"They are where you left them I expect" Tracy reminded him "It's a message from Al Longton down in Haychester" she confirmed "apparently as planned they are now one patrol car short."

"Good" the Commander responded as Tracy handed him back the mobile which he then returned to his inside tunic pocket "now we will have to wait until tomorrow to find out what they are going to do with it."

"I reckon they will just drive straight up to the front door in it" Collins remarked as he rotated his empty coffee cup on the table, clearly contemplating another one "nothing like an official looking motor at the front of your convoy to get the private security muffins on the gate to open up is there?"

"...and then the rest of the merry band just piles in behind them" Tracy concluded.

"Another round anyone?" Collins asked as his deliberations about a second coffee concluded with him deciding further refreshment was required after all.

"Tea, milk, no sugar" the Commander confirmed to which Collins gave him a puzzled look.

"I've got him to give up sugar as well" Tracy explained "took some doing but we did it."

"Sell everything you have in Tate & Lyle though" the Commander jokingly suggested.

"Same for me please" Tracy then confirmed upon which Collins made for the counter at the back of the shop.

"Black Americano and two teas please" Collins requested brandishing his work expenses credit card.

"Eat in or take away?" the friendly barista asked to which Collins was about to say 'in' at that point but he happened then to glance over and noticed the Commander on his mobile and then give him a circular motion hand signal.

"Looks like it will be take away please" Collins confirmed.

A few moments later Collins rejoined Tracy and the Commander, drinks in hand as they were getting up and preparing to leave.

"Just been given the all clear by the fire brigade" the Commander confirmed as he and Tracy took their drinks from Collins and together they headed for the exit.

Five minutes later they arrived back on the scene of the fire where Whitehall was still sealed off at the junction with Parliament Square, a cordon now reinforced with metal barriers stretched across the road and a full detachment of Security Service officers on patrol ensuring nobody passed unless they had official business.

Tracy, Collins and the Commander were of course let straight through where they were met by the Chief Fire Incident Officer by one of the Fire Brigade pump and ladder units still on the scene.

"Welcome to the mess" the Fire Chief welcomed them "You'll need these for a starter" he then proceeded to hand out hard hats to the three before leading the way ahead.

"What's the damage?" Tracy asked as they approached the building, carefully picking their way over the myriad of hoses still strewn about.

"Fire started on the fifth floor in a corridor" the Fire Chief confirmed "then it spread through various old vent shafts to the sixth and the roof."

"Sounds nasty" the Commander remarked as they reached the front of the building where a number of fire fighters were involved with the clear up operation, removing the burnt and smouldering debris from where it had crashed onto the pavement.

"Jim!" the Fire Chief called over to one of the fire fighters nearby "Chuck us a couple of torches would you?" he requested.

"Where was the rescued individual found?" Collins asked, hiding the real identity of who had been brought out of the building earlier as it was decided to keep that information from as many as possible.

"He was found in a room on the fifth floor" the Fire Chief confirmed as they headed inside through the front door where the interior of the building was not fire damaged but was wet with dripping water seemingly seeping through from everywhere where it had been put on the fire a few floors up earlier "Lucky fella actually, the fire was started outside the door of the room he was in. If it hadn't been for the fire door that stood between him and the fire he would probably not have made it."

"I guess the electricity is out" Collins remarked as they headed up the back stairs, where some temporary portable battery powered lights were in use at regular intervals to at least make the building a bit safer for those still working within it.

"Seems to have cut out just before the fire started according to the guy who runs this place" the Fire Chief explained "now normally I would say, especially given the elderly nature of the building that this started thanks to wonky old electrics except my Investigation Branch guy is certain there was accelerant involved."

"Curioser and curioer" the Commander remarked as they trudged up the stairs which were absolutely sodden with water.

As they ascended upwards and reached the upper floors, it was noticeable that the damage clearly increased the walls and ceilings becoming more blackened by smoke and an increase in charred debris littering the floor as well as cracked and broken windows.

"Here we are" the Fire Chief declared as they left the stairs and passed through the badly burnt remains of a connecting door into the corridor of the fifth floor "Be careful what you touch as there is no telling what historic nasties may be lurking in the old fittings and decor" he warned.

"Thank you" the Commander responded before he, Tracy and Collins moved off down the almost burnt out corridor, the various doors leading off it charred black but still in place except for one on the far left.

"This one?" the Commander called back to the Fire Chief who had remained at the top of the stairs.

"Yes Sir" the Fire Chief called back "the guy who is in charge of this place told my men where to find the casualty when we arrived."

"What happened to him?" Tracy asked "the guy in charge?"

"Got taken into protective custody by a couple of your guys not long after we arrived" the Fire Chief called back whereupon Tracy and the Commander looked at each other, clearly thinking the same thought before she picked up her radio.

"Control from Angel One" Tracy called "Urgent message."

"Control receiving, Angel One" came the quick response that echoed all around the damp charred interior of the corridor.

"Can you run a check for me please" Tracy formally requested "Did we take into protective custody anyone from the scene of the fire tonight in Whitehall?" she asked.

There was a pause of a few moments as her request was processed and checked before the response came.

"Control" the response duly came "Nothing showing on our system, the only person taken from the scene is the individual the Fire Brigade rescued who is currently receiving treatment in the Security Unit at St Thomas' Hospital at this very moment."

"I'm on it" Collins confirmed as he got onto his mobile phone and stepped away to one side leaving Tracy and the Commander to contemplate the door in front of them or rather what remained of it.

"I've got to head back downstairs" the Fire Chief called "call me over the radio if you need anything else" he confirmed before he too departed.

"Okay" Tracy declared as she and the Commander looked around "What strikes you odd about this particular door?"

"Well at first glance they all look the same" the Commander commented "allowing for the fire damage of course."

"Agreed love" Tracy confirmed "so why does this one door have a security lock of very high quality" she indicated the charred but still recognisable door lock "whilst all the others have bog standard ye olde Chubb types?"

"Someone has something to hide in here?" the Commander ventured.

"That would be my guess" Tracy agreed "So lets see how we get in" she suggested as she kneeled down and looked at the lock in more detail "Four digit code required for this" she confirmed.

"Can I just try something?" the Commander asked as he kneeled down alongside her and looked at the smoke blackened metal buttons whereupon he duly pressed a sequence of digits before turning the handle which saw the locking bar in the door edge retreat inside the escutcheon plate.

"How did you know that?" Tracy asked in amazement as they both stood back up again.

"A combination of guesswork and something a little bird told me" the Commander only vaguely explained "Lets take a look inside shall we?" he then suggested.

"After you my love" Tracy confirmed whereupon the Commander pushed his shoulder up against the badly charred door and gave it a good shove which it needed as despite the damage that it had incurred, it was still structurally sound.

"Yeesh..." Tracy remarked as she followed the Commander inside and they shown their torches all around the interior of the room "Someone has got a hell of a lot of clearing up to do."

Everything in the room was covered in a fine layer of soot that had seeped into the room through vents and cracks when the fire was raging outside however despite that, everything seemed to be present and intact.

"How the hell are we ever going to find anything in this mess?" Tracy asked as they began to walk along between the tall rows of shelves, looking for some sign of possible tampering, indeed anything to indicate what may have been either examined or taken.

"Search me love" the Commander was forced to admit before something caught his attention and he shone his torch directly at it "What's that?" he indicated a spot on the floor where something could be seen lying on the water and soot damaged carpet, its soot covering rendering it almost invisible and only the shadow cast by the torchlight actually making it appear.

"Looks like a pair of spectacles" Tracy remarked as they moved in closer and kneeled down together to examine the object in situ "Sir William Devane's?" she suggested.

"Seems logical" the Commander agreed as he carefully picked up the soot covered spectacles and looked at them more closely, trying to picture the face that once would have been visible through them before the lenses had become cracked.

"Anyone in here?" Collins was then heard to call from the doorway.

"Over the back here" Tracy called back, shining her torch back behind her to guide him in "I think we have found where Devane was thumped and left for dead" she confirmed.

"I am pretty certain these are his glasses" the Commander added as Collins joined them and he passed across the spectacles for him to take a look at.

"Yeah, I reckon they are his" Collins agreed "So if he was thumped here, that means there is a chance what he was looking for was in this section" he ventured.

"What have we got in this section" the Commander wondered as he brushed some of the soot off the spine of the box files in front of him and examined the smoke stained hand written label on it "Oh dear..." he then remarked.

"What have you got?" Tracy asked, already sensing that there was a problem approaching.

"Well unless I am very much mistaken" the Commander explained as he wiped off more soot from further files in the same section to confirm his theory "this appears to be the resting place for every dark secret that has been the subject of deep level investigations by amongst others Lord Hainault over the last thirty or forty years" he confirmed.

"Ah..." Tracy responded as she pulled one file off the shelf at random and quickly realised its significance upon seeing the title on the front "family history you might say" she commented.

"These are all undisturbed though" Collins commented "that says to me that he was after something specific from here."

"Hang on a minute" the Commander called "Tracy love, shine that torch along this shelf, I want to check something."

As Tracy held the torch as requested the Commander ran his finger tips along the bottom of the spines of the files on the shelf wiping away the soot covering to reveal their individual file numbers which were clearly in sequence until Tracy called out.

"There's one" she called "the numbers jump from 513-04-232 to 513-04-235, there are two missing."

"Any way we can find out what these were?" the Commander asked Collins.

"Possibly" he responded, scratching his head in thought for a moment before realising he was covering himself in soot and immediately ceased "There should be a central index of some kind somewhere" he confirmed.

"There is one other question" Tracy remarked "Did Devane take these or someone else?" she asked.

"Devane had no files of any kind on him when he was brought out by the fire brigade" Collins confirmed "that to me suggests whoever attacked him may well have taken them."

"The question is were they extracted from the shelf by Sir William and his attacker struck him for them or has his attacker already got his or her hands on them and was about to depart when Devane comes blundering in?" the Commander asked.

"No way of telling without asked Sir William himself" Tracy confirmed "and judging from the state of him, that won't be happening anytime soon."

"I need to get this place sealed off and one of my specialist cleaning teams in here" Collins confirmed "There are God knows how many dark secrets in this place that would be very bad for a lot of people if they got out."

"Did you manage to track down the guy who is supposed to be in charge of this place?" Tracy asked.

"Oh yes" Collins remembered "I called Simon Fuller and had him look through the CCTV from the surrounding streets" he explained "It looks like he was taken away in a silver coloured Mercedes saloon, definitely not one of yours or ours."

"So who has got him?" the Commander asked.

"And what was in those files?" Tracy added, a note of concern readily apparent in her voice.

"All questions that I think will have to wait until the morning" Collins confirmed "in the meantime I had better get my people in here to secure and relocate this mess."

"Let me safely assure you that this is the one and only time that I will be happy to see a Security Service car coming up my driveway" Villiers announced as the car came to a halt outside the main entrance and he opened the driver's door so that he and Garforth could talk properly "How did you manage it?"

"Found a patrol parked up who were searching nearby fields" Garforth explained "You know for an organisation who spend millions every year on crime prevention information and guidance, you would have thought their own officers would know better than to leave their cars unlocked when unattended!"

"Remind me to write a strong letter of complaint to the Security & Police Service authorities when all this is over" Villiers responded with a laugh.

"With your permission I would like to get this in the workshop and give the mechanicals a once over" Garforth went on to explain "I thought the steering was a bit sluggish on the way over here."

"Did you disable any tracking devices?" Villiers asked.

"Of course" Garforth confirmed "There is absolutely no way that this car can now be traced to here or indeed anywhere else for that matter."

"In which case I shall let you get on with your work" Villiers declared as he shut the door once more "and well done once again."

With a nod of acknowledgement, Garforth slowly drove off in the direction of the outbuildings where the temporary vehicle workshops were located. As the tail lights of the car disappeared around the corner, Villiers was joined once more by Hansell.

"So" Villiers asked his number two "planted?"

"I reckon so" Hansell agreed "It all seemed just seemed a little too convenient" he confirmed.

"In which case I do believe our friend Mr Garforth will have to lead the way tomorrow afternoon then" Villiers remarked "which ironically is exactly where I want him."

"I've got it!" the Commander suddenly declared as he arrived in the kitchen where Tracy looked up from the cooker hob where she was preparing their supper.

"You can probably get pills for it I expect" Tracy wryly replied with a smile.

"No love, you don't understand" the Commander explained "it's that Hansell guy, I've remembered where I have seen him before."

"Is this the point where I feed your supper to the cat and you rush out on some form of wild goose chase by any chance?" Tracy asked.

"It can wait until the morning" the Commander confirmed "Sorry" he then apologised to the old tabby cat who had been looking on expectantly.

"So which skeleton from your extensive collection are we looking at now?" Tracy asked as she proceeded to serve their supper at the table.

"This all goes back to my Haychester days" the Commander began to explain "Whilst Codmore Hill is an illusion of smoke and mirrors, it does have a basis in fact."

"Sorry love" Tracy admitted defeat "You've lost me."

"About fifteen years ago plans were drawn up for a number of high security cash and valuable materials handling sites" the Commander explained "There had been a number of high profile big armed robberies around the country and so plans were drawn up to provide more secure facilities."

"The one in Kent we based the fictional Codmore Hill facility on being one of them I presume?" Tracy asked.

"Indeed" the Commander confirmed "There were to have been about a dozen sites nationwide but in the end Government cut backs got in the way as they always do and

only a few of them were actually built, one in Kent, a second one in Berkshire and one which was never completed somewhere over Hertfordshire way I think."

"So where does the mysterious Mr Hansell fit into all this then?" Tracy enquired.

"The contract to design and build these facilities went to a private contractor who as part of the process had site meetings with the local law enforcement to thrash out the details" the Commander continued to explain "Codmore Hill was one of the potential sites and I was one of the local senior Security Service officers involved in the initial planning stage before it got canned. I am certain that our new friend Mr Hansell was one of the consultants that were present on the site visit."

"A mystery deepens" Tracy remarked "So what happened to all of the sites then?" she asked.

"All bar Codmore Hill were sold off by the Government to raise some cash back in the 1990's" the Commander went on to explain "Some were little more than some foundations and a fence, some just bare pieces of land where no work had yet been undertaken at all."

"And our friend Mr Hansell" Tracy asked "Where does he fit into this little story?"

"If that is his real name" the Commander responded "and assuming that he is the same guy then he would possess invaluable knowledge about how these sites are constructed and what may be contained therein, at least in theory."

"And it would explain how Villiers has managed to get so much detailed information" Tracy added "even if that detailed information about Codmore Hill is in fact what we made up especially for their consumption."

"The thing is" the Commander remarked "why would a successful guy in the civil engineering business then go and change career and become a bag man for one of the criminal underworld's most successful heist planners?"

"I guess the pay is better" Tracy responded "I suppose it gives us something to start the conversation with once we have slapped the cuffs on him and dragged him into an interview room for a nice cosy chat"

"Hmm...." the Commander responded to which Tracy paused eating and peered at him more closely.

"What's up love?" she then asked, automatically sensing something was troubling her husband.

"This Pyramid lot" the Commander responded "Could they be the group behind Villiers and his merry men?" he suggested.

"Why would a secretive group derived from an old Thatherite era think tank be interested in a gang of sophisticated thieves plucked from the finest selection of the criminal underworld?" Tracy asked "The Pyramid Group if they really do exist in the

form we suspect are only interested in political manipulation and power, Villiers' gang of thugs and thieves are only interested in money."

"Does rather sound like a match up of chalk and cheese doesn't it?" the Commander agreed as he finished his meal "Any ice cream?"

"You shouldn't have any really" Tracy responded as having finished her own meal as well she got up from the table and picked up their empty plates "especially at this time of night, you will give yourself nightmares."

"You are probably right love" the Commander reluctantly agreed.

"Oh go on then" Tracy then relented with a wry smile "After all, tomorrow is going to be a very busy day I think."

Amber McWilliam was, understandably given the early hour, not in the best of moods as she was buzzed into the High Security Section of St Thomas' Hospital where she found an armed guard of two Security Service Close Protection Section officers on duty outside the seemingly ordinary wooden door that led into the private ward containing Sir William Devane.

"I am expected" McWilliam declared as she proffered her Section Fourteen Division identification whereupon one of the officers on duty duly opened the door and allowed her to enter.

"Oh I hate hospitals" she remarked to herself as the door closed behind her and she found herself alone with just Devane lying on a hospital bed, an oxygen mask to his mouth whilst the only sound was his raspy breathing and the gentle beeping of the vital signs monitoring system to which he was comprehensively wired up.

"Good morning Sir" McWilliam announced "I trust you are feeling better?" she inquired.

Devane merely opened his eyes and nodded in acknowledgement.

"I am sorry to disturb you at such an early hour but I need to ask you a few questions relating to last night's incident" she explained "not least of which was why you were there?"

"I had to get some files" Devane began to explain, his voice noticeably a bit raspy as he was still suffering some ill effects from breathing in smoke the night before.

"Are you aware of the nature of the files in the section you were found in Sir?" McWilliam then asked to which Devane merely nodded.

"As I am sure you are aware Sir, the entire facility is a depository for documents, reports and associated material that is highly classified but has not been permanently archived yet as it is still consulted from time to time" McWilliam went on to explain

"the section you were in particularly contains some extremely sensitive material to which I do not think ordinarily folk like you should have had authorised access. Is that correct sir?"

"Yes..." Devane weakly acknowledged.

"Upon examination of the scene by my opposite numbers from the Security & Police Service plus MI5" McWilliam continued "it was discovered that where you had been knocked unconscious by person or persons unknown there were two files missing" she checked her notes that she had brought with her "reference numbers 513-04-233 and 513-04-234. Do you possess these files at this time or if not, have you ever possessed them?"

"No..." Devane protested all be it with a continually weak voice.

"Are you aware of the subject and/or content of these missing documents at all sir?" McWilliam then asked.

"No..." Devane once again weakly confirmed.

"Ah..." McWilliam responded with a sense of disappointment "Well that makes two of us then as we don't know what was in them either."

"David St-John Smythe" Devane replied "The Chief Archivist, he will know."

"If you are referring to the elderly gentleman who operates the aforementioned facility" McWilliam explained "unfortunately he seems to have disappeared without a trace."

"Oh..." Devane responded with a depressed look.

"Who instructed you to obtain these files?" McWilliam then asked.

"Left hand inner jacket pocket" Devane indicated his smoke stained jacket in a clear plastic bag over on a side table.

McWilliam went over to the table and once she had put on some latex gloves, proceeded to open the bag and extract the jacket which she held up by the collar before carefully going into the pocket indicated where she found a gold pen, a money clip and a carefully folded piece of yellow paper.

"This?" she indicated the piece of paper and Devane duly nodded in agreement.

With care she unfolded the paper to its fullest extent and as soon as she saw not only what was written on the formal form but also who it was who had authorised it, she let out a small gasp of shock.

"Well, that is interesting" McWilliam remarked "I will need to keep this" she then confirmed to which Devane merely shrugged his shoulders as it made no difference to him at that time.

"Can you tell me anything about your assailant?" she asked as she carefully placed the piece of paper in a clear plastic evidence bag and sealed it.

"Came out of the shadows behind me" Devane struggled to speak clearly but managed to get the words out just about "Must have been in there when I arrived as there was no way they could have entered and passed me without me knowing."

"Age, height, features?" McWilliam knew her inquiry was probably in vain but being a thorough professional she thought she would try anyway.

"No..." Devane responded having thought hard for a few moments "nothing that I can remember. It was all over so quickly."

"All right" McWilliam confirmed "At the moment you are in secure protective custody" she went on to inform him "and you will continue to remain so until the Commander decrees otherwise."

Devane merely nodded to show his agreement with this situation, not that there was realistically any way he could argue about it, his fate at that point was most definitely out of his hands.

"If you recall any details no matter how small I want you to report them immediately" she then continued, passing him a card with her contact details "in the meantime I suggest that you concentrate on your recovery and keep your head down until this is over."

"You'll get no argument from me" Devane readily agreed, glad to be officially out of circulation for the time being.

"Okay ladies and gentlemen" Garforth announced to the gathered members of his vehicle maintenance and preparation team gathered all around him as he stood on a tool chest to give him some height over them "we have one hour before the final briefing to make sure we have everything ready.

Such was the trust and understanding that he had from his team that Garforth had their complete and undivided attention throughout.

"I want a final check on every vehicle" he commanded "which is to include a full inspection to make sure all lights are working, all external identification is correct and consistent and finally please make sure they all have full tanks of fuel. Nothing more embarrassing than trying to make your getaway only to find your tank is empty."

There were chuckles of laughter in response to the last part of his comments which he let subside before concluding.

"Right" Garforth then declared "unless there are any further questions, let's get to work."

On his word, the team dispersed throughout the workshop as well as outside to carry out their tasks, accompanied by much chatter, the clanking of tools and general noise.

Garforth decided to check over his particular vehicle himself, that being the stolen Security & Police Service patrol car that he had managed to acquire the previous evening. Like his younger brother, he was a stickler for detail and proceeded to undertake a thorough check of the car starting with under the bonnet where he checked the fluid levels and that all the connections, wires and hoses were all correct.

A check of the underside all around was next looking for anything that might be either stuck underneath or hanging off the car however again nothing of concern was found.

"Gary" Garforth then called to one of the mechanics nearby "watch my lights will you please mate?" he asked.

The mechanic observed firstly from the front and then from the rear as Garforth switched on and off all of the front and rear lights in a well practised sequence.

"All good boss!" Gary confirmed with a thumbs up.

"Cheers!" Garforth responded before remembering that unlike a normal road car, this one had some extra features to check.

"Hold your ears everyone!" Garforth then called out before, with a look of delight he switched on the flashing blue lights fitted to the roof, front and rear of the car along with the siren.

"Yeah..." he then confirmed as he quickly turned the deafening siren off again "I think we can safely say that works!"

"Ouch..." Hansell remarked as he appeared at the driver's side window, his ears ringing from the siren as he had entered the workshop at just the wrong moment and was unprepared for the noise.

"Sorry" Garforth apologised "You have to be thorough in my line of work you see" he explained.

"Understandable" Hansell agreed before turning to the reason for his arrival "I have a present for you" he then declared, holding up a suit bag "all checked and adjusted to your measurements."

Garforth got out of the car and with Hansell holding the suit bag up, he proceeded to pull down the central zip that went down the front which revealed a full authentic Security & Police Service uniform inside.

"Oh wow" Garforth exclaimed "I feel like a five year old again" he remarked.

"And you even get a hat" Hansell confirmed as he brought his other hand up to reveal the uniform cap complete with engraved metal badge on the front centre of the band.

"How do I look?" Garforth asked as he tried on the hat with a wry smirk.

"Like you should be reporting for duty Lieutenant Commander" Hansell declared with a hearty laugh although Garforth at that point, deep down, was worried that there was the possibility that his cover may have been blown from the mannerisms that he was witnessing.

"Lieutenant Commander?" Garforth remarked as he checked the sleeves and epaulettes of the uniform tunic with a faked disappointment "is that all I am worth?" he asked.

"To have you turn up at the facility front door as any higher rank may have triggered suspicion" Hansell explained as Garforth zipped up the suit bag and took it from him "besides that was the only authentic uniform my reliable sources could lay their hands on."

"Thanks" Garforth responded as he proceeded to open the rear door of the patrol car and lay the suit bag flat across the back seat before placing the hat carefully on top of it.

"As you may have already gathered" Hansell continued "you will be going in first, opening doors for us so to speak" he explained "nothing too difficult I would have thought and with the added bonus that when we leave you can provide us with a fast 'official' police escort too."

"That does have a certain ring to it doesn't it?" Garforth remarked.

"See you at the briefing" Hansell then confirmed before departing.

"Look forward to it" Garforth replied however before he was even half way through his sentence Hansell had gone.

"Be careful won't you" Jack asked as he stood by the car as Tracy and the Commander got in the back.

"Aren't we always?" the Commander wryly asked.

"As a general rule of thumb..." Tracy pondered for a moment sarcastically "No, not really."

"I won't bother waiting up" Jack confirmed "If all else fails I will ask one of the guys down the Yard to come pick me up then we can drive round and listen for explosions" he jokingly suggested.

"Have a good day at school" Tracy called as they closed the doors before she lowered the side window "Say hello to Megan for us" she then added.

"Will do" Jack agreed "See you later" he then waved farewell before leaving himself.

"All right Terry" the Commander called forward "let's go catch some bad guys" he declared.

"Absolutely Sir" Kinderley enthusiastically agreed as he started the engine before they set off, driving up the car park ramp beneath their apartment block and then out onto the main Vauxhall Road.

"Is it me or is the traffic in central London actually achieving the impossible by getting even worse lately?" Tracy asked as almost immediately their journey came to a halt amidst a traffic jam that was snaking its way very slowly through Westminster.

"I think you could be right love" the Commander agreed as he opened the side window and leaned out to take a better look at the vehicles ahead of them "by the time we have negotiated our way through this mess the bad guys will have been and gone again."

"I think I can take care of this Sir" Kinderley responded as he saw a side road coming up ahead as they inched their way slowly forward.

"Sounds like a good idea" Tracy agreed "It's at times like this I wish I was on my motorbike" she added.

As they approached the side road, Kinderley activated the lights and sirens and with the assistance of the vehicles in front of them shuffling over to the right just enough he was able to escape the traffic and drive off down the side road and was able to quickly accelerate away.

"That's more like it" the Commander remarked as Kinderley expertly weaved through the back streets, assisted by the siren and lights clearing what vehicles they encountered off to one side or the other to allow them through.

"When all this is over" the Commander asked as he held Tracy's hand firmly "do you think we should take some time off, get away for a couple of weeks?" he suggested.

"Sounds like a very good idea" Tracy firmly agreed "the sooner the better really as next year Jack will be busy with his exams so now is the right time."

"All right" the Commander confirmed "if I get a quiet moment I will look into it."

"What's a quiet moment dear?" Tracy jokingly asked "I vaguely recall the concept but that seems like years ago!"

"You couldn't make it up..." the Commander then responded as the telephone in the car started to ring with an annoying electronic buzzing noise.

"Anyone important?" Tracy asked as the Commander leaned forward to look at the display on the handset that told him who was calling.

"No" he confirmed as he picked up the handset "just the Prime Minister" he grinned broadly before taking the call.

"Prime Minister" the Commander formally answered "Good morning. What can I do for you?"

"Here comes the spanner in the works..." Tracy quietly remarked to herself.

"This is going to sound a bit weird Commander" the Prime Minister explained "but have you by any chance heard from or seen the Home Secretary lately?"

"Not since sometime yesterday Sir, no" the Commander confirmed.

"Err right" the Prime Minister responded as if something was troubling him deeply but was attempting to hide it "In which case I will let you get on then Commander" he confirmed "by the way whilst I have your attention, is there something you can get done about this early morning traffic?" he then asked.

"Can't see any problems here" the Commander looked briefly out of the window at the streets of London whizzing by at the exact moment that they passed a convoy of VIP Escort Division vehicles stuck in the jam "we are zinging along very nicely" he confirmed.

"Some dam fool just sped past my car with their sirens on full tilt" the Prime Minister remarked "One of your lot I suppose?"

"I'll have words with them Sir" the Commander agreed, trying careful not to laugh "and if the Home Secretary calls I will let you know right away" he confirmed.

"Very well" the Prime Minister concluded "Thank you Commander" he called before hanging up.

The Commander returned the handset to its cradle "Terry, the Prime Minister says to say you are a very naught boy" he announced.

"Fame at last..." Kinderley responded with a wry smile as he continued to concentrate on driving at accelerated speeds through the narrow back streets of west London.

"That there was the voice of a man with something very seriously troubling on his mind" the Commander remarked.

"I was thinking along similar lines" Tracy agreed "If we do have any problems with this Pyramid bunch then the last thing we need is the Prime Minister starting to come apart at the crucial moment."

"We may need to initiate our contingency plan" the Commander ominously warned to which Tracy nodded in agreement all be it with an obvious reluctance.

"At the very least we should hope for the best and prepare for the worst" she confirmed.

"Well hopefully my love it's just the PM having worries about where his cat has got to again" the Commander jokingly remarked "in the meantime lets go catch some bad guys" he suggested.

"How the hell do they do anything in these things?" Garforth remarked to himself as he finished putting on the Security Service uniform which he had been provided with, brushing down the uniform tunic to remove a couple of hairs before looking at himself in the full length mirror and for a moment admiring the gold braiding and the small collection of medal ribbons along with the metal letters and numerals sewn onto the shoulders indicating rank and identification.

"It does look a bit over formal doesn't it" Sam Wallace agreed as he watched from the sofa nearby as he poured himself a brandy from the decanter and took a big swig from it.

"You ought to be careful with that stuff" Garforth remarked "seeing as you are our weapons man and all."

"Trust me" Wallace confirmed "I am descended from Scottish aristocracy, I know how to hold my liquor" he proudly declared "besides" he added as he finished the glass off "the only time any of this lunacy makes any sense is when I am most firmly under the influence of strong drink."

"I know the feeling" Garforth agreed as he finished adjusting the uniform before putting on the utility belt and then placing his gun in the holster, just resisting the urge to spin it around like Clint Eastwood.

"If I didn't know better" Wallace commented "I would say that uniform had been tailor made for you."

"It is rather a good fit I will admit" Garforth agreed "If only history had been different then maybe I would have really had my own one proper" he admitted with a tinge of obvious regret prevalent in his voice.

"Don't forget your hat Lieutenant Commander" Wallace pointed out the gold braided peaked cap sitting on the side which Garforth then reached across to, picked up and then carefully placed upon his head, adjusting it until it was positioned correctly.

It was then that here was a knock at the door which caused both men to exchange a slightly nervous glance at each other for a moment.

"Who is it?" Garforth called.

"It's Hansell" came the response.

Garforth looked across at Wallace who merely nodded and with that he called for Hansell to enter.

"Hi guy's..." Hansell announced as he opened the door and stepped into the room only to pause as he was taken aback by the unexpected sight of Garforth standing there, fully equipped and dressed as a National Security & Police Service officer "...err, nice outfit" he then confirmed.

