



John M Upton

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Episode I - Hainault	Episode XII – Marylebone
Episode II - Holborn	Episode XIII – Haychester
Episode III – Waterloo	Episode XIV – Bank
Episode IV - Moor Park	Episode XV – Leytonstone
Episode V – Westminster	Episode XVI – London Bridge
Episode VI – Victoria	Episode XVII – Cannon Street
Episode VII – Embankment	Episode XVIII – Bethnal Green
Episode VIII – Earl’s Court	Episode XIX – Turnpike Lane
Episode IX – Lewisham	Episode XX – Star Lane
Episode X – Epping	Episode XXI – St. James’s Park
Episode XI – Liverpool Street	Episode XXII - Aldwych

Coming Soon:

Episode XXIII – Nine Elms
Episode XXIII – Priory Park
Episode XXIV – Tottenham Court Road

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Cannon Street

Smoke hung over the centre of London like an ominous dark cloak as the city stood still in a sense of shock at what had just happened.

In the river Thames in the shadow of London Bridge, fire fighters were still attending to the burning wreckage from where a bomb had exploded only minutes earlier, destroying the barge and tug boat in which it was being delivered, as well as a Security Service patrol vessel that had attempted in vain to stop it.

The explosion had brought the area to a shocked standstill but it was only the first of two terrorist attacks as a matter of minutes later whilst communications across the city were deliberately disrupted by those behind this fiendish plot, a car bomb had exploded in nearby Cannon Street, targeting the Prime Minister.

“We are under fire, need immediate backup!” Tracy Caverner called urgently into her radio as she and the Commander were forced to cower behind a parked car whilst they came under a massive hail of gunfire from a group of heavily armed men dressed in black and with balaclavas obscuring their faces.

Behind the gunmen in the centre of London's Cannon Street lay the badly wrecked remains of a black saloon car which only a minute or so earlier had been transporting the Prime Minister until it had been forced to stop before becoming the target of the car bomb.

“Tracy!” the Commander called across to his wife “How many rounds do you have left?” he asked.

“Half a clip” Tracy confirmed as she popped up over the car and fired off two rounds “A tad less now.”

“Alpha One to any God damn station” the Commander called into his own radio with an unusual sense of desperation as all around the gunfire continued with a stand off now well and truly set in as both they, the Armed Response Unit officers and other members of the service continued to exchange fire with the gunmen.

“I think I can see Jenny!” Tracy called back to her husband, referring to her identical twin sister Jennifer who had been driving the Prime Minister's car at the time of the explosion and whose seemingly lifeless body could be seen lying in the road a short distance from the smouldering wreckage.

“Bloody radio frequencies are still down!” the Commander exclaimed “If we don't get any help in the next few minutes then we are well and truly done for.”

“Butch and Sundance time I guess” Tracy admitted as the Commander fired his last shot which only succeeded in causing one of the attacking gunmen to duck briefly before he continued his attack.

“Doesn't look much like the Bolivian Army to me love” the Commander remarked “but we can't stay here much longer.”

“Bob!” Tracy called across the street to the chief of the Armed Response Unit who with four of his officers were valiantly continuing the fire fight, all be it with little success “Could use some help over here!”

“Covering fire in ten seconds?” Bob called back in suggestion.

Tracy reluctantly nodded in agreement before she and the Commander exchanged an apprehensive look.

“Tracy, I love you” the Commander called, his eyes showing a hint of fear, a rare feature for him but understandable in the circumstances.

“I love you to” Tracy confirmed before she took a deep breath, held her gun close to her chest and seemed to offer a momentary silent prayer before she spun around back towards Bob and his team.

“All right, now!” she called whereupon Bob and his men jumped up and began to advance with a volley of gunfire that stopped the gunmen in their tracks.

“Go! Go! Go!” Bob called amid the hail of gunfire that was being exchanged.

Tracy quickly grabbed the Commander and all but threw him ahead of her as they made good their escape down the side of the street, only turning briefly to fire her last three rounds in the direction of the enemy.

Seeing that the main targets of the gunmen had now withdrawn, the leader, a rough but hard as nails man by the name of Harcourt quickly called to his men with a shrill whistle.

“Gentlemen, job done, time to go” Harcourt called in his gruff croaky voice “We are leaving!!”

In response they proceeded to lay down covering fire as they withdrew to a waiting van that pulled out of a side street, the side door of which opened up to allow them to pile inside.

The Commander doubled over in pain and collapsed at the corner of the street as soon as he and Tracy had made it out of range of the gunfire whereupon she was quickly at his side as he lay on the ground holding out his hand to her which she took and held tightly to make sure he knew she was there for him.

“Tracy, I can’t see anything” the Commander called as he looked around but all that he could register was a blur, the result of concussion from being caught in the London Bridge explosion now taking its toll, adrenalin of the gunfight having been the only thing that had kept him going in the intervening minutes.

“It’s all right love” Tracy anxiously called to her husband, “I’m here and I am not going anywhere.”

“Jesus Christ!!” Sir Richard Crowthorne exclaimed as he and a team of officers came running up the road and found the two senior Security Service officers.

“Get as many armed officers as you can down there right now” Tracy requested, not taking her eyes off of her husband, instead merely indicating with her other arm down the length of Cannon Street “Bob and his boys are down there but they are running out of ammo fast.”

“Come on lads” Sir Richard declared as he drew his old six shot revolver from deep inside his coat pocket “Let’s get these bastards.”

By the time Sir Richard and the officers with him had run down the length of Cannon Street and reached Bob and his team’s position however, the gunmen were already bundled into their vehicle and making good their escape.

“Somebody stop them for Christ’s sake!” Sir Richard called angrily down the street but it was too late, with no radio or mobile telephone networks working to issue instructions or make anyone aware of the fugitive vehicle, the gunmen made good their escape and disappeared out into the dense traffic of the City.

“Paramedics!” Bob called urgently back down the street as Sir Richard helped him to his feet before they both went over to the wrecked car to assess the true extent of the disaster.

“Bloody hell, she is still alive!” Bob called as he knelt down and checked Jennifer’s body “I got a very faint pulse here” he confirmed.

Sir Richard meanwhile proceeded around to the other side of the wrecked car and tentatively looked inside the back, covering his mouth with a handkerchief, a barely insufficient barrier against the horror he then found.

“Oh God...” Sir Richard remorsefully remarked as he found the badly charred and mangled body of the Prime Minister inside “Sorry Sir, we let you down” he remarked mournfully before proceeding back over to Bob who by now had got Jennifer turned onto her back whilst a paramedic team came rushing up the street escorted by two ARU officers in case there were any gunmen still around.

“It’s all right Jennifer” Bob called to her “We got you, you are going to be all right” he reassured her even though it was clear she was very seriously injured and extremely lucky to still be alive, all be it by the thinnest of threads.

“We are going to need the air ambulance for this one” one of the Paramedics confirmed “We have maybe ten minutes tops to get her into surgery before we lose her.”

“Oh at last” Sir Richard responded when he saw he now had a signal on his mobile telephone as the strangle hold on the city’s communications was released “I’ll take care of that” he confirmed.

“Anyone else in the car?” the other Paramedic asked.

“Aye, I am afraid so” Sir Richard confirmed sadly “He’s gone.”

“Anyone we know?” the other Paramedic inquired.

“You could say that” Sir Richard responded just as his call was answered “Ah, Hotel Echo Control, this is Sir Richard Crowthorne, authorisation access code Echo Delta One Four. Request immediate emergency airlift evacuation of a seriously wounded Security Service officer from Cannon Street. Alpha priority.”

“Better tell them to hurry up mate” one of the Paramedics warned “She isn’t going to last much longer.”

“Oh my God, what happened?” Amber McWilliam asked in her distinctive broad Irish accent as she and Alan Martin arrived at the end of Cannon Street to look ahead and see the scene of devastation.

“We were too late” the Commander confirmed as he sat on the back step of the ambulance whilst another Paramedic administered oxygen to him as Tracy sat alongside him holding his other hand for support.

“That’s a car bomb” Amber remarked with obvious sadness in her expression “I grew up in Northern Ireland and I know the signs of one when I see one.”

“Could this be down to the Irish?” Martin asked “I thought the old Republican groups had buried the hatchet years ago?”

“They have, that’s the trouble” Amber grimly confirmed “There is little left of them these days except tired old men on Zimmer frames that occasionally do a little tub thumping in the local press and reminisce over a pint of Guinness about the so called good old days.”

“Here comes Sir Richard” Tracy confirmed as they were joined by the senior man, his expression clearly telling the story of what had happened.

“Well folks the bad news is the Prime Minister is dead” he confirmed.

“And there is some good news?” the Commander asked more out of hope than expectation.

“Jennifer is still alive but only... well its borderline” Sir Richard reported “I have scrambled a priority call to the city helicopter ambulance, should be here any minute now.”

“Tracy love” the Commander called to his wife “You had better call Simon, don’t tell him what has happened, just get him down the hospital fast whilst he still has time.”

“Right...” Tracy reluctantly agreed as she stepped to one side and got out her mobile.

“I want you two safely tucked away somewhere until this blows over” the Commander directed his attention to Amber and Martin as they looked on apprehensively whilst holding each others hand tightly in support.

“I can arrange that” Sir Richard agreed “Presidential Suite at the Park Lane Hilton should suffice, it’s secure and I can put a couple of my people on the door without any awkward questions being asked.”

“I feel like I ought to be helping” Amber suggested “You are going to need all hands to the pump on this mess, more so once the general public finds out what has happened.”

“Thanks for the offer” the Commander responded “Trust me, your time will come. If this turns out the way I fear it will then I will need someone on the outside of the loop when it all goes pear shaped, and believe me with the likes of Haliford and his cronies involved, it will. I am sure you two can find something to do to keep yourselves entertained?”

“Well considering how much time we have to catch up on” Amber responded, looking across into Martin’s eyes with a loving expression “I am sure I can come up with something” she agreed.

“I’ll sort out a car for you” Sir Richard confirmed as he returned to his telephone.

“Can I take this thing off now?” the Commander asked the Paramedic as he indicated the oxygen mask.

“All right Sir” the Paramedic reluctantly agreed, seeing that he was not going to win any argument with the Commander even though his battered condition meant he really should be going to hospital “Just at least try and take it easy please?” he suggested.

“Not much chance considering the current mess but I will at least give it a try” the Commander confirmed as a helicopter came in low overhead and proceeded to come into land in the centre of Cannon Street, the reverberating of the noise from the turbine engines and rotors echoing all around the walls of the buildings on either side, heralding the arrival of the air ambulance.

“Look, not over the phone” Tracy was heard to call on her mobile “Just get there any way you can and Simon, you had better hurry.”

“He’s on his way?” the Commander asked.

“Yeah...” Tracy confirmed as she hung up “Charing Cross secure unit is the plan, if she makes it that is.”

“She’ll make it” the Commander tried to reassure his wife “You Caverner’s are made of very tough stuff.”

“I had better go” Tracy responded before she and the Commander kissed each other farewell “I’ll see you later love” she duly confirmed before leaving, getting into a waiting patrol car that as soon as she was in the front passenger seat, sped away with lights and sirens in full cry.

“All right” the Commander declared “I want all the heads of the various Security Organisations in this City gathered at New Scotland Yard in thirty minutes along with the best bomb expert we can find.”

“I know just the man” Sir Richard confirmed as he got back on his mobile once more.

“For now the fact that the Prime Minister is dead is to remain strictly need to know until I say so” the Commander continued “Also I want Sir John Haliford and his trigger happy mob from his ISA or whatever they call it kept well away from this, we don’t need them cluttering things up with their bully boy tactics and agenda waving lunatics.”

“Not going to be easy” Sir Richard warned “They are just itching to get started.”

“That is what I am afraid of” the Commander confirmed “Also find me someone senior from Downing Street, the Home Secretary and the best constitutional expert we have on a secure line once I get back to the Yard, I want to find out exactly who is running the country and the correct chain of command.”

“You do know that as soon as word gets out, there is going to be one all mighty power struggle in Westminster as the various political cliques try and put their preferred man or woman in position” Sir Richard warned.

“So not only do we have an international jurisdictional bun fight, it looks like we are going to get a political one as well” the Commander summarised with obvious agitation “This I could do without.”

“I wholeheartedly agree” Sir Richard confirmed as he and the Commander proceeded to leave the scene, pausing only briefly to look up as the helicopter ambulance took off and then passed them overhead.

For Sir John Haliford, the day had finally come when he no longer had to answer to political masters. The former head of operations for MI6 now had the UK based branch of the new totally independent International Security Agency to play with and he was determined to enjoy it to the full.

“Right ladies and gentlemen” he declared with obvious glee to the room full of operators and technicians before him “Let’s continue to feed our friends in the National Security & Police Service duff gen and keep them thinking our friend the now late Mr Al Masaroute was responsible for the London Bridge bomb.”

“What about the Prime Minister?” the head of operations for this new outfit, Christopher Hoskins, formerly of the United States National Security Agency asked.

“Keep the powder dry on that one until the Commander does his big speech” Haliford confirmed “There is no point jumping the gun just yet.”

“I have the list of suspects for the first round of detentions you gave me all ready to go” Hoskins confirmed as he showed his boss a list of names and addresses on a clipboard.

“Excellent” Haliford responded as he read down the list “When we send our men in to arrest these people I want it nice and public, is that understood?”

“Absolutely...” Hoskins confirmed with a wicked grin of expectation.

“We have to be seen to be sending a message” Haliford continued “There is a new team in town and we mean to kick ass with interest.”

“McCallister is going to the hotel to meet with our Russian friend” Hoskins confirmed “First thing tomorrow morning as soon as we have received word from our Government contacts, we can safely start installing our people in the key positions we need to make this work.”

“In which case I suggest you go home and get some sleep” Haliford remarked as he gave Hoskins a congratulatory pat on the back “Tomorrow is going to be a very busy day.”

Even though the news about the British Prime Minister was not yet in the public domain, already there were urgent messages conveying the news being brought to political leaders and other key players located across the world.

On holiday in the Caribbean, the British Home Secretary, Graham Turner was brought the news by a messenger from the UK Consulate who disturbed him during dinner.

“Is this confirmed?” the tall, middle aged man asked quietly aside as the change in his expression immediately told his wife seated opposite something of the seriousness of the situation.

“I am afraid so Sir” the Consulate messenger regrettably confirmed.

“In which case you better have a jet standing by” the Home Secretary responded as he quickly thought as to what to do “I will be at the airport in twenty minutes.”

“Yes Sir” the Consulate messenger confirmed.

“Also please have a secure line direct to the Commander made available on board” the Home Secretary requested “I fear that much darkness and fear is about to be heaped upon us and we must act quickly if the worst of it is to be avoided.”

Across the other side of the world, a very worried looking Vasily Auremov, the Chairman of the Russian Federal Security Bureau or FSB was making his way through the corridors of the Kremlin in central Moscow accompanied by two guards who were escorting him to a very hastily convened meeting.

Soon they reached a very ornate set of double doors whereupon one of the guards knocked twice before he opened it and allowed Auremov inside.

“Vasily” came a booming voice from the far corner of the huge ornate office that Auremov now found himself in, the doors having now been closed behind him, leaving him alone with the owner of that fear inspiring voice.

“Mr President” Auremov responded whereupon from the shadows of the window overlooking Red Square, the tall distinguished figure of Vladimir Ivanov, the President of the Russian Federation himself appeared “I apologise for the very short notice nature of this meeting but there is something you need to know about right away.”

“Vasily, I have had the honour of knowing you for over twenty years” Ivanov declared as he went over to his large desk and sat down behind it, offering a drink as he did so which Auremov gratefully accepted “and yet even through the darkest times I have never known you to be so worried.”

“Fifteen minutes ago a large explosion occurred in Central London” Auremov confirmed “The target appears to have been London Bridge over the River Thames, fortunately the authorities were able to stop it just short without too many casualties.”

“How big a bomb?” Ivanov asked, clearly concerned.

“From what I gather from our man inside their New Scotland Yard, probably one of the largest seen in London since the war” Auremov reported “However that was just the first incident, there was another a few minutes later.”

“I take it from your tone this is the one that is going to be causing the major headaches?” Ivanov asked.

“The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom has reportedly been killed in a car bomb not far from the London Bridge explosion” Auremov confirmed mournfully “There are initial indications that this could be linked to this new International Security Agency and most importantly as far as we are concerned a certain Alexander Cruschov.”

“Oh dear God...” Ivanov responded, reacting by immediately pouring himself a large vodka in response to the news “Was there anyone else hurt?”

“Apparently Divisional Commander Jennifer Caverner was driving the Prime Minister's car at the time” Auremov explained “She is listed as critical and is not expected to survive.”

“I met her last year during that state visit” Ivanov confirmed “Oh this is dreadful, and the fact that that sick little slime ball Cruschov may be involved just makes it worse. Who do we have in London who is reliable?”

“That's the next problem” Auremov continued with obvious hesitation “Sergei Glasgow has disappeared underground, the last contact we had from him must have been at least forty eight hours ago.”

“Well where the hell is he?” Ivanov asked.

“Best guess is that the Security Service grabbed him before the goons from the ISA got to him” Auremov explained “Hell, these nutters even arrested their own CIA Station Chief, a David Howell so I guess its no holes barred with these guys.”

“I want that piece of scum Cruschov back in a jail on Russian soil as soon as possible” Ivanov declared.

“That is not going to be easy” Auremov responded with a cautious shake of the head “According to my source this International Security Agency have people absolutely everywhere and anyone they can't control has either disappeared like Howell and our man Glasgow or else been severely distracted.”

“It is vitally important that we get Cruschov” Ivanov explained “It may also help our British friends as well, which gives me an idea. I want to contact the Commander directly.”

“National Administrator General Sir Edward Regent himself?” Auremov asked.

“Yes” Ivanov confirmed with all sincerity.

“And presumably Sir you don't want anyone to know about this?”

“You and I are in complete agreement.”

“All right” Auremov responded after a few moments for thought “Give me an hour and I will get back to you” he confirmed.

“Vasily, this conversation never happened” Ivanov called just as the FSB Chairman was about to leave “Tread carefully old friend, I fear there is danger here.”

“I will Sir” Auremov confirmed before leaving.

“What's going on?” Simon Fuller asked as he arrived in the reception area of the Secure Unit at Charing Cross Hospital to be greeted by a worried looking Tracy “I just heard over the radio that there was a car bomb in Cannon Street.”

“There was...” Tracy sadly confirmed as a look of horrified realisation began to come over Fuller's face.

“Oh God no... Jennifer?” Fuller asked.

“She’s alive” Tracy confirmed “But...”

“Where is she?” Fuller demanded to know.

“They have rushed her into emergency surgery” Tracy explained having to all but stop Fuller from forcing his way through into the operating theatre area just ahead “They managed to airlift her to hospital quickly so she has every chance but it is going to take some time” she warned.

“Hang on a minute” Fuller looked around “Who else was in the car?” he asked.

“The Prime Minister” Tracy confirmed.

“Jesus Christ...” Fuller responded in a sense of deep shock “Is he dead...?”

“Very” Tracy admitted “Took the full force of the blast it would appear, probably knew nothing about it, it was so fast.”

“Who is responsible for this?” angrily Fuller demanded to know.

“Calm down” Tracy grabbed Fuller before he went off in a wild rage and placed him down into a chair “You will have your pound of flesh before this is all over but for now your place is at Jennifer’s side, she is going to need a lot of support if she is to make it through this.”

“Look, maybe there is some other way I can help” Fuller decided to suggest a compromise.

“You ought to stay here” Tracy strongly suggested “Perhaps if I were to have a laptop and anything else you may need brought here, that way you can be with Jennifer and help us out on any of the more technical elements that we may come across?”

“All right” Fuller reluctantly agreed “Perhaps you could have Lieutenant Commander Barrett co-ordinate with me whatever you guys require?”

“Consider it done to quote you proverbial catchphrase” Tracy responded.

“Commander!” called David Collins, the operations director of MI5 as he met him and Sir Richard Crowthorne as they arrived in the New Scotland Yard foyer “Thank God you are here.”

“Is everyone I requested here yet?” the Commander asked as they went straight to a waiting lift car before beginning the ascent to the top floor.

“I think so” Collins confirmed “All except anyone from MI6, apparently they have received a missive from their former boss Haliford that this is an internal matter and they are not, repeat not to get involved.”

“I want to keep that nut job Haliford and his goon squad out of this for as long as possible” the Commander strongly emphasised “As far as I am concerned until I see concrete evidence to the contrary, they are responsible for at least part of this mess and I personally am going to nail them right to the wall.”

“I’ve already had the Director General speak to all the media editors” Collins continued “No announcement will be made as to the identity of who has been killed until you give the green light.”

“Excellent” the Commander agreed as the lift came to a halt at the top floor and the doors opened whereupon they marched off down the corridor to the main briefing room at the far end “I don’t want the various political muffins of Whitehall falling over each other in a power struggle whilst we are trying to investigate this mess.”

“Well it may have already started” Collins ominously warned “The Home Secretary wants a word with you on a secure line as soon as you arrive.”

“I’ll speak to him a little later” the Commander agreed as they entered the briefing room which was filled with numerous senior officers and representatives from various different agencies and departments including the FSB London Station Chief Sergei Glasgov.

“Good evening Commander” Glasgov greeted him as they arrived “I appreciate my powers here are somewhat limited but anything I can do to help, it’s yours.”

“Thanks Sergei” the Commander confirmed as they shook hands warmly “I’ll take any help I can get at the moment. If ladies and gentlemen you could all take your seats, we will make a start.”

Everyone quickly found a seat and sat down whilst the Commander remained standing at a lectern at the front of the room.

“To make sure you are all up to speed” the Commander confirmed with grimness readily apparent in his voice “The Prime Minister, Hugo Davidson died approximately an hour ago when his car was lured into a trap and destroyed by some kind of car bomb in Cannon Street, this taking place only minutes after one hell of a distraction incident which saw a barge of high explosives detonated in the River Thames nearby, just west of London Bridge.”

This was the first time for some of those in the room that the rumoured death of the Prime Minister had been confirmed and there were momentary murmurs of shock around the room which the Commander allowed to subside before continuing.

“The first thing I need to know right now is who is in charge of the Government and hence the Country?” he asked around the room generally.

“Theoretically the chain of command dictates that in a situation such as this then the Deputy Prime Minister is sworn in” Sir Richard confirmed “Trouble is the post was abandoned some time back so the next in line is a coin toss between the Home Secretary Graham Turner...”

“...who is on holiday in the Caribbean” Collins reminded them.

“...and Lord Forsyth, the Cabinet Chief, Lord Privy Seal and Chairman of the Strategic Security Committee amongst various other titles he has managed to amass” Sir Richard continued with regret “Not bad for a man who has been politically disgraced three times in fifteen years and is technically unelected.”

“I am not dealing with that two faced little worm” the Commander quickly responded “That man even manages to give slimy toe rags a bad name.”

“My thoughts exactly” Sir Richard heartedly agreed.

“Tell me about the Home Secretary” the Commander requested “Can we rely on him?”

“I think so” Sir Richard confirmed “He came up through the political ranks and I have worked with him before on certain committees, seems like a reasonable bloke.”

“Sir” the Commander’s Personal Assistant called from the far side of the room from where she had been taking notes of the meeting but had stopped to take an urgent telephone call “Someone rather important wants to speak to you on line three.”

“Who is it?” the Commander asked.

“Her Majesty the Queen” the P.A. confirmed with a nervous gulp.

“Ah...” the Commander responded with an understandably surprised look down at the telephone on the desk in front of him before he picked it up.

“Your Majesty” the Commander declared, straightening his posture as he did so.

“Do you know in my thirty plus years of service to this country” Sir Richard remarked aside to Collins as the entire room watched the Commander taking his very important call “I have never once had a personal call from the Queen.”

“Maybe she just doesn’t know your number?” Collins wryly suggested.

“Very funny...” Sir Richard responded as it became clear that the Commander was coming to the end of his conversation.

“Yes your Majesty, I whole heartedly agree” he confirmed, still standing bolt upright which made Tracy look on with some confused wonderment as she entered the room at that exact moment.

“Who is he talking to?” Tracy asked Sir Richard as she sat down alongside him and her curiosity got the better of her.

“The Queen” Sir Richard confirmed all matter of factly.

“Oh...” Tracy responded with a look of understanding before she then did a double take towards her husband when the realisation set in.

“I will keep you informed, thank you your Majesty, goodnight” the Commander declared before gently hanging up the telephone and looking around the room to see that everyone was looking back at him with an expectant gaze.

“Well?” Glasgow asked, reflecting the expectant look from the rest of the room.

“Her Majesty called to inform me of her intentions to deal with our current sudden lack of Prime Minister” the Commander explained “She will not make any immediate decision and will consider all the options in the morning once the initial dust cloud has settled.”

“Sounds good to me” Tracy responded.

“Furthermore she has officially requested that I be in charge of the investigation into his death” the Commander continued to announce “She has granted me executive powers to take any and all means necessary to apprehend the culprits and bring them to justice and I am to receive unobstructed co-operation from all UK and overseas Security Agencies.”

“No arguments here” Collins confirmed.

“Whatever I can do to help, you are welcome to it” volunteered David Howell, the United States head of the CIA’s London Station “Admittedly in my current position since being deposed by Haliford and McAllister’s loonies, it may not be much but I still bring a well filled contact book to the table crammed with useful names and addresses of people who owe me a lot of favours.”

“Speaking of the Haliford and McAllister bandwagon” Tracy asked “What are we going to do about them?”

“Treat them like a mushroom” the Commander confirmed which resulted initially in a rather confused look from the others in the room until Howell realised the meaning.

“Oh, you mean keep them in the dark and feed them on sh...”

“...exactly” the Commander confirmed “I want them and their torture chambers kept as far away from this enquiry in general and me in particular for as long as possible as I am still not convinced they were at least partly to blame for this.”

“Unless of course they want to get thumped I take it?” Collins suggested.

“You guys know me all too well I fear” the Commander confirmed with a wry smile before turning to his wife “Tracy love, welcome back. How’s Jennifer and Simon?” he asked.

“Jenny’s still in surgery and likely to be for some time” Tracy sadly confirmed “Really is touch and go I fear. As for Simon, well I think we had better keep him away from any sharp objects or weapons as I reckon he is all but ready to go after whoever he is responsible single handed and none to subtlety either.”

“Understandable I guess” the Commander agreed “at any rate he is not going to be of much use to us in his current state of mind.”

“When I had got him calmed down” Tracy continued “he did suggest that Lieutenant Commander Barrett may be able to help us out with the technical side of this mess so I took the liberty of installing her in his office before I got here.”

“What did she have to say about it?” Sir Richard asked out of curiosity.

“It’s a disaster area” Tracy confirmed “Trouble is I am not sure whether she was referring to the situation or the state of Simon’s office, could be both for that matter.”

“All right, let’s get started” the Commander confirmed as he sat back down “Gary” he turned to the head of the Service’s Bomb Squad “I want to know everything about these bombs. Who made them, with what and where.”

“The river bomb is going to be tricky” Divisional Commander Gary Findell, head of the Bomb Squad confirmed, scratching the top of his nearly bald head in deep thought “Very high power explosive in a concentrated area, much of which has been either vaporised or diluted by Christ knows what is lurking in the Thames, the PM’s car on the other hand should give us something to work with.”

“It’s a start” the Commander agreed “An expert who witnessed the Cannon Street explosion reckons it was very similar to the sort of car bomb that the old Irish Republican movements used to use back in the 1970’s and 1980’s” he suggested.

“Looking at the initial images from the scene that my on site people have just sent through” Findell responded as he took a look at his laptop on the table in front of him “I would have to say that the pattern of damage to the vehicle seems to correspond with that theory, we will know more however once we get it and any other evidence down to the lab later tonight.”

“Keep me posted” the Commander requested.

“Will do Sir” Findell confirmed as he got up and left the room to continue to co-ordinate his part of this complex investigation.

“All right, we have a name to investigate in all this” the Commander continued “Tracy, I believe you have the paperwork on this?”

“Just before the London Bridge bomb” Tracy confirmed “We received an intelligence tip off about this man” she declared as copies of a briefing document with a photograph attached were passed around the room “The gentleman you are looking at is one Ben Al Masaroute who according to the report we got had apparently sneaked back into this country having been chucked out two years ago for saying nice things about terrorists.”

“I can add something to that” Collins confirmed “We know from past intelligence that he was involved as the fixer for the suicide bombs in the Arabian Gulf a few years back where boats packed with explosives were driven into commercial and military vessels.”

“Sounds like the London Bridge job would be just up this guy’s street” the Commander remarked “or river anyway.”

“We had a water tight case against this guy when we were holding him two or three years ago” Collins continued to explain “then some idiot of a Law Lord said the evidence infringed his human rights and the case got thrown out. Two weeks later Al Masaroute here got slung out of the country first class and according to my friend in MI6 was last seen in Pakistan making friends with certain groups linked to the Taliban amongst other undesirables.”

“From what I read here” Howell commented with a concerned look “This guy has only ever been the fixer, the go between, never the button man.”

“That is what is bothering me” Collins confirmed “I am willing to bet a fiver he was the man at the helm of that boat when it blew but I am also willing to bet further substantial sums that other than being on board at the time, he had nothing to do with this.”

“A primed, packaged and neatly delivered patsy” the Commander agreed “So we have two terrorist incidents within the space of ten minutes and both liberally littered with the hallmarks of distinctive groups who we have had dealings with in the distant and not so distant past.”

“Do the words 'garden path' and 'being led up the' come to the mind of anyone here?” Sir Richard suggested.

“Well lets do the full works run up on him” the Commander suggested “Interview his friends, neighbours, relatives, work colleagues, even his pet goldfish if he has one” he requested “I want to know everywhere he has been in the last two years, where his money comes from and what he spent it on.”

“I have a couple of specialists who can handle that with no problem” Collins agreed “It may also 'reassure' whoever is leading us up this garden path that we are taking the bait and running with it.”

“I would like to give his drum a spin as well as soon as you can come up with an address” the Commander continued “I feel the urge to have kicked in at least one door before this is all over.”

“What about Alexander Cruschov and that Welsh slime ball Altman?” Tracy asked “Not to mention their unmentionable associates, the ugly mothers with the guns.”

“They seem to have gone to ground” Sir Richard confirmed “but don't worry, I can safely bet they will reappear at some point along the way, indeed I am willing to bet the gunmen that attacked you guys after the PM hit are probably part of Bill Stevens lot of guns for hire thugs.”

“Ruthless bastards doesn't even come close to describing that lot” Tracy remarked “I strongly suggest that we all watch each others backs on this one as these people will not hesitate to stick a knife or a bullet in it without so much as a second thought” she warned ominously.

“What about this communications black out that occurred?” Howell asked “How far did that go?”

“From what I can make out” Tracy summarised “it seems to have taken out all of our radio frequencies, the city wide mobile telephone network and the CCTV systems both civil and traffic for over five minutes.”

“How the hell did they manage it?” the Commander asked “A coordinated attack on several different communication lines at the same time, it's not possible is it?”

“Well you would have thought it wasn't” Collins confirmed “However someone did it and that takes more than just some speccy nerd in a garage in Bromsgrove with a tape recorder and a ZX Spectrum. We are talking top drawer specialists here and I don't know about anyone else but that makes me just a tad nervous.”

“The little ditty they broadcast was a nice sinister little touch” Sir Richard remarked “London Bridge is falling down...”

“There have been lines from that song cropping up all over the place in the last few days” Tracy confirmed “These morons are laughing at us and on that subject I feel like Clint Eastwood's mule.”

“I think I may be able to bring something to the table on that matter” Glasgow remarked as he leaned forward with all seriousness “About twenty years ago the KGB's Covert Operations Communications Unit based in Leningrad came up with 'Project Mercury' whereby they assembled a crack team of technological wizards who were given a bottomless expenses account and told to go and create a system capable of seizing control of communication lines at the touch of a button.”

“Cutting off your enemy from their communications at the drop of a hat?” Sir Richard suggested.

“Just so” Glasgow confirmed “Now admittedly this was developed back in the days before we were cursed with mobile telephones but it does not stretch the boundaries of possibility that it could have been expanded in the intervening years to include that

as well. I speak of this in particular as the KGB man in charge of this exercise was none other than our favourite Russian, one Alexander Dimitriev Cruschov.”

“Oh what a tangled web we weave...” Howell remarked with a wistful smile and a look upwards.

“Sergei, David” the Commander addressed the two men directly “I would like you two to work together on this, find me a link, find me a name, find me something I can use.”

“I’ll make some calls” Howell confirmed.

“Always nice to be keeping busy” Glasgow agreed.

“All right” the Commander continued “I suppose I had better go and brief the press. Is there anything specific that anyone here wants me to say?”

“Mention this Al Masaroute character” Sir Richard suggested “He may be a dead end, possibly in the literal sense but maybe we can shake a few trees and see what falls out.”

“Good idea” the Commander readily agreed “Anything else?” he asked.

“Just be yourself love” Tracy suggested with a weakly wry smile. Before getting up and hugging him for support.