"Thanks" Garforth responded.

"Just wanted to remind you guys that we are starting the final briefing downstairs in ten minutes" Hansell confirmed.

"Right, thanks" Garforth responded whilst Wallace simply raised his glass in acknowledgement.

"Okay" Hansell remarked "see you there" he announced before he left again, closing the door gently behind him.

"You know what" Wallace remarked "I still don't know what to make of that guy."

"Oh I do" Garforth ominously responded "that man is an enigma for certain but I also know from bitter experience that he is most definitely someone that is not to be trusted under any circumstances."

"Do you think his boss, old man Villiers knows this?" Wallace asked.

"I doubt it" Garforth commented "Villiers away with the fairies as my old grandmother used to say in his own ego fuelled little utopian dream land. If he is not careful he could find himself suddenly made redundant by his paymaster and Hansell will be the man wielding the axe, possibly literally."

"Ouch..." Wallace responded.

"Indeed" Garforth agreed "and I strongly suggest that once the money starts to appear that we - just in case you understand - keep that man and his closest minions at arms length and down wind at all times."

"No arguments from me there" Wallace readily agreed "If we are to get through this we need to watch each others backs very carefully from here on in until this whole thing is over."

An old disused bus garage in the far west of Greater London provided the location for what could be best described as a staging area for the various vehicles, personnel and equipment that the National Security & Police Service had gathered together for this huge operation, its light, airy and spacious buildings that once hosted over a hundred and fifty double decker buses for nearly three quarters of a century proving ideal for their needs despite signs of age induced deterioration here and there with cracks in the concrete floor, a few cracked and broken windows and a lot of cobwebs festooning the darker corners of the place.

By the time Tracy and the Commander arrived through the gates in their official car, there were already approximately half of the resources expected on site with more vans and other vehicles arriving with each passing minute.

"I think we can safely say the overtime budget is shot to hell" Tracy confirmed as she and the Commander got out of the car before Kinderley drove off to park it up out of the way until it was needed again later.

"If this works we will have felt the collars of some of the most sought after criminals in the world of organised crime across four continents" the Commander reminded his wife to which she nodded in agreement "it will be worth every penny."

"Until their protégés and new emerging talent step into the vacuum they leave behind" Tracy then added "I don't think we will ever totally eliminate big ticket crimes."

"I hope not" the Commander replied "we would be out of business otherwise" he joked.

At that point the mobile in Tracy's tunic pocket began to ring and she took it out to examine it.

"It's McWilliam calling" Tracy confirmed as she went to answer the call "Hello?" she then responded.

"Maam" McWilliam responded as she emerged from the main entrance of St Thomas' Hospital and turned left to walk down the road towards Westminster Bridge over the River Thames with a purposeful stride "I just had a little chat with our old friend Sir William Devane" she confirmed.

"How is he?" Tracy asked as she and the Commander stepped over to one side, away from everyone else and she put the call on the speakerphone function.

"Still suffering breathing difficulties caused by the inhalation of smoke but he will pull through with rest and recuperation" McWilliam confirmed.

"Well at least that is good news" the Commander remarked.

"I can confirm that whatever those files you are asking about were, he does not possess them, never has done and has no idea what they contained" McWilliam confirmed.

"What about his attacker?" Tracy asked.

"He reckons whoever it was may have already been hiding in the room when he went in" McWilliam responded "I know this is purely speculative but I think he may have just stumbled in on someone else making off with the files, they panicked, thumped him over the head and then made a run for it, setting light to the place to cover his or her tracks and implicate Sir William in the process."

"You say his or her" the Commander picked up on a key point in McWilliams's report "are you saying there is a possibility that Sir William's attacker, the file thief and the arsonist, assuming they are all one and the same person may be a woman?" he asked.

"I never rule anything out Sir" McWilliam explained her reasoning "Besides, it's just a hunch at the moment."

"We are still no nearer to discovering what was in those files though" Tracy remarked.

"I have an idea about that" McWilliam responded as she crossed Westminster Bridge approaching the Palace of Westminster beneath the dominant tower of Big Ben "the Chief Archivist, a David St-John Smythe has disappeared" she explained "he was whisked away from the archive building by two men claiming to be National Security & Police Service officers but I think I know who they were really working for and I thought I would pop around and try and convince their boss to see the error of their ways" she evasively announced.

"Would I be right in thinking that I do not want to know what it is you have in mind or whom you are about to upset?" the Commander ventured.

"That would be a fair assumption Sir" McWilliam agreed with a wry smirk.

"She's been trained by Sir Richard Crowthorne all right" Tracy remarked with a wry smile.

"Find him, grab him and get him in an interview room and grill him until the pips squeak" the Commander instructed.

"As soon as I have something I will give you guys a call" McWilliam confirmed.

"Stay in touch" Tracy requested.

"Will do" she responded "McWilliam out."

With that sign off she quickly replaced her mobile phone back in her pocket before looking back over her shoulder. With a swiftly raised arm McWilliam managed to hail a traditional black London taxi cab that was approaching and as soon as it came to a halt alongside, she got into the back of it before shutting the door and sitting down.

"Morning Barry" McWilliam called to the driver, a member of her own Department who maintained a number of special taxis that roamed across the city ready to be called upon by specialist security and intelligence agencies when needed "Fast as you like to the CIA London Office please, the one in Holland Park that we are not supposed to know about that is."

"Ladies and gentlemen, if I could have your attention please" Hansell called out loudly from the front of the room where most of the gang who would be directly involved in that evening's activities had gathered for the final briefing and the assignment of their tasks.

At the back of the room in the shadows Villiers looked on with a sense of pride as the culmination of years of careful planning was now in sight. He was not going to take any part in the briefing himself, instead letting his bag man Hansell issue the final instructions to the whole group.

"I am delighted to confirm that thus far your efforts have been absolutely excellent" Hansell announced as soon as everyone had settled down and he had their complete attention "In the space of just a couple of days we have put together the people, equipment and knowhow we require for what will hopefully be one of the most daring and infamous heists in the history of organised crime."

From his vantage point Villiers could see that Hansell was pressing all the right buttons in his audience and pandering to that inevitable constant in the minds of experienced villains, their egos.

"Operations commence at 17:00 hours this afternoon when you will all be present and correct at your assigned vehicles outside on the main driveway" Hansell continued "Mr Garforth and his vehicle team will ensure that the vehicles are parked up in the correct order half an hour prior to our final muster before departure."

"Slave driver..." Garforth quietly remarked to which Wallace sat alongside him smirked in amused agreement.

"Departure of our convoy will be at precisely 17:30" Hansell resumed "Lead vehicle will be Mr Garforth and Mr Wallace in our 'borrowed' Security and Police Service patrol car who will escort us to location two on your information diagrams."

This led to a rustling of papers among the audience as they all consulted the comprehensive documentation that they had been issued with.

"From there" Hansell continued "the patrol car will go on ahead alone and at approximately 19:30 hours will approach the main entrance into the facility. The guards at the gate will allow the car to enter and proceed across the grounds of the facility to the main goods exchange area here" he indicated on a large plan of the Codmore Hill site being projected onto the wall behind him.

"Sounds nice and simple so far" Wallace remarked aside to Garforth who nodded in agreement although there was something troubling him which was clear from his expression as he concentrated intently on the briefing.

"Our main attack group will follow along exactly two minutes later" Hansell carried on "penetrate the outer perimeter and neutralise the security on the surface whilst our electrical team will disable their communications and cameras so that we do not immediately alert the internal security personnel."

There were a few murmurs among the audience which Hansell let die down before he carried on.

"Once a secure perimeter has been established" Hansell then announced "our explosives team will dynamite the main loading area doors allowing our attack team to carry on into the building and down to the vault level. Any resistance we meet along the way, either physical or personal will be dealt with until we reach the vaults themselves."

"This is going to get messy" Garforth quietly remarked.

"With both the interior and exterior of the site secure" Hansell continued "our lift and load teams will move in, release and secure everything that we are intending to collect and transport it our waiting vehicles which by that point will be in position in the loading bays ready to move. May I remind you that our loading has been carefully worked out and that ONLY what is on our list is to be taken, transported to the vans and loaded."

"Remember" Hansell then warned "we are against the clock so from entry onto the site at 19:32 until the last vehicle leaves the site will be no more than thirty minutes. The team marshals will sound whistles at precisely 19:30 which will be your cue to stop and proceed directly to your assigned getaway vehicle. If the perimeter teams see any authorities approaching then whistles will be blown and the codeword 'Red Optumus' will be called over your radios upon which everyone stops what they are doing and we leave immediately."

"Assuming that all goes to plan however" Hansell then became more positive once again "we will make our escape by one of the four escape routes detailed in your briefing packs, the actual route to be followed being decided upon on our departure with some of you going one way and some another. We all then rendezvous back here no later that 23:30 where we will process our cargo and get a well earned nights sleep."

"Do you get the distinct impression that we are being lined up as the proverbial sacrificial lambs in this little enterprise?" Garforth remarked quietly across to Wallace as the briefing came to a conclusion and the gathered audience began to disperse.

"Look on the bright side" Wallace responded "at least we will have ringside seats for the crime of the century" he remarked.

"Indeed" Garforth agreed although unlike his American counterpart, he knew that the result was going to be very different indeed.

Hansell and Villiers were not the only people briefing large numbers of personnel at that exact moment as, on the opposite side of the ever ongoing fight between crime and justice, Tracy and the Commander were gathering together their own forces, personnel and equipment in the old bus garage.

"Is everybody here yet?" the Commander asked as he and Tracy walked into the centre of the gathering where all around were over a hundred Security & Police Service officers from various different divisions of the Service along with the numerous vehicles they had arrived there in.

"We are missing the local lads I think" Fuller confirmed as he checked a number of lists on his clipboard and looked around but then looked up as the hooting of a car horn was heard and a minibus pulled up.

"Al, what time do you call this?" the Commander called as he greeted an old friend in the form of Divisional Commander Al Longton, the Chief of Operations for the Service in the Haychester area, a position once occupied by the Commander himself some years earlier.

"Sorry we are late Sir" Longton apologised as he emerged from the front passenger seat and the two officers met up where they warmly shook hands "this place took a bit of finding."

"That is one of the reasons why I picked it" the Commander explained "sufficiently off the beaten track enough to discourage anybody from eaves dropping or stumbling across our plans."

"I am surprised you didn't turn up in an old London bus" Longton remarked.

"Don't give my husband any ideas" Tracy responded "he already owns part of an old steam locomotive."

"So" Longton declared as he rubbed his hands together in anticipation "I brought my lads, where do you want us?" he asked.

"Park up over there" the Commander indicated a vehicle parking area over on the far side "I am going to be telling everyone all about our little day trip in a few minutes."

"All right ladies and gentlemen" Longton then declared to his group "you heard the Chief, get your stuff together and park the van out of the way, and this time Barry, try not to lose the keys okay?"

"I think the gangs all here" Tracy remarked as she and the Commander, arm in arm walked across the brushed concrete surface of the garage interior.

"In which case my love" the Commander concluded "I think it is time to get this party started."

They proceeded over to a raised area towards the back of the garage fashioned from an old maintenance ramp and stepped up onto it so that they both had a view over their audience who upon seeing that they were now at the front, began to assemble around them and fall silent as they paid attention.

"Good afternoon everybody" the Commander announced once he was sure he had everyone's complete and undivided attention "Thank you all for coming. I know that

only a few of you will know why we are here so for the benefit of everyone else this is what is going on."

At that point the Commander nodded to Fuller who started a projector which showed an aerial photograph of the Codmore Hill site, the core of that day's operation.

"This is what all this is about" the Commander declared "The Codmore Hill Bullion Processing Facility, a state of the art high security top secret facility approximately ten miles north east of my old stamping ground, the city of Haychester."

There were some murmurings amongst the audience which the Commander let die down before he continued.

"This place is where billions of pounds worth of precious metals are processed, received and distributed from every week" the Commander continued "and is protected by a state of the art security system, electric fences, armed guards, dogs, etc, etc, etc. and this evening a gang put together and led by this man" Fuller changed the screen image to about the only photograph the Service had on file of Villiers "are going to raid it."

"Let me see if I can guess where this is going" Longton remarked as he called upon his many years of experience working alongside the Commander so he knew very well how his mind worked "these guys are going to turn up mob handed only to find us waiting for them to spoil their party?"

"Pretty much" the Commander confirmed "however there is one little detail that we have not mentioned, the place is a fake, there is nothing there of any value whatsoever."

"A trap" Longton commented "very clever."

"Make no mistake everyone" Tracy cut in "tonight we will have what is a potentially once in a lifetime chance to arrest some of the biggest players in European organised crime red handed and put them away for a very long time."

"Hopefully you will now all understand why up until now we have been very secretive about this operation" the Commander carried on "we have carefully crafted an elaborate and well documented lie to lure our would be thieves into our trap. As far as they are concerned the whole Codmore Hill facility is perfectly legitimate and has vaults packed with valuable metals although we believe gold will be their primary target."

"Sounds like we are in for a fun evening" Bob, stood over to one side with his specialist armed response team remarked.

"Now comes the tricky stuff" Tracy continued as the Commander stood aside and let her carry on "we need to get into the Codmore Hill facility and get set up without anyone hearing or seeing us" she explained "the rural location helps us in some respects however we cannot rule out that they may have people on the ground watching out prior to their main group arriving."

"That is where our premiere expert in all things sneaky comes in" the Commander remarked.

"Commander Cassini" Tracy called over to the head of the covert surveillance section who was stood over to the other side with his team including his ever present second in command, the seemingly always silent Ziggy "Is your team ready?"

"Just say the word and we will have counter surveillance up and running on every road and junction in a five mile radius within an hour" Cassini confirmed "We have even bought a new van especially for the occasion."

"That's a nice touch" Tracy responded.

"It had more to do with the fact the old one needed a grand spent on it to get it through the MOT and was basically a death trap on wheels" Cassini wryly admitted to laughter from the others.

"Very well" Tracy carried on "the next step will see us entering the facility in a number of vehicles which we have parked out the back, all unmarked so as not to draw too much attention. Once we are inside the perimeter our technical genius Mr Fuller here and his team will wire the place for sound and vision."

"The more of the attempted raid we get on tape the better the chance of securing convictions on those we arrest who are not already wanted" the Commander explained.

"Gradually in the build up to the expected raid" Tracy carried on "we will place teams of armed response officers at key points outside the main site who will stay hidden in plain sight to be called in when required" she went on to explain using the plan of the area now being displayed on the screen "whilst inside the site we will have Bob and his specialist team secreted within the main buildings."

"We will also be reinforcing the private security guards that have been play acting in the grounds with our own people courtesy of the Haychester office" the Commander added "to the untrained eye it will look like business as normal; we will just be lying in wait for them."

"When they do arrive" Tracy resumed "we expect a lead vehicle of some kind to enter the site by the main gate and proceed directly to the central compound, there we will ensure they meet with limited resistance as they are expecting so that they then call in their main force. Once they are inside the site we close in on all sides and we will have them cornered."

"We should expect resistance though" the Commander warned "given how experienced some of these guys are it is a good bet some of them will not be coming quietly so once the raiding party is on site, additional local units will move in all around the site and intercept anyone who gets out onto the grounds and over the fence."

"Are there any questions?" Tracy asked.

"What are these guys packing in terms of equipment?" one of the Haychester officers asked.

"We have reason to believe all of them will be carrying light arms, handguns, that sort of thing" Tracy confirmed "plus we expect there to be some sort of explosives demolition team which would be required to blast their way through into the non-existent vaults."

"An additional note" the Commander interjected at that point "we have one of our own working undercover in the group plus we believe the CIA have a man in the mix as well so if you do need to open fire please be aware that we will have friendlies in the mix and I think it is fairly safe to say they would rather we didn't shoot them."

"Any other questions?" Tracy asked to which there were a few murmurs amongst the audience but in the end no questions were forthcoming "in which case let's get to work."

As the gathering broke up and everyone dispersed, the Commander took himself off to one side, retreating over into a dark corner of the vast interior of the main building and, having wiped away a couple of old dusty cobwebs from a window he looked out through the dusty and cracked glass at the rapidly setting sun that was just sinking below the distant horizon behind the trees atop the hills nearby.

"Are you all right love?" Tracy asked as she joined him a few moments later taking him by surprise as his attention had become focused on the beautiful red and orange sky that resulted from the mid winter sunset.

"Hmm?" the Commander responded his thoughts clearly elsewhere and not just being distracted by the stunning sunset.

"What's wrong my love?" Tracy then asked, adding a welcome arm of support around him.

"Oh it's probably nothing" the Commander tried to casually dismiss his thoughts but Tracy was having none of it.

"Come on now" Tracy reminded her husband "we have been through far too much and I know you a whole lot better than that."

"Something doesn't add up" the Commander admitted "I don't know what but years of experience are telling me that something is wrong."

"Talk me through it and I will see if I agree" Tracy wisely suggested.

"All right" the Commander agreed before taking a moment to compose his thoughts into some sort of order before he went on to explain his potential concerns.

"Six months ago we sat down and devised a plan to entice the world's most successful and wanted criminal mastermind out of hiding" the Commander began "In order to lure him back to this country we created Codmore Hill, planted convincing documentation in a location only someone as well connected and resourceful as he could get to which in turn provided him with enough information to plan a daring and potentially lucrative raid."

"Effectively we are dangling a very large carrot in front of him tied to enough rope so that should he take the bait then he metaphorically hangs himself" Tracy remarked to which the Commander nodded in agreement before continuing.

"Now..." the commander continued "because of the virtually impenetrable nature of his organisation, to get someone on the inside was always going to be difficult. Enter stage left into our little piece of theatre my brother."

"Perfect back story" Tracy agreed "proven criminal record all be it suitably sexed up for our chosen audience, experienced deep undercover operative and also a world class wheelman, a skill that is required on the team."

"Thus providing us with the perfect way in" the Commander added "recruited effectively straight onto the factory floor."

"So where is the problem?" Tracy asked.

"It's just that every time any of our illustrious family gets involved in anything of this sort someone always seems to get hurt" the Commander admitted "and I can't help having the feeling this is all going to go monumentally pear shaped at some point."

"There are a hundred and one things that could go wrong with this operation or indeed any other operation we do" Tracy responded "It's a risk we take every day" she reassured him

"Yeah I know" the Commander agreed "I think I just need a hug to be honest."

"Well that I can manage" Tracy confirmed with a big smile as they embraced.

"Oh that's better" the Commander agreed "Alright, we can get to work now" he then declared.

"Can you get a message through to the Commander" Amber McWilliam called over her mobile as she got out of the taxi "Tell him that I have managed to track our missing archivist and that I am about to have a word" she confirmed "I will let him know if I manage to get anything out of him."

It was a typically business like conversation from McWilliam as she hung up and put the phone away and strode purposefully towards the main glass doors of the CIA London Office building.

"Commander McWilliam, Section Fourteen" she brandished her formal identification to the two plain clothed armed guards inside the door "I need to see your boss, now."

"Mr Barwell" the intercom on the desk of the CIA London Office Head of Operations buzzed into life and announced forcing him to put down the file he was reading through and return it to his desk where there was already a huge pile of paperwork.

"Go ahead" Barwell responded.

"There is a Commander McWilliam of Section Fourteen in Reception" the caller explained "she wants to see you most urgently."

"One of Sir Richard Crowthorne's people" Barwell remarked "You had best send her up then."

"Yes Sir" the response came whereupon Barwell sat back in his chair with sort of worried look as if he was about to get a visit from the taxman or worse.

Realising then that he had a huge pile of sensitive documents on his desk, he quickly attempted to clear them away and had only just succeeded when there was a knock at the door.

"Just a minute!" Barwell called loudly as he tucked the last file he could not find a place for under the cushion of the couch situated on one side of the office "Okay!" he then called "Come in."

"Commander McWilliam, Section Fourteen" the guard who had accompanied her announced as he showed her into the office.

"All right, thank you" Barwell dismissed the guard and he departed, closing the door behind him.

"Commander Amber McWilliam" she announced as she shook Barwell's hand before proffering her identification "Section Fourteen."

"Good afternoon Ms McWilliam" Barwell greeted her.

"My friends call me Amber, you can call me Commander McWilliam until we get to know each other better" she then suggested leaving Barwell in no doubts whatsoever that he was dealing with a tough customer despite her short stature.

"So Commander McWilliam" Barwell continued as he took his seat behind his desk "What can I do for you?" he asked.

"David St-John Smythe' McWilliam formally announced "the Chief Archivist at that building that caught fire last night, you've got him and I want to see him" she then stepped forward to enhance her point "that's an order not a request by the way."

"Who?" Barwell responded with poorly feigned innocence.

"Scotland Yard's CCTV Centre has some great footage of two of your boys pretending to be two of the National Police & Security Service guys picking him up at the site of the fire and ferrying him away" McWilliam explained "the plates on the car they used match one that is in the US Embassy car pool so shall we dispense with the smoke and mirrors?"

"I can tell that you went to the same school of sneakiness as Sir Richard Crowthorne" Barwell responded in resignation "All right, in the spirit of interdepartmental co-operation and because Sir Richard would have my guts for garters if were here right now, I will let you see him."

"Good decision" McWilliam commended him.

"But..." Barwell issued a condition "I sit in on any interview you conduct" he insisted.

"Agreed" McWilliam confirmed "You know I am starting to like you" she then declared as Barwell got up and escorted her to the door.

"Thank you, I think..." Barwell responded as they made their way down the corridor back to the lift where the door was already open and they stepped straight inside.

"I am a nice lady when you get to know me" McWilliam confirmed with a wry smile "you just won't like me when I am angry that's all."

Barwell took out a set of keys on a chain from his pocket and inserted one of them into a lock in the floor selection panel before pressing a button located right at the bottom whereupon the lift doors closed and they descended down to the lower basement level.

"Welcome to what has been charmingly called the factory floor" Barwell declared when the lift reached its destination and the doors opened before they stepped out into a dimly lit and rather foreboding looking corridor where the only feature was a small security desk with a uniformed US Marine on guard behind it.

"Please state your business Sir" the Marine formally called after standing to attention.

"The little lady and I are here to see our detainee" Barwell confirmed.

"Room Two Sir" the Marine confirmed in immediate response "Leave your weapons at the desk please."

Barwell reached inside his jacket and removed his pistol from the shoulder holster and placed it on the table, meantime McWilliam proceeded to take out no less than three guns, a flick knife and a spring loaded extendable baton from among various pockets and holsters about her person before placing them on the table also.

"My mother always did say I had insecurity issues" McWilliam wryly remarked with a shrug of the shoulders on seeing the expression on both Barwell and the Marine's faces at the sight of the discarded weaponry she had just produced.

"Indeed" Barwell responded "shall we?" he suggested as he showed the way ahead past the desk down the corridor beyond.

The second door on the left was their destination and upon opening it and entering the room McWilliam saw the missing Archivist David St-John Smythe sat at a table with an empty plate where he had just finished the dinner that had been brought for him earlier.

"As you can see Commander McWilliam, we are looking after him" Barwell reassured her as they proceeded to take seats on the other side of the table where St-John Smythe looked up with a distinctively unimpressed look.

"The food is passable I suppose" St-John Smythe responded with disdain "Not exactly the premier Gordon bleu that I am more accustomed to of course."

"You must be a very well paid man then" McWilliam remarked "fine dining doesn't come cheap, slightly odd for a lowly archivist isn't it?"

"Ah but our friend here has two bosses" Barwell explained "although he denies it of course."

"Naturally" McWilliam responded "so leaving aside the paltry salary you receive from your civil service paymasters, it is your other more interesting sources of income that I want to talk about."

"I am just a..." St-John Smythe began to protest.

"...lowly archivist" McWilliam interrupted "Yes I know."

"I was going to say Archivist Manager" St-John Smythe added "that is a whole another pay grade upwards don't you know."

"My people have been going through your accounts ever since you disappeared from the scene of the crime last night" McWilliam continued as she produced a file that she had brought with her and placed it on the table between them although she did not actually open it "you have been banking some considerable sums of money in regular amounts over the last five years which strongly suggests someone has been paying you either to keep quiet or possibly for some other services?"

"Family inheritance" St-John Smythe responded not all that convincingly.

"Checked your friends and relatives as well" McWilliam replied "Tell me another one" she strongly suggested, staring him straight in the eyes.

"I have nothing further to say until I see my solicitor" St-John Smythe declared, folding his arms and sitting back in his seat.

"Fine" McWilliam responded "you won't mind if I do all the talking then" she declared as she took the file away again and returned it to her briefcase.

"I did mention he was not exactly the chatty type didn't I?" Barwell remarked.

"Here is how we see the bigger picture" McWilliam announced "of which, by the way you are but a small minion. You were granted the position of Chief Archivist at this archive facility in Whitehall about five years ago after a glittering if not exactly public career in the civil service."

St-John Smythe said nothing, just merely looked away feigning disinterest.

"In addition to your generous Civil Service pension and your modest wage in your current position" she then continued to set the scene as she saw it "you are also on a retainer from certain individuals in general and one certain organisation in particular to provide certain documents from the archive as and when required. Furthermore you allow persons not otherwise authorised to view the material under your stewardship access by allowing them into the premises without record or check. How am I doing so far?"

The response from St-John Smythe was just to shrug his shoulders with indifference at that point.

"Feel free to chip in with any contribution you may wish to make to the conversation at any point Mr St-John Smythe" McWilliam suggested "besides I am about to get to the really interesting bit, the part where I incite you as being an accessory to arson and attempted murder."

"What!?!?" St-John Smythe responded.

"Ah, that got his attention" Barwell remarked.

"You were in charge of the facility when the fire broke out" McWilliam carried on "there is only one accessible way in and out as all the other exits were locked according to the fire investigation team's report so unless the arsonist and attempted murderer was beamed in by aliens, you let them in."

"If you will excuse my language in front of a lady but quite frankly this is bollocks" St-John Smythe declared "You can prove nothing! I want my lawyer!!"

"Nobody knows you are here pal" Barwell advised him.

"So..." McWilliam decided to up the odds "are you going to tell us what we want to know or am I going to start getting thoroughly unpleasant?"

"Gold Command from Eagle One" the Commander called into his radio as Kinderley brought the car to a stop in a lay-by a couple of hundred yards from the main gate into the Codmore Hill site "We are just about to enter the target location."

"Gold Command" Fuller's voice was heard responding "the front door is open" he confirmed.

"Excellent" the Commander replied as he indicated to Kinderley to drive on "put the kettle on."

The Commander's car led a small initial convoy of three anonymous looking unmarked vans and a couple of other cars as they proceeded down the road where the tall imposing security gates opened electronically allowing them to pull off the main road and sweep straight through onto the Codmore Hill site.

"Straight up to the main building up there" the Commander instructed Kinderley as they led the convoy up the long access road to the centre of the site where already waiting for them was Fuller with a technical team who were unloading their van outside the main entrance.

"Round the back by the loading bays" Fuller called as Kinderley stopped the car alongside him.

"Right you are" Kinderley confirmed before moving off again leading the rest of the initial convoy around to the side of the main building.

"Let's get this party started" the Commander declared as they parked up and he got out of the car before proceeding back to the main entrance where he met up with Fuller. "How are we doing?" he asked.

"Operations control unit is already set up in that vehicle over there" Fuller indicated to a large truck parked nearby whose unmarked external appearance gave no indication of the high-tec mobile control centre installed inside "and we should have the place wired for sound and vision within the hour" he confirmed.

"Excellent" the Commander responded "Anyone seen Cassini around?" he then asked.

"Already out and about scouting suitable observation points" Fuller explained "He reckons he will have his people in position in about forty minutes."

"Eagle One from Angel One" Tracy's voice called over the radio which caused the Commander to step back for a few moments to take the call.

"Receiving love" the Commander responded.

"I'm overseeing the placing of our outer perimeter units" Tracy confirmed "Al Longton wants to know how many marked units you want in the area."

"All of them" the Commander responded "well, as many as he can spare at any rate."

"I think I found a couple of suitable places to hole up until you give the word" Tracy announced "there are a couple of farms inside the ten mile radius which I am requisitioning to stable as many units as I can squeeze in where they will not be visible from the main roads."

"Sounds good to me" the Commander agreed "We are just starting to get things set up here."

"I'll give you a call when we are all settled in" Tracy confirmed "Take care love".

"You too" the Commander responded.

At that point another group of vehicles arrived on site, this time containing Bob and his specialist armed operations group who as soon as the vehicles came to a halt, they deployed, the sound of boots and clinking of arms and equipment filling the air as they gathered together around their senior officer.

"Glad you could make it Bob" the Commander welcomed them "Park your vans up round the back so they are out of sight and then deploy around the grounds as planned."

"Yes Sir" Bob confirmed "Alright ladies and gentlemen" he then addressed his officers "you heard the Commander, let's look lively, Gary, get the vans out of here."

There was a flurry of activity as Bob's team dispersed to take up their assigned positions and their vehicles were driven away.

As the Commander was overseeing the deployment of officers within the complex, all around the outer perimeter fence, pairs of officers made up from the members of Commander Cassini's covert surveillance branch were identifying their positions and beginning to settle in for what was probably going to turn into a fairly lengthy evening.

Coordinating their deployment was Cassini himself who with his ever present deputy Ziggy was working out the best places to discreetly observe anyone approaching the site from any direction by way of a map laid out on the bonnet of their van parked in the lay-by of a narrow country lane not far from the Codmore Hill site.

"If I were a betting man" Cassini remarked as he studied the map "I would bet that whoever we are expecting will come in this way" he indicated on the map one road in particular "nice and wide, few hidden corners and the quickest way in from the main road and out again should things go pear shaped."

"An observation post just here should give us eyes for some distance in each direction Sir" Ziggy suggested as he pointed to one part of the map "I call dibs on that one."

"Sounds good to me" Cassini agreed before reaching for his radio "Echo One to all units" he then called "are we all in position yet?"

There followed a steady flow of confirmations from the various pairs of officers deployed across the area, announcing firstly their designated call signs before their confirmation that they were in position and ready to begin their surveillance.