“Thanks love” the Commander responded before kissing her and then with his head down somewhat, leaving the room.

“You are watching the BBC News Channel and these are the main headlines at just after a quarter past seven” the presenter declared accompanied by the usual seemingly unnecessary but ever present graphics and background music as if the tremendous significance and impacts of that evenings news events needed any further highlighting.

Already the nation and indeed the world through the mediums of television, the Internet and mobile communications were transfixed, glued to their various devices since the first word of the two explosions in the centre of London had broken only a couple of hours earlier.

“Investigations are under way following two large explosions during the early evening rush hour which rocked Central London just under two hours ago” the news presenter announced, backed up by the only images they had available, a helicopter view overhead and some distant shots down the river and the length of Cannon Street which in typical style for twenty four hour news channels they had been repeating on a continuous loop as they had little else to do until an official statement of some kind from the authorities was forthcoming.

“The first, believed to have been an extremely powerful explosive device aboard a boat detonated at approximately ten minutes past five on the River Thames just west of London Bridge” the presenter continued “damage to the river bank adjacent to the explosion site and also to a Security Service patrol vessel that according to eyewitnesses was trying to stop the boat at the time of detonation is reported to be extensive with additional damage to facing buildings in the immediate area.”

The on screen footage accompanying this grave news showed the view from a helicopter of the area of the river Thames where the boat had exploded and showed the smouldering wreckage both in the water and on the adjacent bank along with the superficial damage to the railings of London Bridge itself. Also present were numerous emergency service vehicles and personnel as they were engaged in the onerous job of sorting out the mess, dousing any remaining fires and worst of all, recovering the dead from the wreckage.

“With the authorities all concentrating on this first explosion” the presenter carried on “they were taken by surprise when approximately five minutes later a second explosion ripped through and destroyed a saloon car that was in nearby Cannon Street, not far from the mainline and Underground railway stations.”

The footage on screen switched to the BBC's only available views at that time of the Cannon Street scene which consisted of little more than a very long shot down the length of the street to the area where the remains of the car could just be made out, now surrounded by Security Service personnel as the gruesome investigation got under way.

“For more on this we can now go over live to our reporter James Stock who is at Cannon Street” the presenter announced whereupon the view went into a split screen mode and the BBC's man on the scene could be seen beneath an umbrella alongside many other members of the television media who were all being held back behind barriers at the far end of the street.

“James, what more can you tell us about this explosion in Cannon Street?” the presenter asked.

“From eyewitness reports, we do know there were five vehicles involved” the reporter confirmed from the scene as he consulted his rather soggy notes which had suffered in the heavy rain that central London was now being subjected to “Four Security Service motorcycle outriders were escorting what has been described as a black four door Mercedes or Jaguar saloon car when they came under attack by as many as eight masked gunmen.”

“We have had reports that the driver of the car tried to escape the gunmen” the presenter reported “Can you confirm this?”

“It appears that just prior to the explosion” the reporter continued “there was an attempt to escape by the driver of the car by reversing at speed away from the ambush however it was then that some sort of explosive device was detonated which all but destroyed the car.”

“Do we know who was inside the car when this happened?” the presenter asked.

“Not at this time” the reporter confirmed with a reluctant shake of the head “We do know that one person, believed to have been the driver of the car was airlifted to hospital shortly after the incident and is described by the Paramedics who attended the scene as being in a seriously critical condition, the other occupant of the car is reportedly to have been declared dead at the scene, indeed just a few minutes ago a coroner's vehicle arrived to take away the body of the victim.”

“There were reports of a substantial gunfight following the car explosion, can you add anything to this?” the presenter inquired.

“A team of Security Service officers it is believed led by the National Administrator General Sir Edward Regent himself were amongst the first to arrive on the scene immediately following the explosion” the reporter confirmed “along with his wife, Divisional Chief Superintendent Tracy Caverner, they are believed to have come under considerable gunfire from the gunmen who orchestrated this attack before they fled in a vehicle that has as of yet still to be found.”

“So what is happening now?” the presenter asked.

“If you look behind me down the street” the reporter indicated behind him whereupon the cameraman focused down the street, zooming in as best he could given the distance and the appalling weather conditions upon the scene “You can see the car is now protected by a large inflatable tent whilst specialists from the Security Service Forensic Division along with the Bomb Squad examine it and the surrounding scene for any clue as to what happened here.”

“I am going to have to interrupt you there James” the presenter cut in “as we go over live to New Scotland Yard where we are about to get a statement from the National Administrator General.”

The view quickly changed over to a shot of the interior of the reception area of New Scotland Yard where the Commander, having seen the atrocious weather outside, had decided to move the press conference indoors at that last minute resulting in him having to use the reception desk as his announcing point whilst the ever on duty receptionist decided to shun the limelight and move out of the way for the duration.

“Ladies and gentlemen” the Commander called, holding up his hands for silence which given the amount of respect he commanded he immediately received “There will be a statement and then the opportunity to ask any awkward questions you may have afterwards, however given the nature of what I am about to confirm I do ask for some sensitivity on this matter.”

The Commander paused and looked around for a few moments before clearing his throat, looking down at his hastily scribbled notes and then continuing.

“As you are all no doubt aware” the Commander began in his best authoritative tone “Two terrorist incidents have occurred in Central London this evening. The first was a significantly large explosive device which was carried aboard a Thames Refuse

Barge. We believe its intended target was to be London Bridge, the aim to strike at the financial heart of the City. However thanks to the brave efforts of the captain and crew of the Patrol Vessel Zodiac, the worst case scenario was avoided. However I do have to report that most of the crew of the vessel were killed in the explosion which not only destroyed the barge but also the tug boat towing it and the patrol vessel itself, furthermore there was significant damage to the surrounding area however fortunately casualties here were light as acting on information received we were able to evacuate the majority of the surrounding area just prior to the attack.”

There was a brief pause which was broken only by the occasional flash of a camera before the Commander slightly hesitantly continued.

“At this early stage we have little to go on other than the name of someone we would like to question in relation to this evil attack” the Commander confirmed “A man by the name of Ben Al Masaroute is believed to be connected to this and we would like to talk to him or anyone who knows his current whereabouts immediately. You can speak to us in absolute confidence” he reassured his audience.

“Following on from that incident” the Commander then continued “an attack took place on a Security Service vehicle and its motorcycle escort in Cannon Street a few minutes later. As a direct result of that attack, a bomb of some kind was detonated, destroying the car. There were two occupants in the vehicle at the time.”

He paused for a moment and took a deep breath before proceeding to relay the sad news.

“The driver is confirmed as being Divisional Chief Superintendent Jennifer Caverner of the VIP Escort Division of the Security Service” the Commander confirmed, somehow only just managing to remain calm considering it was his sister in law, the identical twin of his own beloved wife he was talking about here “At this time she is in hospital undergoing surgery and is reported as being in a very serious condition.”

There was another pause as the Commander prepared himself to deliver the most shocking news of the evening, something that had not been announced in the United Kingdom since the shooting and resultant death of Prime Minister Spencer Perceval in the lobby of the House of Commons way back in 1812.

“The other person in the car has now been confirmed as the Prime Minister, Hugo Davidson” the Commander declared, resulting in looks of utter shock from the press which was no doubt reflected by the reaction from those watching and listening to this news conference live around the world “Initial indications are that he was killed instantly as a direct result of the explosion. Unfortunately despite our best efforts and hampered by a possibly deliberate communications blackout, we were unable to either stop the attack or apprehend the gunmen who after a brief but intense fire fight, fled the scene in a dark coloured van.”

The Commander did not need to ask for any silence to be forthcoming as the various members of the press before him were still suitably stunned by the dramatic revelation.

“At this time I am sure you all understand that it is too early to engage in the usual tittle tattle and speculative deliberation that always goes with intensely dramatic events such as these” the Commander confirmed “we however have the full force and expertise of the entire Security & Police Service at work on this case along with that of most or our sister agencies as well as some specialist help which has been kindly donated.”

“For the moment I would like to take this opportunity to publicly state that our thoughts at this time are with the relatives and loved ones of those who have either been killed or injured in these outrageous and despicable attacks” the Commander declared with grim determination and a stare that with not much more effort probably would have been able to cut through solid steel “Make no mistake ladies and gentlemen, those who perpetrated this act will be found and when they are I will personally nail them naked upside down by their testicles to Nelson's Column in Trafalgar Square and use them for target practice.”

“Subtle...” Tracy remarked with a wry smile as she watched the BBC News broadcast on the large television in the Commander’s office up on the top floor.

“Any questions?” the Commander asked generally.

“With the death of the Prime Minister and no Deputy Prime Minister, who is in charge of the country now?” asked one reporter.

“Well...” the Commander responded, looking slightly embarrassed “I have already been in conversation with Her Majesty the Queen and at her insistence until sometime tomorrow morning when an emergency cabinet meeting can be convened err... apparently I am.”

“Bloody hell...” Sir Richard responded as he nearly choked on his coffee at this revelation, a sentiment that was probably being echoed by many other people “Run for cover everyone, no door or Home Secretary is safe tonight!”

“No, I didn't want the job either” the Commander admitted upon seeing the reaction of his immediate audience which raised a much needed chuckle on what had been a very dark evening for the country.

Many miles away in a luxurious newly built office building on the outskirts of Greater London, Sir John Haliford was relaxing back in a huge office chair as he watched from behind his desk the press conference as it was being broadcast live and was now coming to a close.

“Well done Commander...” Haliford remarked sarcastically with a brief slow hand clap “Must say I didn't see that one coming.”

“Problem Sir?” Hoskins asked as he came into the office at that point initially to tell his boss that the Commander’s press conference was on the television but found that he need not have bothered.

“It would appear that our beloved Commander has, temporarily at least been promoted to Prime Minister, well until tomorrow morning at any rate” Haliford explained “At the specific request of Her Majesty I may add.”

“You can't argue with royalty” Hoskins remarked.

“No you can't” Haliford agreed “and believe me my little American friend I have tried in my various capacities with my former employer over the years.”

“Stevens and his boys are all ready to go into Al Masaroute's flat and set it up for our friends from the Security Service” Hoskins confirmed “All he needs is the word.”

“Christopher, tell him the word is given” Haliford confirmed “then once he has planted the little party surprise, I will phone in the gilt edged invitation.”

“Yes Sir” Hoskins agreed.

“Oh, err Hoskins” Haliford called after him just as he was leaving the office “Have that disgusting yet extremely useful thug Harcourt and his boys put on standby as well. A little bird tells me that the Home Secretary is flying back to the UK later tonight and I would like to arrange a little welcoming party for him.”

“Friendly or unfriendly?” Hoskins was almost afraid to ask given the ruthless nature of his seemingly now well out of control boss.

“It would appear that Mr Turner has some very ill advised sympathies that are not mutually agreeable to our aims” Haliford explained “Indeed if he and the Commander were to start working together then it could present certain difficulties for us so we need to take steps that he is removed from the equation before he does any damage.”

“Attributable to our phantom terrorists naturally” Hoskins commented “Err, sooner or later we will need some Irish fall guys won't we?” he asked.

“Don't worry about that” Haliford responded as he relaxed back in his chair with an evil satisfied grin “I have a fall guy in mind or rather fall girl to be exact and lets just say her fall from grace will have other benefits as well.”

“I begin to see a clever plot unfold” Hoskins remarked “You really do live up to your reputation boss.”

“But of course” Haliford confirmed “If the Home Secretary's little accident could happen before our big announcement tomorrow afternoon then so much the better.”

“I'll see what I can arrange Sir” Hoskins confirmed “Good night.”

With that, Hoskins left the office and proceeded down the corridor to the main nerve centre of the International Security Agency where numerous operators were sat at computer terminals monitoring various communications and intelligence feeds from around the country and beyond.

“Jim” Hoskins called to the on duty supervisor, another of his former NSA colleagues “Get onto Team One, give Stevens the go.”

“Echo Base to Team One” the Supervisor duly called into his radio head set “You have a green light, set out the welcome mat.”

“Thank you” Stevens responded before casually disconnecting the mobile telephone call and placing the device back in his pocket.

“Does that mean we have got to go out there Guvnor?” one of Stevens men asked, indicating the pouring rain in the quiet little side street in which their van was parked, the heavy rainfall hammering down on the sheet metal roof making conversation very difficult to be heard.

“Didn't I mention this job was going to be full of excitement and glamour?” Stevens joked with a hearty evil laugh.

“Oddly enough Guv, no you didn't” the man responded.

“All right guys” Stevens called to his team of men “It's time to set up our little surprise party.”

On his orders, the men in the van proceeded to get out, all of them carrying a number of bags or cases of equipment with them. Immediately they proceeded from the vehicle and down the narrow lane to the back of a block of flats where the sound of a passing express train covered their entrance through the secured back gate of the premises by means of cutting off the padlock that otherwise barred their way.

“We want flat number sixteen gentlemen” Stevens confirmed as he led the way up the stairs to the third floor of the typical slightly down at heel 1960's concrete block where they soon found themselves outside the very ordinary looking door.

With a careful move, one of Steven's men quickly had the door unlocked and they proceeded inside, Stevens hanging around on the balcony for a few moments to look up and down, ensuring they remained unobserved before he too headed inside and quietly closed the door behind him.

“Where do you want the stuff Guv?” one of the men asked as Stevens joined them in the main hallway.

“Primary device connected to the front door” Stevens instructed in a very business like manner as he consulted a blueprint plan of the flat “Give me a two minute clock on that please, also can we have some connections to the windows just in case.”

“You got it boss” the man confirmed before setting about his assigned task.

“Meanwhile I want you guys” Stevens addressed the rest of the men “to make sure the requisite clinching evidence is left in prominent places, it should be amongst the first things our friends notice when they arrive in the morning.”

“So how are they going to find this place then?” one of the men asked as he and the others began to unload a number of items from one of the bags and proceeded to place it in various places around the living room of the flat.

“Because thanks to the current 'national crisis' which with the usual unwitting assistance of the press will of course be racked up to unprecedented levels” Stevens explained “the Security & Police Service will be so desperate for a lead that I guarantee that they will happily accept the fantastic once in a life time invitation that our esteemed benefactor will be sending them in the morning.”

“Device is in place Sir” one of the men called from the front hallway whereupon Stevens proceeded to join him to inspect the handy work.

“Very nice” Stevens confirmed as he looked over the device and its associated wiring attached to the front door.

“I put the main charge of the package in the broom cupboard” the man showed Stevens the blue plastic barrel before gently closing the cupboard door “It should remain undetected until the trap is sprung.”

“In which case all that we need to do now is to set it running” Stevens agreed as he knelt down and took a screwdriver to the connecting box mounted just above the front door handle and proceeded to work on it, making the final connections.

“How do you know so much about this fall guy of ours?” the man alongside Stevens asked as he watched his boss carry out the delicate final stages of the job.

“In this job lad” Stevens explained “you have to know how and why a particular person works, their methods, motives, techniques and their methodology right down to how they like to protect themselves. Everyone in the late Mr Al Masaroute's admittedly rare profession has a unique way of doing business which when carefully studied by an expert can make it possible to do what we are doing now.”

“And that is?”

“Making it look like the London Bridge bomb is all the work of a single mad bomber with connections to certain popular extremist groups with connections in some of the more unsavoury parts of the world” Stevens confirmed “For which as a clincher we need to provide sufficient evidence of the man's unique trademarks, hence this little beauty” he declared as he tightened the final screw before stepping back to admire his handy work.

“You're the man boss” the man congratulated his superior upon seeing the quality of the finished article.

“I have to admit there are days when I amaze even myself” Stevens was forced to admit as he put his tools away and then wiped clean the door of any potential fingerprints or other evidence he may have inadvertently left “All right boys, let's get out of here” he declared.

Upon his order, the team of men left as silently and as unnoticed as they had arrived, making their way out of the block of flats and back to their waiting vehicle.

As soon as they were back in the van, Stevens made a telephone call.

“Echo Base, this is team one” he confirmed “The party poppers are in place, you may send the invitation at your discretion, out.”

With the call terminated, Stevens banged on the dashboard of the van which was the cue for the driver to start the engine before driving off into the rain and murk of that very dark and stormy night.

As the jet took off from the Bahamas airport, the Home Secretary tried to relax in his seat but his combined general dislike of flying along with the unfolding situation meant he was far from settled as his aide brought him the secure telephone.

“Dial one three five and the central switchboard should connect you directly” the aide confirmed as he handed the telephone across to his superior “The National Administrator General has been advised to expect your call Sir.”

“Very well, thank you” the Home Secretary responded “I must admit when it comes to making important calls, I haven't felt this nervous since I had to ring the President of the United States that time.”

“Not surprising I suppose” the Aide admitted “You are about to talk to the man who reputedly has collected the scalps of at least two of your predecessors plus one deputy Prime Minister, a Justice Secretary and at least three other members of parliament in the last six years alone at the last count.”

“Yeah, thanks for the reassurance Mike” the Home Secretary responded sarcastically as he picked up the telephone whereupon the aide left him alone to make the call.

“Home Secretary Graham Turner for the National Administrator General” he confirmed as soon as his call was connected.

The Commander was in his office, sat on the sofa with Tracy lying alongside him, her arms around him as she rested her head on him when the telephone rang.

“I hate to disturb you love” the Commander called to her “but I have the distinct feeling I am going to have to get that” he confirmed as he gently unwrapped her arms from around him and left her to rest on the couch before getting up, going around to the rear of his desk and picking up the phone.

“Hello” the Commander called “Ah Home Secretary, glad you called. How are the Bahamas?” he asked.

“Apparently hot and sunny” the Home Secretary admitted as he took a brief look out of the aircraft window “Unfortunately thanks to this evenings festivities I didn't get the chance to see much of it.”

“Yes, it has rather been one of those days here in London” the Commander confirmed as he looked across at his wife who was now sleeping peacefully on the couch.

“What time is it there?” the Home Secretary asked as he looked at his watch, trying in vain to work out the difference between the time zones at either end of that call.

“Just approaching midnight” the Commander confirmed from his antique pocket watch “Thankfully the shock of what has happened seems to have settled in and the nation and its news hounds have gone to bed for the night, all is quiet for now.”

“Do we have any idea what happened?” the Home Secretary asked.

“In a nutshell someone managed to distract us with a sodding great bomb and some duff intelligence and whilst we were chasing the proverbial untamed poultry, someone else popped up and blew the Prime Minister and Jenny Caverner to kingdom come” the Commander responded “I've got eight dead officers between the motorcycle escort and the wrecked patrol vessel on the Thames and three injured, Jenny being critical plus one very dead Prime Minister and no God damn answers, only horrible theories that just happen to fit what few facts we have.”

“What is all this about some bunch of mad Americans setting up shop in town?” the Home Secretary asked “I got some badly faxed copy of some memo in my daily messages earlier that made absolutely no sense whatsoever.”

“Ah, you mean the Haliford & McAllister All Star Bandwagon Road Show as we have nicknamed it” the Commander realised “The so called independent 'International Security Agency', strictly between you and me my friend I am not convinced they didn't have something or indeed a lot to do with this pretty little mess we are involved in.”

“Sir John Haliford is a ruthless little shit” the Home Secretary warned “Every time I have shared the same Commons Committee room with him he just seems to make my skin crawl and as for that fat obnoxious git McAllister, don't get me started on that vile subject.”

“I met them earlier this morning along with their resident bag man, an ex NSA trigger guy by the name of Hoskins” the Commander confirmed “A creepier trio I have not had the dubious privilege of entertaining in my office and then sending away with a flea in their ears for some considerable time and believe me I have dealt with some real unpleasant bastards over the years.”

“Don't tell me” the Home Secretary responded “Give me some good old fashioned armed robbers any day. I read that article series the Daily Telegraph ran on you and your wife a few weeks back.”

“Somebody actually read it?” the Commander wondered with some amazement.

“Has anyone been appointed to take charge yet?” the Home Secretary asked.

“Apparently the general consensus in the corridors of power that it will either be you or, and I do hope you are sitting down with a stiff drink to hand for this one, Lord Forsyth who will be confirmed as the acting PM sometime tomorrow” the Commander confirmed.

“Just as I thought things could not possibly get any worse” the Home Secretary declared with a slightly anguished look upwards “I certainly don't want the job but the thought of that lying cheating expenses fiddling unelected conman Forsyth getting it is even worse.”

“Never met the fellow myself” the Commander admitted “Seen him in action on Newsnight now and again though. Is he really that slimy?” he asked.

“Slimier if that is at all possible” the Home Secretary confirmed “You will need a bucket load of de-greasing agent wherever he has been, let me warn you now.”

“Well with any luck common sense will prevail and they will ask you to take the job” the Commander remarked “Mind you given how crazy and warped things have been around here of late I suppose anything could happen.”

“I am on my way back to the UK now” the Home Secretary informed him “With a bit of luck and a following wind I should be back in London sometime in the morning. In the meantime what is the plan regarding the investigation?” he asked.

“Well I had a call from the Queen no less” the Commander admitted, still slightly bemused by that occurrence earlier in the evening “She insists that I remain the sole officer in charge of the overall investigation into the explosions and whoever is behind it.”

“Sounds like a sensible plan to me” the Home Secretary agreed “If I do get the centre seat in Downing Street then knowing there is an officer of your experience, reputation and competence at the helm of the investigation will make my job a little easier.”

“When you arrive, we should meet as soon as possible” the Commander suggested “Call me when you are approaching London and Tracy or I will come out and meet you personally.”

“I'll do that” the Home Secretary confirmed “If you can, try and keep everything in order until I get there.”

“Shouldn't be too much of a problem” the Commander reassured him “Goodnight Sir.”

Once he had hung up, the Commander looked back across the office towards the couch where Tracy had woken up and was looking back at him with a smile.

“Is everything all right love?” she asked.

“In so much as things could be given the circumstances” the Commander confirmed “Still no word from the hospital though.”

“Jenny will pull through, I can feel it” Tracy remarked “One of those strange things about being an identical twin, you just know how the other is feeling and at the moment I sense terrible pain but that is being overridden by powerful determination.”

“I hope you are right for all our sakes” the Commander agreed “for one thing if she were to die I am willing to bet that Simon's attempts at vengeance would make me look like an amateur.”

“So we are talking way beyond kicking in doors and kneecapping prominent members of the community here I take it?” Tracy asked.

“I reckon so” the Commander was forced to admit as he got up from behind his desk and went back to the couch to be with her.

“So are we going to be seeing home tonight love?” Tracy asked as they put their arms around each other on the couch “Not that it isn't comfy on the sofa here that is.”

“By the time we will have got home, it will almost be time to come back again” the Commander admitted “It's going to be an early start in the morning I fear.”

“What about Jack?” Tracy asked as she was worried they had overlooked the needs of their adopted son.

“Well he should be all right” the Commander responded “After all he can take care of himself.”

“Did you see the state of the microwave the other morning?” Tracy reminded him.

“Err you mean the tomato soup explosion?” the Commander sheepishly asked to which Tracy nodded “I'm afraid that was me actually love” he reluctantly admitted.

“You and technology were never meant to coexist in the same universe were they?” she asked with a giggle.

“I think I managed after seven years of trying to get mobile telephones fairly well worked out” the Commander confirmed as he found his mobile in his pocket and proceeded to make a call.

“You've reached the mobile of Jack Regent” came the response as soon as the call was answered “I'm half asleep so please leave a message after the raspberry.”

“You know lad with cynicism like that, you would make a great Security Service officer” the Commander wryly remarked.

“On what you guys get paid?” Jack responded “Sorry but I think I will stick to a safer profession, maybe bomb disposal or something.”

“You all right mate?” the Commander asked “Only it looks like the wife and I won't be getting home tonight by the looks of things.”

“Given the extraordinary media speculation that seems to be ongoing across almost every channel” Jack confirmed as he flicked through the television channels with the remote, each different one showing some variation of the news coverage of that evenings extraordinary and dramatic events “it doesn't really come as any great surprise.”

“Just out if interest” the Commander inquired “Who are they betting on to be the next Prime Minister, temporary or otherwise?”

“Well the BBC is going with the Home Secretary as the narrow favourite but they are also tipping the Chief of Defence as well which surprised me” Jack confirmed “Unfortunately they all also seem to be reluctant to rule out that outrageous slime ball Forsyth.”

“That was what I was afraid of” the Commander admitted.

“How is Auntie Jennifer?” Jack asked “She seems to have barely warranted a mention beyond your statement to the press earlier.”

“Stable but still officially critical” the Commander confirmed “I think your guess is as good as mine on that one.”

“She survived the initial explosion” Jack pointed out “If she is tough enough to come through that then I reckon she can survive almost anything.”

“Err listen mate, things are likely to get a bit dicey around here over the next couple of days” the Commander warned “Stupid question I know but are you going to be all right on your own for a little while?”

“Of course I will be” Jack confidently confirmed “Tomorrow is a new day as they say.”

“I must say, you are being very positive” the Commander commented.

“Megan is back from holiday in the morning” Tracy reminded him, referring to Jack's girlfriend who although he would never publicly admit it, he had missed dearly over the last ten days.

“For the umpteenth time, she is...” Jack began to protest, always embarrassed about his relationship with Megan.

“...just a friend” Tracy and the Commander both responded in unison.

“All right then, if you say so” the Commander agreed with a wry smile “If anything crops up, you just call Tracy or me” he instructed.

“I will have you guys on speed dial” Jack confirmed “However if things do globally pear shaped I’ll try not to call you when you are likely to be busy getting shot at.”

“What makes you think we are going to wind up being shot at?” Tracy asked, understandably slightly concerned.

“Past experience?” Jack explained “Whenever you two start mixing it up with the political muffins of Whitehall is usually when it starts to get interesting.”

“Now there is confidence for you” the Commander remarked “Anyway, you take care all right and we will call you if anything goes wrong.”

“You two will be all right” Jack tried to reassure his adopted parents “Nothing a little careful application of brute force and ignorance can’t solve.”

“Remind me to use that excuse when I meet the Home Secretary in the morning” the Commander agreed with a chuckle “All right, goodnight Jack.”

“Goodnight guys” Jack confirmed before he hung up.

“He would be lost if it weren’t for Megan around” Tracy remarked as the Commander and her snuggled up to each other on the couch.

“Everyone should have someone to love” the Commander responded “I think I heard that in a song once.”

“Probably from you dad’s old collection of 78’s” Tracy confirmed “Well we have each other, seems pretty perfect to me.”

“I’ll drink to that” the Commander readily agreed before they kissed each other.

A few miles away in the secure unit of Charing Cross hospital, Simon Fuller was looking almost vacantly out into the distance from the fourth floor window across the dark city skyline. His beloved wife Jennifer was his life almost and now he felt so alone and fearful as she still had yet to emerge from the seemingly endless surgery in which she had spent the last seven hours.

Whilst Fuller was alone in the clinically clean and unwelcoming waiting room, he wasn’t alone in that section of the hospital for there was a formidable presence of Security Service officers present around and about, many of them from Jennifer’s own VIP Protection Branch who had volunteered to work unpaid overtime to guard their commanding officer in her time of direst need.

As one of the duty Doctor’s proceeded down the corridor, he was more than willing given the circumstances to subject himself to a identity check and a pad down before he was allowed into the waiting room where as he entered, Fuller turned away from the window and looked at him with an almost pleading look.

“She is going to be all right” the Doctor confirmed with a restricted smile which led Fuller to look up at the sky momentarily and offer a silent thanks and sigh of relief upon hearing the words he had thought would never come.

“Can I see her?” Fuller immediately asked.

“One thing at a time” the Doctor issued a note of caution “There are still a few things you need to be aware of.”

“Such as?” Fuller asked, clearly desperate not only to see her but to also find out exactly how she was.

“It has taken a hell of a lot of work to patch her back together” the Doctor explained as he and Fuller sat down at his insistence “When the explosion occurred, it appears she was blown forwards and out of the vehicle and it is that impact damage that has been the most difficult area to try and address.”

“Look, just give me the bottom line, please” Fuller begged.

“All right” the Doctor agreed slightly reluctantly “She has burns all up the left hand side of her back, fortunately her uniform and stab vest took the brunt of it and probably saved her life, that will heal in time. The shrapnel from the explosion however did break her left arm in two places so we have had to pin it back together.”

“This is leading up to the bad news isn't it?” Fuller asked, already sensing where this was going.

“We managed to save her right leg” the Doctor admitted “However the left foot up to about two inches above the ankle was mangled beyond recognition; it looks like part of the car's gear box went straight through it.”

“Oh no...” Fuller head sank in disbelief at the shock of what he was hearing.

“For the moment we are keeping her under” the Doctor continued “She has got a lot of mending to do. The leg we can fix with a prosthetic at a future date, you would be surprised what we can do these days.”

“A wooden leg?” Fuller responded with a hint of a smile at the thought of Jennifer on a Captain Hook style peg leg.

“Actually I think they use a specially developed composite plastics these days, often hard to tell the fake leg from the real thing” the Doctor confirmed “Anyway there are a number of other comparatively minor injuries pretty much all over but considering what she went through she is very lucky to be alive, maybe one in a million chance really.”

“Can I see her now then Doctor?” Fuller asked.

“Yes, all right” the Doctor agreed whereupon they both rose from their seats before he led the way out of the room and then down the corridor to the treatment room where he then paused at the door for a few moments.

“You may be shocked by what you about to see” the Doctor warned “Jennifer is wired up to a lot of equipment and breathing apparatus which is there to keep her stable and support her whilst she remains in the controlled coma.”

“I understand Doctor” Fuller nodded in agreement whereupon the Doctor duly opened the door and allowed him to step inside.

“Oh my...” Fuller remarked as he saw Jennifer lying on the hospital bed with, as the Doctor had warned moments earlier, a protrusion of pipes and wires connected to a significant amount of monitoring equipment which beeped away constantly in time with her heartbeat.

“It's all for her own good” the Doctor reassured Fuller upon seeing his understandable reaction to the initial sight of his wife in such a state “She's a tough young lady I'll give you that.”

“That she is” Fuller readily agreed as he sat down at the bedside and took Jennifer's hand in his, noticing the treated cuts and abrasions that were on the back of it before looking at her face where he saw that her eyes were closed but yet she seemed at rest, almost relaxed as if oblivious to the battle her body was mounting in trying to recover from her horrific injuries.

There were some minor scratches to the left hand side of her face, a few bits of her hair over her ear had also been singed off and her left ear was still noticeably bloody and cut but it was still definitely Jennifer lying there which reassured Fuller all the more.

“How long will you be keeping her under for?” Fuller asked.

“Hard to tell” the Doctor was forced to admit “We have to be a bit careful about how long we keep her under, too little and we risk causing her harm, too much and we could endanger the baby.”

“Ah I see” Fuller responded before he then did a double take “What baby?” he then asked.

“She's six weeks pregnant” the Doctor confirmed “Didn't you know?” he asked.

“Well she had been complaining of feeling a little bit under the weather first thing in the morning lately” Fuller admitted, clearly rather stunned at this revelation “but we both put that down to her being overworked of late. Now hang on a minute, it must be a mistake, she can't have children!”

“Already checked the records on that one” the Doctor confirmed “It's her twin sister Tracy who can't have children, Jennifer can, all be it there being much less chance than most women her age.”

“Just proves that sometimes the odds pay out in mysterious ways I suppose” Fuller admitted “Is the baby all right?”

“Absolutely fine” the Doctor confirmed “Nicely encased within her stab vest so he or she probably didn't feel a thing.”

“A baby?” Fuller responded, still somewhat numb at the shock “Really?”

“You want to see the ultrasound picture we took?” the Doctor asked.

“Do you suppose Jennifer knows herself?” Fuller asked.

“Maybe not” the Doctor theorised “After all if you and her did not expect her to get pregnant because it was highly unlikely there is no reason to suspect that she would have investigated that as the cause of her illness lately.”

“Blimey...” Fuller remarked “Twenty minutes ago I was facing the prospect of losing my wife, the one and only thing I hold dear and true in my life and now I find not only will she be all right but I am going to have a child as well.”

“I think a little celebration is in order” the Doctor suggested “Although maybe wait until she is back with us.”

“Absolutely” Fuller agreed as he looked back at Jennifer once again “Thank you for everything Doctor” he declared, shaking the Doctor's hand quite vigorously.

“All part of the friendly service” the Doctor confirmed with a smile, satisfied that his job was done for the night “You should stay here with her; I'm going to go home and get some sleep.”

“Goodnight Doctor” Fuller called as he left.

Lieutenant Barrett looked up from her desk and across at the clock on the wall of the specially set up incident room as it ticked past six o'clock in the morning.

Not surprisingly given her dedication to the job, she had been there all night but had finally fallen asleep at her desk around about three in the morning and it was only the ringing of a telephone nearby that had brought her back to her senses.

“At this time of the morning?” she wondered out loud even though there was no one else in the office to hear her remonstrations “Must be serious then” she then reckoned as the telephone continued to ring which saw her reach for the handset on her own desk “Or at least it had better be” she added as she duly pressed a button that transferred the call to her own phone.

“Special Incident Room” she declared upon taking the call “Lieutenant Commander Barrett speaking.”