"All Echo Units from Echo One" Cassini then instructed "Keep a sharp lookout for any persons or vehicles approaching from any direction towards the target zone and give me regular quarter hourly check ins please. At all other times please maintain radio silence throughout unless you have anything to report. Echo One out."

"All right then" Cassini then confirmed "let's find a nice place to sit down for the night as I reckon it's going to be a long one" he suggested.

"Got the important equipment here boss" Ziggy confirmed as he pulled a rucksack from out of the van before slamming the side door shut "maps, binoculars, night vision gear, biscuits, sandwiches and two flasks of coffee."

"The coffee being the most important part of course" Cassini responded as he reached for his radio "Echo One to Gold Command" he then called "All surveillance units in position and operations now commencing."

"Sir" Fuller called across from the control desk in the mobile control room through the door to where the Commander was standing just outside "Cassini confirms all his people are up and running."

"Lovely" the Commander responded as he stepped inside "and Bob?"

"Just setting up the last of his people inside the perimeter fence as we speak" Fuller confirmed "and all our recorders are up and running" he added, indicating the bank of screens surrounding him which were displaying numerous different views from covert surveillance CCTV cameras across the site.

"Angel One from Eagle One" the Commander called into his radio "Tracy love, how are you doing out there?" he asked.

"All parked up and putting the kettle on dear" Tracy confirmed as she was passed a cup of freshly brewed tea over the bonnet of the patrol car which along with a couple of other and two vans were now safely hidden from general view inside a large empty farmers barn about two miles away from Codmore Hill itself.

"All right love" the Commander responded "sit tight and stay warm" he suggested "I'll see you later."

"Be careful love" Tracy advised with sincerity.

"I will" the Commander confirmed "Love you, see you later."

As the Commander concluded the call to his wife, all around him the frenetic activity that had been going on for over an hour since their arrival was now starting to subside as everyone was now in their allotted positions and ready to go.

The Commander paced around the yard outside the main building of the complex and looked around as the floodlights came on in response to the darkening skies as dusk descended on that cold late winter evening before he returned to his radio.

"All units from Eagle One" the Commander then called into the radio with a clear tone of authority "this operation is now live" he declared "I want everyone to be fully alert and report anything which may be of significance straight to Gold Command" he instructed "else wise I want radio silence kept throughout. Good luck everyone and let's be careful tonight. Eagle One out."

With that declaration the Commander duly turned smartly on his heel and returned to the command truck and proceeded inside.

"All right" the Commander declared as he entered and took a seat "Now we wait for our guests to arrive, in the meantime someone put the kettle on."

It was a well practiced routine for a professional criminal like Hansell, for an hour before setting off on what he always called a 'mission' he would withdraw from the noise and hubbub to a room for quiet relaxation and contemplation.

Lying on his back in the exact centre of the modest bed in his room, he closed his eyes and tried to clear his mind of thoughts so that he would be able to concentrate clearly on the task ahead. He continued his meditative state for over half an hour during which the sun began to set and the light in the room dimmed considerably to almost darkness.

Only the distant muffled sounds of activity outside could be heard and as they were coming from the other side of the house to where his room was, even these were barely noticeable.

At precisely 17:55 Hansell's watch illuminated and began to sound a distinct beeping to which he responded by opening his eyes straight away, cancelling the alarm and then sitting bolt upright on the bed, swinging his legs around smoothly until his feet now just touched the floor.

Hansell took out a small key from his pocket attached to a chain and proceeded to unlock the bedside drawer before opening it and extracting one of a number of neatly laid out mobile phones located within.

Switching the chosen mobile phone on, it was only a matter of moments before it lit up and began to ring with the only indication of the caller on the screen being the ominous words 'PRIVATE NUMBER' but Hansell knew exactly who was calling and that this call would be made at this exact time.

"Hello" Hansell formally answered whereupon there was a pause at the other end before he was asked to respond to an authentication code question.

"Delta Foxtrot One Zero Two. Condition Green" he then confirmed slowly and methodically to ensure there was no error or misunderstanding.

Whoever the caller was, their message was brief as only a few moments later Hansell would respond by repeating the instructions to ensure there was clear understanding.

"Delete primary source, erase evidence, secure files, execute plan revision three" he responded before listening intently for confirmation that his instructions were understood correctly.

There was no further conversation once the confirmation that all was correctly understood had been received, instead the call was immediately terminated and the line went dead.

Hansell looked down at the mobile for a few moments in brief contemplation before proceeding to dismantle it and take out the SIM card which he immediately destroyed by placing it in an ashtray on the bedside table top amongst some scraps of paper that he then proceeded to set alight with a cigarette lighter.

The glow from the small flames and sparks briefly lit the room and his face for a few moments until the fire died down again. Switching on the bedside lamp, Hansell then returned the mobile phone to the exact position from where it came, selected another and placed it in his pocket.

He then closed the top drawer and opened the bottom one to reveal a pair of automatic pistols, matching silencers and spare ammunition clips which he proceeded to take out and check before placing in his holsters and jacket pockets.

Once he was sure that his weapons were checked and secured about his person correctly, Hansell stood up, took one last look around and then, collecting his coat on the way out, left the room.

From the room, Hansell proceeded down the corridor where as he headed along it, he was joined by two of his closest aides who together walked briskly and ominously to the top of the staircase before heading up to the top floor.

Once they reached the top of the stairs, Hansell took the lead and they strode purposefully and directly to the study door of Villiers.

"Come in!" the unsuspecting Villiers called in response to the knock on the door.

"You two wait here until I give the word" Hansell quietly ordered his two aides who in response merely nodded and then took up positions either side of the door, standing with their backs against the wall before Hansell opened the door and entered.

"Ah there you are my boy" Villiers called in a delirious brandy fuelled sense of delight as he had been imbibing of alcohol for the last couple of hours in an almost celebratory mood "do come in, have a drink" he proffered the brandy decanter.

"No thanks" Hansell responded "I have work to do and I will need a clear head, I hope you understand."

"But of course" Villiers replied still somewhat merry from the drink "so are you ready for the big event dear boy?" he asked.

"Everything is ready Sir" Hansell formally responded "our masters have been in touch to wish us the very best of luck."

"That's strange" Villiers remarked "they usually call me direct."

"Perhaps you were in the loo when they called Sir?" Hansell suggested although he knew full well that the real reason for the conversation directly between him and their masters was far more complicated and sinister than Villiers knew.

"Perhaps I was" Villiers agreed although he was having a bit of trouble with his memory now thanks to the effects of the drink.

"They asked me to tie up a few loose ends before we set off Sir" Hansell went on to explain, still maintaining his formal stance and tone.

"Oh really?" Villiers asked "and what loose ends would they be?" he asked.

"Items surplus to our requirements" Hansell explained somewhat evasively before reaching inside his jacket and producing his pistol, the silencer already attached and aiming it directly across the desk at Villiers who looked on in shock "namely you."

"Wait!" Villiers quickly protested as he realised what was about to happen but it was too little too late as with a cold stare Hansell carried out his orders, firing three times, the muffled thuds of the silenced shots impacting in his target's forehead first followed by the other two shots in the chest.

Villiers let out a last gasp as he collapsed off the chair and crashed to the floor behind his desk with death being almost instantaneous.

At that point Hansell went around the desk and checked that his former boss was now dead whereupon he was joined by his two aides.

"All right gentlemen" Hansell declared "I want every scrap of paper and material related to this project gathered up and destroyed within the hour" he ordered as he leaned forward and took one of the bottles of expensive brandy from the desk which had still yet to be opened and examined the label with a smile "then take care of the rest and burn everything."

"Yes Sir!" the two aides immediately responded before proceeding to search the room and gather up all of Villiers's papers from the desk, drawers and cabinets and piling it all up high on the desk whereupon Hansell proceeded to pour the contents of one of the part consumed bottles of brandy all over it.

"Okay, out you go" he then urged before he turned back to the desk whereupon he produced a small black box of some kind and placed it carefully amongst the brandy soaked papers before flicking a tiny little switch on the top of it which at that stage did nothing more in response than emit a small bleep and exhibit a tiny red light.

With his work in the room complete, Hansell departed, turning off the lights and closing the door as he left before rejoining his aides in the corridor whereupon they proceeded to head back to the staircase.

Outside the manor house the various vehicles, personnel and their equipment were now gathered on the main driveway and ready to depart as Hansell reached the front door and looked out, impressed by the scene before him.

"Okay lads, once you are finished here meet me at location delta" Hansell directed them "we have a little extra job to do tomorrow morning."

"Yes Sir" they both responded in unison before heading back inside the house.

Hansell closed the ornate carved wooden front doors behind him before descending the small flight of steps and proceeding to the front of the convoy of vehicles which was led by a silver Mercedes saloon car which was his vehicle, parked alongside the stolen Security Service marked patrol car with Garforth behind the wheel and Wallace sat in the front passenger seat alongside him, both now fully dressed in authentic Security Service officer uniforms.

"Ready gentlemen?" Hansell asked as he leaned down to speak to them through the driver's side window.

"As ready as we will ever be" Garforth confirmed.

"All right then" Hansell responded as he then proceeded to his own car and got in the front passenger seat whereupon his driver started the engine.

"I've got a bad feeling about this..." Wallace remarked as they watched Hansell in the car alongside reach for a radio to broadcast an announcement.

"All units, can I have your attention please" Hansell called over the radio which was broadcast to everyone in the heist team who were ready and waiting for the off "From now on radio silence is to be maintained at all times unless I say otherwise or there is some sort of emergency" he ordered "Keep your radios on at all times and do exactly what I tell you and by the end of tonight we can go home exceedingly rich."

"That's what you think..." Garforth remarked quietly to himself with a wry smile.

"All right everyone" Hansell then called over the radio "lets move out!"

The quiet country atmosphere was then broken by the sound of some twenty vehicle engines all starting up from humble saloon cars through to a huge articulated truck before, with Hansell's car leading they moved off, weaving their way down the long driveway towards the main gate.

Once the tail vehicle of the convoy was out of sight, the two aides that Hansell had left behind were free to commence their task, a job which began with them proceeding to take out silenced automatic weapons and check them before moving

through the manor house to the main hall where many of the back up and logistical crew not involved in the heist itself were socialising.

The first thing that the two men did was discreetly close the south end doorway into the main hall and lock it securely on the outside, they then quickly went around by way of the corridor to the opposite end and secured the north end doorway as well trapping the others inside with no means of escape other than the windows which were also locked.

The next step for the two men was to proceed up the stairs and onto the landing balcony which overlooked the main hall down below. As they looked down the two men could see that no one below had realised anything was amiss as of yet, it was only when the first hail of bullets rang out in among them and some fell to the floor that the panic started.

The two executioners were merciless as they used automatic weapons to gun down the twenty or so men below them.

"It's like shooting fish in a barrel one of them remarked as they reloaded having quickly exhausted their first magazines of ammunition before resuming their deadly attack.

After only thirty seconds everyone in their sights lay either dead or dying and so their guns fell silent and they casually chucked them away by tossing them over the balcony sending them crashing to the floor below.

"I'll clean up the stragglers" one of the men confirmed as he took out his silencer fitted hand gun "you set the devices, we'll meet at the car in fifteen."

With a nod of agreement exchanged the two men went their separate ways, one proceeded back downstairs and checked the various rooms to see if anyone remained lurking elsewhere in the building but found nothing so carried on through the abandoned kitchen and out to the barn workshop.

A few mechanics were still there when he arrived in the barn and before they could react the assassin quickly shot them down, killing them instantly. He continued to hold his gun up; always pointing ahead as he moved forwards to make sure no one else was hiding anywhere before looking across at the tank of fuel that was in the far corner which had been installed to fuel the various vehicles the gang had been using for the heist.

"Oh why not" the man casually remarked to himself as he opened fire and shot four holes in the lower part of the tank causing leaks of fuel to come pouring out onto the barn floor.

He let the flammable liquid build up a bit as he took out a cigarette and stepped outside before striking a match and lighting it and then tossing the still alight match back through the door towards the flow of fuel.

"And now for the big bang..." he then remarked as he wisely walked away from the barn where a few moments later the fuel flow reached the smouldering match and ignited.

"All set inside" the other assassin reported as he joined his colleague outside the barn.

"You may want to step back a bit" the first man strongly advised as a bright orange fiery glow began to emit from the open doorway.

"Err yes" the second man quickly agreed and they duly walked briskly away.

A few moments later the fire which was spreading rapidly thanks to the ignition of the flow of fuel reached the storage tank and caused a large explosion which virtually destroyed the entire barn in a single moment sending burning debris into the air and showering down for some distance all around.

"That will wake the neighbours" the second assassin remarked as they looked back at the fiercely burning wreckage.

"Nearest neighbours are fifteen miles away" the first assassin reminded his colleague "so do you want the honour?" he asked as they reached their car parked safely away from the barn and manor house.

"Here we go" the second assassin remarked as, having retrieved a control box from the front passenger seat of the car, he switched it on and started to press a sequence of buttons.

The first of these controlled the device that Hansell had left nestling in amongst the brandy soaked documents on the desk in Villiers office next to his dead body. It began to bleep quickly and ominously before detonating by effectively emitting electrical sparks that ignited the brandy and within a few moments saw fire quickly engulf the desk before spreading to the entire room.

As he worked his way through the buttons, a number of other similar devices placed throughout the manor house duly ignited and began a series of small fires throughout the building but he then paused as he reached the last one on the panel.

"I've saved the best until last" the second assassin explained to his colleague "nice little party piece strapped to the gas main in the kitchen" he explained before pressing it.

A split second later a massive explosion ripped through the kitchen and former servants section at the end of the house blowing out the windows and sending more burning debris into the air as flames began to emit fiercely from the windows, doors and a few moments later the roof.

"Nice work" the first assassin remarked to his colleague as they stood there for a couple of minutes and watched as the fires spread rapidly and began to engulf large sections of the manor house sending a huge orange glow up into the sky.

The two men then decided it was time to leave and so proceeded to their car where as they got in a thought occurred to the second assassin.

"I know this place is pretty remote place but surely this is going to attract someone's attention" he remarked as he started the car and they proceeded to drive away.

"That's the idea" the other assassin confirmed with a knowing smile "I just hope it attracts the right person" he ominously remarked as they headed off into the night with the fierce glow of the fire behind them illuminating the sky all around.

"Attention all units" Hansell called over the radio to everyone in the convoy formed up tightly behind his car as lead vehicle "We are going to pull into this lay-by up ahead in about two hundred yards. Maintain radio silence please" he then reminded everyone as his driver slowed the car down and prepared to pull over as instructed.

"What now?" Garforth asked as he duly followed Hansell's car into the large lay-by by the side of the road they had been travelling along.

"I reckon this is the point where we part company" Wallace remarked as they came to a stop with the rest of the convoy following suit immediately behind them.

"Here we go" Garforth motioned his head ahead in indication as Hansell was seen to get out of his car, look around with a cautious stance and then proceed around to his drivers side window.

"All right fellas" Hansell greeted them.

"How do" Garforth responded in return.

"Time to get this party started" Hansell confirmed as he looked at his watch for a moment "As we discussed, you guys go on ahead and enter the Codmore Hill site" he instructed "you should have no problem gaining access, call it a routine security check or something, they do have them from time to time from the local plod."

"Roger that" Garforth confirmed

"Once you are inside go straight up the access road to the main buildings and then radio in" Hansell continued to instruct "I need to know exactly how many guards you can see from the front gate right through to the main door."

"Seems straightforward enough" Wallace agreed.

"All right then guys" Hansell then declared "Off you go and good luck."

"See you later" Garforth confirmed although by now both he and Wallace were pretty certain that would probably be the last they saw of him for quite some considerable time.

Hansell watched as the patrol car pulled out into the road and drove off, quickly accelerating to a high speed before disappearing off around the corner. Once it was out of sight he then reached for his radio and entered a four digit number code into the control panel.

"All units" Hansell then called "our guests are now away, everyone is to switch to the alternate frequency at the end of this broadcast and we then proceed to the target location at best speed. One out."

With that declaration Hansell then proceeded to get back in his car whereupon his driver restarted the engine once again.

"Let's roll" Hansell then declared whereupon the driver moved off and turned across the carriageway to travel back in the direction where they had just come from with the rest of the convoy continuing to maintain close formation quickly following behind.

"Right Mr St-John Smythe!" McWilliam prominently declared as she came back into the room with Barwell following behind "Lets try this again and this time I want the truth or otherwise I am going to start getting angry" she then sat down opposite St-John Smythe and stared at him intently to make absolutely sure he got the message "and you won't like me when I am angry."

"I have nothing further to say" St-John Smythe responded although the calm reserved tone of his voice from earlier was now gone and replaced by that of a man clearly becoming increasingly unsettled at his situation and how it was developing.

"Show him the deal" McWilliam called aside to Barwell who produced a manila coloured card folder and opened it, extracting a formal looking document with the seal of the US Central Intelligence Agency prominently printed at the head of it.

"The United States Government is please to offer you full protection, asylum and a new identity in exchange for your co-operation in our ongoing joint investigation" Barwell formally announced as he presented the document by placing it face up on the table in front of St-John Smythe before extracting a pen, clicking it and placing it alongside "all it takes is your signature on the dotted line."

Both McWilliam and Barwell could tell from St-John Smythe's initial reaction that there was at the very least a hint of interest in this potential exit from the situation that had now presented itself.

"Let me put it this way" McWilliam advised "You are well over retirement age now, you have no major outgoings, this is your chance to enjoy a peaceful secure retirement somewhere a dam sight warmer than here in the UK. That sort of offer doesn't drop into your lap every day now does it?"

Initially St-John Smythe said nothing, he merely extracted his antique reading glasses from his inside jacket pocket, perched them on the end of his nose and proceeded to

lean forward slightly to take a closer look at the document in front of him, paying particular attention to the detail contained in the wording therein.

"Hmmm" St-John Smythe remarked to himself before removing his reading glasses once again and looking up "An interesting proposition it must be said but I should point out that those whom have employed my services have far reaching influence" he warned.

"This is a guarantee of your safety from the most powerful law enforcement and security agency in the world" Barwell advised but then noticed the look of incredulity on McWilliams's face at his remark.

"Second?" he then ventured.

"Discounting the UK National Security & Police Service, MI5 and my own organisation of course" McWilliam wryly confirmed.

"You have no idea who these people really are do you?" St-John Smythe remarked as he looked at both of his inquisitors.

"Acquaint me with them then" McWilliam suggested.

"I want guarantees" St-John Smythe demanded.

"All you have to do is sign on the dotted line" Barwell confirmed as he picked up the pen and proffered it once more.

"Hmmm" St-John Smythe contemplated the situation once again for a few moments as he made his decision "All right then, I'll sign" he then announced as he picked up the pen and after a brief pause as he quickly scanned the document once again proceeded to sign his signature in the space provided.

"On behalf of the United States Government" Barwell declared as he took the document away again and returned it to its manila folder for safe keeping "welcome aboard."

"So now that the paperwork is out of the way" McWilliam resumed "let's hear everything you know about these people" she strongly suggested.

"The one thing you need to know most of all is that they are everywhere" St-John Smythe began "For many years the organisation has had very much a passive existence. Its activities have been generally limited to a little influencing here, some tweaking there, some information sharing to the right people, that sort of thing."

"I get the distinct impression that this 'organisation' as you refer to it now has bigger plans" McWilliam remarked.

"Oh if only you knew" St-John Smythe responded almost laughing at the situation for a moment "By this time tomorrow they will have achieved a major power shift in the political spectrum of this country but first there is some housekeeping to be done."

"Such as?" Barwell asked.

"Sadly not everybody subscribes to the organisation's ethos" St-John Smythe went on to explain "therefore it will be necessary to tidy up the few loose ends outstanding, either through conversation or confrontation and if that doesn't work, neutralisation and elimination" he ominously warned.

"So they plan to launch some sort of coup, is that their plan?" McWilliam asked.

"Nothing so common" St-John Smythe responded "just a mere redressing of the political balance of power, a few minor tweaks so that they can get their ideas in the hands of those who are in a position to make them become reality."

"And what are these ideas they have?" McWilliam went on to ask.

"They operate on the simple premise that knowledge is power and the application of that knowledge in the correct place at the correct time can be of immense benefit to the right people" St-John Smythe continued to explain "for many years now they have been formulating policy ideas, funding the leadership and electoral campaigns of those sympathetic to their cause and making available via various back channels certain items of information that would normally be unavailable."

"I think in old fashioned terms that is called bribery and corruption" Barwell remarked.

"No laws have been broken by the organisation" St-John Smythe quickly emphasised "a few parliamentary procedures may have been bent a little but I can assure you all has been done legally. They have one of the most expensive and experienced legal advisory teams in known human history checking every detail."

"So if as you say the organisation is all legal and above board" McWilliam went on to ask "why are they funding and providing classified information to a bunch of thieves who are intent on carrying out a heist on a major high security vault facility?"

"There is nothing illegal about sharing information" St-John Smythe smoothly responded "nor about providing legitimate funds to registered business operations. What those who are in receivership of said funds, real or theoretical actually subsequently do with them is of no matter."

"All right" Amber decided to move things on a little "I want to know who this organisation of yours has in their sights and what they are intending to do about it, and I want to know now."

"You will have to let me have a few minutes" St-John Smythe requested to which both Barwell and McWilliam, having exchanged nods promptly agreed.

With that they both got up and stepped outside the room, Barwell closing the door behind him before calmly taking out the signed document from its folder and looking

at it briefly before proceeding to tear it up into pieces and then chucking them in a waste bin adjacent to him.

"That's a signed federal document" McWilliam remarked "You could get into a lot of trouble for that."

"Oh I doubt that" Barwell replied "It's amazing what you can print off using a couple of downloaded logos and Microsoft Word these days."

"Sneaky" McWilliam responded in admiration "You know what, I am beginning to like your style" she complimented him.

"Shall I put the kettle on again Sir?" Fuller asked the Commander who, sat in a seat in the corner of the mobile operations control truck looked up from the latest issue of Railway Modeller magazine over the top of his small round framed reading glasses.

"Why not" the Commander agreed "Do we have any biscuits left?" he then asked.

"I think Bob had the last ones half an hour ago" Fuller confirmed as he went over to the counter at the far end which was fitted with basic kitchen equipment including a sink and water supply and proceeded to switch on the kettle.

"Nuts..." the Commander responded as he checked his antique railway pocket watch "Remind me next time we have one of these little shindigs, more biscuits to be supplied as standard equipment."

"Kettle's on" Fuller confirmed before returning to his computer console.

"Better radio around and see if anything is happening" the Commander requested.

"Gold Control to Angel One" Fuller proceeded to call over the radio headset he was wearing "Are you receiving, over?"

"Angel One Receiving" Tracy responded from the front passenger seat of the patrol car she was sitting in, parked in the relative warmth inside a farmer's barn.

"How are you doing out there love?" the Commander asked.

"All snuggled in and sharing a fish and chip supper at the moment" Tracy confirmed as she reached across to the dashboard, selected a chip and then dipped it into some ketchup before biting into it.

"Bob's had the last of the biscuits here" the Commander responded as Bob looked up at the ceiling with feigned innocence "I just hope our guests show up soon or we are going to be starving."

"Any signs?" Tracy asked.

"Exactly what I was going to find out" the Commander confirmed as he indicated to Fuller to patch in a line to Commander Cassini "Echo One from Gold Command" he then called "Anything happening out there?"

"Echo One receiving" Cassini whispered in response as from his position up in a tree he surveyed the surrounding area through night vision binoculars "Twas the night before my annual leave and not a creature was stirring" he confirmed.

"Do you ever get the feeling we have been stood up?" Tracy asked.

"Guv" Ziggy called over to Cassini "Seven o'clock" he pointed across to their left.

"Oh" Cassini responded as he turned to look through the night vision binoculars at the area Ziggy had just indicated "Hang about..."

"What have you got?" the Commander asked as he leaned forward.

"Single vehicle" Cassini confirmed as he zoomed in closer on the shape in the distance with its piercing headlight beams clearly visible to him "looks like a car, approaching from the North West."

"Can you make anything out about it?" the Commander asked.

"Saloon car, possibly red" Cassini reported "About two miles out approaching on the lane from the main Haychester to London road" he then lowered his binoculars for a moment in thought before resuming his surveillance through them "Ziggy, is it my imagination or does that vehicle look like one of ours?" he asked his deputy.

"I think you could be right boss" Ziggy confirmed.

"Guesstimate on arrival time?" the Commander asked.

"Should be at the main gate in about two minutes if it maintains present speed" Cassini estimated.

"One of ours?" Bob asked as he sensed the tension had begun to rise.

"Not exactly" the Commander cryptically replied before reaching for the radio "All units from Gold Command" he then announced "Be alert, vehicle approaching. You know what to do" he instructed.

A couple of miles away Garforth was concentrating on driving down the narrow twisty lane with Wallace looking forwards from the front passenger seat and stifling a yawn.

"Not keeping you up are we?" Garforth asked, not taking his eyes off the road ahead "We are nearly there."

"I am a logistics and support type of guy normally, not front line" Wallace explained "and I have been up since five this morning" he added.

"I know the feeling" Garforth agreed as he turned off the narrow lane onto the wider road that led to the gates of the Codmore Hill complex "but best be awake as we are here" he then announced as he slowed down and indicated to turn right.

After checking that the way was clear, Garforth turned right and came to a stop with the front of the patrol car facing the main gate whereupon two security guards appeared from the office alongside and came up to the side windows.

"Evening" Garforth called to the Security Guard who was stood alongside his side window whereupon he proffered a fake but realistic looking Security & Police Service identification and warrant card whilst Wallace did the same on the other side to the other guard "Local Control at Haychester asked us to look in and check everything is all right, just routine" he informed them.

"Yeah, no worries mate" the guard responded having examined the warrant card and then handed it back before he indicated to his colleague "Open the gate" he called across.

The wide metal gates that blocked the way ahead began to open with a deep whirring noise before the two guards gestured the car through whereupon the gates closed once again behind them.

"Well that was easy" Wallace remarked as Garforth drove slowly and carefully up the long driveway that led to the centre of the site where the main buildings that made up the Codmore Hill complex were situated.

"A little too easy for my tastes" Garforth openly admitted "So the question is now what do we do?" he asked.

"Main entrance over there looks a winner" Wallace suggested as ahead of them the main buildings came into view of their headlights and Garforth turned to drive up to the armour plated main doorway.

"Perhaps we should knock?" Garforth wryly remarked but at that moment the doors began to open and the light from inside the building shone out, illuminating the car and the ground immediately outside.

"Then again..." Garforth then remarked before slowly advancing the car forwards into the loading and vehicle reception area inside.

"ARMED OFFICERS!!" came the sudden shouting as a large number of fully armed Security Service officers suddenly appeared and deployed all around the car, surrounding them and cutting off any hope of escape "Turn off the engine, put your hands up!" came the loudly barked order.

"All right, all right" the Commander then called as he came through the ranks of armed officers, all still pointing their weapons directly at the car "you can stand down" he confirmed.

"Evening little bruv" Garforth remarked as the Commander came up to the side window whilst all around them the armed officers began to stand down and withdraw.

"Evening" the Commander responded "Do you know what, you actually brush up quite well in a proper uniform" he remarked.

"Thank you" Garforth replied "Erm, can I put my hands down now."

"Oh yes, of course" the Commander confirmed as he realised that both Garforth and his passenger still had their hands up "And you are?" he then asked the passenger.

"Sam Wallace" he confirmed "Part time CIA, full time general dogs body."

"So" the Commander then asked "What's the plan?"

"Once we have accessed the premises we are supposed to radio in and confirm the numbers on the ground, most likely ways in, that sort of thing" Garforth confirmed.

"Best get on with it then" the Commander suggested.

"Base from advance party" Garforth called into the radio he had been issued with earlier and then waited as Wallace and the Commander looked on for the response.

Base from advance party, are you receiving, over" Garforth repeated after thirty seconds during which the only response was static.

"Simon!" the Commander called across to the mobile operations truck "get over here" he summoned whereupon Fuller emerged and quickly jogged over.

"What's up?" Fuller asked as he joined them.

"Check this out" the Commander requested whereupon Garforth passed the radio across to Fuller who proceeded to examine it carefully.

"Coded frequency, VHF system, seems straightforward" Fuller remarked "the frequency is dead as the proverbial dodo though" he then confirmed.

"How are we to report in?" Wallace asked.

"You don't" the Commander reluctantly concluded "I think it is fairly safe to say that you two have been made and we that we have been had."

"Eagle One to Echo One" the Commander then called urgently into his radio as he went over to the doorway and looked out into the darkness outside "any sign of anybody else?" he asked.

"Eagle One from Echo One" Commander Cassini responded as he and his team continued to scour the surrounding area through the night vision binoculars "Except for a couple of deer near the eastern perimeter and a few dozing cows, I can confirm not a creature is stirring for at least three miles in every direction."

"Ever get the feeling you have been had?" Tracy asked.

"Well big bruv" the Commander remarked to Garforth as he joined him at the doorway "it looks like you were less the advance party and more the entire circus."

"So I take it the bad guys are not coming then?" Fuller asked.

"Not here at any rate" the Commander confirmed "Our little duck blind has been turned against us and we walked straight into it" he remarked with an obvious sense of controlled frustration as he reached for his own radio "All units from Eagle One" he then announced "stand down immediately and return to the main building. We have been well and truly stood up."

"Eagle One from Angel One" Tracy was then heard to call over the radio "What's occurring?" she asked.

"Looks like we have been sent on a wild goose chase love" the Commander confirmed.

"Well that doesn't make sense" Tracy responded quizzically "You don't put that much top dollar talent, resources and equipment together unless you mean to use it. They have got to be somewhere getting up to something."

"Tracy love, get back here as soon as you can" the Commander requested.

"On my way" Tracy confirmed as she got back in her car and started the engine.

"So where are the bad guys then?" Bob asked as he joined them having stood down his team seeing as there was clearly nothing for them to do.

"A very good question" the Commander agreed as he turned smartly on his heels and headed back to the mobile operations truck.