“The man on the television you say you want” a clearly obscured voice declared over the telephone “Al Masaroute his name, he have a flat, number sixteen Dalchett Court in Shepherds Bush. I cannot speak any more otherwise I may be killed, goodbye” whereupon the caller promptly and abruptly hung up.

“Err right...” Barrett responded, somewhat taken by surprise at the rather abrupt nature of the call as she proceeded to quickly write down the information that she had just received “Thank you for your help whoever you were” she remarked before tearing off the paper from the pad and proceeding out of the office with a purposeful stride in her step.

She strode business like down the corridor and then turned right before passing into the outer office whereupon she then tentatively knocked on the Commander's main office door.

“This had better be bloody brilliant” the Commander was heard to call which was Barrett's cue to enter the office.

“Sorry to disturb you Sir” Barrett apologetically called upon seeing the Commander relaxed on the couch with Tracy half asleep alongside him “Does an anonymous tip off with Ben Al Masaroute's home address count as 'bloody brilliant' by any chance?” she asked.

“It will suffice” the Commander agreed after a brief moment for consideration “Where is it?” he asked.

“Flat in Shepherds Bush by the looks of it” Barrett confirmed as she handed across the paper with the address written on it.

“In which case see if you can rustle up an Anti-Terrorist team as well as Bob and some of his lads, I'll go and give his drum a spin later this morning” the Commander agreed.

“Very well Sir” Barrett confirmed before with an acknowledging nod she left.

“You know for a lass like me who was born within the sound of the proverbial Bow Bells” Tracy quietly remarked as she stirred and sat herself up “I still seem to have problems comprehending what on earth you are going on about sometimes love.”

“So do I” the Commander wryly admitted “So do I.”

“That's excellent news” Sir Richard confirmed over his mobile as he and Collins walked along the north embankment of the River Thames towards Westminster Bridge “I'll pass it on, bye.”

“Sound's promising” Collins remarked as they reached Westminster Bridge Road and as the traffic light controlled crossing was in their favour, quickly darted across to the other side before heading for Parliament Square.

“That was Simon Fuller, it looks like Jennifer is going to be all right” Sir Richard confirmed “Still unconscious at the moment and with a lot of mending to be done obviously but she and the baby should pull through.”

“That's the best news in many a day” Collins responded “Err what baby?” he then inquired.

“Apparently she is about five or six weeks pregnant” Sir Richard explained “No one knew about it, least of all Simon until it showed up when they were treating her at the hospital.”

“At least someone will be happy today” Collins remarked as he paused to see the red glow of sunrise come up behind the skyline of the city “It's so quiet” he then looked around Parliament Square in the shadow of the Houses of Parliament which was eerily deserted with only the occasional passing bus and a black cab disturbing the calm “I fear it is the calm before the storm.”

“Could well be” Sir Richard confirmed as they continued to walk across Parliament Square heading towards Victoria Street over on the other side “Once the political mandarins rise from their pits, think tanks and under their respective rocks and then get their cliques together later this morning, it is likely to get very lively around here.”

“When is the Home Secretary due to arrive?” Collins asked.

“About nine o'clock at London City Airport” Sir Richard confirmed as he checked his watch just as the bell of Big Ben began to chime the half hour at 06:30. “Private charter, no passenger manifest being issued to keep away the snoopers, press and any uninvited guests and Jennifer Caverner's deputy has promised the best escort team he has available.”

“Discrete, swift and secure I do hope” Collins agreed “He may be our last best hope for a decent steadfast leader in this crisis and by God we are going to need one.”

“I wonder how long it will be before the dark lord of the Sith rises from his coffin and starts plugging his ugly mug on the BBC?” Sir Richard wondered.

“Who?” Collins asked, suitably mystified.

“Lord Terrance 'I am your friend, trust me' Forsyth” Sir Richard confirmed “No doubt he already had his evil minions and supporters in the popular press fully briefed before the echo of the Cannon Street explosion had even died down.”

“You know that man even gives sinister creeps a bad name?” Collins remarked.

“Damming him with faint praise I fear” Sir Richard agreed “Whatever happens in the next forty eight hours, we must do all that we can *legally* to ensure he does not seize power.”

“That would be seen as the Security Services dictating political policy” Collins warned “A very dangerous step. If MI5 or anyone else were seen to be siding with one political viewpoint or side over another there would be hell to pay.”

“We must watch our every step” Sir Richard agreed “Co-ordinate our efforts, stick to the script with no one and I mean absolutely no one going off message” he insisted as they turned right from Victoria Street and headed for Broadway in the shadow of the New Scotland Yard building.

“I fully agree” Collins confirmed “I can have whatever our Political Security Bureau have on him brought up to you at any time if it will be of help?”

“Thank you” Sir Richard agreed “I have a fair bit on Forsyth myself but any fresh information you can bring to the table will be more than welcome.”

They reached the main entrance of New Scotland Yard and proceeded directly inside with a customary wave from Sir Richard to the Receptionist as they passed and made directly for the lifts which they then took up to the top floor.

“So what do you think Forsyth's plan will be?” Collins asked as the lift car ascended up to the top floor.

“If I know that snivelling little worm like I do” Sir Richard remarked wryly “Ten gets you one the first thing he does is assemble a focus group and 'correlate a basis for an ideas threshold' or some such utter bollocks. He's like that you know.”

“I feel that the first thing we should be doing is correlating a basis for an ideas threshold” declared Lord Terrance Forsyth as over breakfast in the House of Commons restaurant he studied the various newspapers he had in front of him, most of which announced the tragic events of the preceding twenty four hours in huge headlines across rather grainy blown up photographs of the explosion scenes.

Forsyth was quite an unpleasant vulgar looking little man, the slicked back receding hair on his head was a vain and largely unsuccessful attempt to make him look younger than his fifty four years of age whilst the tailored suit that he was usually to be seen wearing equally had little effect in disguising his short and portly stature.

If it had not been for the austere setting and his distinguished company, anyone observing would have been forgiven for mistaking Lord Forsyth for some dodgy east end of London second hand car salesman, a genetic throw back from the 1970's.

“Derek, I am going to appoint you as my press liaison officer and campaign manager” Forsyth called upon the tall and very thin figure of Derek Lloyd, one of the lesser known members of parliament and someone who despite his talents at manipulating,

had generally remained below the proverbial radar and was largely unknown to the wider public.

“I have already taken the liberty of contacting those political editors in the media both here and overseas who are already sympathetic to our world view” Lloyd confirmed “We can have you on the BBC within the hour and begin briefing the key movers and shakers whenever you like.”

“What about our online media presence?” Forsyth asked “Admittedly not my specialist field mind you but it occurs to me these days that you tend to make a better impact through the internet and blogs, that sort of thing.”

“The website goes live in an hour” Lloyd was pleased to confirm.

“It was most kind of our friends at the ISA to give us the advanced heads up on this situation” Forsyth commented, nodding to Sir John Haliford as he joined them at the table and helped himself to some coffee from the pot “The only potential obstacle remaining is the Home Secretary who could be appointed acting Prime Minister should we fail to get our oar in first.”

“That angle is already being taken care of Sir” Haliford was pleased to inform them “Apparently he will have some trouble at the airport.”

“And what are the Security Services doing as we speak?” Forsyth asked.

“Being led on a merry dance” Haliford confirmed with an almost overly pleased look “By this very afternoon the National Security & Police Service will be in such a muddle that the new administration under your expert leadership will have no choice but to appoint my new agency to oversee the security of the nation.”

“The Commander isn’t going to be happy” Lloyd cautioned all be it with little obvious actual sympathy.

“Believe me my friends” Haliford reassured the group knowingly “The Commander, his wife and those others who make up the old order of law enforcement around here will have plenty more pressing matters to worry about.”

“In which case gentlemen” Forsyth declared with a hearty chuckle which just added to the odiousness of his character “I suggest we prepare ourselves for Government.”

“Good grief, what a mess” the Commander instantly reacted as he walked into the forensic examination area located in the lower basement of New Scotland Yard.

What had caused his reaction was the sight of the wreckage of the Prime Minister's car which took centre stage in the clinically clean room, illuminated by spotlights and surrounded by a team of white overall clad forensic experts who were photographing and going over every fragment of the vehicle in minute detail.

“Good morning Commander” Divisional Commander Goddard, the head of the Forensic Science Service called as he joined his superior officer and looked upon the scene with him.

“Morning Andy” the Commander responded “Can't say there is too much good about it though” he admitted.

“Yeah...” Goddard was forced to agree “So would you like the main headline or do you want the details first Sir?”

“Car bomb?” the Commander asked.

“Car bomb” Goddard duly confirmed “How did you know?”

“Someone who heard the explosion and has quite an expert knowledge of Irish Republican attacks immediately reckoned it was” the Commander explained.

“Well whoever they were, they were about as spot on as you can get” Goddard agreed “Classic example of a car bomb, magnetically attached to the underside of the vehicle so even if the car comes under attack as it did here, it doesn't matter how far away you drive you still wind up in the middle of the big bang.”

“So what happened?” the Commander asked.

“From what we can work out from the debris pattern, deformation of the vehicle structure etcetera” Goddard explained as they stepped forward so he could show the results of his findings so far “the device attached itself to the car around about here” he indicated the area where once the rear seat had been.

“The Prime Minister was in the back?” the Commander inquired.

“Bomb was almost right beneath him” Goddard confirmed “when it went off, the blast went upwards and forwards, impaled the PM with part of the chassis frame. He never felt a thing.”

“Well that is something I suppose” the Commander admitted.

“Jennifer Caverner was extremely lucky” Goddard then continued “The defensive screen between the front and back parts of the car interior plus the specialist seat she was sitting in and the fact she had body armour on meant she survived although even then that was only because she did not have her seat belt on which meant the force blew her out of the car.”

“Just had a call from the hospital” the Commander remarked “Seems she is out of surgery, she should be all right but it will take a lot of time.”

“She is a very lucky girl” Goddard commented “One in a hundred thousand chance I reckon and I have seen enough of these sorts of gigs over the years believe me.”

“What about the device itself?” the Commander asked.

“Glad you asked” Goddard led him over to an examination table over on the far side of the room where numerous fragments of the bomb which had been found were meticulously laid out “What you have here are the identifiable fragments of your classic car bomb which one small problem, it isn't your classic car bomb.”

“Come again?” the Commander asked.

“It's a fake” Goddard explained “Someone very clever has assembled a fully working car bomb as was unfortunately demonstrated yesterday evening, the thing is they have built it in such a way as to make us *think* it originated with some pissed off Republican Splinter group taking up their old hobbies once again.”

“I see a plethora of garden paths up which we are being led opening up before me” the Commander concluded.

“Oh but it gets even better Sir” Goddard continued “Step this way” he gestured his superior officer over to a side room where after passing through an air tight security door they found themselves in a medical examination suite where lying on a table in the centre was a body shaped object covered in a simple white sheet.

“I am not going to like this, am I?” the Commander wryly asked, already sensing what was coming.

“It depends on whether you like your investigations to be nice and simple” Goddard admitted as he went and stood by the head of the table “Meet your London Bridge boat bomber” he declared as he drew back the sheet and revealed the badly burned face and upper torso, a sight which made the Commander wince quite badly.

“Where did this guy come from?” the Commander asked, only glancing intermittently at the corpse.

“Thames River boys fished him out from amongst the floating wreckage about three hours ago” Goddard confirmed “He is not one of the Patrol Vessel crew, neither is he an unfortunate passer by as he was wearing a Thames Refuse Service jacket so he must have been the one the Captain of the Zodiac reported as seeing on the bridge of the tug boat shortly before it blew.”

“Do we know who he is?” the Commander asked.

“A guy by the name of Ben Al Masaroute” Goddard read from a clipboard to confirm the facts before passing across a clear plastic evidence bag containing a badly scorched set of documents including what was just about recognisable as a passport and a driving licence.

“Signed, sealed and delivered” the Commander remarked “Case closed.”

“I reckon that is what someone wants us to think Sir” Goddard had to agree “Add this guy's colourful history to the initial findings of the chemical analysis of what the explosives were made up from and it all points to the same conclusion.”

“Some faction of Al-Qaeda or some similarly brainless bunch of death worshipping loonies” the Commander agreed.

“Clever fellow this Al Masaroute though” Goddard admitted “I mean he manages to steer a boat with a barge load of explosives in tow the best part of ten miles up a river unaided and the key handicap that he had been dead for at least three days at the time.”

“What?” the Commander exclaimed with a look of amazement.

“Someone had kept this guy on ice and just like my missus with the turkey every Christmas had not defrosted him properly” Goddard confirmed “He is fully cooked on the outside but deep in the middle he is still an icicle.”

“Ruling out your wife and her festive culinary skills from the list” the Commander asked “Any ideas who we should be looking for?”

“The fact that both explosions show evidence that someone has worked on the methodology to make us think their were perpetrated by separate terrorist groups” Goddard concluded “I think it is fair to say you are looking at one organisation with a lot of money in the bank and a lot of balls to pull something like this off.”

“Fits in with the communications blackout as well” the Commander agreed “There is no way anyone could have pulled something that big and coordinated off without some serious technical no how. Definitely not the sort of thing you pick up watching Tomorrows World that is for certain.”

“I really wish I could tell you more” Goddard admitted “but unfortunately that is all I have for you.”

“It's a start” the Commander reassured him “Besides I am on my way in a short while to give our frozen dead friend here's place the once over.”

“Fiver says you either find nothing or a signed and sealed concrete confession or else a nasty surprise” Goddard concluded.

“Oddly enough given the current circumstances” the Commander remarked “I would settle for finding nothing, less ammunition for certain agenda waving groups in our midst to go on some damn fool crusade in the name of the 'war on terror' or whatever the spin merchants of Whitehall and Washington D.C. are calling it this week.”

“Sir, if I may ask” Goddard ventured slightly cautiously “What *is* going on?”

“Much unpleasantness” the Commander eventually admitted after a thoughtful pause “Much unpleasantness indeed.”

“I give up” Lieutenant Barrett was forced to admit as she chucked the pen she had been fidgeting with whilst she worked over her shoulder in total dismay “I just give up.”

“My grandmother told me you should never give up” Sir Richard advised her as he sat down alongside her “Of course that meant she never gave up the pipe tobacco and was dead from lung cancer before she was sixty but there you go.”

“Now I do admit Sir that I don't have Simon Fuller's technical now how but even I should be able to access the CCTV archives for yesterday evening but they seem to have been totally erased” Barrett explained the main reason for her frustration “Indeed it is almost as if they were never even created in the first place.”

“Not a good sign” Sir Richard was forced to admit.

“I mean normally when a CCTV image or video is deleted there is at least some sort of electronic trace even if it is only an empty folder with the corresponding time and date stamp on it but look” she gestured at the screens in front of them “Absolutely nothing.”

“In which case I think my dear we will waste no further time on this particular dead end” Sir Richard agreed “Did you manage to get anything from trawling through the life of this Al Masaroute character?” he asked.

“Unusually MI6 were surprisingly helpful” Barrett confirmed as she reached down beneath the desk and then produced an enormous pile of files and documents that landed on the desk with a heavy thump much to Sir Richard's surprise “I didn't even have to hack into their system and steal it, they merely couriered this lot over about thirty minutes ago before the ink was even dry on the Form Twenty Seven request.”

“Everything we are doing keeps pointing to this guy” Sir Richard remarked “You can bet that if Sir John Haliford still has any influence over his former colleagues at MI6 and I reckon that is pretty close to even money, that this little lot has been carefully prepared with false signposts, traps and specially created juicy bits designed to throw us progressively more and more off the scent.”

“Sexed up dossiers” Barrett remarked “Now where have we heard that one before?” she ventured.

“Indeed” Sir Richard agreed “After that business I always did wonder how on earth Haliford kept his job over it, now it would appear I know. Friends in high places, or low ones perhaps, it depends upon your point of view.”

“The Commander called about ten minutes ago” Barrett confirmed “Forensics pulled a body out of the Thames earlier right in the centre of the London Bridge bomb explosion site and it looks like our man Al Masaroute complete with conveniently placed identification.”

“Someone wants us to wrap this up quickly” Sir Richard commented “Where is the Commander now?” he asked.

“Briefing the Anti-Terrorist and ARU Teams downstairs” Barrett confirmed “He has a probable address for our dead bomber and he is going to personally go and kick the door in.”

“That may be unwise” Sir Richard cautioned as a thought occurred to him “I think I will go along and give some advice.”

“What sort of advice Sir?” Barrett asked.

“Beware of unpleasant surprises” Sir Richard ominously confirmed as he put on his overcoat and with an apprehensive look, left the room.