"Simon" he called as he came in.

"Can I safely assume all didn't go quite according to plan?" Fuller asked.

"That's putting it mildly" the Commander admitted "The bad guys are a complete no show."

"Oh dear..." Fuller responded.

"Pull out everything including every single favour we are owed plus the family silver" the Commander instructed with his customary sense of calm urgency "check everything that our absent guests and their paymasters may have had even the briefest

and remotest access to, any links no matter how improbable and find us probable targets for their little enterprise."

"I'll put a full scale monitor on all listed and unlisted security alarms as well" Fuller added as he got to work on the mammoth task he had been set "I'll get back to you as soon as I find anything" he confirmed.

"Thanks" the Commander responded before returning to the others "So, anyone got any ideas?" he asked.

"We could put the kettle on" Garforth wryly suggested which prompted a few smiles "I don't know about anybody else but I'm parched"

"Will this help?" Wallace asked as he reached inside the Security Service uniform tunic and produced a notebook and passed it across to the Commander "It's a full list of everything they asked me to obtain, weapons, ammunition, communications and ancillary equipment."

"Guns, guns, guns, more guns" the Commander scanned through the pages "Crowbars, electrical equipment, radios, NBC suits..." he tailed off "What the hell is an NBC suit?" he then asked "are they going to a dinner party afterwards or something?"

"Nuclear, Biological and Chemical suit" Fuller announced as he pointed to a computer display alongside on which was showing an internet page "Wikipedia is your friend."

"What the hell?" the Commander quietly exclaimed as he read the information on the Internet page in front of him.

At that moment there was the sound of approaching vehicles screeching to a halt and moments later Tracy came in having driven in at high speed.

"What did I miss?" she asked.

"NBC suits" the Commander responded "apparently our missing gang have a consignment of them" he indicated.

"Not the sort of thing your average crook is wearing these days" Tracy remarked "and certainly not something you need for handling precious metals"

"Indeed" the Commander readily agreed "which leads me to my next question, what the hell are they up to?"

"Let's think this through logically" Tracy suggested "these guys have been planning and preparing for the job for what, weeks, months even so they must be using at least some of that for their true objective" she remarked "There is no way that even the most determined of villains wouldn't go to this much trouble just to send us up the proverbial garden path."

"Wait a minute" Garforth then ventured after a few moments of thought "Didn't you say something about this glorified duck blind of yours being based on the plans of a real live location?"

"Yes" the Commander recalled "a large cash clearing and processing facility in East London and a number of other places, some built, some never started."

"Simon" Tracy called across to Fuller who was still busily working away at the computer terminal "Have you found anything yet?" she asked.

"Sorry, I haven't found anything yet" Fuller apologetically confirmed.

"Try checking out any facilities that have connections to our Codmore Hill duck blind" Tracy instructed "in particular anything that uses the same basic design or was built by the same people. Any connection you can find no matter how insignificant and tenuous it might seem."

"Give me a minute" Fuller responded whereupon all they could all hear was the rapid tapping noise of a computer keyboard and mouse being expertly used as he initiated his specialist refined search.

"Got anything?" the Commander asked.

"Try this for size" Fuller announced "Your Codmore Hill facility is based on plans drawn up by a Government construction contractor called Browne and Upton of Bethnal Green" he explained his initial findings which he was studying on the three large connected computer screens in front of him "The original contract was for a design and build operation with plans for seven facilities but in the end only three were ever started and of those only two completed and the rest of the programme was cancelled when the Government of the time got the proverbial boot at the next General Election."

"Keep talking" the Commander prompted "this is starting to get interesting."

"Codmore Hill was one of the uncompleted ones" Fuller continued to explain "there are two completed facilities were located on the outskirts of Canterbury in Kent and the other is in East Surrey near Guildford."

"You think one of those is the real intended target?" Tracy asked her husband.

"It's a theory that fits the facts" the Commander admitted.

"Well you can scrub the place in Kent off the list" Fuller interjected "according to this it was wiped out by the construction of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link ten years ago."

"In which case may I suggest, and do please excuse the unladylike language that we haul ass?" Tracy suggested.

"A very good idea" the Commander agreed before returning to Fuller "Simon, can you get us exact locations for these various places and get as much armed backup as you can to them ASAP."

"Should be rolling within the next two minutes" Fuller quickly confirmed "Also for your information I have just tried dialling their secure phone lines and they all seem to be down."

"Roger that" the Commander replied as he walked over to where his car was waiting with Kinderley already waiting ready to go.

"I take it all is not going according to plan Sir?" Kinderley asked as the Commander got in the front passenger seat whilst Tracy and Garforth got in the back.

"Plan B Terry" the Commander confirmed "How fast can you get us to Guildford?"

"With this little baby on the roof" Kinderley responded as he reached for the blue flashing light and placed it through the side window onto the roof "faster than you may believe."

"In which case let's get moving" the Commander declared upon which Kinderley duly released the handbrake and quickly accelerated away out of the main door and into the night with Bob and the others following in their own vehicles closely behind.

"Tango Victor Three Seven from Control. Are you receiving, over?" the radio in the patrol car parked in a lay-by on the main Guildford to Crawsham road crackled into life.

Unfortunately there was no one present to immediately take the call as the patrol officer who's vehicle it was, was busy attending to a speeding driver he had pulled over a few minutes earlier.

"This time you are being let off with a warning Sir" the officer, Lieutenant Commander Garry McKenzie of the Surrey & Thames Valley Traffic Unit informed the lucky driver "Next time if you are lucky it will only be a huge fine and a three year driving ban and at worst a fatal collision so drive carefully" McKenzie firmly advised.

"I will, thank you Officer" the understandably relieved driver confirmed but at that moment both his and McKenzie's attention were caught by something approaching them on the otherwise near deserted dual carriageway.

"What the hell...?" McKenzie remarked as he saw the headlights of a convoy of vehicles approaching at considerable speed.

Within moments they were passing him, approximately twenty vehicles including cars, vans and two large trucks which were travelling in excess of the fifty miles per

hour speed limit of that stretch of road and in close formation in a single file with barely half a car length between one vehicle and the next.

"Good luck with that lot Officer" the car driver remarked as the final vehicle of the convoy passed them and rapidly disappeared into the distance with just the glow from the multiple vehicles tail lights still visible.

"Mind how you go Sir" McKenzie advised before rapidly returning to his patrol car where he quickly reached for the radio.

"Central from Tango Victor Three Seven, are you receiving, over" McKenzie called.

"Control receiving" came the swift and urgent sounding response "We've been trying to get a hold of you, we've got a message from Lima Alpha Command and you are the nearest unit."

"Go ahead" McKenzie replied.

"Possible armed break in either in progress or shortly to occur at the Cranleigh Cash Deposit Centre" the Control Room Dispatcher explained as McKenzie listened intently.

"The what?" McKenzie responded "Can you give me a specific location address as I have never heard of it, sorry."

"Linking an upload to your vehicle computer from Central now" came the response whereupon McKenzie got in the car and looked at the computer screen mounted in the centre front console.

"All right" McKenzie responded "What do you want me to do?" he asked.

"Use extreme caution and report back what you find" came the slightly ominous confirmation "Back up is on the way but it will be a little while so sit tight until the cavalry arrives."

"Roger, all received" McKenzie responded as he started the car "I am on my way" he confirmed as he accelerated away into the night with sirens and lights in full cry.

"Ah back on home turf" Kinderley remarked as he expertly drove around a roundabout at high speed barely missing a beat or slowing down "I grew up around these parts."

"Are the others still with us?" the Commander asked whereupon Tracy looked back over her shoulder out of the rear window.

"Just about" she confirmed "Bob is driving the wheels off of his motor trying to keep up, I think we may have lost Cassini though."

"Not really surprising given the state of that tatty old van he uses" Garforth remarked.

"All part of the art of general sneakiness in which he and his highly devoted little team specialise" Tracy explained "a nicely battered old Transit van rarely attracts attention."

"Well except for that one time a few months back when Essex Division Traffic thought it was potentially a vehicle with no MOT and pulled him over one morning" the Commander recalled with an amused smirk.

"Which way do you want me to go at the next roundabout?" Kinderley inquired as he nodded ahead to the well lit interchange that was coming rapidly closer.

"What are the options?" the Commander asked.

"We can either take the longer route by the main road or else there is the shorter option but that means potentially winding up upside down in a hedge as it's narrow single track country lanes most of the way" Kinderley warned.

"I say we take the risk" Tracy suggested.

"You heard the good lady" the Commander confirmed.

"All right then ladies and gents, hold on to your hats, this is where things get interesting" Kinderley confirmed as they reached the roundabout and with a merest hint of braking and a turn of the wheel he steered the car off the main road and onto the narrower lane.

"Eagle One from Tango Victor Control" the radio in the Commander's car suddenly interrupted causing its intended recipient to pause his intensive train of thought for a few moments before reaching for the handset.

"Eagle One receiving" the Commander confirmed "pass your message, over."

"We have had no alarms from that facility near Guildford that your office asked us to check on" the Thames Valley Divisional Control Room supervisor confirmed "We have a Traffic Division unit in the area whom we have dispatched to take a discreet look and report back."

"Tell whoever it is to use extreme caution and wait until backup arrives before they do anything" the Commander strongly advised at which point Kinderley, despite concentrating intently on driving silently attracted his attention.

"Wait one" the Commander requested over the radio before holding it against his chest to muffle the microphone.

"See if you can find out who is on that Traffic Unit Sir" Kinderley suggested.

"Tango Victor control from Eagle One" the Commander returned to the radio "Can you confirm the identity of your Traffic Division Unit crew please?" he formally requested.

"Yes Sir" came the swift response "It's a single manned unit, Lieutenant Commander Garry McKenzie."

"One of yours?" the Commander asked Kinderley to which he nodded in reply.

"Worked with him for many years" Kinderley confirmed "One of the best in the Section."

"How long before we get there?" the Commander asked.

"At this speed" Kinderley nodded towards the dashboard which despite the narrow twisty rural lanes they were speeding down was registering speeds in the seventy to eighty miles per hour range "about ten minutes, fifteen tops."

Apart from a screeching owl in the nearby trees, the crunching sound of the wheels of McKenzie's patrol car was about the only sound that could be heard as with the lights and sirens turned off he drove very slowly up the access road that ran across the back of the secure facility on the outskirts of Guildford.

"Is there anybody there?" McKenzie remarked quietly to himself as he looked all around for any signs of activity, legal or illegal but all he found was still undisturbed silence.

"Control from Tango Victor Three Seven" McKenzie called discreetly into his radio "On scene but as far as I can tell there is nobody home. This isn't a wind up is it?"

It was then as no response was received to his call that he realised there was no signal on the radio in that relatively rural location which prompted him to try his mobile phone instead only to find that it too had no signal, effectively cutting him off from the outside world and leaving him without any possibility of summoning assistance.

"Fantastic..." McKenzie remarked as he realised the nature of the situation. It was then as he continued to drive slowly along the lane that he noticed a hole in the ten foot high security fence that otherwise enclosed the site.

He duly stopped the car immediately adjacent to the hole in the fence and after thinking about how to handle this McKenzie reached for a torch and, after winding down his side window, shone its beam of light outwards.

"Could be really big mice I suppose" McKenzie commented to himself as the torch beam illuminated the hole clearly showing it to be approximately five feet square and very neatly cut before checking once again that he still had no usable signal on either his radio or mobile phone.

"Ah sod it" McKenzie remarked to himself as his many years of experience in the Service told him to investigate further "lets go and see what's occurring" he declared as having checked his firearm, he got out of the car.

Cautiously and methodically McKenzie cast the light of the torch up and down the length of the fence and then cast it all around the immediate surrounding area but apart from the hole in the fence previously identified there was nothing visibly or audibly out of place.

Instinctively his thoughts were to check further whilst maintaining caution as per the instructions he had received but with no communications available to him there was no way he could report either his small discovery or his current whereabouts and situation.

With the torch in his right hand and his left hand holding his gun in its hip holster just in case, McKenzie proceeded to step carefully through the hole in the fence and into the grass covered grounds of the secure site itself.

By now McKenzie's eyesight was getting used to the darkness and he was able at least to make out the vague outline of a couple of buildings located approximately half a mile inside the boundary fence.

With nothing else visible worthy of further investigation McKenzie started to walk towards the distant buildings. As he approached, he could clearly see that there were a number of fairly innocuous and all but identical industrial type structures in the mist.

Curiously however there was no sign of activity and only a few bulkhead lights around the supposed front of what appeared to be the main building shed any illumination on the scene other than that from McKenzie's torch which he continued to scan around to check the corners for any potential unpleasant surprises.

Such was the darkness McKenzie almost failed to notice the grassed ground gave way down a slope to a concrete surfaced area below until he was almost on top of it and only narrowly avoided slipping down the bank.

It was still a barely controlled scabble that got him down to the concrete surface level which despite the limited illumination proved to be just about visible as some sort of loading area for the adjacent buildings.

The only sounds audible were a slight hum from the few lights that were on plus a faint rattling noise which with a little investigation McKenzie discerned was coming from a rather battered old air conditioning unit mounted on the side of a small building nearby.

There also appeared to be some light coming from the same building so with caution McKenzie made his way towards it.

As he drew closer McKenzie was able to identify a sign on the small hut like building which read 'Site Security Office' which seemed a pretty logical place to him to find out what if anything was happening here from the on site security personnel.

Continuing to maintain the utmost caution, McKenzie maintained the hold he had on his still almost fully holstered firearm as he carefully opened the door and once looking around the corner of the door pillar to ensure that it was safe to do so, he proceeded inside.

Much like the rest of the site, the security office appeared deserted. As was typical of such facilities it consisted of a small portacabin basically furnished with a few chairs, tables, a couple of lockers and some other bits and pieces.

The half drunk mugs of coffee and open packet of biscuits on the table together with the coats hanging up on the adjacent wall showed that someone had been there very recently however.

Having looked around the room, McKenzie was about to leave when something caught his eye over in the far corner of the room.

"Oh hang on a minute" McKenzie remarked to himself before cautiously going back over to the far corner of the room where there was a large covered object of some kind which was obscured from view by a tarpaulin sheet that had been placed over it.

It was the tiny bit of red liquid that had started to appear from beneath the edge of the sheet that had made McKenzie take a second look and so with some trepidation he carefully knelt down and slowly lifted the edge of the sheet.

"Oh shit..." he responded upon discovering the bodies of the two site security guards, their untimely and violent end having been at the receiving end of a firearm of some sort judging by the bullet holes readily evident.

Once again McKenzie checked both his radio and his mobile for any signal and once again neither had any connection to the outside world. Thinking quickly he then decided to check the dead security guards for mobiles but then noticed that they had already been removed by whoever their assailants were and smashed.

McKenzie respectfully replaced the sheet back over the bodies before noticing the land line telephone still intact on the desk but as per his expectations picking up the handset revealed the line to be dead, most likely cut off somewhere externally before the security guards were attacked.

"I don't like the looks of this" McKenzie remarked quietly to himself before moving on, deciding to cautiously check out the rest of the site.

The main building that dominated the site was his next choice and as he approached the large loading bay doorway he could see it had been recently forced open. However if anyone had used this point of entry then he concluded that the chances were whoever was responsible was almost certainly long gone as there were visibly no vehicles present anywhere on the site.

With a cautious stance and with gun drawn McKenzie proceeded inside the building.

Immediately inside the door was a large warehouse distribution like area with only some casually discarded goods trolleys and some empty wooden packing crates littered about the place giving the impression that someone had left the place in a hurry.

Aside from the humming from the lights and a gentle wind ruffling through the trees outside, all McKenzie could hear was his own heart beating quite rapidly.

It was clear to him that there was no longer anyone around, whoever had broken into the place were clearly long gone but there was something about the whole situation that disturbed McKenzie considerably, put simply it was just too quiet.

Walking cautiously across the loading area still with firearm drawn and pointing ahead, McKenzie headed towards the far side where a large metal door some ten feet high and at least as much across was set into the wall.

The sign on the door officiously informed all that it was to be kept closed and secured at all times yet it was ajar, unattended and open. Another check of his radio and mobile phone confirmed there was still no way for McKenzie to call for assistance and the internal telephone on the wall immediately adjacent to the huge door had been ripped from the wall and lay in pieces on the concrete floor.

Cautiously stepping through the large door McKenzie continued further into the building and found himself in a wide corridor off which led four doors of regular size but each fitted with secure locks indicating that they potentially blocked the way to something of considerable value.

Three of the doors were still secured tightly as their design indicated they should be but the fourth was unlocked which McKenzie discovered to his surprise and not a little deeply felt discomfort.

Looking inside it was difficult to make out anything as it was almost totally dark in there, only sparse light from the room outside where McKenzie was peering in from provided any form of illumination and even that did not amount to much.

McKenzie attempted to locate his torch only to find it had been damaged and no longer functioned.

"Great..." he responded before placing the useless torch on the floor immediately adjacent to the door and then very cautiously proceeding inside against all his better instincts.

Suddenly as he stepped inside the lights came on, a mass of fluorescent strip bulbs in the ceiling and along the edge of the floor flickered into life in a typical uneven pattern until they were all lit and McKenzie found himself bathed in light.

"Motion sensitive lights" McKenzie correctly concluded "very classy" he remarked before moving on slowly down what was now revealed to be a corridor lined with what seemed to be rows of small locked metal cupboard doors somewhat reminiscent of the sort found in a safety deposit vault but obviously intended for the secure storage of something larger and more specific.

"What the hell is this place?" McKenzie asked himself as he tried the locks on a few of the cupboard doors to find them all still fully secured.

At the far end of the long corridor was another secure doorway all but identical to the one that he had passed through a couple of minutes earlier only this one had an internal quick release mechanism fitted so that anyone trapped in there would be able to get out easily.

As McKenzie approached the door at the far end the lights behind him started to extinguish whilst at the same time the lights all around the doorway illuminated showing him the way out.

It was with some trepidation that McKenzie stepped up to the door and placed his hand on the release lever mounted on it before pressing it down.

With a loud clunk the complicated mechanism of the door released and it opened.

"Armed Security Service Officers. Do not move!!!" McKenzie suddenly found himself bathed in light and confronted by over a dozen armed Security Service officers as the order was shouted at him.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa!" McKenzie called out "I'm one of the good guys" he protested, wisely putting down his firearm before raising his hands in the air.

"I hope you will not be offended if I ask you for your identification" the Commander asked as he stepped forward.

"Of course Sir" McKenzie agreed, recognising the Commander straight away as he reached inside his uniform tunic pocket and extracted the official warrant card.

"You can put your hands down by the way" the Commander then added "I think we can safely say we are all on the same team here" he confirmed as he checked the warrant card by the light of a torch "and I can also confirm that your credentials are impeccable Commander McKenzie" he then declared as he handed him back his identification.

"Pardon me for stating the obvious" Tracy asked as she re-holstered her weapon and stepped forward "but has anyone seen any bad guys around here?"

"I came in what I presume is the back way" McKenzie confirmed "Two dead guys in the internal security office and signs of forced entry into what looks like a loading area of some kind but other than that I reckon nobody's home."

"We are being given the run-around big time if you ask me" Tracy suggested to which the Commander nodded in agreement.

"I concur love" he responded before looking around once again as if in the hope of some kind of divine inspiration "What exactly is this place anyway?" he then asked.

"Some kind of secure storage and distribution place I reckon" McKenzie responded "the thing is Sir I can't believe anything was taken, indeed this whole place has a kind of mothballed feeling about it if you ask me."

"Well they have got to be somewhere" the Commander responded as he proceeded to take his notebook out of his uniform tunic pocket and examine it "Look, the way I reckon it, we are being deliberately sent on a carefully laid breadcrumb trail to keep us occupied all night chasing our own tails" he commented.

"I think we can safely say its working" Garforth agreed.

"What are these alleged bad guys using for transport?" McKenzie asked as he recalled something that he had witnessed earlier in the evening.

"Ideally you are looking for a convoy of vehicles consisting of high spec cars, light goods vans and a couple of heavy trucks travelling in close formation" Garforth responded.

"I have seen such a convoy" McKenzie recalled "fifteen or twenty vehicles passed me at high speed in close formation as I was dealing with a roadside ticket" he confirmed.

"Where was this?" Tracy asked sensing like the others the merest hint of a possible breakthrough in an otherwise increasingly frustrating evening.

"Chuck us that map and some light" McKenzie asked.

"Here you go" Garforth responded handing over his maps which between them they opened and then positioned flat on a large wooden crate before examining it.

"Okay, where the hell are we?" the Commander asked.

"Over here" McKenzie indicated "that convoy I saw were down here heading north east along the main London road."

"Completely the wrong direction for this place" Garforth remarked "even allowing for a circuitous cleaning route that would still put them nowhere near here or indeed your Codmore Hill duck blind."

"Speaking of which, what exactly is this place?" Tracy asked.

"Mothballed private secure facility with a token security presence on site to keep the casual visitors away" the Commander confirmed "we have been played with a stage dressed duck blind of their own."

"So we are looking for other targets that have some sort of connection to this place that is somewhere along this general line of route" Tracy remarked.

"Well wherever they were going, they were certainly in one hell of a hurry to get there" McKenzie confirmed.

"Let's take another look at that list Simon gave us" the Commander suggested as he extracted his notebook from his tunic pocket and after fumbling through its tired dog-eared pages he found the notes that he was looking for.

"All right" the Commander then declared "I'll read these out and you plot them on the map" he instructed before reading out the first.

"Bordon Lane Chemical Storage, Tinsley Green" he then announced.

"Over here near Gatwick Airport" Tracy pointed out.

"Unlikely" Garforth remarked "Too much security in that general area only a phone call away. The authorities would be on top of them before they had even parked let alone broken into the place."

"East Grinstead" the Commander then called out "Sealed Environmental Storage Operations in Hangar Lane."

"Outside possibility" Tracy remarked "that description covers a multitude of possibilities."

"Agreed my love" the Commander responded "It doesn't necessarily have to be cash, gold or diamonds they are after, plenty of other commodities of high value around if you have the connections to move it on discreetly and Villiers certainly has that."

"Anything else?" Tracy asked.

"What looks like a Customs & Excise clearing house in Kent, just the other side of Tonbridge and some sort of research establishment near Horsham" the Commander read from his hurriedly scribbled notes "No idea what that could be but it does seem to have some sort of Ministry of Defence code attached to it so could be of interest to our Mr Villiers and his associates."

"I don't follow" Garforth then cut in "What's the connection to this place and our Codmore Hill duck blind?"

"All designed by the same architect" the Commander explained "and therefore all using the same basic structure with some variation and modification so if you research one or two you have the basic foundations for what you may find in any others the same guy had a hand in, certainly enough with a little extra homework to conduct a raid on the place."

"In which case I suggest we split up" Tracy proposed "We have three places to check and probably not very long to check them in."

“Sounds like a good idea” the Commander agreed “McKenzie, you take one of Bob’s teams and Mr Garforth here and check out this place near Horsham” he instructed.

“Yes Sir” McKenzie confirmed.

“I’ll take the East Grinstead place” the Commander then continued “Tracy love, you take the rest of Bob’s team and get over to this one in Kent as fast as you can and see what is going on over there.”

“You’ll need back up” Tracy strongly advised.

“I’ll pick up a team on the way” the Commander reassured her “The specialist armed team at Gatwick should be available.”

“I’ll get the Haychester Area Office to send a couple of guys over to this place at Tinsley Green just on the off chance” Tracy added as they all prepared to depart.

“Right everyone” the Commander issued his final orders before they all left “Let’s all use extreme caution; these guys when we find them are determined, armed and extremely dangerous. All right then, good luck everybody” he then declared before they all duly departed.

Outside in the car park outside the front entrance of the site there was much activity as the Commander was the last to emerge with numerous officers getting into their vehicles, the sound of revving engines and sirens filling the air.

“Be careful love” Tracy urged the Commander before they kissed.

“I will I promise” the Commander readily agreed before seeing his wife off, departing as the front passenger in Bob’s Armed Response Unit van with lights and sirens in full cry.

The Commander also watched the others depart in quick order from the site before going over to his own car and getting in the front passenger seat.

“Nice to see Garry McKenzie again” Kinderley remarked as he started the car “It’s been a while.”

“Seems to be a decent sort of chap” the Commander readily agreed.

“So, where to Sir?” Kinderley asked as he proceeded to drive out of the car park towards the main gate where a guard of local uniformed officers was now stationed to secure the premises and investigate the seemingly pointless break in that had occurred and cost the lives of two private security guards.

“East Grinstead” the Commander instructed “Quick as you can” he then requested.

“You got it Sir” Kinderley confirmed as he activated the unmarked car’s lights and sirens before accelerating to full speed as they came out onto the main road and began to head eastwards.

They had travelled barely a mile when the Commander was suddenly startled by his mobile telephone bleeping which prompted him to retrieve it and after fiddling with the device for a few moments managed to extract the message he had just received.

“That’s odd” Kinderley remarked “I thought we were still in the communications black spot here.”

“We are” the Commander “At least...” he then tailed off.

“Something wrong Sir?” Kinderley asked, sensing something was not right.

“Look for yourself” the Commander offered up as some form of explanation, showing Kinderley the screen of his Blackberry.

“Mr Villiers requests the pleasure of your company” Kinderley read from the screen “How the hell...?”

“The communications blackout must be down to Villiers or one of his technically savvy associates” the Commander confirmed “I still don’t have a signal yet I just got this.”

“So who called for the backup back there then?” Kinderley asked “because those local lads somebody sent for didn’t just appear out of thin air” he remarked.

“I thought that was you” the Commander asked.

“No communications available” Kinderley responded.

“Flip this thing around, we’re going back” the Commander suddenly requested.

Kinderley instantly responded to the Commander’s order by hitting the brakes and then skilfully turning the car through a handbrake turn before, amid much squealing and tyre smoke he rapidly accelerated back up the road the way they had just come.

“Would you mind telling me Sir what you expect to find?” Kinderley asked as in a short time they were once again approaching the site.

“Well unless someone rustled up a carrier pigeon then those officers on the gate are most definitely not ours” the Commander remarked “Pull up just here and lose the lights” he then instructed.

“Roger that” Kinderley agreed as he slowed to a crawl, shut off the headlights and then brought the car to a halt in a lay-by a short distance down the road from the site.

The Commander looked straight ahead for a few moments, observing the movements of a couple of armed men in Security Service patrol uniforms who were standing

outside the main gate, oblivious to the Commander's presence and to his experienced eye looking decidedly out of place.

"No transport" Kinderley quietly commented "but I bet they didn't walk here."

"And they didn't fly in either otherwise someone would have heard them" the Commander agreed "which means they were probably already here before we arrived."

"So what is the plan Sir?" Kinderley asked as he observed the Commander reach around onto the back seat of the car and retrieve his rarely worn uniform cap.

"Walk right in through the front door" the Commander responded as he reached forward and opened the glove compartment in front of him, extracting one of the two semi-automatic Glock pistols which he checked before placing it carefully into the lining of his cap.

"Right..." Kinderley responded, clearly unconvinced.

"Trust me" the Commander explained even if it was slightly evasively "I'll be all right, after all I have an invitation and this is a meeting I have been expecting."

"Do you want me to come in with you Sir?" Kinderley asked "after all I am supposed to be in charge of making sure you don't get into trouble, Home Secretary's orders."

"Bollocks to the Home Secretary" the Commander wryly responded.

"I had the strangest feeling you were going to say that Sir" Kinderley remarked with a wry smile.

"Stay here, keep your head down and if I am not back in an hour, drive to the nearest working telephone and call for assistance" the Commander instructed as he opened the car door.

"Good luck Sir" Kinderley called after him as he got out of the car.

"Thanks" the Commander responded before gently closing the car door and turning smartly on his heels to face the direction of the gateway. He then proceeded to carefully put his cap on his head, adjusted it slightly so that it was comfortable and then started to walk purposefully ahead.

Reaching the gate the Commander could see despite the poor quality of the limited lighting around that the two men on the gate were not genuine Security Service officers, their poor quality facsimile uniforms were fine at an initial glance earlier but close up it was clear he was looking at a couple of hired thugs with guns and little else.

"Good evening gentlemen" the Commander announced as he approached the gatehouse and stood before the two armed men "I believe I am expected."

The men said nothing, merely looked the Commander up and down for a few moments before stepping aside to allow him to pass between them and through the gate.

As he approached the main building, even such an experienced officer as the Commander could not help but feel distinctly uneasy at the situation he now found himself in, however ever the professional, he kept his feelings hidden inside whilst maintaining a calm and controlled demeanour on the outside.

Ahead a large automatic door that led to another part of the complex opened as he approached, a spotlight over the door coming on to illuminate the path ahead that someone wanted him to take to his as yet unknown destination.

Although there was no one in his immediate vicinity, the Commander knew full well he was being watched and that there were almost certainly numerous unseen armed men in the shadows either side of him making sure that he stuck to the lit path that was being laid out before him.

Entering through the door which closed behind him, the Commander found himself unable to make out where he was other than the immediate area he was standing in, the door now firmly shut behind him and some sort of corridor leading off ahead into the pitch darkness, the only illumination being from a single strip light immediately above his head.

“Ah well, best foot forward” the Commander remarked to himself and started to walk purposefully ahead. As soon as he moved forward the lights set in to the walls and ceiling began to automatically come on, some of them randomly flickering a little longer than others until after a few moments the entire length of the corridor was lit.

The corridor was approximately fifty yards long and now fully illuminated, the only features in it was a door at the far end which appeared to be identical to the one through which he had just entered.

Approaching the door at the far end a few moments later, the Commander then stood in front of it before looking up to his left where he noticed a discreetly installed CCTV camera.

Momentarily the lens in the front of the camera could be seen to move as its unseen operator focused on the Commander, this leading a few moments later to the door ahead opening and the lights in the corridor behind him switching off as mysteriously as they had come on a minute or so earlier.

The room he stepped into was small and it was not until the door closed quickly behind him that the Commander realised he had in fact stepped into an elevator which had a locked panel over the controls to which he had no access.

As it turned out he didn't need it as with an ominous whirr of electric motors and a slight judder, the elevator car began to descend into a sub-basement level but how many storeys down was a mystery as there was no indicator whatsoever inside.

“At least it doesn’t have any piped muzak” the Commander remarked quietly to himself as he waited for the elevator to stop which it duly did a few moments later and the doors opened.

"Come in Commander, we've been waiting for you" an authoritative voice called from out of the darkness whereupon lights gradually came on illuminating a large oval table in the centre of the room around the far side of which were sat around twenty individuals of various colours and creeds, all watching the Commander as he looked on from his position still standing in front of the elevator door which at that point closed behind him, cutting off his only obvious route out of there at least for now.

"I have been wondering when this meeting would take place" the Commander admitted as he proceeded to approach the table whereupon a man appeared from the shadows and politely took the Commander's uniform overcoat before showing him to the vacant seat at the centre of the table facing all the others with the speaker who had addressed him sat in the centre immediately opposite.

"You were certain about this meeting happening then?" the speaker asked as the man in the shadows returned, bringing the Commander a cup of freshly made tea and placing it on the table in front of him before discreetly withdrawing back into the shadows once more.

"Sooner or later I as head of the country's Security, Police and Justice system would have to meet you" the Commander confirmed "Two equal and opposite powers, it was inevitable, I presume you are the elusive and mysterious Pyramid Group?" he ventured as he took a sip of tea.

"One group, many identities" the speaker confirmed "Some well known, others far less so."

"Nice tea by the way, thank you" the Commander remarked "just how I like it, I'm impressed."

"We know so much about you Commander" the speaker responded "things even you don't know about yourself, plus of course the little details, how one prefers his tea for example."

"You forgot the..." the Commander remarked but at that moment the man in the shadows briefly returned and placed a bone china plate of his favourite biscuits on the table in front of him "...biscuits" he tailed off.

"Edward James Regent, better known as Eddie but nowadays of course simply The Commander" the speaker announced "married to Tracy Louise Caverner and foster parent to Jack Thornton who I notice here" he consulted a note in the large document file open on the desk in front of him "wants to follow his adoptive parents into the family business."

"You know so much about me" the Commander replied as he took another mouthful of tea before carefully and thoughtfully placing the cup back down again "but if you don't mind me asking, who are you?"

"We are the Pyramid Committee" the speaker confirmed.

"So you would be man in charge?" the Commander suggested

"A voice, a spokesman if you prefer" the speaker responded "There is no leader as such" he went on to explain "We are all equal members of an executive committee, effectively a board of advisors."

"That would explain why you have been so hard to track down" the Commander concluded "we were looking for a hierarchical structure where there was none."

"I speak here tonight on behalf of the Executive Committee of the Pyramid Association group" the speaker confirmed, leaning forwards so that his face became fully illuminated and visible to the Commander for the first time which revealed him to be a slightly stout looking individual, well dressed in a tailor made suit probably from somewhere exclusive like a Oxford University tailor or Savile Row which matched his word perfect diction which suggested a formal private education at some point in his past "you may call me Mr Dawson."

"Not your real name of course" the Commander remarked to which the speaker merely nodded politely in confirmation "Don't worry, I'm used to false names in this job."

"In our line of work a cloak of anonymity is part of the company uniform as it were" Dawson remarked.

"And what may I ask is it you actually do in your 'line of work' as you put it?" the Commander inquired.

"We are those who control, influence and manipulate in order to maximise the benefits for the greater good" Dawson proudly declared.

"Does that include arranging armed robberies and hiring thugs?" the Commander asked.

"We do whatever is necessary in order to achieve our aims" Dawson confirmed "We have abundant resources at our disposal and people sympathetic to our beliefs everywhere."

"And our infamous South African arms peddler and planner of armed robberies Villiers" the Commander inquired "Where does he fit into the corporate vision."

"We have employed his services, at considerable expense I might add" Dawson confirmed "however whilst he is currently in our employ as it were, he's not actually 'part of the programme' as my American colleagues like to phrase it."

"So where is Mr Villiers and his merry men?" the Commander asked "They must be up to something to justify all the effort that has been put in."

"Oh I can assure you Commander that there is indeed a robbery in progress somewhere and when the time comes, once Mr Villiers has fulfilled his contract then you shall have him and his associates delivered to your organisation gift wrapped with our compliments" Dawson confirmed.

"There was never any connection to the Bethnal Green job was there?" the Commander ventured "that and the careful choice of Henry Villiers as your lackey stroke bagman was deliberately designed to get my attention."

"Congratulations Commander" Dawson confirmed "your reputation is proved more than formidable once again."

"So where is the job going down?" the Commander formally requested.

"Oh somewhere in the local vicinity" Dawson evasively replied.

"I had a funny feeling you would say something like that" the Commander remarked.

"We can't give everything away Commander" Dawson responded "where would the fun be in that?" he asked.

"How far reaching is your influence if you don't mind me asking?" the Commander politely inquired as he helped himself to more biscuits.

"We are not at liberty to provide intimate details about our work" Dawson replied "suffice it to say that we are everywhere and nowhere. That reminds me, may I introduce you to our newest member?"

At that moment a light came on and illuminated one of the people sat around the table, revealing it to be none other than Jane Grey, the Home Secretary.

"Well fancy meeting you here" the Commander remarked with mild sarcasm as he was not surprised in the least that she was there.

"Good evening Commander" the Home Secretary replied "I trust you are well?"

"Bit tired" the Commander admitted "So what made you hitch your flag to this little bandwagon?" he asked.

"This organisation is the future" the Home Secretary admitted as she gestured around the room "a future with political stability and clearly defined sense of where this country is going."

"And we would like you to join us" Dawson then added "You have influence, respect and power and we can help you use it more effectively in return for the odd favour now and then to one, some or all of our members from time to time."

"You are having a laugh aren't you?" the Commander responded as a fresh cup of tea was delivered to his side without prompting and the first now empty cup quickly taken away.

"It is a serious and honest offer Commander" Dawson insisted "You have something we do not possess that you could add to our collective."

"That would be honesty and integrity then?" the Commander quickly replied with a wry smile.

"Hmmm" Dawson responded with a disappointed look as he took a moment to consider his response.

"Sorry" the Commander continued "the only thing I ever sign up to is my subscription to Railway Modeller magazine."

"Irrespective of your viewpoint Commander" Dawson then responded "and I must say I am disappointed although not wholly surprised by your response to our very generous offer to join our organisation, we will carry on. Wheels are in motion and we have a lot of work to do."

"Thanks for the tea by the way" the Commander remarked as he lifted the cup up to his mouth "if nothing else, your organisation is remarkably polite."

At that point the Commander proceeded to drink the tea but within a few moments of swallowing the contents suddenly began to look distant and woozy.

"Ah..." the Commander remarked before collapsing face down onto the table, the cup falling from his hand and crashing to the floor where it smashed into many pieces.

"Goodnight Commander" Dawson declared.

The first moment that anyone was aware something was happening was on the dot of 21:30 when a controlled explosion shattered the peaceful evening and rocked the secure site main gates and the internal private security office immediately adjacent came under intense attack from gunfire which killed or severely injured the half dozen personnel inside before they either realised what was happening or were able to raise the alarm.

Moments after the on site security guarding the gate had been confirmed as having been comprehensively neutralised, a number of vehicle's led by a large truck fitted with a kind of snowplough type attachment came speeding through and smashed down the smouldering remains of the main gate before proceeding onto the site.

At that point a number of security personnel appeared from elsewhere on the site and attempted to halt the intruders only to be cut down without mercy by rapid gunfire.

"All right let's do this!" Hansell declared over a radio as he got out of one of the fast cars, automatic firearm in his hand and quickly surveyed the scene.

This was the cue for a group of armed men to proceed to establish and reinforce a perimeter cordon around their operations whilst the specialist entry team proceeded directly to the main door.

The formidable looking door that blocked the way ahead was solid metal comprising amongst its many parts, sheets of solid steel in excess of two feet thick. To tackle this potential problem they had planned carefully and brought one of the best demolition entry teams in the organised crime business, three men who on cue emerged from their van and, carrying a number of metal briefcases proceeded directly to the doors to begin their work.

"Here, here and here" the team leader indicated three points on the doors, marking them with all with a chalked 'X' as all around them the perimeter guards continued to fire off rounds as they finished off what remained of the on site security personnel in addition to disabling the numerous CCTV cameras that were watching over them.

Hansell looked on suitably impressed as the entry team went about its work preparing the door. After a couple of minutes the team leader took a moment to make some final checks before indicating to the others to move back.

"Ready to go Sir" the team leader then announced.

"All right, everybody back" Hansell called out whereupon all personnel quickly moved away and sought safe refuge. Once he could see everyone was back at a safe distance he then gave the nod to the team leader to proceed.

"Fire in the hole!" the team leader called before pressing the plunger on a remote detonator he had in his hand.

Moments later a number of carefully placed shaped charges detonated with loud cracks of noise accompanying bright flashes of light and smoke.

Hansell waited a few moments for the smoke to clear before turning to another team and indicating with a click of the fingers that it was now their turn to leap into action.

At this point a large truck with a heavy duty winch mounted on the rear was backed up to the now badly damaged door and cables connected between it and the winch. Once these were secured the driver of the truck quickly accelerated forward and once the slack ran out in the steel cables the door was wrenched out collapsing in three very broken pieces to the ground with a loud crash before they were then dragged clear out of the way.

"Okay lets load up" Hansell called and duly led the rest of the men in through the still smouldering doorway "Let's get some lights in here" he then called which resulted in a number of portable spotlights being brought in and activated which illuminated the interior of the building.

"Everybody remember what we came here for" Hansell then reminded his men "stick to the lists and no window shopping. We want all the crates down the left here, those large crates over there and any marked 'X5'" he went on to request.

The lifting and shifting team doing the physical moving of the crates and some barrels stood out from the armed thugs who had been doing all the work so far as they were dressed in full chemical protection suits, the need for these being emphasised by the various diamond shaped chemical danger warning symbols marked on the items they were taking.

With this next phase of the operation now in motion a number of large box body vans were reversed up to the doorway and a requisitioned forklift truck was also brought into use for the larger crates, some of which according to the rather vague external markings painted on them weighed in excess of half a ton each.

"Let's move it guys and girls" Hansell called, clapping his hands as the loading operation commenced in earnest "I want to be rolling in ten minutes."

The frenetic activity continued methodically and efficiently as the building was systematically ransacked with large quantities of goods being checked and removed out to the main doorway where a loading team put them on their fleet of vehicles and secured them down to prevent any possible movement in transit.

"Sixty seconds!" Hansell called into the radio as he checked his watch. This was the cue for everyone involved to complete their tasks and prepare to return to their assigned vehicles.

Hansell looked at his watch intently as the seconds counted down until the final moments arrived and he began to count down the last ten seconds.

"All right" he then declared "Everybody out!" he ordered.

There was a flurry of movement as the entire gang proceeded directly to their escape vehicles as quickly as they could. The last to embark were the perimeter armed guards and finally Hansell himself who took one last brief look around the ransacked interior of the building before getting back into his car and shutting the door.

"Okay Mike, lets go" he then instructed his driver whereupon his car led the convoy back down the driveway and through the main gate before disappearing off down the road leaving behind a few flickering embers and a trail of destruction in its wake.

Kinderley was still sat in the Commander's car parked by the side of the road and looking somewhat apprehensive. It had been almost an hour now since the Commander had left and disappeared in through the perimeter gates of the premises.

Checking his watch for the umpteenth time, Kinderley began to wonder what his next course of action should be. He was torn between his orders from the Commander to go and seek assistance and his official remit to protect him at all costs.

It was then that Kinderley noticed that the two guards who had been standing in front of the main gate had now disappeared and to all intents and purposes the surrounding area was now desolate and deserted.

"Eagle One X-Ray to any station" Kinderley then called over the radio in an attempt to see if any communications were now possible but the only response he received once again was loud static. Checking the mobile phone on the dashboard of the car also confirmed the worst, he remained cut off with no communications of any kind.

"Oh Terry, what are you doing?" he then asked himself as he looked across at the glove compartment in thought for a moment. Initially he reached across and opened it revealing the remaining semi-automatic Glock pistol inside but then slammed the compartment shut again and sat back in his seat.

"Bad idea Terry, bad idea" he remarked to himself.

At that moment Kinderley jumped when there was a knock on his side window and he looked out to see to his great surprise the Home Secretary standing there.

"Err..." Kinderley initially responded, slightly disorientated as he lowered the side window "Good evening" he then called.

"You had best get in there" the Home Secretary informed him "You will find the Commander in a conference room on the basement level."

"Yes Maam" Kinderley replied as he reached back to the glove compartment and opened it again.

"And if anyone asks, I was never here" the Home Secretary insisted.

"Right you are Maam" Kinderley agreed as he extracted the firearm and turned back to the side window only to see the Home Secretary had disappeared into the darkness as quickly, quietly and mysteriously as she had appeared.

"I have really got to cut down on late night toffee eating" Kinderley remarked to himself as he got out of the car and proceeded to holster the weapon and two spare clips of ammunition on his belt before locking the car and then looking all around to see if anyone was in the vicinity.

"Now where the hell did she go?" Kinderley asked himself as he could see no trace whatsoever of the Home Secretary or indeed anyone "Ah, to hell with it" he then remarked and proceeded with a cautious stance towards the main gates.

The lights that had been illuminating the gates and the site within when the Commander had proceeded inside were now turned off and the entire location and the road outside were in near total darkness.

Kinderley went around to the back of the car and opened the boot to take out a powerful large beam torch which he switched on and swung all around to make a further check of the immediate area but again he found nothing and no one.

Instead he then proceeded towards the main gates which as he approached he could see thanks to the torchlight had been left unlocked and ajar in addition to being unguarded.

"Here goes..." he remarked to himself as he reluctantly drew the gun from its holster and proceeded through the gates before moving up the driveway towards the main building where Kinderley could see a few battery powered emergency lights were still dimly illuminating the main entrance and the interior of the building itself.

With understandable caution Kinderley entered the building and looked around by the light of his torch at the empty and abandoned interior.

Two levels below ground the Commander remained face down on the table unconscious where he had passed out nearly an hour earlier. Since Dawson and the rest of the 'committee' had departed, the only sound present in that all but empty room had been the Commander's shallow breathing and the faint humming of the lights.

The sound of a lift door opening somewhere nearby failed to disturb the Commander from his induced sleep and he still did not stir when Kinderley entered the room, gun still drawn and pointing straight ahead.

"Sir?" Kinderley asked with obvious concern as soon as he saw the Commander and having re-holstered his weapon, came straight over, firstly checking for a pulse and then attempting to shake him awake.

"Are you all right Sir?" Kinderley asked.

"What?" the Commander sleepy muttered as he began to stir.

"Oh thank God" Kinderley responded in relief "What happened?" he then asked as he helped the Commander to sit back up, still somewhat woozy and disorientated.

"Too much tea I guess" the Commander wryly remarked seeing the shattered remains of the smashed tea cup still on the floor alongside him "Anyway, what are you doing down here."

"I got tipped off" Kinderley explained although he still could not quite believe it himself "by the Home Secretary would you believe, at least I think it was her."

"It was" the Commander confirmed "I can assure you that Ms Grey is far more than just a humble politician and Member of Parliament with responsibility for one of the major offices of state, she is also a asset for MI5's Political Operations division."

"Well I never" Kinderley remarked in total amazement as he helped the Commander to his feet.

"Come on, lets get out of here" the Commander declared "there is still so much to do."

With Kinderley providing assistance to the Commander who was still pretty weak as the effects of the knockout drug were still in his system, they headed back up to the ground level in the lift.

"So I take it you found them then Sir?" Kinderley asked as the doors opened and they exited the lift car.

"The so called 'Executive Committee' no less" the Commander confirmed
"Remarkably polite I thought, tea with proper posh biscuits and everything."

"Did you find anything out?" Kinderley asked.

"Something about how they are going to redraw the political map or some such cobblers" the Commander replied as they reached the door and headed down the driveway towards the main gate where Kinderley was able to let the Commander carry on unassisted now that the feeling had fully returned to his legs and he was able to walk pretty much normally.

"Sounds like a load of hot air to me Sir" Kinderley remarked.

"Agreed" the Commander responded "They actually asked me to join them, can you believe that?"

"I presume you told them politely where to shove their offer Sir?" Kinderley asked as they exited through the gates and went over to the car.

"That's was when I made the mistake of accepting more tea" the Commander admitted as they got in the car where Kinderley immediately proceeded to start the engine.

"So, where to Sir?" Kinderley asked as he prepared to drive off.

"The nearest land line telephone" the Commander confirmed "and let's switch the heater on, it's getting a tad chilly around here tonight."

"Any units from Gold Command" Fuller called over the radio as soon as he was sat down at the console in the Down Street control centre where he had been joined by Jennifer.

"Still nothing?" Jennifer asked as she handed her husband a freshly made mug of coffee that he very gratefully accepted.

"Nothing, not a God dam thing" Fuller admitted "All the frequencies are working but I can't get anyone on any of them."

"What about the domestic Security Service frequencies?" Jennifer asked.

"They still work" Fuller confirmed as he put up on one screen a graphical representation of the radio traffic between various units which showed plenty of day

to day communications in progress between officers, sections and control rooms of the Service across London and the south east "it's all our special communications channels for this Codmore Hill operation that seems to have gone dead."

"Technical fault, hackers, mice chewing the cables?" Jennifer suggested.

"I suppose it could have been hacked through the central system" Fuller admitted as he got to work at his computer terminal "If they have then I would expect to see..." he then looked on with a sense of triumph "Ah there you are!" he declared with an obvious sense of triumph.

"Found something?" Jennifer asked as she looked at the same screen except all she saw was to her meaningless techno babble.

"Some sneaky bugger has used a back door into the system that is there for outside sister security organisations to link their systems to ours and vice versa to slide in and by the looks of things neutralise all the connections in the hub of the system" Fuller explained.

"Really?" Jennifer responded although she had not the slightest idea what her husband was going on about but decided to bluff it anyway.

"Of course the question is who has been playing around in our systems" Fuller continued as he worked some more on the computer terminal.

Jennifer looked on suitably impressed even though she had no idea exactly what it was he was doing for a couple of minutes and Fuller mumbled to himself various technical sounding terms in his attempt to trace the source of the system hack.

"Dam it" Fuller remarked "I should have put a bet on it" he then indicated an address on the screen to Jennifer who leaned forward and looked at it, still none the wiser.

"Holland Park?" she remarked.

"The unlisted address of the new London offices belonging to no lesser an organisation than the Central Intelligence Agency" Fuller confirmed "They are the ones who buggered up our comms" he declared.

"Can you restore the communications?" Jennifer asked.

"Possibly" Fuller confirmed as he began to work on the problem only to be interrupted by the telephone ringing on the desk alongside him.

"Hello?" Jennifer called on answering the land line telephone.

"Jennifer?" the Commander called "Is that you?" he asked.

"Yes" Jennifer confirmed "Simon has just found out why none of our communications have been working. Seems our system got hacked by someone from the CIA London office."

"Why am I not surprised" the Commander remarked as he wiped the condensation from a panel of glass alongside him.

"Where are you Sir?" Fuller asked once Jennifer put the call on speakerphone.

"In a phone box somewhere in darkest rural Surrey" the Commander confirmed as he looked out of the small panes of glass that made up the sides and door of the traditional red telephone box by the side of the road whose fading and peeling paint clearly showed that with the modern advent and widespread usage of mobile telecommunications meant it was these days little used and neglected.

Outside the rain was now hammering down, drumming on the roof of the telephone box as well as the Commander's car parked alongside with Kinderley remaining at the wheel, safe out of the rain.

"I think I can restore the communications to the entire group" Fuller confirmed "I just need you to give me the word."

"Won't that give the game away that we know what they are up to?" Jennifer asked with a note of caution.

"Too late" the Commander responded "this proverbial horse well and truly bolted some time ago. Let's get everyone back on the air" he then instructed.

"One minute Sir" Fuller confirmed as he proceeded to work once more on his computer terminal "Okay" he then called a few moments later "that should do it."

"All units from Eagle One" the Commander called over his radio "Anyone receiving out there?"

"Angel One receiving" Tracy's voice was then heard almost straight away "Good to hear your voice love."

"Yours too" the Commander responded "Anyone managed to find our bad guys yet?" he asked.

"That's a negative from us" Bob called from his vehicle parked outside one of the other sites he had been sent to check and had found nothing.

"Nothing anywhere as far as I can tell" Tracy agreed "Where are you?" she then asked.

"By a phone box in darkest Surrey getting rather wet" the Commander confirmed as he ran from the phone box back to the car and quickly got in the front passenger seat.

"Uploading the Commander's co-ordinates to your mobile now Maam" Fuller interjected.

"Oh" Tracy looked at the display on her smart phone "We are only a couple of miles away" she indicated to Garforth who was driving to change course showing him the details on the small screen "Rolling to you, should be there in a couple of minutes."

"We'll hold here" the Commander confirmed "What the hell?" he then remarked as he heard distant sirens approaching up that deserted country back road. His experienced ears told him they were not Security Service vehicles approaching with sirens and lights in full cry but something else much larger.

The distant flashes of blue lights quickly came into view in the distance shining brightly against the dark skies as whatever was the source of them came ever closer, the intermittent bursts of sirens interspersed with the loud growling of powerful engines.

"Something wrong?" Tracy asked over the radio.

"Did someone send for the fire brigade?" the Commander asked as the source of the sirens came into view around the corner and came towards them, three Fire & Rescue Service fire appliances approaching rapidly.

"Perhaps it is something to do with that over there?" Garforth motioned ahead towards the near distance where a large orange flickering glow could be seen silhouetted by the top of the hill in front of it.

"Looks like someone is having a bit of a barbeque somewhere" the Commander confirmed as the three fire appliances screamed past and carried on down the road.

"I just had a terrible thought" Garforth remarked "the manor house that Villiers and Hansell were using as a base of operations, that is around here somewhere I think."

"Follow that fire engine" the Commander ordered Kinderley.

"Yes Sir" Kinderley enthusiastically confirmed as he spun the car around, activated the lights and sirens and set off in pursuit of the fire appliance vehicles just visible in the distance down the road ahead.

"We'll join you" Tracy confirmed as Garforth turned off the road they were following to intercept "Bob, bring a detachment of your guys up here as well" she then requested.

A minute later Garforth stopped at a road junction as the fire appliances crossed his path heading to his right and were followed a few moments later by the Commander's car upon which he pulled out and followed on behind.

"Right behind you love" Tracy called over the radio and could see in response the Commander wave back at her through the rear window of his car.

"We are going where I thought" Garforth remarked as he continued to follow what was becoming quite a convoy now as they were joined by another two fire appliances

now behind them making five in total in that group heading towards the source of the bright orange glow on the horizon that as they drove on was getting steadily closer.

"Are you sure?" Tracy asked.

"I have a photographic memory for roads in the same way my illustrious younger brother, your husband has a photographic memory for trains" Garforth explained "Oh yes, I have been here before."

They reached a main gate that led onto the estate and it was there a problem was discovered, a set of securely locked security gates blocking the way ahead so as the fire appliances arrived it became necessary for some drastic action.

"Evening" the Commander called to the Fire Brigade Chief Officer as he showed his identification "Mind if we tag along?" he asked.

"Join the party mate" the Chief confirmed "Barry!" he then called to one of his fire-fighters "get this gate open!" he ordered.

"Yes Sir" the fire fighter responded as he proceeded to the back of the fire appliance and lifted open one of the side storage compartments before extracting a petrol powered circular saw which he then took to the gate and with a deafening noise, began to cut through the secure lock.

Everyone else stood back and shielded their eyes from the bright glow of the sparks flying off the circular blade as it cut through the lock as if it were made of butter before with a loud clunk it gave way and the gate was opened.

"All right, let's go" the Fire Chief ordered whereupon everyone got back in their respective vehicles once more and with the Commander's car leading they headed through the gate and sped quickly up the gravel driveway towards the fiercely burning manor house and outbuildings.

"Good grief!" the Commander exclaimed, reflecting everyone else's opinion as he got out of the car and was joined by Tracy and the others as they looked across at the burning building, flames and smoke emerging from most of the windows and parts of the roof.

"Is this the place?" Tracy asked Garforth as they all stepped back to allow the fire brigade to get on with their work.

"Yes" Garforth confirmed "however I would be willing to bet any chance of finding any forensic evidence here just went up in smoke, literally."

"Mr St John-Smythe" McWilliam declared as she briefly rubbed her eyes "It's late, we are all very tired and so far, despite the excellent assurances that both I and my friend from the CIA here have given you regarding your future wellbeing and safety you still haven't told us anything remotely useful."

"What time is it?" St John-Smythe asked as he looked around.

"Half nine" Barwell confirmed as he looked at his watch.

"Time for the man to see the Queen" St John-Smythe cryptically declared "for the stones are now cast and their plan steps into top gear."

"Evasive and somewhat bizarre" McWilliam remarked.

"The culmination of ten years of careful planning begins right about now" St John-Smythe explained without really actually explaining anything at all "All of their pieces are now in play and the final opening act now begins."

"I still don't have a clue what you are going on about" McWilliam admitted, somewhat dumbfounded as well as painfully tired.

"The Pyramid Group has always sought to influence Governments and their associated agencies to bring about the implementation of their policy ideas" St John-Smythe went on to clarify a little "whilst maintaining certain political checks and balances to ensure that a moderate and amenable Government was always in place."

"So what's changed?" McWilliam asked "Something must have happened if they now see fit to emerge from the shadows and begin to become proactive rather than reactive?"

"The coalition Government in the last parliamentary term only came about because the Pyramid Committee wished it to be so, furthermore they ensured that by getting the third party of state to effectively ditch all their election promises and ethos and sign up to the coalition, their loyal voters deserted them in droves come the next general election and as a result they were punished by being effectively all but wiped out."

"So that was a long term plan to remove or at least drastically reduce their political influence which I presume was contrary to the agenda or agendas the Pyramid Committee wished to promote and develop?" Barwell asked.

"Precisely" St John-Smythe confirmed with a knowledgeable smile "now all they had to do was rig the vote for the leader of the opposition so that they voted in a complete and utter left wing nutcase and as if by magic all credible opposition to the party of Government is effectively wiped out as they become totally unelectable."

"Thus you get a stable one party Government proactively sympathetic to their cause in power for at least ten years I would have thought" Barwell remarked.

"Well you don't seriously believe the new leader of the opposition won the leadership vote on the basis of his ridiculous policies do you?" St John-Smythe asked "No, that was all carefully organised behind the scenes with manipulation of the media and backroom deals done in smoke filled rooms in the darker lesser known corridors of Whitehall."

"So now what are they up to?" McWilliam asked.

"Putting the final pieces into place, removing some deadwood and also certain potential obstacles that may cause them problems in the months and years ahead" St John-Smythe went on to explain "I cannot of course go into details naturally as I am merely an information handler within the group, well I was anyway."

"So why are you telling us all this now?" Barwell asked "why all the prevarication?"

"Because now that the deadline has passed and they have what they want, there is not a single thing you or anyone else can do about it" St John-Smythe declared.

"How do we stop them?" McWilliam asked.

"Oh, you can't" St John-Smythe confirmed dismissively "their political activities are very well protected however their ancillary support operations can be tackled, if you know where to look and indeed what to look for."

"Ancillary operations?" Barwell asked.

"Any successful enterprise of this nature needs hired help, logistical support and indeed to use a crude term, someone to take out the trash" St John-Smythe explained "after all they wouldn't be financing and supporting a gang of thieves in robbing a high security storage facility without a very good reason now would they?" he suggested.

"I want names" McWilliam demanded.

"I have none to give" St John-Smythe defiantly replied as he sat back and crossed his arms "and that is all I have to say on the subject."

A couple of minutes later Barwell and McWilliam were standing out in the corridor whereupon he offered her a cigarette that she gratefully accepted before loaning her his lighter as well.

"Whoooo" McWilliam remarked after her first deep inhale "Haven't had one of these in a while, thanks."

"You looked like you needed it" Barwell remarked.

"Not wrong there" McWilliam readily agreed "So, what do you think?"

"I think he is telling the truth but its so intertwined in a well rehearsed web of lies that it is almost impossible to tell where one ends and the other begins" Barwell remarked.

"If these Pyramid people are so well connected then surely they must know Codmore Hill is a trap for their gang of thieves so why are they financing their little enterprise?" McWilliam asked "None of this makes sense."

"A means to and end I guess" Barwell commented "You know I could put one of my specialist interrogation guys on him?" he suggested.

"He doesn't know anything" McWilliam responded "You heard him yourself, he is an information monkey, he deals with files and the access thereto."

"May I make a suggestion?" Barwell asked to which McWilliam nodded as she finished her cigarette "Sleep on it, and then find out who still stands in the Pyramid guys way that will need to be dealt with before they finalise their plan and put it into action."

"All right" McWilliam responded "I'll talk to Sir William Devane again in the morning and see if I can get him to indicate who is most likely to be sympathetic to the Pyramid ethos and who will definitely oppose it, that may give me something to work with."

"Administrator General?" the Fire Chief called out having emerged from the smoke blackened main front door of the manor house and removed his breathing apparatus.

"What have you got Chief?" the Commander responded and he and Tracy came over and they met in the centre of the hose reel littered front driveway of the house.

"You best get your best forensic guys down here Sir" the Fire Chief grimly confirmed "We have bodies in there, lots of them and they didn't die in the fire."

"Oh hell..." Tracy responded.

"I'm no expert admittedly" the Fire Chief continued "but I would say they were shot down before the fire was started in several different locations which included this little beauty" he then passed across the badly burned and mangled remains of some sort of device now safely stored in a clear plastic evidence bag."

"Interesting" the Commander remarked as he stooped down and with Tracy, they examined the bagged object by the light of the car headlamp "Did you find this anywhere near a gas main by any chance?" he asked.

"Rear kitchen area near where the boiler is" the Fire Chief confirmed "or rather, was. There is not a lot left of it now."