“Thanks to the local patrol lads” the Commander called from the front as he continued his briefing with Tracy looking on from the side lines “we have been able to confirm that the flat is fairly isolated” he proceeded to pass out surveillance photographs of the exterior of the target flat and the surrounding area to the ARU and Anti-Terrorist Officers he was briefing “The flats either side are believed to be currently vacant on account that the whole block is due to be pulled down sometime early next year.”

“At least we won't wake the neighbours” Bob, the leader of the ARU team agreed “Makes a change I suppose.”

“The council have very kindly supplied a plan of the place” the Commander continued as he went over to a display board on which he had pinned the plans of the building a few moments before all be it at a somewhat askew angle “Two entrances” he confirmed “Back door at the top of an isolated metal fire escape whilst the front door is in the centre of this balcony so there is plenty of room to approach the front door from both sides.”

“Sir” Bob asked “Do we know if anyone else lives in this flat?” he asked.

“Nothing showed up on council records” the Commander confirmed “Mind you that doesn't mean anything so we presume that someone will be at home when we go in until you and your guys confirm the building is clear.”

“Understood boss” Bob agreed.

“All right, everyone know what they are supposed to be doing?” the Commander asked generally to which he got nods of agreement all around “Very well, let's saddle up.”

“Okay guys” Bob called to his men “You heard the Guvnor, let's go and kick some doors in.”

As the ARU and Anti-Terrorist officers, all of them clad in their body armour and carrying their Service issue MP7 semi-automatic weapons duly boarded the waiting

Security Service vehicles, the Commander went over to his beloved wife and they hugged each other for comfort.

“Be careful love” Tracy warned “I have a terrible feeling about all of this.”

“I’ll be all right my love” the Commander reassured her “I have been kicking doors in since I was sixteen; I can handle this without any problems.”

“I don’t know” Tracy responded “It’s just...” she tailed off.

“Look” the Commander looked directly into her eyes “You keep everything under control here and I will be back before you know it.”

“All right” Tracy agreed, managing a smile which also cheered the Commander up.

“And if that little snot Haliford pops around” he added “ensure you only give him the really cheap and nasty coffee” he suggested.

“I’ll even put the half decent biscuits away” Tracy confirmed.

“Sounds like we have a plan” the Commander agreed before they kissed “See you later love, I love you.”

“Love you too” Tracy confirmed before they reluctantly let go of each others hands whereupon the Commander duly went over to the lead minibus and got in the front passenger seat.

Tracy duly looked on as she watched the convoy of vehicles set off, the wheels squealing on the painted concrete surface of the sub level car park until they had disappeared from sight up the exit ramp before with a somewhat heavy heart she turned slowly and headed back to the lifts.

“I feel the time has come for strong leadership in what is beyond all doubt a time of national crisis and mourning” Lord Forsyth confirmed with convincing but fake sincerity as he was interviewed on the BBC News Breakfast programme.

“It will always be difficult for anyone, even someone with a strong and popular personality to step into the shoes of such a courageous and popular head of state as the late Prime Minister and coming so soon after his tragic murder” he continued, the wide eyes, nodding head and hand gestures accompanying his words trying to emphasise his sympathetic persona well beyond the real truth.

“As the smoke dissipates over central London this morning and the country wakes up to the full revelations of the horrors that have occurred” the news presenter asked “there is already much debate over who should take at least temporary command of the Country in the absence of an existing Deputy Prime Minister.”

“Politics like nature abhors a vacuum” Forsyth responded, the sincerity by now being piled on not so much with a trowel than with a spade “It is vital that someone with a proven track record, recognised by the public and of course a *safe pair of hands* is appointed certainly before the day is out if we are to ensure continuity of Government.”

“Jesus, I thought our politicians could bullshit for their country” David Howell exclaimed as he and the others watched the live news programme on the large screen at the front of the incident room at New Scotland Yard.”

“You will find that two faced jumped up bureaucrats with ideas far above their station such as Lord Forsyth there have turned the art of spin to give its slightly more printable name into an art form” Sir Richard confirmed as he entered the room and joined the group before looking around “Err where is Sergei?” he then asked.

“Been next door on the phone for the last hour” Collins nodded towards the connecting door where the shadow of Glasgow could be seen through the frosted glass “Looks like he is arranging a welcome home party for whenever we managed to slap the cuffs on Cruschov. Very passionate sounding language is Russian.”

“Despite the cold and the vodka, you will find they are still a very proud and passionate people” Howell agreed.

“So what has Lord Forsyth been saying then?” Sir Richard asked as he sat down at the table.

“Basically indicating in no uncertain terms that he wants to be Prime Minister and that it is his God given right to be so but not actually saying it out loud if you know what I mean” Collins explained.

“This could get tricky” Sir Richard admitted “Ten gets you one that he is already putting his people in the right places, I mean he is already on the BBC and its not even eight in the morning yet. Trouble is the world seems to have been fooled into thinking he is a decent bloke who just wants to serve his country.”

“Who's this slime bag?” Tracy asked as she came in and made an instant judgement of Lord Forsyth from what she could see and hear over the television.

“With one notable exception of course” Sir Richard added with a chuckle “That there my dear is one Lord Terrance Forsyth” he duly confirmed.

“Have I or my husband ever arrested him for anything?” Tracy asked as she sat down.

“Not that I am aware of” Collins remarked “He has a very good lawyer you know.”

“If you want to annoy him” Sir Richard advised “I suggest you call him Terry, it really makes him grate his teeth in anger.”

“I'll bear that in mind” Tracy responded with a wry grin.

“So has your legendary husband kicked any doors in yet my dear?” Sir Richard asked with a hint of concern within his enquiry.

“Any minute now” Tracy confirmed as she checked her watch.

“In which case everyone, lets keep our fingers crossed” Sir Richard ominously declared.

The clomping of hard soled boots on the concrete walkway was the only sound that indicated the approach from both ends of the Armed Support Unit officers, all of them dressed in full body armour complete with Kevlar helmets and armed with their standard MP7 semi-automatic rifles.

Leading them to the door was the Commander who naturally enough had eschewed the body armour and was still in standard full uniform, only the change of weapon from his trusty old six shot revolver to one of the ARU's MP7's being his sole concession and that only at the insistence of Tracy who had sent strict instructions via Bob.

Looking up at the battered old stick on numbers on the front door of the flat, the Commander confirmed it was the target address and then silently indicated to the others to go in.

With that order, one of the ARU officers duly stepped forward with a hand held battering ram and placed it against the Yale lock on the door before looking to one side to see the Commander duly give the nod to proceed.

The door duly gave way with one single strike from the ram, splintering the door frame and ripping one of the hinges out of the rotten wood.

“Armed Security Service Officers!” Bob duly declared loudly as he led his team inside “Nobody move!”

In an efficient and well drilled operation, the ARU officers divided off into groups of two to search separate rooms and within moments calls of 'Clear' were heard throughout the flat as the place was confirmed to be vacant.

“Very nicely done lads” the Commander remarked as Bob rejoined him in the front hallway before they proceeded through to the living room.

“We aim to please” Bob duly confirmed.

“Wise sentiment” the Commander remarked.

“Divisional motto” Bob admitted as with the majority of the ARU officers now withdrawing back out of the flat, he and the Commander looked around their unfamiliar surroundings.

“Not enthusiastic about his interior décor, are you?” the Commander remarked as they looked around the poorly maintained and dilapidated looking interior.

“Judging by the state of the place” Bob remarked as he looked around at the contents of drawers and cupboards strewn about the room “I would say we were beaten to it, either that or he isn't much of a housekeeper.”

“Something doesn't feel right” the Commander was forced to agree as he looked around with an uncomfortable and concerned expression.

“Dear oh dear” Bob remarked “My grandmother had wallpaper like that back in the 1970's, actually come to think of it I believe she still has it.”

“Oh look, clinching evidence, what a surprise” the Commander sarcastically declared as he looked through a random pile of documents he had picked up “Almost as though we were meant to find it.”

“Admittedly I am not totally in the loop on everything that has been going on Sir” Bob remarked “but I can't help smelling a huge great set up here somewhere.”

“Never a truer word said I fear” the Commander agreed before pausing to listen to a sound in the background that had caught his attention and then made him follow it to its source by proceeding back though to the hallway.

“Can you hear that?” he asked Bob as they both looked around for the source of the distinct beeping noise.

“Coming from over there I think” Bob indicated to a cupboard near the remains of the battered front door.

“Funny place to keep your microwave” the Commander remarked before another thought occurred to him which judging by the look on Bob's face was the same conclusion he too had reached.

“Trojan One to all units” Bob called urgently into his radio as he and the Commander duly made a run for the door and a rapid exit onto the balcony outside “Emergency Evac, NOW!”

The two officers were barely yards away from the front door of the flat when the beeping stopped and just a moment later there was an explosion which blew out the windows and sent a shock wave through the whole block.

“Oh shit...” the Commander called out as with Bob just ahead of him he felt the balcony floor beneath him move and begin to collapse as the force of the explosion, made up from carefully placed demolition charges took their affect and the entire centre section of the block began to collapse in on itself.

Amid the deep rumbling, dust clouds and the descending debris, Bob looked around just in time to see the Commander fall backwards and disappear from sight.

“Sir!” Bob called out, his voice practically smothered by the loud roar as the centre part of the block collapsed amidst a deeply choking cloud of dust “We need some help up here!” he then called loudly to his colleagues “Now!!”

Returning to the balcony, Bob went quickly to the point where it had broken away and there was now a ragged edge across where just a few moments before there had been a walkway. Looking over the edge he found the Commander clinging by his fingertips to the rough edges, his legs dangling below him over the pile of twisted metal and rubble below that if he were to fall would almost certainly kill him instantly on impact.

“I could use some help here mate” the Commander called up as he could feel his grip beginning to slip but Bob soon rescued him, reaching down and grabbing his arm before with the help of another ARU officer, hauling him back up onto the truncated remains of the walkway.

“That was close Sir” Bob admitted “Are you all right?” he asked.

“Another uniform ruined I am afraid to report” the Commander responded as he took a moment to dust himself down and then look around at the wreckage as all around the echo of the explosion died down only to be replaced with the sounds of sirens approaching and numerous car alarms sounding.

“In which case I suggest we get out of here in case there are any more little surprises around” Bob wisely suggested.

“A very good idea” the Commander readily agreed as they proceeded to evacuate the area.

“Alpha One from Lima Alpha One” Tracy's voice was heard over the Commander's radio which amazingly still worked despite the battering it and its owner had just received.

“Go ahead love” the Commander responded as he and Bob reached the ground floor where already numerous Security Service officers were sealing off the area and keeping the onlookers well back from the dangerous remains of the building.

“I just got a report of an explosion somewhere near where you are” Tracy confirmed “You didn't hear anything did you?” she asked from her seat at the main command console in the New Scotland Yard area control room.

“Err maybe...” the Commander sheepishly responded, not wanting to worry Tracy unduly.

“You were there weren't you?” Tracy quickly worked out what had happened.

“Let's put it this way love” the Commander admitted “Our late terrorist friend Al Masaroute is probably better off dead as otherwise he will have a hell of a time explaining to his landlord what just happened to his original 1970's flock flower wallpaper.”

“Are you all right love?” Tracy asked.

“Bit dusty but otherwise all right” the Commander was glad to confirm “Any word on when the Home Secretary is due to arrive?” he asked.

“Plane is scheduled to land at London City Airport in Docklands in about fifty minutes” Tracy confirmed “Do you want me to send out a full meet and greet party?”

“No thanks” the Commander responded “I want this kept low key for the moment, no need to invite any party crashers or other unwanted guests. Speaking of which, has anyone crawled out from under any rocks that I need to know about?” he asked.

“Lord Forsyth is doing the grand tour of all the major media news organisations” Tracy confirmed as she looked across the Control Room at one of the screens on which was being shown the aforementioned politician who was now appearing over on Sky News “Seems to already have a campaign team in place and has some sympathetic editors on board if the first editions of the London free sheets are anything to go by.”

“If he is worth one tenth of his dubious reputation you can bet he has had a plan ready to take over ready to go for years” the Commander admitted “He will kiss the backsides of anyone who will support him in his thirst for power and domination.”

“According to Sir Richard, the proverbial political back channels of Whitehall are in virtual meltdown” Tracy reported “Rumours doing the round all over the place.”

“What about Haliford and his little outfit?” the Commander asked.

“Strangely quiet” Tracy responded “and I don't know about you love but that makes me just a teeny bit uncomfortable.”

“The feeling is mutual believe me” the Commander agreed as he walked around the corner only to see a sight that made him look on in disbelief “Err Tracy love” he asked as he bent down to look at the front end of a vehicle in amidst the rubble “Could you send over some transport, I am afraid someone appears to have parked a building on top of Bob's van.”

“Please, please, no more questions” Lord Forsyth politely requested of the throng of press reporters that mobbed him as soon as he left the side entrance of the Sky News studios “I will say simply this” he continued having held up his hand in a request for calm to allow him to speak “Today is a day of great change for this nation, its politics and its people and my task in this is to merely serve, thank you.”

With that typically pompous statement Forsyth carried on assisted by his minders and other associates where he was shown into the back of a waiting car where once he was inside and the door close, silence descended.

“Very impressive Lord Forsyth” Sir John Haliford remarked as he lowered his newspaper and looked across at him “Insightful yet pointless” he added with a wry grin.

“Well I am known for being able to bullshit with the best of them” Forsyth admitted with a chuckle as Haliford indicated ahead to his chauffeur to drive on “Can't let down the expectations of my adoring public now can I?”

“Indeed you can not” Haliford agreed “So how is it going?” he asked.

“Well that is the last of the major news groups visited” Forsyth confirmed “Now there is just the matter of convincing the minions in Whitehall, all assuming that is the Home Secretary can be removed from the equation.”

“Already in hand Sir” Haliford confidently confirmed “He lands in about twenty five minutes” he checked his watch “We have some people in New Scotland Yard tapping into their communications and keeping us updated with live intelligence, meanwhile I have a couple of very reliable people at the airport ready to take appropriate action as soon as he arrives.”

“So who are we going to blame it on this time?” Forsyth asked “After all so far our combined efforts of the last forty eight hours have managed to lay irrefutable blame for terrorist outrages at the doors of the Irish, the usual popular Islamic loonies and even the Welsh equivalent of the Mafia if what I read from your briefing document is correct.”

“I was thinking it was time for some old friends from long ago to step forth and take a bow” Haliford confirmed “We have already managed to wrong foot our old friends at MI5 and Special Branch completely and as for the Security Service, well let's just say that they will no longer be a problem by lunchtime today.”

“And I have your word on this?” Forsyth asked.

“As a gentleman Sir” Haliford confirmed.

“I knew there was a reason I appointed you to the post of my new International & Domestic Security Advisor” Forsyth responded with a wry grin.

“You are too kind” Haliford replied “So where to now Sir?” he asked.

“Campaign headquarters” Forsyth declared “It is time we brought our little team together for the first time and get everyone acquainted. We are going to have a lot of work to do in the coming hours.”

“And a lot of people are going to be in for some very unpleasant surprises as well” Haliford admitted “Can't wait to get started...”

“Good grief!” Tracy exclaimed as she and Sir Richard Crowthorne got out of the Security Service patrol car and looked across the scene where the London Fire Brigade were dampening down the dust and debris following the explosion at the block of flats.

“I had a nasty feeling something like this might happen” Sir Richard admitted as he and Tracy made their way through the throng of busy emergency service personnel to where the Commander was sitting on the edge of a low wall looking up at the ruined centre section of the block of flats.

“Are you all right love?” Tracy asked as she and the Commander met up and hugged each other firmly.

“A little dusty and battered” the Commander admitted as he smiled when Tracy administered a much needed supporting peck on the cheek “Nothing new there really.”

“More pandering to the audience I fear” Sir Richard remarked as he looked around with an even more worried look than was normal for him.

“There are times my old friend when you really fail to make any sense whatsoever” the Commander admitted.

“You remember the Madrid train bombers some years back?” Sir Richard asked.

“Not exactly the sort of thing you forget in a hurry” Tracy admitted.

“Well when the Spanish Intelligence Services managed to find an address for the suspected bombers a couple of days later” Sir Richard explained “they duly popped around mob handed and when they kicked the door in the terrorists decided that death was the better option and triggered a booby trap that destroyed them, the flat and several innocent bystanders into the bargain.”

“I think it is about time we stopped dancing to these ridiculous tunes and got to the truth of this” the Commander declared as he stood up and with Tracy's help, dusted down his uniform.

“I fully agree” Sir Richard confirmed “and I think the first order of business is to go and safely collect the Home Secretary from the airport, he is due to land in about twenty five minutes.”