"We've seen this sort of thing before haven't we love?" Tracy asked.

"Indeed we have my love" the Commander agreed as the both stood back up again and he handed the bagged object back.

"Some sort of incendiary device?" the Fire Chief asked as he too took a look at the object.

"Clever and simple little gadget" the Commander explained "You strap this onto a gas main somewhere in your target property hidden somewhere where it is very unlikely to be found, then you use a radio control of some kind or even a mobile phone to activate the little blade which cuts into the gas pipe, creates a leak and then after a set period of time as you allow the gas to build up it is ignited and to put it as plain and simple as it gets...."

"Boom!!" Tracy completed the sentence.

"Nasty" the Fire Chief remarked "Sort of thing a professional arsonist would use if they were being hired by someone to do their dirty work on somebody they really didn't like."

"There is an alternative possibility" Tracy then suggested "We have seen these before, perhaps using one of these and making sure we find it, someone may be trying to send us some kind of message."

"All I wanted was a simple operation" the Commander admitted "set up a trap, ensnare some bad guys, go home, job's a goodun."

"Since when has anything we have ever got involved with ever been simple?" Tracy reminded her husband to mutual wry smiles.

"Thames Valley East Control" the dispatcher in the Regional Security & Police Service Control Room in Guildford, Surrey called over her radio as she took a call on what had been up until that point a pretty quiet evening.

"I think you had better get someone down here right away" came an almost panicked sounding voice over the phone line "There has been some kind of shooting here I think."

"Now Sir" the Dispatcher responded as she realised that so far there was nothing to go on as to location or indeed any other information "Take a deep breath, calm yourself and tell me exactly where you are" she requested as she pressed a button on her control panel to summon the Duty Supervisor.

"Okay..." came the somewhat breathless response followed by a few moments of silence broken only by distant heavy breathing "I'm err..." the callers voice tailed off for a second or two again before resuming "in a call box on the main road just outside Cranfield" he then confirmed.

The Duty Supervisor came up to the workstation at that point and the Dispatcher indicated towards the screen in front of her where she had already started to input what few details she had so far into the computer system.

"Possible Code Ten" the Dispatcher quietly whispered to the Supervisor as she briefly held her hand over the microphone of her radio headset.

"You got a location yet?" the Supervisor asked as he plugged his own radio headset into the system so that he too could hear the conversation and join in if necessary.

"There" the Dispatcher pointed towards the screen which was now showing the location of the telephone box from where the call was being made.

"Caller" the Dispatcher then called "Can you tell me exactly what has happened please?" she formally requested.

"Chaos, bodies, it's like a massacre" the caller responded, clearly still anxious and in some state of shock at whatever it was he had apparently discovered "Looks like someone has taken out the security guards and gates at that industrial estate off Baron's Lane."

"You keep him talking" the Supervisor suggested "I am going to try and locate this place."

"Is there anyone who needs an ambulance?" the Dispatcher asked "Anyone else there alive?"

"No" the caller confirmed "Just bodies and debris. It's like a war zone down there."

"Got it" the Supervisor then confirmed as she managed to locate both the telephone box the caller was located at and the location he was calling about on the map on the screen in front of her.

"All right Sir" the Dispatcher continued "We have managed to establish your precise location and help is on its way."

"Any units from Tango Victor Echo Control" the Supervisor proceeded to call over his radio headset "Any units in the vicinity of Cranfield able to respond to a possible Code Ten please?"

Outside the manor house, Tracy and the Commander watched on as the fire fighters efficiently set about dousing the flames and some of the building began to come under control as the fires began to be extinguished.

"Lick of paint, a couple of new windows" the Commander wryly remarked as part of the roof collapsed inwards with a loud crash sending up a shower of sparks and smoke "Job's a goodun."

"I've lived in worse" Garforth agreed "You should have seen the glorified shed that Sir Richard Crowthorne persuaded me to shack up in for three days in Australia last year."

"Sir!" Kinderley called from the car holding the radio microphone in his hand "Something you should hear" he explained.

"What have you got?" the Commander asked as they returned to his official car.

"Reports of a Code ten..." Kinderley confirmed.

"Suspected major firearms or explosives incident" Tracy explained to Garforth on seeing his quizzical expression.

"Oh, thanks" he responded gratefully.

"Seems to be somewhere in the Cranfield area which when I last looked was about fifteen miles west of here."

"Could be something" Tracy suggested.

"Hand me the radio Terry" the Commander requested whereupon Kinderley duly passed out the handset on the end of its curly cable.

"Eagle One" the Commander announced "Where exactly has this incident been reported?" he asked.

"Report is that there has been some sort of incident involving firearms and explosives with casualties reported at an industrial estate just off Barons Lane on the outskirts of Cranfield Sir" came the direct response.

The Commander clicked his fingers towards Kinderley and motioned to him for the Surrey and South London A to Z atlas which he duly passed out whereupon he placed it on the bonnet of the car and with Garforth providing a light, they proceeded to look at it.

"Nothing on the map that I can see" Tracy remarked as they all could see that there was nothing marked on the map anywhere near Barons Lane let alone any industrial estate.

"Agreed" the Commander confirmed "Simon" he then called over his mobile "are you getting all this?" he asked.

"Every word of it Sir" Fuller confirmed as he looked across at the various screens in front of him "Google Earth shows up nothing either."

"Could be a straight banana?" Garforth suggested.

"Well we are not going to find anything out here before the morning at least" Tracy looked back at the manor house where the fire-fighters were continuing to work battling the fire "Could be our missing crooks."

"All right then" the Commander concluded "let's saddle up and go take a look" he declared which was the cue for the various officers to return to their vehicles.

As Kinderley started the car, the Commander got in the front passenger seat and returned to the radio "Eagle One to Tango Victor Echo Control" he called "Show us as attending. Should be there in about fifteen minutes."

"Shall we tag along as well?" Bob asked.

"Might as well" Tracy responded as she got in the back of the car with Garforth
"Leave a team here to guard this mess though and then follow us" she suggested.

"All right Terry, lets see what this car can do" the Commander declared whereupon
Kinderley set off, accelerating quickly away.

It was a rare moment of quiet for the Prime Minister Sir Hugo Davidson and he took this opportunity to take a little time out for quiet reflection. Getting up from his desk, he went over to the window and slowly raised the blind to look out into Downing Street below where the rain was hammering down, pattering on the glass whilst a whistle of wind could be heard ominously blowing through the cracks in the old wooden window frame.

Downing Street itself was all but deserted, just the patrol officer in full wet weather protective gear as always on duty outside the famous front door. The Downing Street cat momentarily appeared and ran across the road towards the shelter of the Cabinet Office building opposite, such was the weather though that even the usual permanently encamped collection of political correspondents and their attendant camera crews had given up and gone home for the evening.

Sir Hugo took a sip of whisky from the glass in his hand as he contemplated this moment of peace, knowing full well that it would almost certainly be shattered and destroyed at any moment.

The silence of the room was then indeed shattered by the ringing of the telephone on the desk to which Sir Hugo turned back to glare at for a moment in a fruitless attempt to somehow silence it through the power of thought.

There was no point in ignoring the call which continued to await him as confirmed by the continued ringing, he was after all the Prime Minister and his exact whereabouts were a matter of public record to all who needed to know at all times.

"All right, all right" Sir Hugo protested as he crossed the room and returned to the desk whereupon he pressed the speakerphone button "Yes?" he then answered before finishing his whisky and placing the glass back on the side table next to the decanter.

"Lord Privy Seal's Office" came the austere and officious sounding response over the telephone speaker "You are to receive a deputation in ten minutes" the instruction came.

"May I enquire as to the subject?" Sir Hugo asked sensing something was wrong.

"All will be revealed" the officious sounding voice confirmed "Please be ready to accept the committee representatives when they arrive. Goodnight."

With that declaration the caller abruptly hung up leaving Sir Hugo looking on at the telephone on the desk with obvious apprehension.

For a few moments he anxiously looked around as if in search of inspiration as to what his next move should be or what the foreboding pronouncement may be about.

Realising however that time was short Sir Hugo then proceeded back to his desk and sat down behind it. From inside his jacket pocket he extracted a pair of keys on a chain, the other end of which was attached to his belt and reached down to the very bottom drawer to unlock it.

Once unlocked he opened the drawer and lifted up a number of official papers that were located in there to extract a mobile telephone that he disconnected from its charger that was fitted to the interior of the secure drawer and proceeded to make a call.

"You have reached the voice mail of Edward Regent" the Commander's voice was heard as soon as the call was connected causing Sir Hugo to roll his eyes skywards with a wry smile "Leave a message after the beep thing and when my wife reminds me how to extract your message I will attempt to get back to you. Err which button do I press now?"

"Some things never change" Sir Hugo wryly remarked to himself as the bleep came in and he was now able to record a message "Commander" he announced "Erm sorry to spoil your evening but I am about to receive what I suspect will be a very unpleasant visit" he then paused "I'll try to call you again in the morning. Goodnight."

With that Sir Hugo disconnected the call and returned the mobile to the drawer and locked it away once more before sitting back in his chair and looking across at the drinks decanter as he pondered the possibility of having another drink as he had a feeling he was probably going to need it.

After a few moments evaluation he decided that a clear head was more important and so decided to leave it be for the moment. It was then that Sir Hugo became aware of a number of vehicles arriving outside and so stood up and went over to the window to look out and see what was going on.

Looking down out of the window he saw a convoy of three vehicles had arrived. The lead and tailing vehicles were both black Range Rover's with heavily tinted windows out of which emerged a number of men who by their tailored suits, demeanour and appearance were clearly expensive private security or bodyguards.

The vehicle they were escorting was a silver Mercedes saloon that was now parked immediately outside the front door of Number Ten in the exact centre of the road.

A few moments paused as the private security guards ensured that they were secure before three of them proceeded to open the passenger doors and erect black umbrellas to protect their charges against the rain that was continuing to hammer down incessantly.

The umbrellas meant that Sir Hugo was unable to see the faces or figures of the three individuals who alighted from the car and were promptly escorted across to the door and inside without question or obstruction.

Sir Hugo returned to his desk with a heavy heart as he realised that what was approaching could almost certainly spell the end of his political career, maybe even his reputation. The next few minutes were going to be of the utmost importance not only for himself but also for the country.

The intercom on the desk buzzed ominously a few moments later and it was with understandable reluctance that Sir Hugo leaned forward, pressed the button and then waited.

A few moments later the door opened and three individuals were shown into the office led by Dawson who had the Home Secretary and another aide with him.

"Prime Minister" Dawson respectfully called with a brief nod of the head as he approached the desk.

"Good evening" Sir Hugo responded with a noticeable tone of coldness and ill feeling readily apparent in his voice "What can I do for you?" he asked.

"I will come straight to the point as time is short" Dawson immediately pressed ahead with the business at hand "You are to resign in the morning as Prime Minister and retire to the back benches where you will serve the remainder of your term as a Member of Parliament until we decide otherwise."

"I beg your pardon?" the Prime Minister responded with incredulity "Don't you realise who I am?" he asked.

"Oh yes" Dawson casually replied "You are an obstacle to the bright new visionary political framework that I and my associates have strived for over twenty years to design, build and install. Now like all good recipes, the ingredients are all together and its time to turn on the oven."

"Under what authority do you make this request?" Sir Hugo demanded to know.

"Mr Jones" Dawson indicated to his aide who passed over a leather attaché case that they had brought with them whereupon Dawson opened it and extracted a number of documents from within.

"What's that?" Sir Hugo asked as the documents were presented to him on the desk methodically and carefully.

"Power and persuasion" Dawson responded "Incriminating evidence if you prefer, there is usually something we can use if we dig deep enough, grease the appropriate pockets and hack into the right computers and if it doesn't exist then we just make it up anyway."

"You really are the epitome of nasty" Sir Hugo responded with a noticeable scowl.

"Compliments and comments are always welcome" Dawson replied with a meek smile "So, about your impending imposed retirement."

"You have nothing that can harm me or my Government beyond any repairable damage" Sir Hugo defiantly replied.

"Ten years ago I would have agreed with you" Dawson responded "However these days the power of social media is almost immeasurable, especially when you have some friendly newspaper editors on your side and some eager bloggers and Twitterers ready to provide solid, indisputable but ultimately made up facts at the touch of a button or the click of a mouse."

"You forget something" Sir Hugo replied with a little more confidence "The Security Services, both civilian and special maintain a constant watch of key media channels and will move to intercept and counter any false information or statements that you or your associates choose to put out there."

"Nice try" Dawson coolly responded "We have people in key places who will ensure our message gets through no matter what" he informed the Prime Minister "all it takes is one phone call..."

"All right then" Sir Hugo turned to the Home Secretary "What's your angle in all this?" he demanded to know.

"Their ethos and aims appeals to my political ambitions" Grey responded "In the complicated game that is politics it all comes down to who has the most power, influence and above all money."

"If I may be frank Prime Minister" Dawson decided enough was enough "We want you gone by midday tomorrow."

Sir Hugo merely looked on with an expression of disgust but knew that his options were fast running out as he was well aware of the contents of the documents Dawson had just presented to him and their potentially disastrous impact.

"So we can do this the easy way or the hard way" Dawson then continued "the easy way is for you to graciously resign, retire from the public eye and spend the next few years earning two grand a night on the after dinner speech circuit."

"And if I refuse?" Sir Hugo asked.

"Then it is the hard way" Dawson confirmed with smoothly implied menace "We feed you to the newspapers, we have a number of friendly editors who will be more than happy to print anything we toss their way, the more sordid the better. Of course if you go down in flames then you will take some other notable people down with you."

"May we at least make a gentleman's agreement and allow me to think about this overnight?" Sir Hugo formally requested.

"Of course" Dawson agreed "You will find on reflection there is only one course of action open to you if you are to save yourself and those who are strongly allegiant to you."

"Very well" Sir Hugo responded "I will let you know of my decision in the morning."

"Thank you for your time Prime Minister" Dawson remarked as he and the others stood up and prepared to leave "I hope you have an enjoyable retirement."

"Ah hell" Sir Hugo responded "I never really wanted to be PM anyway."

"Good night Sir" Dawson declared before he and his aide left however the Home Secretary hung on and remained in the office.

As soon as the door was closed Grey turned back to the desk and confronted Sir Hugo.

"Call the Commander as soon as you can" Grey warned "These Pyramid people are going to try and eliminate him, possibly tomorrow afternoon."

"How do you know this?" Sir Hugo asked with an obvious sense of both shock and surprise.

"Because I am the one who has to issue the order tomorrow" Grey confirmed with a look of sadness on her face, unusual in the extreme for a normally stoic and solidly determined individual.

"You are not all that you appear" Sir Hugo ventured after a brief moments deliberation.

"Well lets put this way" Grey confirmed "I have not always been a parliamentarian, I also have another job."

"Do tell" Sir Hugo inquired, his intrigue suitably tweaked.

"I'm also a specialist undercover field intelligence officer for the Political Security Unit of MI5" Grey explained.

"An MI5 asset in the heart of Government?" Sir Hugo exclaimed "Have things really got that bad now?"

"Initially I was just a precautionary measure installed along with a couple of others many years ago by Sir Richard Crowthorne" Grey went on to explain "I don't think anyone ever dreamed of how important an advantage it would become."

"So what do I do?" Sir Hugo asked.

"You will have to do as they say" Grey regrettably responded "Resign with immediate effect and let nature take its course. It is the only way we can find out exactly what this Pyramid Organisation has planned."

"I had better call the Queen then" Sir Hugo reluctantly remarked with a heavy sigh.

"Don't worry" Grey reassured him "We have the situation under control and contingencies in place. They won't get far."

"I hope you are right" Sir Hugo ominously responded "otherwise it could be the end of everything."

"Eagle One to Control" the Commander called into his radio as they sped along the main road with lights and sirens in full cry "Any further details from the incident site?" he asked.

"Control, no updates at present Sir" came the formal response.

"All right" the Commander responded "We are about err..."

"...ten minutes Sir, present speed" Kinderley confirmed when the Commander looked across at him.

"...ten minutes away" he then continued "Keep me updated with any further information you receive right away please" he formally requested.

"Understood, Control out" came the reply.

"Bloody hell, who is this comedian?" Kinderley remarked as he was forced to decelerate sharply when a Ford Transit van came around the corner in the opposite direction at considerable speed on the wrong side of the road before swerving over and passing them, only narrowly avoiding a collision by a matter of a few inches.

"Hang about" Garforth remarked as he quickly looked over his shoulder at the van as it passed them "That is one of the vehicles I supplied Villiers for the job."

"Flip this thing round" the Commander called.

"Hold onto your hats everyone" Kinderley warned as it he hit the brakes and performed a text book handbrake turn to swing the car sharply around before gunning the engine and in a cloud of tyre smoke and squealing from the wheels, quickly drove off after the van.

"Bob" the Commander called into the radio as they passed the rest of their group still travelling in the opposite direction "Lead the others and proceed to the incident site whilst we chase down this van."

"Will do Guv" Bob was heard to respond over the radio.

"Bloody hell, this guy is moving" Tracy remarked as she could see that despite the theoretical advantage in engine power of the car over the elderly van they were

pursuing, they were struggling to catch up "Did you do something to that van by any chance?" she then asked Garforth sat alongside her in the rear passenger seats.

"I might have erm tweaked it a bit" Garforth sheepishly admitted.

"Looks like a section of dual carriageway coming up ahead" Kinderley remarked as he continued to concentrate intently on driving the car precisely and expertly at very high speeds in what were very limited lighting conditions.

"If you can get cleanly alongside without risking any civilians then you have my authorisation to proceed" the Commander confirmed.

"Here goes" Kinderley remarked as the road began to widen into a dual carriageway and as the van stuck more or less to the left hand lane, he pulled out and accelerated and began to come alongside.

"He's struggling" Tracy remarked as they all noticed that the van, now being driven at the very limits of if not slightly beyond the capabilities of both it and its driver was starting to weave and wobble.

"Uh-oh" Kinderley exclaimed as he noticed the headlights catch a large patch of standing water across the carriageway just ahead and with lightning quick reflexes, immediately hit the brakes which saw them drop back.

The van however, its driver unaware of the hazard immediately ahead, carried on briefly until it hit the standing water and began to aquaplane. All control of the vehicle was lost and it quickly became apparent that there was about to be a major accident.

Kinderley had already seen what was about to happen and skilfully braked and pulled back to avoid a potentially lethal collision as ahead the van skidded sideways at high speed and went off the road, smashing into a tree before coming to a stop.

"Ouch" the Commander remarked before he and Tracy quickly got out of the car, weapons drawn and headed over to the mangled remains of the van, parts of which were strewn all over the immediate area.

"Hands where we can see them please gentlemen!" Tracy politely ordered, her gun aimed directly at the drivers side window to emphasise her point whilst the Commander did the same on the other side towards the passenger.

"Your time has come" the driver, clearly badly injured called "Pyramid rises!" he then declared before biting down on something in his mouth.

"What the...?" the Commander responded as the passenger in the van similarly copied the driver's actions.

Both the occupants of the van were then seen to foam at the mouth and struggle to breathe for a few moments before collapsing into silence.

Tracy cautiously stepped forward and reached through the smashed side window into the cab and checked for a pulse from the driver's body.

"He's dead" she then declared before leaning forward a little and sniffing "Cyanide" she then confirmed.

"A bit over the top for a couple of armed robbers" the Commander remarked as he holstered his weapon and returned to Tracy's side.

"What the hell is going on?" Tracy asked generally.

"I wish I knew my love" the Commander responded as Garforth joined them.

"Ambulance is on the way" he confirmed.

"Not an awful lot of point" the Commander nodded across towards the van "they both just took cyanide to evade capture."

"Good grief!" Garforth exclaimed in semi-disbelief as the Commander proceeded to the back of the badly damaged van and tried to open it without success.

"Jim, give me a hand with this" the Commander asked whereupon he and his brother positioned themselves at either end of the roller shutter door and proceeded to pull on the handle together in an attempt to force it open.

"This isn't budging in a hurry" Garforth concluded after both he and the Commander gave up.

"Let me try my special key" Tracy suggested as she drew her weapon and aimed directly at the lock that was securing the door tightly.

Garforth and the Commander both quickly got out of the way before Tracy fired three shots which saw the lock and its mechanism disintegrate and the door come loose.

"Wow!" Tracy exclaimed as the door was lifted up and with the Commander shining a torch inside the interior of the van they saw a number of wooden crates in amongst which where they had shifted and broken open as a result of the crash a significant number of gold and silver bullion bars could be seen, glinting in the torchlight.

"Someone is going to be mightily pissed when they realise they have lost this lot" Garforth remarked as they continued to look inside the van in amazement at its contents, the value of which must have run into the hundreds of thousands if not millions of pounds.

"Terry!" the Commander called across to the car "Get the local lads out here to put a guard on this lot before anything goes walkies."

"Yes Sir!" Kinderley confirmed before going straight onto the radio.

"I've got their identification" Tracy confirmed as she stepped back from the cab with the wallets of the two occupants in her hands "I.D.'s look fake but the pictures on them seem to be legit" she confirmed.

"Eagle One to Gold Command" the Commander called into his radio "Simon, are you there?" he asked.

"Receiving Sir" Fuller's voice was heard to call over the radio.

"The good lady wife is about to send you a couple of pictures of the I.D.'s of two dead guys we just found" the Commander confirmed "See what you can do with them" he requested "I want names, history, know associates, pets, the whole nine yards."

"Should have something for you within twenty minutes" Fuller confirmed before signing off.

"Cavalry is here" Tracy called over, indicating up the road from where blue flashing lights and sirens approaching at high speed heralded the arrival of backup.

"Good" the Commander confirmed "As soon as we get this area secured we had better get back to where we were originally going."

Despite the lateness of the hour, the few people still about took no notice of the Home Secretary returning to her ministerial office in Marsham Street, alighting from the back of an official ministerial car and proceeding alone in through the side entrance to the complex in Horseferry Road.

The duty security guard on the desk looked up momentarily as Grey passed through where she headed directly to the lift and pressed the button for the top floor.

Ascending alone, Grey looked a little surprised when the lift stopped again on the 1st floor but her concern turned to relief when the doors opened and she saw who was waiting.

"Commander McWilliam, good evening" Grey remarked as she joined her in the lift car, the doors closed and the journey upwards resumed.

"Good evening Home Secretary" McWilliam responded in kind as they stood alongside each other "Had a busy night have we?"

"What do you know?" Grey asked, sensing that McWilliam probably already knew exactly what was going on.

"Well according to my very expensive yet extremely reliable sources you and a couple of 'friends' paid a visit to the Prime Minister earlier" McWilliam confirmed "and ever since then the PM has been attempting to call the Commander every twenty minutes without success."

"I think it is fairly safe to say that our Pyramid friends have rattled his cage somewhat" Grey confirmed as the lift reached the top floor, slowed to a gentle stop and the doors opened before they stepped out into the deserted corridor and headed for Grey's office located down the far end.

"I know" McWilliam responded as she produced a digital voice recorder from her pocket and proceeded to play part of the conversation that had occurred between Grey, Dawson and the Prime Minister in Ten Downing Street earlier that evening to emphasise her point.

"You bugged the Prime Minister's office?" Grey exclaimed although deep down she was not entirely surprised by this revelation.

"Chalk that one up to our old friend Sir Richard Crowthorne" McWilliam confirmed "he has had that placed wired for sound and vision since the days of James Callaghan."

"So it really is true" Grey remarked as they reached her office where she opened the door and they proceeded inside "walls really do have ears."

"Now that we are alone" McWilliam continued once she was sure that the door was firmly closed "well except for Sir Richard's little devices" she then admitted "what exactly is the plan?" she asked.

"In the next twenty four hours all hell is probably going to break loose I expect" Grey admitted as she sat down behind her desk and then rubbed her eyes which further illustrated just how tired she was.

"So they really do plan to do it then?" McWilliam asked.

"Oh yes" Grey confirmed "by this time tomorrow there will be a new Prime Minister in charge and the instruments of Government will be secretly controlled by an unelected elite with a wide ranging agenda designed to suit their own needs and line their own pockets."

"This is moving a lot faster than we expected" McWilliam commented "we will need to act quickly to make sure we can keep control whilst maintaining the illusion they have won."

"Good luck with that one" Grey responded "Presumably we have a plan regarding the Commander?" she asked.

"Make the call" McWilliam instructed "I will have my people take care of the details when the time comes."

"Right..." Grey looked down at the telephone on her desk and with reluctance leaned forward to pick up the handset whereupon she dialled a number and then waited to be connected.

"Section Three please" Grey formally requested as soon as her call was answered
"Authorisation password Xavier, code nine" she then declared.

McWilliam looked on with a serious frown as she took in every detail of the conversation, the expressions and little physical giveaways on Grey's face, everything in assessment of exactly how honest she was being at that most important time.

"Authorised to proceed with termination" Grey then called "usual full deniability and disposable assets" she then confirmed before hanging up.

"That simple" McWilliam commented.

"That simple, yes" Grey confirmed "rather scary when you think about it."

"I had best get to work and make some calls myself then" McWilliam remarked as she checked her watch "it's going to be a long night."

"For us all" Grey agreed "for us all."

"Good grief!" Tracy exclaimed as they arrived at the main gates and saw ahead of them the still smouldering wreckage where once the tall high-security gates once stood, now reduced to a pile of twisted scrap metal and shoved out of the way of whoever was responsible for the scene of utter devastation before them.

"It's a mess all right love" the Commander agreed as they got out of the car and by the light of headlamps surveyed the wreckage.

"Bob's here" Garforth remarked as the van pulled up alongside the car, its lights adding extra illumination to the scene in front of them.

"I think it is safe to say that whatever happened here, we missed it" Bob remarked as he and his team of specialist armed officers joined the others in surveying the mess.

"They certainly meant business by the looks of it" Garforth agreed as Bob indicated to a couple of his officers to check around the immediate area.

"Got a body over here Sir!" one of the specialist armed officers called over a few moments later whereupon Tracy, Bob and the Commander carefully picked their way over the wreckage to take a look.

"What have you got?" Tracy asked as she looked down at where the officer was indicating whilst the Commander, still squeamish despite his years of experience chose to hang back a bit.

"Looks like private site security" the officer confirmed as he shone his torch down
"He's been dead about an hour I would say and I think there is another one over there"
he then indicated ahead into the darkness where the remains of the gate security office was.

"I think we had better take a look inside this place" Tracy suggested.

"I concur love" the Commander slightly reluctantly agreed "Bob, station a couple of your guys here on guard here and wait for the cavalry" he requested.

In response Bob quickly and silently indicated to two of his team to take up guard positions with immediate effect.

"All right then" the Commander then declared as he drew his faithful old six shot revolver from its holster and checked it "Let's go and take a look."

They proceeded through the remains of the gateway in a fixed formation, Bob took point and with four of his officers who all had lights mounted on their weapons they provided illumination of the paved road ahead as Tracy and the Commander followed closely behind.

"Looks like another dead site security guy over there" Bob indicated across to their left approximately twenty yards inside the perimeter when he picked up something visible lying on the grass in the beam of his light.

"They didn't stand a chance did they?" Tracy asked.

"Fish in a barrel by the looks of it" the Commander agreed as they carried on towards the central part of the site where some lights were providing scant illumination of the buildings there.

"I don't like it" Tracy commented as they reached the first building and cautiously moved on towards the centre where they found in the loading area more bodies, most of them the onsite security again but there was also a couple of the intruders who had been brought down in the initial fire fight that had taken place here.

"Neither do I" the Commander agreed, taking her hand in his in reassurance.

"The place looks like a war zone" Bob remarked as they stood still and surveyed the scene in more detail, seeing numerous spent ammunition casings, discarded empty weapons and bits of wooden crate and barrels strewn about all over the place.

"I can't be certain" the Commander remarked as he looked around carefully "but there is definitely a resemblance between this place and the Codmore Hill plans."

"Designed by the same guy?" Tracy ventured.

"That would be my educated guess yes" the Commander then agreed before looking across at the main loading area where the majority of the battle debris seemed to be concentrated "let's find out exactly what was so valuable that they went to all this trouble to steal it" he suggested.

"Gold and silver bullion surely?" Bob responded as they proceeded forwards, still maintaining a cautious stance just in case anyone was still around "that is what you found in that van you intercepted."

"That's the problem" the Commander admitted "something about that just didn't feel right, it was like we were being used for some sort of audience participation in a carefully set up play put on for our specific entertainment and education."

"It certainly took more than two guys with a death wish in an old battered Ford Transit van to carry out this kind of operation" Tracy admitted as they reached the loading area and clambered up onto the floor level of the adjacent building before proceeding in through the main doors.

"That look like gold bullion to anyone?" the Commander generally asked as they entered what appeared to be the main storage and distribution area of the premises and saw the various containers, boxes and bits thereof all around.

"What the hell is this place?" Tracy asked.

"Judging by the secrecy this place seems to garner, somewhere that someone doesn't want anybody knowing about" the Commander remarked.

"Okay everyone" Bob then took charge "Everyone search in twos and check that the building is clear" he ordered.

As they moved off in pairs to perform a systematic search of the building, Tracy and the Commander came across further bodies from the fire fight that had taken place earlier which unexpectedly included one of the raiders in amongst the internal security staff.

"Any I.D. on him?" the Commander asked as Tracy conducted a search of the body.

"Just a wallet with twenty quid in cash and a driving licence, probably fake" she confirmed.

"We got a live one!!" came a call from the other side of the building which caused everyone to look across before Tracy and the Commander proceeded to wind their way through the remains of broken and discarded packing crates and battle debris over to where one of Bob's officers was kneeling down alongside one of the internal security guards who could be seen to be still alive but with wounds visible that were in need of urgent medical attention.

"Gold Command from Eagle One" the Commander immediately proceeded to call into his radio "Urgent."

"It's all right mate" Tracy tried to comfort the man as he regained some consciousness and then became agitated "We are the good guys" she reassured him.

"We need a helicopter evacuation for one seriously injured male on site" the Commander instructed "multiple gunshot wounds, semi-conscious, looks like he has lost a lot of blood."

"Help is on the way" Fuller confirmed back over the radio.

"And when you have done that, get the local lads to seal this entire area off and dusted down for prints and anything else they can find" the Commander continued "I want to know what the hell happened here, what was taken and what they can do with it."

"I'll get right on it Sir" Fuller reaffirmed.

"Can you tell us what happened mate?" Tracy asked the injured man as she and one of Bob's officers attempted to patch him up as best as they could with the field first aid kit they had available.

"Must have been a hundred of them" the man croakily answered "guns blazing" he continued "cleared out the warehouse, it was a slaughter."

"What was taken?" Tracy then asked "Can you tell us?"

"Experimental medical supplies, chemicals, specialist stuff" the man answered.

"Is there anything here that presents an immediate danger to health mate?" the Commander asked, sensing that there could be a potential problem.

"I don't know, sorry" the man apologetically replied.

"All right, I want everyone out of here now" the Commander called out "You too love" he then told Tracy.

"You stay, I stay" Tracy informed her husband "I think if there is anything toxic in here we have probably already breathed it in by now anyway" she concluded.

"Bob" the Commander called out as he ceded to Tracy's request "get your people out of here and reassemble outside then get hold of Control and tell them they need to scramble every Hazardous Materials team they have out here right away."

"Come on everyone, out!" Bob then instructed his team and quickly ushered them out of the building.

"How's he doing?" the Commander asked, not overly keen on looking at the mans wounds too closely thanks to his inherent squeamishness.

"If we can get him to hospital quickly then I think he has a chance" Tracy confirmed.

"Good" the Commander confirmed "He may be our only living witness and I definitely do not want to lose him."

"Whatever was here someone went to a hell of a lot of trouble and expense to steal it" Tracy remarked as she checked the wounded man's bandages "what do you suppose they plan on doing with it?" she wondered.

"Firstly we need to find out exactly what has been taken and what it does" the Commander remarked "and I get the distinct impression that we are not going to like the answer."

"This had better be good" Jack remarked as the doorbell rang and he checked his watch to confirm it really was almost midnight before pausing the DVD episode of Babylon 5 he was watching and proceeding into the hallway and up to the front door where he stood on tiptoes to look through the spy hole to see who was calling at such an unsocial hour.

"What the...?" Jack exclaimed to himself before opening the door and looking out to make sure he really had seen what he had thought he had seen.

"Prime Minister?" Jack remarked with astonishment "You guys make house calls now?" he asked.

"Only on special occasions" Sir Hugo admitted "can I come in?" he then asked.

"Erm yes, sure" Jack confirmed as he opened the door fully and stood aside to allow the Prime Minister to enter the modest three bedroom flat that he lived in with his adopted parents. Before closing the door however Jack took a quick look out into the corridor to see if anyone else was around before closing the door and showing the Prime Minister into the front room.

"Are your parents in? I was hoping to speak to them" Sir Hugo asked as Jack showed him to the sofa and he sat down.

"They are not back yet" Jack responded "apparently they have run into a few problems with their operation I gather from my err 'reliable sources' as old Sir Richard Crowthorne says."

"That's a pity" Sir Hugo remarked "I have been trying to get hold of them for a couple of hours now with no success" he confirmed.

"Last I heard they were still chasing bad guys around the Surrey Hills" Jack confirmed as they both sat down "apparently there has been some sort of fire as well."

"Sounds nasty" Sir Hugo responded although it was clear he was still distracted and not really paying full attention, a fact Jack had already picked up on.

"You must be in trouble" Jack concluded "No flunky's or official escort in tow I notice."

“All I see before me is darkness” Sir Hugo admitted “Lunatics to the left, fanatics to the right...”

“Here I am stuck in the middle with you” Jack finished the somewhat amended quote with a smile “I’ve been raiding my adopted father’s record collection again” he explained.

“I shan’t take up any more of your time” Sir Hugo apologised as he got up.

“That’s all right Sir” Jack responded “I was just having a marathon session of Babylon 5 on DVD. Just got to the bit where the Shadows are about to invade and general make a through mess of things.”

“I know that feeling....” Sir Hugo remarked “If your parents do make an appearance get them to call me urgently would you?” he asked.

“Of course Sir” Jack agreed “but isn’t it a bit late?” he then remarked as he glanced at the grandfather clock and saw it was now almost midnight.

“I won’t be getting any sleep tonight, trust me” Sir Hugo ominously confirmed “nor for quite a while afterwards I suspect either.”

“Hazmat team is here” Tracy called over to her husband as a couple of Security & Police Service vans approached, these being clearly different to the standard vehicles by their day-glo yellow and orange livery as well as baring the ominous ‘Hazardous Materials Unit’ on the sides.

Also approaching was a dark coloured saloon car with a blue flashing light on the roof which as they arrived proceeded to overtake the Hazmat team vans and pulled sharply to a stop alongside the Commander’s official car.

“Alan?” the Commander called as he saw the tall dominant figure of Divisional Commander Alan Harding, the head of the Anti-Terrorism Unit emerge from the passenger front door of the car “What brings you out here on a cold night like this.”

“Evening Commander, Maam” he greeted his two senior officers as they met by the front of the cars “I got a phone call about an hour ago, whilst I was in the middle of dinner with the wife I might add, saying you and your lads were dealing with a major incident here.”

“Well you can see the mess for yourself” the Commander gestured around “admittedly most of this was all over before we got here for a change.”

“Do you have any idea what this place is Sir?” Harding asked, immediately sensing that there was a lack of information here that his two senior officers needed to know and urgently.

“Not a clue” Tracy admitted “That’s why we sent for the overalls and gas mask club” she indicated across to the Hazmat Team vans where its occupants were now getting kitted up in their protection suits and gathering their equipment ready to proceed with their investigation.

“In my office on the seventh floor is a list of places in this country that are so security sensitive even you don’t know about them” Harding explained “This just happens to be number thirteen on the list” he indicated to the buildings ahead of them.

“Thirteen?” Tracy remarked “Unlucky for some...”

“This place is a highly secret medical and biological research facility complete with a secure storage unit containing or I suspect judging from the state of the place, used to contain some very unpleasant stuff that certain terrorist and extremist organisations would just love to get their hands on.”

“You were right Love” Tracy remarked “This was never about any cash or gold grab” she concluded.

“When you say nasty” the Commander inquired “what sort of level are we talking about?”

“The sort of stuff that if it were prepared in the correct manner you would be best advised to be at least ten miles away from it when it was deployed” Harding ominously confirmed.

“Well there goes my hopes for a nice quiet day in the morning” Tracy remarked.

“Who else knows about this?” the Commander asked.

“Just myself and my Duty Operations Officer back at the Yard” Harding confirmed “I will have to inform Dave Collins and his lads at MI5 in the morning though and the Joint Intelligence & Security Committee will also need to be informed as well.”

“And you do so enjoy those meetings love” Tracy remarked to her husband with a smirk.

“Could be worse” the Commander admitted “Not sure how but I am sure I will think of something.”

“Can I be of assistance Sir?” Harding asked.

“Can you work with the Hazmat guys?” the Commander asked “I will need a detailed list of exactly what was taken, what it can do, everything by midday tomorrow.”

“Midday today now” Tracy added causing the Commander to look at his old pocket watch to see it was now well past midnight.

“Ah, yes” the Commander agreed before returning the pocket watch back to its rightful place and then stifling a yawn.

“I will need to bring a couple of my lads down here to co-ordinate but I think we should have something for you in the morning Sir” Harding confirmed.

“Don’t use any official communications channels though” the Commander advised “the moment you find anything you contact me direct on this number” he handed Harding a piece of paper “and if you cannot get a hold of me then try Tracy.”

“Roger that Sir” Harding confirmed.

“Sir!” Kinderley called from the car “Commander Longton wants you on the radio, urgent.”

“Doesn’t anyone ever sleep around here?” the Commander asked.

“Not tonight it would seem” Tracy sympathetically agreed as the Commander got in the front passenger seat of his official car and took the radio handset from Kinderley.

“Commander Regent” the Commander called “Is this going to upset me?” he requested.

“Entirely possible Sir” Longton responded from outside the fire ravaged manor house as he looked from his patrol car across to where the fire brigade were in the process of damping down the wreckage, aided now by powerful portable spotlights that they had since brought in which highlighted the devastating damage that had been wrought in such a short time.

“What have you got for me Al?” the Commander then asked.

“Fire Service went into the manor house about half an hour ago” Longton began to explain “The place has been pretty much trashed from top to bottom but they did find a hell of a lot bodies.”

“How many roughly?” the Commander inquired, a sense of shock pulsating through him and also affecting Tracy and Harding who were also listening.

“Fifteen or twenty in the main hall” Longton confirmed “a few others dotted about the place as well plus one more up on the top floor.”

“Did the fire kill them?” Tracy then asked even though she already suspected something far more sinister.

“Looks like they were all shot dead by automatic weapons before the place was set alight” Longton confirmed “It’s early days but the Fire Chief reckons there was incendiary devices, accelerant - probably petrol and what looks like some sort of ignition device used on the gas main as well so I think it is fairly safe to say the place didn’t catch fire accidentally.”

“Any identification on the bodies?” the Commander asked more out of hope than expectation.

“Only from the one found on the top floor” Longton confirmed as he picked up a clear plastic evidence bag that was resting on the roof of his patrol car and looked at the charred and blood stained contents inside “this guy stood out from the rest as he was significantly older and also located away from the main cluster of victims so they dragged his body out first, not least because that part of the building was close to collapse when they got to him.”

Longton squinted in the poor light at the contents of the evidence bag attempting to make out the name that was written on the charred documents just visible within.

“Looks like Vill... err something” Longton read from the documents “Villhelm?”

“Villiers?” the Commander responded “Henry Villiers?”

“Yes Sir” Longton agreed “That could be him.”

“Oh great...” Tracy responded, rolling her eyes upwards.

“Something wrong?” Longton asked, sensing the mood that emerged in response to his confirmation.

“Nothing” the Commander responded slightly dejectedly “Well other than our prime suspect is now toast.”

“Sorry Sir” Longton apologised.

“Not your fault mate” the Commander reassured him “Just means we have a whole different investigation to sort out now, that’s all.”

“I’ll keep a secure perimeter around this place, keep the press away and continue to send you updates as and when I get them” Longton confirmed.

"Thanks" the Commander responded "in the meantime I suggest wherever we can we try and get some sleep" he recommended "I have a feeling its going to be a long day tomorrow."

The Home Secretary Jayne Grey could not sleep, there was so much on her mind that she did not even bother going to bed in her modest Westminster apartment, instead finding comfort in a dressing gown and a box of chocolates as she rested on the sofa and listened to the rain that had started to hammer down with severe intensity outside.

A glass of wine was her only other comfort and it was just as she was about to take a sip of it that she heard a noise from the front hallway.

Grey put the wine glass down very gently so as not to make a sound as the noise in the hallway become more recognisable as someone trying to open the door.

Instinct told her what to do as she slipped her hand behind the sofa cushion and pulled out an automatic pistol that she quickly checked and held close to her chest before reaching across and dimming the lamp on the side table which was the only source of illumination in the room.

There was a clunk from the hallway as the door lock gave way and from the casting of shadows and light from the corridor outside it was clear the door was slowly opening and someone was entering the flat, slowly and cautiously.

"Hold it right there pal" Grey called out, her gun pointed ahead towards the hallway and simultaneously switching the lights on as the mysterious intruder came into view.

"Boo..." McWilliam called in response, her hands raised as soon as the lights came on and she realised that she was on the receiving end of a weapon "Only me Home Secretary" she confirmed.

"Commander McWilliam" Grey responded "What the hell are you doing here? I could have shot you."

"I doubt that" McWilliam confirmed as she lowered her arms at the same time that Grey lowered her weapon "I've seen your firing range test results in your file."

"Very funny" Grey responded "I presume there is a reason why you have broken into my apartment in the middle of the night?" she asked.

"We thought something had happened to you" McWilliam explained as Grey proffered a glass of wine which despite being on duty she gratefully accepted before the Home Secretary resumed consuming her own "The Prime Minister has been trying to get a hold of you all night."

"I think I am dead woman walking" Grey responded "Did the Commander manage to get out of that place?" she then inquired.

"Yes" McWilliam confirmed "Last I heard he and Commander Caverner were on a proverbial wild goose chase around the Surrey countryside in pursuit of some non-existent armed robbers."

"So what does the Prime Minister want of me?" Grey then reluctantly asked.

"He needs to see you urgently" McWilliam confirmed "As a matter of fact right now."

"Now?" Grey incredulously responded as she checked her watch "at half two in the morning?"

"I am afraid so" McWilliam agreed "I have a car waiting downstairs."

"So what is this about?" Grey asked.

"Search me" McWilliam admitted "all I know is that something has got the Prime Minister seriously spooked as if someone has seriously rattled his cage."

"And we wouldn't want that would we?" Grey responded "All right then, if the Prime Minister wants a meeting then lets go and have a meeting."

"Good morning Sir, Maam" the Commander's Personal Assistant called as he and Tracy entered the outer office.

"Morning" Tracy responded whilst the Commanders attempt to respond was instantly interrupted by a huge uncontrollable yawn.

"Sorry..." he then apologised "Long night..."

"I fear Sir it is also about to become a long morning as well" the P.A. then remarked "The Director of Public Prosecutions and the Lord Chief Justice want to see you."

"Oh joy..." the Commander responded with no enthusiasm whatsoever.

"Where are they?" Tracy then asked with a sense of resignation.

"I shoved them in Conference Room Two with a pot of coffee and some biscuits" the P.A. confirmed.

"The cheap biscuits I hope?" the Commander asked "Don't want to waste the good ones on them."

"Of course Sir" the P.A. confirmed with a wry smile.

"All right then, lets get this over with" the Commander declared and turned smartly on his heels only to then immediately pause for a thought before turning back again.

"Whilst we are dealing with the full force of judicial bureaucracy" the Commander requested "could you get hold of the Prime Minister for me please? He has been trying to get hold of me all night but has since stopped answering the phone for some reason."

"I know a few unlisted numbers I can try" the P.A. confirmed "Give me twenty minutes."

In Conference Room Two situated just down the corridor on the same floor, the Lord Chief Justice Sir Henry Garvin screwed up his face in obvious disgust as he sampled the obviously inferior biscuits and then returned the remainder back to the plate on the conference table at which he was sat.

Meanwhile the newly appointed Director of Public Prosecutions, the tall slim figure of Stephen Brent continued as he had done since they arrived twenty minutes earlier to pace up and down in front of the window that dominated the entire width of one

side of the room and looked out across the rooftops of Westminster towards the Houses of Parliament and the south side of the river.

"Anyone would think you were feeling nervous" Garvin casually remarked as he decided to finish the biscuit he had started to consume after all, not without reluctance though.

"I am about to go up against the Commander himself" Brent responded, finally pausing his pacing for a few moments "and personally I have no desire to find myself joining his long list of people who have pissed him off over the years as from what I understand from our mutual friends, most of them have ended badly."

"You will be fine" Garvin attempted to reassure him "relax for God's sake, sit down and have one of these quite appallingly cheap tasting biscuits" he pushed the plate across the table towards him.

Brent reluctantly pulled a chair from beneath the table and sat down but his seated posture was far from relaxed.

"I can assure you that the Commander will not be a problem" Garvin then continued "He and his good lady wife have been on a wild goose chase around the countryside for the last twenty four hours thanks to the efforts of our mutual friends so I can assure you that he will be the worst for wear. He will receive the message all right."

"I had forgotten about his wife" Brent then admitted.

"RELAX" Garvin reiterated with a calming and insistent look.

"Good morning gentlemen" the Commander announced as he and Tracy then entered the room but then paused as he saw Brent, a man he did not recognise and was not expecting at all "and you are?" he then politely inquired.

"Stephen Brent Q.C." the tall man introduced himself "the new Director of Public Prosecutions since Sir Harvey Jones retired."

"I wasn't aware Sir Harvey was retiring?" the Commander asked with obvious concern at this sudden and unexpected development.

"Apologies Commander" Garvin explained "it's all a bit last minute you see, he was forced to step down yesterday due to ill health and family commitments."

"I see..." the Commander responded "Well never mind, it's been a long night so whatever it is, this had better be good" he ominously warned.

"Firstly we wanted to congratulate you on your successful operation" Garvin announced with a beaming smile.

"Excuse me?" Tracy responded as she and the Commander looked on, clearly confused.

"Your honey trap operation to capture the armed robbery gang" Brent confirmed "Marvellous operation, brilliantly executed and superbly tied off."

"But we didn't arrest anyone" the Commander responded, clearly taken off guard by the direction of the conversation which was in complete contrast to what both he and Tracy knew and understood from the events they had experienced over the preceding twenty four hours.

"You didn't need to" Garvin explained "everyone is accounted for, no unsightly prosecution case to pay for, no publicity to worry about, very neat, very neat indeed."

"What are you talking about?" Tracy asked although both her and the Commander through their years of experience could already sense where this was heading.

"The ringleader and planner, Henry Villiers" Garvin consulted a file in front of him before passing it across to the Commander and Tracy to see "Killed by his own men in a fit of greed fuelled anger before being set alight."

"Nasty way to go..." Brent remarked.

"The gang then turned on each other as the evidence of the state of the bodies confirms in this preliminary report confirms" Garvin then handed across another file "and finally the remaining members were apprehended by your good self with the loot in the back of their van a couple of hours later."

"They committed suicide, with cyanide no less" the Commander responded.

"Another happy outcome for us and the already overburdened justice system" Brent declared with a sense of triumph.

"And the loot didn't even come from the job they did" Tracy added with an obvious sense of incredulity "the van was full of precious metals, gold bullion and the like but the place these bozos hit was some kind of chemical or medical research storage facility so dam secret even we didn't know about it."

"Irrelevant as far as we are concerned" Brent dismissed the argument with a mere wave of his hand "As far as my office and the judgement of my colleagues is concerned the bad guys are all dead, the stolen property has been recovered, the case is closed."

"You should take this for what this is" Garvin coolly remarked as he attempted to calm down the obviously rising tension in the room.

"Oh, you mean a complete whitewash and sweep under the carpet job?" Tracy quickly replied, simmering with anger which she was keeping under control but only just.

"An opportunity to bathe in a little glory" Garvin continued to explain "Okay I will grant you like so many legal cases there will always be the odd loose end or two..."

"Loose ends?" the Commander interjected but Garvin ignored him and carried on.

"...but at the end of the day the most important thing is that thanks largely to your efforts a significant number of players in the field of organised crime are now dead... err I mean neutralised and there will be no embarrassingly long, complicated and most importantly of all expensive trial to organise and battle through so as far as I can see it is a win win scenario for all of us."

"It's no use appealing to his ego" Tracy warned "my husband doesn't have one."

"All right then" Brent resumed "if you want it in plain English..."

"That would be appreciated" the Commander responded, making clear through his tone of voice and body language that he was far from impressed at this turn of events.

"You will cease and desist all operations, investigations and actions concerning this matter and all individuals involved including perpetrators, associates, suspects and any individuals outside of the central operation you may have an interest in" Brent instructed before producing a document and handing it across.

"What's this?" Tracy asked as she received the document and looked at its very formal appearance with a Government Agency logo on the front she had not hitherto seen before.

"That there is a D121 Notification" Brent went on to explain "effectively a cease and desist order issued by the new Joint Security Operations Oversight Council to any law enforcement agencies and their representatives such as yourselves. David Collins over at MI5 Operations should be receiving his version of this by secure courier any moment now."

"The what council?" the Commander then asked, clearly confused.

"Did you not receive the memo Commander?" Brent asked.

"The wife and I have been rather busy for most of the last twenty four hours" the Commander pointed out with a definite hint of sarcasm which he could tell from the look on Brent and Garvin's faces was not being received at all well "paperwork has had to take a back seat."

"The Office of Public Prosecutions, certain elements of the Joint Intelligence and Security Committee's mandate and also some parts of the Ministry of Justice and the Home Office are now grouped under one oversight committee which commenced as of midnight last night" Garvin explained "Nothing in the legal, justice, security or policing areas in the UK and its overseas dependents will be permitted until it has been evaluated and discussed at committee level."

"And your first action is to enact this load of toilet paper" Tracy held up the D121 Notification Document with disdain.

"A wise precaution in a dangerous world" Brent responded calmly.

"Bollocks!" the Commander retorted with an angry tone "this is a gagging order, no more, no less!"

"Quite frankly Commander" Brent responded as it became clear the two men were starting to square up to each other "you can call it what you like, the effect is the same. All operations and investigations into this matter cease with immediate effect and all material and other evidence gathered is to be surrendered into the custody of the Committee Receiver no later than midday today."

The Commander said nothing for a few moments, merely maintained his stare directly at Brent and watching him begin to squirm a little whilst Tracy looked on ready to leap in and separate them if necessary.

"Okay..." the Commander then calmly conceded, stepping back "You want a white wash, you've got one."

"Thank you Commander" Garvin responded "I am sure you will find in time you have made the right decision."

"Just don't come complaining to me if this all goes pear shaped and comes back around in your face gentlemen" the Commander ominously warned "for believe me, it will."

"We will take up no more of your valuable time then" Garvin declared as he stood up and stared at Brent who realised that this was a good point to make a hasty exit before it turned nasty.

"Err yes" Brent then agreed as he quickly got his documents together in his briefcase and closed it before joining Garvin at the door "It's been a pleasure meeting you both" he then added which was probably almost the exact opposite of how he really felt "Good day."

With that the two men left leaving Tracy and the Commander alone to look at each other with puzzled expressions.

"I think we just got steamrolled by the establishment" Tracy remarked.

"We are rapidly running out of allies" the Commander agreed "losing Sir Harvey is a major blow, there is no way he would condone or go through with this shambolic charade of theirs."

"And this oversight committee?" Tracy asked.

"A talking shop designed to filter out everything they don't want us knowing about or poking our noses into" the Commander confirmed "at the same time it gives them the perfect vehicle with which to feed their own material into our systems to lead us astray."

"It has the Pyramid Group written all over it" Tracy remarked "so what's the plan love?" she then asked.

"We play their game for a little while" the Commander confirmed after a moment for thought "at least that is what we make it appear like we are doing."

"We are going to need some help" Tracy advised.

"Way ahead of you my love" the Commander agreed as he struggled with his mobile telephone before managing to dial a number "Simon" he then called as soon as he was connected "can you patch this into a conference call with Dave Collins?" he asked.

"Give me just a minute Sir" Fuller confirmed at his workstation one floor down in the same building.

"Let's see if Dave has had a visit from the postman yet" the Commander remarked as he waited for the conference call to be connected.

"Okay everyone" Fuller was heard to call over the speakerphone "you are on the air."

"Dave" the Commander called "have you just received a nasty letter in the post?" he asked.

"You mean this load of shite from some oversight committee nobody has ever heard of?" Collins remarked as he looked at his copy of the D121 Notification Document on his desk in front of him.

"That would be the one" the Commander confirmed "We just got ours hand delivered by no lesser mortal than the Lord Chief Justice along with his obnoxious new bag man, a guy by the name Stephen Brent who apparently is the new DPP which is news to us."

"That name came up a day or two ago in a report from my Political Security Section" Collins confirmed as he reached across his desk to a pile of files and began to rifle through them in search of the document he required "yes, here he is, Stephen Charles Brent Q.C. Used to be an advisor to some think tank until fairly recently."

"Simon" the Commander then called "Pull everything you have out of your bag of tricks and find out everything about this guy as soon as you can please" he instructed "I want to know who is pulling his strings."

"I should have something for you in an hour Sir" Simon confirmed as he quickly set to work before disconnecting from the conference call.

"Is it just me or is someone deliberately attempting to knobble the entire justice system from within through this new oversight committee stunt?" Collins asked.

"It's not just you" the Commander agreed "I just wish I could get hold of the Prime Minister or even the Home Secretary for that matter but nobody seems to know where either of them are."

"I am going to do some discreet asking about" Collins remarked "I am not letting some civil service muppet with delusions of grandeur tell me or my department what to do."

It was then that the Commander's Personal Assistant knocked on the door and popped her head around it.

"Sorry to disturb you Sir" she politely called "Edward Hoskins from Interpol is on the other line for you" she confirmed.

"Can I patch him through on this thing?" the Commander asked, indicating his mobile.

"I'll do it Love" Tracy confirmed, taking the telephone off him and making some adjustments.

"Hello?" the Commander then called "Eddie?"

"Yes" Hoskins confirmed from his home in South London, the Commander's voice echoing around his well appointed kitchen where he had been preparing breakfast before he had received a message that had forced him to suspend cooking and make this call.

"You are on a conference call with Dave Collins" the Commander advised "What can we do for you?" he then asked.

"Look guys, I know you Brits have some strange ideas from time to time" Hoskins called "but just what the hell is this bollocks cease and desist order one of your flunkeys just sent around?" he demanded to know.

"Not our idea" the Commander confirmed "far from it. Both us and MI5 have received one as well from some new Committee nobody had even heard of until this morning."

"Oh..." Hoskins responded "Sorry..." he then apologetically added.

"No need" the Commander confirmed.

"We are getting the distinct impression someone is trying to shut our investigation down for good and then put the cuffs on to deter us from any future nosing about we want to do" Collins explained.

"Our Pyramid friends?" Hoskins suggested.

"The cap fits" the Commander confirmed.

"Trouble is how far has their influence spread?" Tracy asked.

"With an oversight committee under their control watching over all of us from the Joint Security & Policing Committee downwards, to be honest they don't need to

spread much further" Collins concluded "they have us cornered and will be watching our every move."

"So" Hoskins then asked "what is the plan?"

"Why does everyone always think I have a plan?" the Commander responded knowingly.

"You are the Commander" Hoskins explained "You are like the old Russian KGB, you always have a plan."

"Publicly we call the case closed, seal it off and send this Committee or whatever they call themselves copies of all the evidence, at least that which we want them to see" the Commander explained "in the background meanwhile we keep plugging away using what resources we have tucked away that they don't know about until we find out exactly what is going on, what they have got, what they intend to do with it and how to stop them."

"Anything you need, just call" Hoskins responded "Being outside the UK based loop means I still have contacts outside these borders that owe me favours and hopefully should not be on these bozo's radar."

"Thank you" the Commander replied "We may need them..." he then tailed off as he noticed a message appear on his other mobile telephone which he went off to one side to read before returning.

"Hello?" Collins was heard to call "Anyone there?"

"Sorry" the Commander responded, returning to the call "Something came up" he then passed the telephone to Tracy so that she could also read the message. The look on her face in response to the message content was clearly one of stunned amazement.

"Gentlemen" the Commander then called "I am going to need to call upon you all at some point in the next few hours, please don't ask any questions at this time, I shall reveal more later if I can, just stay by your phones."

"Will do" Collins confirmed.

"I'll be here" Hoskins then agreed.

"Very well" the Commander then concluded "Thank you gentlemen, speak to you later" he then disconnected the call.

"Is this for real love?" Tracy asked, indicating the message they had just received.

"Looks like it" the Commander confirmed "Something big is happening in the heart of Government and its propelling a band wagon that I fear is careering towards us at some considerable speed.

"We're here" Jennifer Caverner confirmed as she pulled the ministerial escort car to a halt in a side street just off the Aldwych in central London, her car now parked nose to nose with an identical car from the same department that was empty except for its driver who also happened to be Jennifer's second in command.

"Thank you" Grey responded as Jennifer opened the door for her and she got out.

"I believe you are expected in there" Jennifer then indicated a doorway ahead where a lattice gate was open leading inside a red terracotta tiled building.

With some understandable hesitation Grey stepped forward and went inside whereupon an armed guard immediately shut the lattice gate closed cutting her off from the outside world before he then showed her through the old station ticket office area to the lift that would take her down to the abandoned platforms of the long since closed former Aldwych Underground Station.

The old wooden lift car creaked and rattled as it proceeded down to the former platform level where the guard then opened the gate and allowed Grey to exit.

"Just follow the signs for the platform Ma'am" the guard instructed "I will wait here."

With further trepidation Grey stepped out of the lift into the dusty tube shaped tile lined corridor and proceeded on into the dark depths of the old station until she emerged onto the former platform where she found parked a three car train of old 1969 type tube stock in the old unpainted aluminium livery of London Underground.

"Thank you for coming Home Secretary" the voice of Sir Hugo suddenly called as he emerged from the shadows upon her arrival, their footsteps echoing quite loudly around the cavernous space all around them.

"Prime Minister" Grey responded still understandably confused "Good morning."

"My apologies for dragging you all the way down here" Sir Hugo began "I needed somewhere where we could talk without being overheard and the Commander suggested this charming little place."

"Well it certainly is deserted and isolated Sir" Grey agreed as she looked around before Sir Hugo showed her to a bench on the platform and they sat down together.

"Firstly" Sir Hugo then got down to business "may I please confirm that you are what I think you are?"

"If you mean am I an asset for MI5 carefully placed to monitor the Government from within in case of infiltration by, how shall I put it, unfriendly concerns then yes" Grey confirmed "Trained by old Dicky Crowthorne himself no less."

"Good" Sir Hugo responded with more than a hint of relief "At around about twelve o'clock today, that's in a little under two hours I shall be making an emergency speech to the House of Commons. Approximately fifteen minutes later the Commander will

then in response initiate a long standing emergency procedure called the Zodiac Protocol."

"Never heard of it" Grey responded "What is it?"

"The main part of it as far as you are concerned is detailed here" Sir Hugo explained as he produced a letter sealed with red sealing wax and passed it to her.

"Go ahead, read it" Sir Hugo then encouraged the reluctant Grey who proceeded to break the seal, open the envelope and extract the three page document contained therein.

"Briefing notes" Grey remarked as she looked at the heading on the first page before carrying on to read what were basically her instructions during which she suddenly paused when she saw what it said.

"You..." she stuttered at first before regaining her composure "You can't be serious?"

"It is something that has to be done" Sir Hugo explained with an obvious hint of reluctance "If we are to defeat the Pyramid Group then we must appear to be playing to their tune for a while and your position not only as a specialist MI5 field officer but also a senior member of the Government who has managed to infiltrate and gain the trust of this group puts you in the perfect position."