“Better get a shift on then” the Commander agreed as they proceeded to make their way back to the patrol car “Tracy, I know I am going to regret saying this but you're driving.”

“All right ladies and gentlemen” David Collins declared as he entered the operations room “You are the best technical boffins we have so why are we not seeing much boffing going on?” he asked with a subdued tone of frustration readily apparent in his voice.

“I think Sir it depends on what it is you want us to boff at as there is not a lot to go on” one of the senior technicians present in the room admitted after an awkward pause of silence.

“Come on people” Collins responded “Last night someone managed to pull the plug on practically every communications medium in Central London from secure telephone links right through to carrier pigeons and it might just help us in some way if we could figure out how it was done and by whom.”

“Well so far we have conducted the electronic equivalent of a full forensic sweep of all systems” the senior technician present confirmed “Usually with something like this we can find some sort of digital finger print, a pointer or some clue as to who had done it but so far we have come up with nothing.”

“So we can assume this wasn't done by an over enthusiastic fifteen year old computer hacker in his basement” Collins concluded “So what would be needed to pull off something like this?”

“Each individual system affected on its own, probably little more than some technical now how and a fast computer probably connected using an untraceable pay as you go mobile phone” the technician admitted “but to pull off something this thorough, coordinated and widespread, that takes something a lot more sophisticated, not to mention expensive.”

“What about that shut down of the telecoms network that MI5 pulled off a few years ago in Liverpool?” Lieutenant Barrett asked which caused Collins to look around at her with a concerned expression.

“How the hell did you know about that?” he asked, taken aback by the Lieutenant's seeming advanced knowledge.

“Read it in Sir Richard's memoirs a couple of weeks back” Barrett admitted, “Don't worry” she reassured Collins upon seeing his worried expression “He is not planning to actually publish it, well not yet anyway.”

“I should damn well hope not” Collins responded with a mock sigh of relief “That man is walking can of diplomatic worms which should never be opened in a public arena.”

“Who pulled off that job for your lot then?” Barrett asked.

“That was one of Simon Fuller's party pieces” the senior technician confirmed “I hate to say this sir” he then went on to admit with some reluctance “We need him and his expertise here if we are to crack this.”

“Not going to be easy” Collins responded thoughtfully “How do you ask someone for help when they are spending every waking moment at the bedside of their nearly dead wife?”

“Depends how you phrase it” Barrett remarked “After all it would give him something to do that could ultimately lead to whoever it was who nearly killed Jennifer.”

“Any request for his assistance would still have to be cleared by the Security Service Administrator General” Collins confirmed “However I am willing to at least put it to him. Where is the Commander now?” he asked.

“Heading over to London City Airport with Divisional Commander Caverner to meet the Home Secretary off of his flight” Barrett confirmed.

“Do we have any Diplomatic Protection guys down that way at the moment?” Collins asked “The Home Secretary may be our last chance of resolving this mess quickly and quietly and I don't want anything happening to him.”

“Apparently all the DPG teams have been asked to report to the Parliamentary Council offices in Whitehall at nine o'clock” Barrett explained “Someone issued something called a Central Services Operations Order or CS23 form about half an hour ago.”

“CS23?” Collins responded “Never heard of it.”

“Me neither” Barrett was forced to admit “Sounds a lot like someone is already moving their pieces into play.”

“I don't like this” Collins remarked “I don't like this at all.”

“I shouldn't worry Sir” Barrett responded “With Tracy and the Commander to watch over him, it would take someone very brave or extremely foolish to try something against the Home Secretary now.”

“I hope you are right my dear” Collins responded “For all our sakes.”

The Commander advanced cautiously through the large glass automatic doors at the entrance to the main terminal at London City Airport. He had had plenty of experience of the vagaries of these contraptions before and was not prepared to be caught out again.

“I hate airports” the Commander admitted as he and Tracy proceeded across the concourse, having to weave around queues of travellers with piles of large luggage who were waiting to check in and board flights.

“Look on the bright side love” Tracy reminded her husband accompanied by a reassuring hold of his arm in hers “At least you won't have to get on any planes or helicopters.”

“There is that I suppose” the Commander was forced to admit before he caught sight of a couple of Airport Terminal security guards who he and Tracy then went towards.

“Hello mate” the Commander called to them “We are looking for the area where private planes will arrive.”

“Down the corridor there, third left, follow the signs” one of the guards politely informed them, indicating the way ahead.

“Much obliged” the Commander politely responded before he and Tracy continued off in the direction indicated.

“Perhaps we should have brought Sir Richard along rather than leave him in the car?” Tracy suggested.

“I think for this little logistical exercise, the less people we have around the better” the Commander responded “Besides knowing those two, the first thing Sir Richard and the Home Secretary would do when they met would be head for the bar to work through a case of finest single malt and then we would not get any sense out of either of them for the rest of the day.”

“He is a politician” Tracy sarcastically reminded her husband “Maybe even soon to become at least acting Prime Minister and let's face it, they don't talk sense when they are sober never mind under the influence.”

“I have found in my admittedly limited dealings with the current Home Secretary that he is much less of a career politician than many” the Commander remarked “He is not afraid to put his reputation and position on the line if it means doing what is right for the country.”

“Polar opposite of that sleaze bag Lord Forsyth then” Tracy remarked “I pulled everything we had on him whilst you were busy demolishing half of Shepherds Bush, I cannot believe how much he has got away with on his way up the greasy pole.”

“Only current member of the House of Lords to be admonished by the Parliamentary Standards Committee not once, not even twice but three times in ten years and yet he manages to emerge from the tabloid fuelled murk with a knighthood, an OBE and a position in one of the most powerful legislative chambers in the land” the Commander concluded “I can only assume he must have a safe jammed pack full of compromising photographs of a lot of very influential people to have got where he is today.”

“And claiming it all on expenses to boot” Tracy added with a wry smile “£132,000 and change last year alone on top of his basic salary of eighty odd grand before tax.”

“Oh he doesn't pay tax” the Commander confirmed “Got an accountant in the Cayman Islands apparently who can make gold out of lead as well as other dubious yet unprosecutable miracles. Top that off with a very generous pension scheme and free train travel nationwide thrown in and you have the ultimate example of the old phrase, nice work if you can get it.”

“All right then love” Tracy asked as they arrived at the Private Aircraft arrivals section and looked out from the panoramic windows across the tarmac at the row of

expensive small jet aircraft, many of them belonging to major corporations based in the City “Which one is our boy's little toy then?”

“Bronze one third from left” the Commander pointed ahead to a Tri-Star jet that was just coming to a halt before its built in steps deployed with the opening of the fuselage access door “Got a little gold crown on the top of the tail sides.”

“Classy” Tracy remarked before she and her husband proceeded through the doors and exited out onto the tarmac just as the Home Secretary appeared at the top of the steps of the aircraft.

“Thank God that is over” the Home Secretary muttered with obvious thanks as he practically skipped down the steps to the tarmac where for a moment Tracy and the Commander thought he was going to kiss the ground in thanks.

“I won't bother asking how your flight went” the Commander remarked as they met on the ground and exchanged handshakes.

“Never could get the hang of this flying lark” the Home Secretary admitted ruefully, glancing back at the plane “I said to my wife when she suggested going for some winter sunshine in Barbados, what's wrong with Bognor Regis my dear?”

“Where would you like me to start?” Tracy wryly responded.

“Anyway, glad you are finally here” the Commander confirmed as they proceeded back to the airport terminal building and headed inside “The last twenty four hours have certainly been nothing if not eventful.”

“Do we have confirmation on who was responsible for the bombings?” the Home Secretary asked.

“Well there appears to be a growing body of very much planted evidence that seems to be pointing fingers at Islamic Extremists for the London Bridge bomb” the Commander explained “trouble is the gift wrapped suspect we had handed to us had in fact been dead and kept in a deep freeze for at least three days prior to him apparently blowing himself up.”

“And the explosion that claimed the Prime Minister?” the Home Secretary asked with some reluctance.

“Car bomb” Tracy confirmed “Straight out of the 1983 edition of the IRA Field Handbook, indeed so text book that it could not have been them.”

“Nothing like a good old fashioned frame up to send the authorities on the proverbial wild goose chase I suppose” the Home Secretary admitted.

“Meanwhile it would appear that the professional greasy pole climber Lord Forsyth is already moving his people into positions of 'influence' as if he is already anointed himself Supreme Being” the Commander grimly confirmed.

“Someone needs to pull the rug out from under him ASAP” the Home Secretary agreed as they headed down the corridor back towards the main airport concourse
“Any volunteers?”

“Form an orderly queue for that job” Tracy mused.

“What about Sir John Haliford and his little bandwagon?” the Home Secretary asked.

“That is the really worrying bit” the Commander admitted “Despite all that has been going on since last night we have not heard a peep from them.”

“I am wondering if Forsyth is keeping them in reserve in his portfolio ready to strike later should he assume command” Tracy suggested.

“In which case” the Home Secretary suggested “I think it is time we got to work. When is the Parliamentary Council meeting?”

“In forty five minutes” the Commander responded as he checked his old pocket watch just as they reached the main airport concourse and proceeded across it towards the main exit.

As they made their way through the crowds of waiting passengers in the terminal, there was a momentary interruption to their progress when a man in a formal business suit coming the other way accidentally bumped into them, causing the long traditional umbrella he was carrying to stab into the Home Secretary's lower leg.

“Terribly sorry” the businessman apologised before with an exchange of understanding nods between the two parties they each continued on their journey.

“How anyone can be so calm when they are about to get on one of those flying contraptions I do not understand” the Home Secretary remarked before momentarily stifling a cough with his hand.

“Are you sure you two aren't related by any chance?” Tracy wryly asked as they reached the exit.

“Not keen on flying either I take it?” the Home Secretary asked the Commander before he was forced to pause and stifle a second slightly more aggressive sounding cough.

“Well call me old fashioned but when I last looked, if you took a one hundred ton plus chunk of metal, raised it up off the ground, let alone to ten thousand feet and let it go, the law of gravity says it should fall immediately to the ground with a very loud thud” the Commander admitted “and that always makes me just a little uncomfortable with anything higher off the ground than a step ladder.”

“And you are not much good with ladders either” Tracy reminded her husband “I had to get Jack to do the light bulb in the hallway in the end.”

“The car is over there” the Commander indicated over to the right as they exited through the main door way and began to walk towards the Security Service patrol car parked in the near distance with Sir Richard Crowthorne waiting in the back seat, looking on slightly nervously.

Suddenly the Home Secretary stopped in his tracks and doubled over in obvious agony, coughing fiercely before he began to fit alarmingly and then collapsed to the ground.

“Sir, are you all right?” the Commander immediately asked as he and Tracy knelt down to try and attend to the Home Secretary who was convulsing on the ground as from the patrol car, Sir Richard who had seen him collapse was now running over to join them.

“What the hell happened?” Sir Richard asked.

“Search me” the Commander responded “He was absolutely fine but then suddenly he just started coughing and then collapsed” he confirmed as alongside him Tracy was already on her radio set and summoning emergency assistance.

“This is too sudden to be an illness” Sir Richard remarked as he made an assessment of the Home Secretary's condition with an increasingly worried look “Did anyone hit him with anything in the last few minutes?” he asked.

“One of the passengers on the concourse bumped into him on the way out here” the Commander recalled “Got him with his umbrella.”

“Where?” Sir Richard asked as his concern became increasingly obvious.

“In the leg I think” Tracy confirmed “ETA on the Paramedics is about three minutes.”

“Umbrella you say?” Sir Richard asked as he rolled up the Home Secretary's trouser leg to reveal a small red puncture wound in his right calf muscle.

“A poison tipped broolly?” the Commander asked, now thinking along the same lines as Sir Richard.

“That sounds a bit far fetched” Tracy remarked as they were joined by the Airport based medical team who had also responded to the call and they stood back from the Home Secretary to let them carry on.

“It's been done before” Sir Richard confirmed “The KGB used such a trick on a Hungarian dissident by the name of Georgi Markov on Waterloo Bridge back in the late 1970's.”

“Oh yes, I remember that” the Commander recalled “Happened the same day I was falling off a roof somewhere near Haychester.”

“Sir” the medic attending the Home Secretary called back with obvious urgency “We are going to need a helicopter evacuation for this patient or we could lose him.”

“Lima Alpha One to Control, urgent message” Tracy called into her radio in response to this urgent request “I need a helicopter ambulance and as much armed support as you can muster scrambled to London City Airport immediately” she confirmed.

“Best get the airport sealed and ground all flights” the Commander suggested “If we are lucky...”

“...which lets face we haven't been so far this week” Sir Richard reminded them.

“...maybe we can catch our Brolly Boy before he takes off, probably literally” he declared.

“In the meantime” Sir Richard responded regretfully “I had better inform Lord Hainault of the bad news.”

It was with a confident and purposeful stride that Lord Forsyth strode down Whitehall surrounded by a throng of accompanying press all eagerly firing questions and taking pictures all whilst being held back by a line of suited private security guards who encircled Forsyth and his two ever attendant advisor's.

“I think the phrase 'media circus' springs to mind” Commander Cassini, the head of the Security Service's specialist covert surveillance section remarked as he looked on from the other side of the road, keeping pace with the onward moving throng in the centre of which was the man of the moment, almost hidden from view by the crowd around him.

“Eyeball One to Alpha One, come in please” Cassini discreetly called into his radio microphone secreted inside his jacket.

“Alpha One, go ahead” the Commander was heard to respond, having to raise his voice above the background noise of a helicopter ambulance that was just taking off from behind him.

“Just thought I would let you know Sir” Cassini informed his superior officer “Lord Forsyth and his advisor's along with pretty much the entire Westminster press corps are heading down Whitehall bound for the Houses of Parliament now.”

“I'm impressed” the Commander responded “I haven't even got around to asking you to put the tabs on him yet.”

“Well I was at a loose end this morning and given what has been happening I thought I would get to work” Cassini admitted as he continued to shadow the group from the opposite side of the street where he could now see they were reaching the end at the junction with Parliament Square.

“Knew I could rely on you” the Commander confirmed “Keep him and his cronies in your sights but beware, if what I think is about to happen does happen then you are likely to be spying on the man about to be anointed acting Prime Minister.”

“Oh please tell me you are joking Sir” Cassini responded in disbelief.

“Well lets put it this way” the Commander explained with a strong note of regret as he watched the helicopter ambulance head off into the distance “If the Home Secretary does not make a miraculous recovery in the next thirty minutes then there is no one left to stand in Forsyth's way.”

“Well he can be assured Sir that on his ascendancy to self imposed God hood he will have me and my boys watching him every step of the way” Cassini was pleased to confirm “and with any luck we can watch his spectacular fall from grace, after all it is the least he deserves.”

“Keep me informed of who he meets, where he goes, when he feeds his pet goldfish, everything” the Commander requested “If he blows his nose one octave out of key I want to know about it before the echo has died down.”

“Consider it done Sir” Cassini confirmed “Eyeball One out.”

With that Cassini paused momentarily on the corner of Parliament Street and Parliament Square to observe the throng with Forsyth at the centre revelling in the attention make its way across the street towards the imposing edifice of the Houses of Parliament before he himself melting into the crowds continued on his way to maintain his surveillance.

Lord Hainault was very much a well respected member of the Whitehall establishment, a senior elder statesman who had been patrolling the corridors of power across the country for over fifty years during which time he had taken on many onerous duties from public inquiries to overseeing Governmental procedures and ensuring that the political machinery not normally seen by the public was kept running efficiently.

With the momentous events of the last twenty four hours, the normally publicity shy Lord Hainault had been thrust into the media limelight as the man who was now charged with the job of not only overseeing a full scale inquiry into the first Prime Ministerial assassination since Spencer Perceval in 1812, but also the immediate problem of appointing a successor to at least temporarily fill the vacuum that had been left at the very heart of Government.

The weight of this responsibility was reflected somewhat in the way he had spent the last fifteen minutes pacing around the Palace of Westminster, his tall figure slightly stooped and with a grim expression as if some terrible fate was heading towards him and there was nothing he could do about it.

The sound of rapidly paced footsteps on the marble floor approaching caused him to pause and look up to see a messenger approach, a telephone in his hand and purpose in his stride.

“Lord Hainault” the messenger called calmly “Urgent telephone call for you Sir” he confirmed as he handed him the telephone.

“Thank you” Hainault responded slightly hesitantly as he took the telephone before the messenger respectfully stepped back so that he could take the call without being overheard.

“William Hainault” he declared to the caller.

“Hello old friend” Sir Richard Crowthorne confirmed, calling from an isolated location on top of a rooftop not far from the City Airport where below him was a scene of much frantic activity as the Security Service had sealed it off and were in the process of searching everyone and everything present in a probably fruitless effort to find the mysterious attacker.