"Holy shit..." Grey exclaimed "This is heavy."

"Don't worry" Sir Hugo reassured her "I will still be around in another capacity to help you where needs be, but be warned, a lot is going to change and even more is going to happen in the next forty eight hours."

"No kidding" Grey responded, clearly overwhelmed by what was being asked of her "and what of my Pyramid contacts?" she then asked "What do I tell them?"

"Keep them in the dark and only tell them what we want them to know" Sir Hugo confirmed "Your brief will not have changed. I believe that the Commander has put everything you need to know in that document you have there and many others will be receiving instructions like those in the next couple of hours."

"In which case Sir" Grey remarked as she folded the instructions and replaced them in the envelope before putting them inside her jacket pocket "I had better get a move on, for one thing I suspect I am going to need a new outfit or three."

"It's done Sir" Brent confirmed as he and Garvin entered the plush modern office where Dawson was sat behind a huge modern glass desk, behind him a large single sheet of glass that looked out across London and South East England from the high up vantage point on the sixty fifth floor of the Shard building adjacent to London Bridge Station and the tallest structure in the country.

"Excellent work gentlemen" Dawson responded, practically rubbing his hands together with glee before leaning forward to press the intercom on his desk "Send Mr Hansell in please" he then requested.

"Sir" Hansell formally announced as he arrived in the office a few moments later "Gentlemen" he then additionally greeted Brent and Garvin.

"A couple of loose ends to tie up before we can get to work my old friend" Dawson announced "there is the small outstanding matter of Sir William Devane that needs to be attended to urgently. Do you have anyone available?"

"Most of my people are still transporting and securing the merchandise" Hansell confirmed "I do however have a couple of specialist teams in reserve for just such an occasion."

"See to it then that Sir William checks himself out of hospital at the earliest opportunity and escort him out of the city" Dawson requested "Make sure he is seen leaving by whatever spies the Commander has deigned to place watch over him and then when the opportunity arises neutralise him."

"The Commander or Sir William?" Hansell quickly sought clarification.

"Why both dear boy" Dawson confirmed "Sir William has outlived his usefulness and as for the Commander, well lets just say our organisation can do without him sticking his oar in our business."

"It will be done Sir" Hansell agreed.

"Oh, one other thing" Dawson then called just as Hansell turned to leave "Make sure that you leave sufficient evidence lying around to pin it all on our friendly MI6 double agent Mr Court would you?" he requested.

"I thought I chucked Alistair Court out of a window a few days ago?" Hansell responded, clearly confused.

"Yes" Dawson simply responded "that is exactly what we wanted you and everyone else to think."

"Right..." Hansell replied, clearly confused but he decided not to pursue the matter any further, merely get on with the task in hand.

"Good luck" Dawson called after him as he left.

"You do realise if you have the Commander killed then all hell is going to break loose?" Garvin warned once Hansell had left and the door was closed behind him.

"It depends on how you do it" Dawson explained every so slightly evasively "Appearances can be deceiving."

"Terry!" the Commander called as he and Tracy exited the main door of New Scotland Yard and called to his official driver who was standing by his car parked alongside the kerb.

"Sir?" Kinderley responded, standing to attention "Where to?" he then asked as he opened the front passenger side door for the Commander to get in.

"Secure unit entrance of Charing Cross Hospital" the Commander confirmed.

"Devane?" Tracy ventured.

"He is about the only link we have left that isn't either dead or disappeared" the Commander confirmed.

"I'll alert McWilliam to meet you there" Tracy confirmed "Be careful love" she then warned.

"I'll try" the Commander agreed before they kissed and then Tracy closed the door whereupon he wound the window down "I need you to co-ordinate a few things until I get back" he then evasively instructed.

"I don't like the sound of that dear" Tracy cautiously responded.

"Just in case" the Commander added by way of reassurance "I have this nasty feeling all is about to go pear shaped and when it does we will need to act quickly."

"All right" Tracy agreed "but stay in touch" she warned.

"I will" the Commander confirmed as he indicated to Kinderley to start the car "Love you" he then called.

"Love you too" Tracy responded before the car quickly pulled away off up Broadway towards Victoria Street, the sirens and lights quickly kicking in at full cry.

"Commander McWilliam" Amber called as she arrived at the reception desk of the Secure Unit at Charing Cross Hospital and produced her identification "National Security Service. I am here to see Sir William Devane?"

"Oh, I am terribly sorry" the Receptionist responded "he checked himself out about twenty minutes ago."

"What?!?" McWilliam responded with a sense of dreaded surprise before quickly regaining her composure "Can I see the paperwork please?" she then requested.

"Erm, yes" the Receptionist took a moment to search for the required form before locating it and placing on the desk in front of her "here it is."

"...and this was what, in the last quarter of an hour?" McWilliam asked as she quickly scanned the three page form that had been completed in barely legible handwriting, not helped by this being the carbon copy of the original.

"Yes" the Receptionist confirmed.

"National Security Service" the Commander then called as he also arrived at the desk "Here to see..."

"...Sir William Devane?" the Receptionist asked with a somewhat worried look.

"Yes..." the Commander cautiously responded.

"He's done a runner Sir" McWilliam confirmed as she passed the documents to him which the Commander duly took and examined in a sense of disbelief "or someone has checked him out on his behalf, either way he is gone."

"Wait a minute" the Commander responded as he noticed something on the document "look at the name of the person who signed him out, does that read Alistair Court?"

"I do believe you are right Sir" McWilliam looked again at the document, paying particular attention to the section the Commander was indicating.

"Eagle One to Control" the Commander called into his radio "Tracy, you there love?" he asked.

In the main Control Room at New Scotland Yard, Tracy had only just sat down at the main supervisor's desk that overlooked the whole room and the large wall of screens across the front of it when the call came through.

"Go ahead love" Tracy quickly responded as she put down her cup of coffee that in the last minute she had only just obtained and was about to take her first sip of.

"That dead guy who flew out of a window at MI6 the other day" the Commander then asked "Alistair Court?"

"Yeah, that's the fellow" Tracy confirmed.

"This is going to sound silly but are we absolutely sure he is dead?" the Commander then asked.

"Excuse me?" Tracy responded quizzically.

"Did we get the right identification for the body?" the Commander then asked.

"Well there wasn't much left of him if I recall" Tracy admitted "you kind of get that when you impact a pavement having been thrown out of a window on the fourteenth floor, plus he was dead before then anyway so that was really just err window dressing, no pun intended."

"Only it would appear he has arisen from the grave and in the last fifteen minutes signed Sir William out of the secure unit" the Commander explained the reason for the inquiry.

"Oh shit..." Tracy responded before clicking her fingers in the direction of Fuller who entered the Control Room at that point and she beckoned him over.

"Something up Maam?" Fuller asked.

Check everyone and every vehicle that has left the Secure Unit at Charing Cross Hospital in the last twenty five minutes" Tracy urgently requested "Sir William Devane has vanished and to cap it all he was signed out by our supposedly dead MI6 double agent Court."

"Give me five minutes" Fuller confirmed as he quickly took a vacant workstation and began to work on the computer, calling up CCTV cameras from all around the requested target area.

"I could use it being in two" Tracy responded.

"Of course" Fuller agreed with a smile.

Behind Tracy on one part of the main screen was the live broadcast feed from the BBC News channel which was starting to show its ominous 'Breaking News' banner across the bottom of the screen whilst its two studio news presenters were to be seen looking uncertain and starting to shuffle papers across their desk as some major news story was starting to become apparent but as of yet they were unclear exactly what was going on.

"What are they wibbering on about now?" Tracy then generally asked as she looked around at the screen.

"Search me" Fuller responded "I may have a lead on our disappearing Sir William however, looks like there is just one departure from that section in the time window specified, a silver Mercedes Benz saloon registration number Lima Foxtrot Six One Echo Alpha Tango is seen arriving at 10:48, one occupant gets out then he and a second person who looks a bit like Sir William are seen getting in at 10:59 and driving away.

"Show me on screen three" Tracy requested whereupon Fuller duly displayed the extracts of CCTV footage he had found on the screen.

"Yep, that's him" Tracy confirmed "Can you get any clearer look at the guy with him?" she asked.

"Working on it" Fuller confirmed.

"You got anything?" the Commander was then heard to call over the radio.

"I think so" Tracy confirmed "They left in a silver Mercedes saloon about fifteen minutes ago" at that point she broke off to stare across at Fuller who was busy indicating something with his hands "Patching Simon in" she then added before nodding at him to proceed.

"That car just went through a Congestion Charge camera near Bank" Fuller confirmed "it is registered to a firm on the other side of Bethnal Green, I am sending you the details to your mobile now Sir" he responded.

"Maam" one of the Control Room operators called.

"In a minute Dave" Tracy responded.

"Maam..." the Control Room operator repeated with a more urgent tone "you really need to see this" he indicated the screen showing the live broadcast feed of the BBC News channel.

"What the....?" Tracy responded as soon as she saw the writing on the screen that was scrolling across beneath the large 'Breaking News' banner. "Somebody turn it up, quick!" she then ordered whereupon the sound was increased so that the news broadcast was now audible.

"To repeat the breaking news that has come through in the last couple of minutes" the lead studio based news presenter confirmed "the Prime Minister Sir Hugo Davidson has announced in the last few minutes to a packed House of Commons that he is resigning with immediate effect" she announced "there is at this time no official word from Downing Street although we are expecting a statement clarifying the situation in the next ten minutes."

"What's happening?" the Commander asked as he could only really hear background noise over his radio which did not tell him very much.

"The Prime Minister just quit, effective immediately" Tracy confirmed "It's all over the BBC News channel and it looks like the other news broadcasters are confirming it as well."

"Holy crap...." McWilliam remarked.

"I think you had better make a phone call" the Commander strongly suggested.

"Sod the phone call, I will go and drag him back here personally" McWilliam confirmed.

"You had better hurry" the Commander remarked "The situation is changing very fast" he remarked.

"I will be back before you know it" McWilliam confirmed as she put her coat on "Be careful" she then advised before departing.

"Maam" Fuller called from his workstation "City Division reports one of their patrol cars has that silver Mercedes in their sights" he confirmed "they want to know what you want them to do."

"Pull it over at the first available opportunity but use extreme caution" Tracy advised "and then call us back as soon as they have the vehicle and its occupants secured."

"Roger that" Fuller confirmed before proceeding to relay the message.

"Tracy love" the Commander then called "any more details yet?"

"Only that he has announced his resignation" Tracy confirmed from the summary that the BBC News channel was now displaying "no reason given at this time, statement to follow later from the Lord Privy Seal and Downing Street and..." she paused as another late breaking news item came up which she took in before relaying it "it's just been confirmed that Jane Grey is to step in as PM, to be sworn in at Buckingham Palace in the morning."

"That was arranged awfully quickly" Fuller remarked.

"Not if you prepared for this possibility in advance" the Commander remarked with a knowing tone in his voice.

"Ah, contingency plan" Tracy concluded.

"Listen love" the Commander requested "I need you to do something for me."

"Name it love" Tracy responded.

"I am going to head over towards Bethnal Green and try and intercept this car that the City Division lads have pulled over, see if we can't recover Devane before anything unpleasant happens to him" the Commander confirmed.

"You mean before anything more unpleasant happens to him" Tracy reminded her husband "he hasn't exactly had the best of weeks thus far."

"Indeed" the Commander agreed "What I need to you to do is go into my office, unlock the bottom left hand drawer of my desk and at the bottom you should find a sealed red envelope."

"Okay" Tracy confirmed as she noted down the details "then what?" she asked.

"Open it and you will find a list of names and contact details" the Commander continued "I need everyone on that list connected to a conference call I am going to make via the phone in my office in twenty minutes."

"In which case I had better get a move on" Tracy remarked as she got up from her seat "Speak to you later my love" she then called before disconnecting the call.

"City Division just confirmed they are pulling that car over just past Roman Road in Bethnal Green" Fuller confirmed.

"Relay that information to the Commander and advise them that he is on his way" she responded "I have to take care of something" she then confirmed before leaving the Control Room.

With a definite swiftness to her pace, Tracy headed down the corridor and straight into her office before using the connecting door to access her husbands own office, bypassing the Personal Assistant who was still at her desk just outside the door.

Sitting in the large leather chair behind the desk, Tracy looked down at the bottom left hand drawer before taking out a set of keys attached to a chain in her pocket and leaning down to unlock it. Once opened she then proceeded to locate and extract the sealed red envelope as she had been instructed, placing it on the table and looking at it for a few moments before breaking the seal, opening it and slightly nervously extracting the contents.

"All right, let's see" Tracy remarked to herself as she prepared to read the document "what do we have here?"

On the first page of the document was a list of notable people including various heads of departments across the various agencies both national and international that make up the justice and security system in the UK. In addition to those names were a number of others in related organisations as well as a couple of notable individuals outside the inner circle including a couple of politically placed persons and one surprising name, that of Jack, their adopted son.

Jack was attempting to get to the school canteen with Megan to get lunch at that exact moment and like everyone else on that list he was about to be intercepted by an unexpected arrival in the form of a Security & Police Service Internal Secure Motorcycle Courier who, escorted by a member of School staff approached the young couple.

"Who have we upset?" Megan asked aside to Jack as he was called by name by the School staff member and they turned to see the two men approaching ominously.

"Priority message for you Mr Regent" the Courier confirmed as he produced a sealed red envelope, very much like the one that the Home Secretary had received a little earlier and that Tracy was at that exact moment opening.

"Thank you" Jack responded as he took the envelope with a slight reluctance before the Courier nodded in respect and departed as swiftly as he had arrived, the motorcycle leathers creaking as he walked away.

"I am going to hazard a guess that isn't a Christmas card" Megan remarked as they both looked at the very official looking sealed envelope in his hands.

"I think we can also guess that lunch just got cancelled as well" Jack added "so shall I open it or would you like the honour?" he asked.

"This is your family party" Megan responded "knock yourself out."

"Okay, here goes" Jack declared as he tentatively opened the envelope and took out the contents before he and Megan stepped off to one side away from everyone else as they read the document.

"Instructions" Jack declared "it would seem that my application to join the Service has been fast tracked and approved a couple of years earlier than I had anticipated."

"Oh heck..." Megan responded as she also read the extensive instructions which were signed at the bottom by the Commander himself "Looks like we will be saying goodbye for a few days it would seem."

"Nonsense" Jack replied as he finished reading the instructions and returned them to the envelope before putting it inside his uniform jacket "You are coming with me."

"Are you sure?" Megan asked.

"As sure as I will ever be" Jack confirmed before taking her by the arm "Come on, our transport should be here in half an hour."

Tracy took the opportunity of a quiet moment to sit back in the chair in the Commander's office and try to relax for a few moments as she knew that there was little chance there would be such an opportunity again in the foreseeable future.

She swung the chair around to look out through the window, across the rooftops of the city towards Westminster where she could see the tower of Big Ben and beyond it the top of the London Eye among the features dominating the view.

After a few moments of quiet contemplation the telephone on the desk rang and Tracy swung back around to press the speakerphone button to answer it.

"Administrator General's Office" Tracy formally called.

"Hello love" the Commander called as he stood alongside his car, now parked in a side street near Liverpool Street station whilst Kinderly stood on the other side of the car watching around "is everyone ready?" he then asked.

"As ready as they will ever be I reckon love" Tracy confirmed "shall I press the magic button?" she then tentatively asked.

"Go for it my dear" the Commander responded.

"Here we go" Tracy declared as she pressed a button on the key pad and at that moment the complex telephone system duly connected up a number of key individuals who were all waiting for the call.

"Good morning everyone" Tracy called "you are all now on open mike with the Commander" she confirmed.

"Sorry to spoil your day ladies and gentlemen but we have a situation that needs our co-ordinated and immediate attention" the Commander called "As you may have seen in the last hour all hell has broken loose in the corridors of power added to which a number of additional complications have occurred so I need to make sure everyone is precisely clear on what I need them to do over the next few hours."

"Everyone should have received in the last hour a red envelope by secure courier" the Commander then continued "please open it now" he instructed.

There was a large amount of rustling over the connection as various people reached for their envelopes, many having secured them in safes or desk drawers as soon as they had received them.

"Oh heck..." Collins remarked as he opened his envelope and saw the header on the first page.

"I am invoking the Zodiac Protocol" the Commander then announced "As of this moment you are all required to follow only the chain of command specified in the documents in front of you. There are a few others who will have already received this information who are not in on this call as their part in this operation has already commenced."

"There goes the overtime budget" Hewitt remarked from his office in MI6 headquarters over on the south bank of the River Thames in Vauxhall.

"Who's first?" Jennifer Caverner asked.

"You are" the Commander confirmed "I want you to select the two most reliable cars you have and four officers including yourself to man them" he instructed "make sure you are all armed and then go and locate the Home Secretary, Jane Grey, provide full armed escort wherever she goes and do not leave her side under any circumstances."

"Yes Sir" Jennifer confirmed "Leaving now" she responded as she duly disconnected her line and quickly left her office to carry out her instructions.

"Dave" the Commander then addressed Collins over at MI5 who sat up and paid attention "I need you to put your best team at our disposal as soon as possible. Don't tell them anything just yet, just select them and get them ready to move when the word is given."

"You got it" Collins agreed.

"Commander McWilliam" the Commander then moved on to the Section Fourteen representative who was in her car, listening to the call over her hands free equipment "I think you can guess what I need from you at this time."

"Target already located and I am on my way to collect him as we speak" McWilliam confirmed "Should be back in time for dinner tomorrow" she remarked before disconnecting the call and bringing the car to a stop parked in a bay.

Grabbing her bag, she then got out of the car and proceeded to a waiting black and gold helicopter which already had its rotors spinning and was ready to go.

As soon as McWilliam was aboard the helicopter and had put the headphone set on, it took off and departed southbound, quickly ascending high above the city and disappearing into the low mist.

"Our overseas friends from MI6 and Interpol" the Commander continued as he addressed both Eddie Hopkins at Interpol and John Hewitt over at MI6 "I want you two to work together on the international side of this mess" he explained "see if our Pyramid friends are up to anything outside of the UK, work with our Fraud Squad and try and trace the money they are spending, it's got to be coming from somewhere, I want to know who is signing the cheques and where I can find them."

"I'll start making some phone calls" Hewitt agreed "I have a pretty good idea where to start."

"Meanwhile I have a few contacts I am happy to shake and see what falls out of their pockets too" Hopkins agreed.

"All right" the Commander continued "Bob, are you there?" he then addressed the head of the Specialist Armed Response Section who was back in his office a few floors down inside New Scotland Yard.

"Here Sir" Bob confirmed.

"I am going to need your top game over the next few days" the Commander confirmed "I need a first response team ready to go around the clock made up of your best people and armed escort for everyone listed in your instructions to be initiated as of thirty seconds ago" he instructed.

"Going to have to put a lot of overtime on the sheets for this lot" Bob responded "but it's definitely doable" he confirmed.

"I also need the location specified designated 'Eagle Command' secured air tight ready for tomorrow morning" the Commander then added "the details are in your instructions, I would like you to take charge of that personally please."

"Consider it done Sir" Bob agreed.

"Very well" the Commander carried on "Simon, where are you?" he then called to Fuller.

"Just heading out of town in the company omnibus" Fuller confirmed from the drivers seat of the Mobile Operations Unit, a converted single deck bus that contained a fully

equipped portable Control Room and some of the most sophisticated communications equipment available.

"On your way to Eagle Command pick up Jack and Megan from their School" the Commander instructed "You are expected" he confirmed.

"Roger that Sir" Fuller responded as he manoeuvred the converted bus through a complicated traffic light controlled junction with relative ease "On my way."

"I need everything up and running by nine tomorrow morning" the Commander then added "Will you be all right with that?"

"Mostly just a case of plugging in and switching on" Fuller confirmed "I just hope someone has remembered to connect the electricity though."

"All right then" the Commander responded "I will let you get on with it, see you later."

With Fuller now disconnected from the conference call the Commander began to wind the briefing up.

"I want everyone to stay in touch throughout all of this" the Commander then generally instructed "you should all have the details of the secure communications channels we have set up in your instructions. Don't use any unsecure or general use communication channels unless it is an urgent matter of life or death" he then insisted "Anything you find that we need to know about can be channelled through either Tracy or myself."

"Finally" the Commander then began to conclude "everyone please be careful, we have a potentially very dangerous situation here, somewhere in this country someone is currently in possession of a load of unidentified materials that are bound to be used for something very unpleasant so I want everyone to be extra careful okay?"

There were confirmations of agreement from all those still involved in the call which the Commander allowed to pass for a moment before continuing.

"All right then" he then declared "as per your instructions ladies and gentlemen, you will be collected by secure transport from wherever you may be at precisely eleven o'clock tomorrow morning, then the hard work will really begin. Until then, good day and thank you for your co-operation."

With that declaration the Commander terminated the conference call leaving just Tracy still on the other end.

"Are you all right my love?" the Commander then asked her.

"As right as I ever will be given the circumstances" Tracy responded, a heavy tone of resignation in her voice "Are you sure about this?" she then asked ominously "you are taking a hell of a risk" she warned.

"It has to be done I am afraid love" the Commander confirmed "speaking of which here he is now" he then remarked as another car, accompanied by an escort of two Security & Police Service marked motorcycles arrived, stopping immediately behind the Commander's own car whereupon Garforth got out of the drivers seat.

"Take care then love" Tracy responded "I'll run the show from here and I will see you tomorrow."

"See you tomorrow" the Commander responded "Love you."

"Now why do I never get calls like that?" Garforth wryly remarked as the two brothers met by the car.

"I think it's time we got you a lady in your life" the Commander remarked "see me afterwards."

"Yikes..." Garforth responded "Anyway, about this little job you have for me" he then asked.

"It's all in here" the Commander duly produced another of the sealed red envelopes and handed it to him "and I have one for you too Terry" he then passed another across to Kinderley who took it with a noticeable look of caution.

"All very cloak and dagger" Kinderley commented as the two men opened their instructions and began reading them.

"Ah, the penny drops..." Garforth remarked "You do know there are about a hundred different ways this little stunt of yours could go wrong, don't you?" he then ominously warned.

"Unfortunately under the current climate it has become a necessity" the Commander admitted "So do you think you can pull it off?" he then asked.

"Of course I can" Garforth confirmed with a wry smile as he folded the instructions and replaced them in the envelope "It is just that afterwards you and my Guvnor had better set aside some time to discuss the significant pay rise that I shall be putting in for" he grinned knowingly.

"I'll talk to Accounts" the Commander agreed "So, are we ready?" he then asked both of them.

"Yes Sir" Kinderley responded whilst Garforth nodded affirmatively.

"Good" the Commander responded "because I don't think I am!"

"There he is" Jack pointed ahead down the street towards a red single deck bus that was just coming into view down the road and was approaching them, the difference between the oncoming vehicle and any ordinary London bus that may be seen around

that area being its markings and the sets of blue flashing lights mounted on the roof at both the front and the rear.

"Not exactly inconspicuous is it?" Megan remarked as the vehicle drew closer and the National Security & Police Service markings on it became visible.

"It does mean it can use Bus Lanes though and is exempt from the Congestion Charge" Jack confirmed as the vehicle came to a halt in the bus stop and the doors opened in front of them.

"Hop aboard guys" Fuller called from the drivers seat "Oyster Cards not valid on this service."

"I hope lunch is being provided on this little mystery tour" Megan remarked as they took their seats near the front before Fuller closed the doors and they moved off "We got dragged out of the canteen for this."

"Don't worry" Fuller confirmed as he manoeuvred back into the traffic flow "our destination is fully equipped with the best catering the Service can provide."

"Oh dear..." Jack recalled the less than fantastic experiences he had had in the New Scotland Yard staff canteen.

"First however we have to take a detour via Bethnal Green" Fuller confirmed "and you will need your camera, it should be in the cupboard beneath that console next to you" he called.

"Okay..." Jack remarked as Megan being the nearest extracted his camera and passed it across to him "What's this all about?"

"We need some 'independent' witnesses who just happen to be there with a decent camera" Fuller explained without really explaining much "and you have been nominated."

"Eagle One from Angel One" Tracy called into her radio as she walked briskly out of her office and along the corridor before proceeding down the stairs one storey to the main control room "Are you there love?" she asked.

"Eagle One receiving" the Commander responded.

"Where are you now?" Tracy inquired as she entered the Control Room and quickly looked over the large screens that dominated the far wall.

"Just coming up to where the City Division have pulled over that silver Mercedes that whisked away Sir William Devane earlier" the Commander confirmed "Indeed there seems to be quite a circus happening here" he then remarked as his car and motorcycle escorts drew to a halt, their progress temporarily halted by tape across the road.

"Afternoon Sir" a City Division officer guarding the perimeter of the scene called as soon as he recognised the importance and identity of the front seat passenger.

"Afternoon" the Commander responded as he got out of the car "What's all the excitement about?" he then asked gesturing towards the silver Mercedes which was off the road at an angle, imbedded in a lamp post which was now leaning at a rather precarious angle.

"Driver had a heart attack and crashed by the looks of it Sir" the officer explained as he accompanied the Commander to the centre of the scene "Judging by his clothing I would say the chap has just left a hospital."

"Oh hell..." the Commander responded as he briefly looked through the drivers side window before turning away from the sight of blood and gore, this briefest of glances being enough to confirm that Sir William Devane was indeed the one who was dead at the wheel.

"You know him?" the officer asked upon seeing the Commander's reaction.

"Knew, past tense" the Commander confirmed "All right, get this whole area sealed off, no press and I want a full top to toe autopsy on the deceased as soon as possible please."

"Yes Sir" the officer confirmed as the Commander returned to his car before looking back "and you had better give MI5 a ring, ask for their Political Security Section and tell them what has happened as well, that will really make their day."

As the Commander got back in the car and they resumed their journey in an easterly direction, two men in a van equipped with sophisticated monitoring equipment were following his every move.

"Zulu Three to base" one of the monitors then called into a radio "Eagle One's presence in the vehicle is confirmed, he is on his way to the target location now."

"How is Sir William?" Tracy asked over the radio as Kinderley activated the lights and sirens to speed up their journey through the traffic as best as he could.

"Brown bread" the Commander grimly confirmed "Smells like a set-up as well."

"Somebody is busy tidying up the loose ends I guess" Tracy ventured "Where are you now?" she then asked as she looked up at the big screens across the front of the Control Room.

"Just passing through Bethnal Green now" the Commander confirmed as Tracy could hear the car accelerating hard in the background noise over the radio transmission.

Outside Bethnal Green Underground Station the traffic was pretty heavy where the junction with Roman Road crossed and two diagonally opposing lines of vehicles intersected.

Jack and Megan had just arrived nearby and were standing on the corner by the Underground Station entrance when they noticed the dark coloured unmarked Ford Mondeo with its blue flashing lights standing at the traffic lights with two Security Service motorcycles immediately behind, all stuck much like the rest of the traffic.

A few moments later the traffic lights turned green, however they turned green for all four possible directions and suddenly without warning a large white articulated forty four tonne truck came roaring through at speed and collided directly with the car, ramming it through a metal roadside barrier and on into the adjacent brick wall.

"Oww!" Tracy called out in pain as at that exact moment an ear piercing screech emitted over the radio forcing her to rip the headphones off before picking them up again only to hear ominous static.

"Control to Eagle One" she then called "Respond please."

Her call was met with nothing but static so she tried again, trying to remain calm but fearing the worst.

"Control to Eagle One, please respond" she called again.

"Maam" one of the Control Room officers called from across the room "getting reports of a major Road Traffic Accident outside Bethnal Green Underground Station."

"Get me traffic cameras up, now" Tracy immediately requested whereupon live feeds were quickly displayed on the screens at the front of the room showing the carnage that had occurred.

"Oh my God!" Megan called out as other vehicles also bumped into the wreckage all around amid the screams, screeching of brakes and smashing of glass.

"There" Jack then pointed to the driver of the articulated truck who once he had come to a stand, calmly got out of the cab, brushed himself down and then slipped away into the crowd using the chaos all around to make good his disappearance.

As people came running to the scene to see what had happened and offer assistance, the two motorcycle officers mysteriously slipped away as did a car that was driven off at high speed containing at least three occupants, one of them the driver of the lorry involved in what was clearly a deliberate targeted collision.

Bob and a couple of his specialist armed response team were the first Security Service officers to reach the mangled wreckage and it was Bob himself who checked the mangled remains of the car before deciding on his next course of action.

"Oh no..." Bob remarked to himself before turning away "all right let's get everybody back right now!" he then ordered which saw his colleagues and other officers now arriving on scene set about cordoning off the area and moving the crowds back well out of the way.

"Control from Lima Alpha Nine Zero One" Bob called into his own radio "Priority message" he declared.

The message Bob was about to convey would send a chill of shock down the spines of those who saw it appear on the status screens at MI5, MI6, various department offices in New Scotland Yard and associated Security Service buildings as well as the mobile telephones of key politicians such as the Home Secretary.

It was however deep in the bowels of the Pyramid Group operations centre that the reaction was very different as Dawson took a look at the message and smiled a huge smile that quickly turned to almost manic laughter which echoed ominously along the dark subterranean corridors of the complex.

It was a message with just four simple words but huge implications, it signalled potentially the end of an era and the beginning of dark uncertain times to come, worst of all as Tracy walked slowly back to her office seemingly to those who saw her in a state of shock, it meant her worst fears had been realised.

The same message had also reached McWilliam as her helicopter was just coming into land on a helipad marked in the neat grass outside a châteaux in the countryside a few miles outside of Paris, France.

As soon as the helicopter had landed and she was able to get out, she strode purposely and briskly across the meticulously maintained gravel driveway and up to the ornate stone and wooden doorway that was the main entrance to the châteaux.

She did not need to knock or ring the bell as the door opened as soon as she reached the top step and she was able to deliver her message directly to its intended recipient.

"Sir" McWilliam formally called before taking a momentary deep breath to deliver the message that many were now receiving.

"Eagle One is down"

To be continued....

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