“Ah Dickie, I was wondering where you had got to, having not heard anything” Lord Hainault responded, clearly relieved to hear his voice at last “Tell me you are on your way back to Westminster right now with the Home Secretary.”

“Err no” Sir Richard reluctantly responded.

“What?” Lord Hainault exclaimed, his face dropping in response.

“He collapsed about twenty minutes ago” Sir Richard explained “Early days at the moment but it is starting to look like someone got him with a poison tipped umbrella would you believe?”

“Given what has happened in the last day or so” Lord Hainault responded with a depressed sigh “strangely I do believe it. So I guess that is our old KGB friends having the surreptitious finger of suspicion pointed at them now.”

“Along with the current favourite Islamic Extremists and of course our Irish friends” Sir Richard grimly confirmed “If someone wanted to make sure the authorities were sent on a wild goose chase in several different directions at once then they are making a very good job of it I would say.”

“Damn it...” Lord Hainault declared “With no viable alternative candidate, this means I will have no choice but to cave into the requests of the lobbyists who have besieging me since four this morning and accept the majority decision of the Parliamentary Council.”

“My old grandmother Gold bless her soul once told me that in order to win a battle for what you want you have to learn to tolerate anything, even the intolerable” Sir Richard mused “Of course she was rather overly fond of gin and prone to spouting utter gibberish from time to time.”

“She should have become a politician” Lord Hainault responded “Sounds like she was more than handsomely qualified.”

“Yes, but she cared so that would probably disqualify her in the final interview” Sir Richard admitted.

“Oh dear...” Lord Hainault remarked as he heard the commotion of Forsyth's party and its attendant crowd of bodyguards and press enter the building down the corridor “Looks like the ego is here, best get this unpleasantness over with I suppose.”

“Make sure you de-louse afterwards” Sir Richard warned “Anyone or anything that comes into contact with Forsyth and his dubious associates, no matter how respectable looking the veneer on the outside seems to become doomed to corruption and duplicity.”

“Don't you worry old friend” Lord Hainault reassured him “I fully intend to keep him at arms length and remain downwind of him at all times.”

“Good luck” Sir Richard responded.

“You too” Lord Hainault agreed before disconnecting the call. Reluctantly he went across the hallway and returned the telephone to the messenger who then departed.

He took a few moments to straighten his suit, waistcoat and tie before with a hesitant pace he proceeded down the corridor to where Lord Forsyth and his associates, now separated from the press throng, were waiting, being overseen by Hainault's most trusted aides.

“Ah Lord Hainault, my old friend!” Lord Forsyth called as they all proceeded into the adjacent Committee Room.

“With friends like him who needs enemies” Lord Hainault remarked quietly to himself which caused his aide alongside him to break into a brief smirk in agreement.

“Truly an historic day is it not?” Forsyth suggested as the two parties met in the centre of the room and the two senior men exchanged handshakes, noticeably colder on Hainault's side than Forsyth's.

“I would have thought infamous would have been more appropriate?” Hainault responded, trying his level best not to show his utter contempt for the man before him and everything he supports and represents.

“It is a pity that I have to take on such a burden in the light of such cataclysmic events” Forsyth admitted.

“Don't count your chickens yet Forsyth” Hainault politely yet firmly warned “The Home Secretary may be out of the running for now but there is still the correct procedures and regulations to follow so if you and your associates would take a seat, we can get started.”

“You are in charge” Forsyth duly agreed with a huge grin “but not for much longer” he then added quietly under his breath as he and his aides duly took their seats.

“I hereby call to order this extraordinary general meeting of the Central Parliamentary Oversight and Operations Committee” Lord Hainault declared from the centre seat at the head of the main table in the committee room “This is closed session, we have a lot to talk about and a potentially very rocky road ahead of us ladies and gentlemen so lets get on with it shall we?”

“Hello mate” the Commander quietly called as he entered the private single bed ward located in the high security section of Charing Cross Hospital “How is she?”

“Considering what she has been through” Fuller admitted as he looked back across at the still unconscious Jennifer “She's holding up pretty well.”

“Made of tough stuff like her sister” the Commander agreed “Look, partially I wanted to look in on her to see how Jenny was but...”

“...there are other reasons for this little visitation” Fuller finished the sentence already knowing what was coming and looking across at the Commander with a knowing grin

“We need your help” the Commander confirmed “Dave Collins over at MI5 has been coordinating the technical side of this investigation but has hit a dead end. I know we have got Lieutenant Barrett and also the guys over at MI5 on hand but we really need your brains on this.”

“Let me guess, the situation is critical” Fuller summarised “The lunatics are coming out of the woodwork left, right and centre and what resources we have are stretched all over the place?”

“Nicely put” the Commander was forced to agree with wry smile.

“Business as usual then” Fuller remarked “So what have I missed?”

“The Home Secretary has been poisoned, possible fatally” the Commander confirmed “He is two doors down breathing his last as we speak.”

“Hence the urgent sounds of the ARU guys clonking their expensive hard soled boots down the corridor a few minutes ago” Fuller remarked “I figured something was up.”

“Meanwhile someone is busy planting evidence that says our river bomb was the work of Islamic Extremists” the Commander continued.

“Highly unlikely considering how second rate and amateurish their most recent efforts have been” Fuller remarked.

“The bomb that took out Jenny's car and the Prime Minister is apparently text book IRA and now we have the fingers being pointed at the Russians for the Home Secretary” the Commander confirmed.

“Well life would be dull if it weren't so complicated now and again” Fuller agreed “So what about that ISA agency lot that set up shop yesterday?”

“Haven't heard a peep from them” the Commander confirmed “and that is starting to worry me.”

“So if the Prime Minister is dead” Fuller asked “Who the hell is running the country?”

“Technically no one at the moment” the Commander explained “Lord Hainault is convening the Parliamentary Committee or whatever they call it as we speak but apparently the juggernaut that is powering Lord Forsyth's political bandwagon seems to be heading this way at full tilt.”

“You do know that Forsyth was the leading light that nominated Sir John Haliford for his knighthood last year don't you Sir?” Fuller asked.

“No I didn't” the Commander freely admitted “That makes things even more awkward if Haliford is in Forsyth's pocket. It would explain why Haliford's almighty band wagon has been awfully quiet since last night.”

“Waiting for the call from his holiness to start reaping havoc would be my guess” Fuller agreed before looking back at his still unconscious wife “Sir” he asked sincerely “did Haliford or Forsyth have anything to do with this” he indicated Jennifer.

“No evidence, yet” the Commander was forced to admit “but I reckon their foul stench has been permeating throughout this whole sorry mess ever since that poor guy turned up dead in the Thames the other day.”

“So if I help you guys, we could nail the bastards who put my Jenny in here” Fuller concluded before looking at the closed eyes of his wife “Well if she was awake right now she would be saying go and catch those buggers.”

“Without a doubt” the Commander readily agreed.

“All right” Fuller grimly responded “One condition though.”

“Name it” the Commander replied although he already knew something along the lines of what it would be.

“I want to be there to personally put the cuffs on them when we find them” Fuller demanded.

“Consider it a done deal” the Commander agreed.

“Could you give me a moment please Sir?” Fuller asked.

“Yeah sure, I'll just be outside” the Commander confirmed as he respectfully withdrew from the room.

“All right Jenny love” Fuller gently addressed his wife, holding her hand “Got to go to work now but I will be back soon” he told her before leaning forward and giving her a kiss “See you later love.”

Outside the single bed ward, the Commander was waiting with a heavy heart. He knew what Fuller was going through more than well as he too had been there with Tracy almost a year earlier and this brought back some of those deep feelings he too had felt.

A few moments later the door opened and Fuller stepped slowly out into the corridor to stand alongside his superior officer, closing the door quietly behind him.

“You all right mate?” the Commander asked.

“I will be Sir” Fuller agreed, showing a weak smile “Let's go kick some arse” he suggested whereupon the two men duly departed with a purposeful stride.

“In breaking news during the past hour the National Security Service has just launched an immediate lock down of London's City Airport in the heart of the Docklands area in the east end of the capital” the presenter on the BBC News channel confirmed which caused Alan Martin to look up from his breakfast cereal.

“Cue my Guvnor ringing Scotland Yard to demand an answer no doubt” Marin wryly remarked to Amber across the presidential suite on the top floor of the Park Lane Hilton also in central London where they had been put up for the night since returning from a considerable and life threatening adventure over the last few days.

“What was that love?” came the rich Irish accent of Amber from the bathroom whereupon she emerged dressed in one of the hotel's embroidered dressing gowns and returned to the table to continue with breakfast.

“The Commander's lads just shut down London City Airport” Martin explained “My boss at the Department of Transport won't like that, especially with the holiday season coming up.”

“It is going to be an interesting meeting when you have to explain to your boss what you have been doing for the last three days” Amber remarked “Even with the Commander putting in a good word for you.”

“Sorry boss” Martin embarked on a mock explanation “I was coming into work when I got kidnapped under gunfire at London Bridge Station by the National Security Service Administrator General who then asked me to go alone to deepest darkest Wales to rescue my long lost love who was being chased by a secretive organisation and a lot of very unpleasant men with guns in order to stave of a political coup.”

“Sounds perfectly plausible to me” Amber responded, breaking into a fit of giggles “Might want to leave Wales out of it thought, don't want to go too over the top.”

“How are the injuries?” Martin asked as he poured Amber a fresh cup of coffee.

“My leg is still a bit sore” she confirmed, leaning down to rub the now professionally treated and bandaged wounds on her lower right leg “Arm is still painful, my golf swing will probably never be the same again.”

“You play golf?” Martin asked.

“No, but given that most of the bad guys now know who I am and who I really work for” Amber admitted “I guess I am going to have a fair bit of spare time on my hands in the near future.”

“Speaking of the future” Martin hesitantly asked “Where do you go from here?”

“I was rather hoping that would be where do 'we' go from here” Amber suggested to which Martin merely smiled in ready agreement.

“You don't know how glad I am to hear you say that” Martin admitted “I was afraid that now I had found you after all these years you would disappear once more back into that secretive undercover world never to be seen again.”

“Never” Amber resolutely responded and took hold of Martin's hand across the table, looking straight into his eyes “I am never letting you go ever again” she confirmed “You are the only stable thing I have ever had in my entire life, all the rest of it has been a cloak of lies and deception in the service of Queen and Country.”

“I will stand by you no matter what” Martin responded sincerely “I would die for you, walk through fire and brimstone to protect you.”

“I know” Amber confirmed “Let's just hope it never comes to that though” she wryly suggested.

“I'll drink to that” Martin agreed as they both raised their coffee cups in salute.

“You know I was thinking last night” Amber suggested “When all this is over, there always a job in Sir Richard's Section Fourteen organisation if you are interested.”

“I don't think I am really cut out for spending my days being endless shot at by bad people intent on doing bad things” Martin admitted.

“If only it were like that all the time” Amber remarked “Much as many would like to think that what all we and similar organisations do is all guns and glamour, most of the time its old fashioned desk work, sifting through dusty long forgotten archives in search of forgotten secrets and listening at keyholes.”

“Now that I can probably handle” Martin confirmed.

“I know you can” Amber responded “I have been watching your back for four years, you can handle yourself in a fight, plus it means we can work together and call it instinct but I reckon we make a hell of a team.”

“We do rather don't we” Martin admitted whereupon they leaned forward together across the table and kissed.

“So what do you want to do today?” Amber asked suggestively.

“Quite frankly as long as I can be with you I don't really care” Martin responded.

“Good answer” Amber agreed “Where do you want to go for dinner?”

“Terrance Forsyth” Lord Hainault slowly screwed the cap back on his antique gold fountain pen as he formally addressed the grinning man sat opposite him “It is the conclusion of the *majority* of this committee although I stress at this point not its chairman that you are to be requested at this time, 09:55 a.m. on Friday 11th November to form an operational interim supervisory cabinet and assume control of the primary instruments of Government for a period not to last less than seven days.”

“It will be my honour” Lord Forsyth responded with a very satisfied look of someone who was being appointed to the level of supreme being never mind Premier of the country.

“In accordance with the set rules and procedures” Hainault continued, his reluctance readily obvious in his voice and posture as he addressed Forsyth directly “You are charged with the duty of running the instruments of Government until one week from today when this committee will reconvene to further discuss the situation and any developments that may have taken place in the interim.”

The room was respectively silent for the respected elder statesman as he continued to read the adjudication.

“This interim state will remain subject to appropriate oversight checks and balances until such as time as a new Government can be installed by means of the public electoral process” Hainault continued “This committee retains the right to terminate your appointment at any time should it see fit either by default of duty or other circumstances arising.”

“I will carry out my duty for my country” Forsyth confirmed, barely able to contain his unmitigated glee.

“These proceedings are closed” Hainault then declared, giving Forsyth a look that told all present that he did not believe Forsyth's duty statement for one second and was not in the least bit afraid of anyone knowing it.

With Lord Hainault's declaration that the meeting was closed, those present rose from their seats whereupon they followed a general exchange of congratulatory handshakes and slaps on the back for Forsyth and his advisor's from many in the room.

Lord Hainault merely looked on with a sense of controlled disgust, he knew that despite being chairman of the committee, there was nothing he could have done to have prevented this event, even more so once the Home Secretary had been 'conveniently' removed from running.

"For God's sake" Hainault muttered to his aide alongside him as the congratulatory throng began to file out of the room "Has everyone forgotten a good man died last night?"

"You don't think any of this lot had anything to do with that do you?" the aide quietly asked his superior.

"Is my middle name Cornelius?" Lord Hainault admitted.

As the majority of the people in the room had now left, Forsyth was gathering his papers and was about to leave himself when Lord Hainault coughed loudly to attract his attention.

"Lord Forsyth" Hainault called after the diminutive man, his stature now seemingly far from appropriate or matching with the power he had now been granted "A word in private if you please?" he requested, gesturing towards a side room.

"Certainly" Forsyth agreed and proceeded to follow Hainault through into the side room and then out onto the balcony overlooking the River Thames with the tall carved stone walls of the Palace of Westminster stretching away from them either side.

As a tug boat sounded its horn which echoed through the foggy atmosphere outside, Lord Hainault leant forward, his hands on the balcony ledge and looked out whilst Forsyth moved alongside.

"I feel I must offer some congratulations" Hainault declared although it was clear from his tone that these were not his real feelings on the subject "Somehow in the last six months you have managed to carefully manoeuvre your people into the committee so that when the time came, your road to glory was well and truly guaranteed."

"People in politics today recognise talent when they see it" Forsyth responded "I can't help being popular can I?"

"They may be able to allegedly recognise so called talent but I know bullshit when I smell it" Hainault defiantly responded.

"Perhaps you and I should start afresh" Forsyth suggested "We seem to have got off on the wrong foot."

"The only connection with my foot you will have will be the day I kick you up the arse and out of Westminster for good" Hainault directly informed him.

“I had you down as someone who would not need to resort to tedious idle threats” Forsyth remarked.

“This is not a popularity contest” Hainault responded “Personally I think you are a conniving snivelling little shit.”

“You are beginning to sound like my mother” Forsyth replied with a wry smirk
“Anyway you are a dinosaur, a relic of the old way of doing things and I very much doubt you will be around much longer to worry about me.”

“A warning my little friend” he emphasised as he towered over Forsyth “The greasy pole goes two ways, you may have climbed your way to the top but it is very easy to slip very quickly back to the bottom and I fully intend to sweep away the safety net from beneath you when your deserved fall from grace occurs.”

“So noted” Forsyth agreed “Should be interesting” he remarked as he turned to leave, only pausing to deliver his final coup de grace “I wonder which of us will be going first?”

With that he mockingly tugged his forelock before departing, leaving a quietly fuming Hainault to ram his fist against the top of the balcony parapet in a controlled fit of anger.

“You see Sir in order to shut down an individual system you need to have the requisite access codes and the right equipment but it is still something that can be done by just one person” Fuller explained as he and the Commander crossed Broadway and made their way to the main entrance of New Scotland Yard.

“The problem is someone managed to block not only our entire radio system across the city, they also took out the mobile telephone network and even some land lines for a total of ten minutes” the Commander reminded him “Plus there was that clever little trick playing 'London Bridge is Falling Down' at us.”

“Exactly Sir” Fuller agreed as they entered the main reception area and made for the lifts “Even without the laugh in our faces with that charming little ditty, it will still have taken a pretty large team working from a very high-tec facility to pull it off.”

“Could you do it?” the Commander asked as the lift doors closed and they began their ascent to the top floor.

“On my budget?” Fuller asked which made the Commander smile “With help and a couple of million quid’s worth of gear, maybe but I would need the co-operation of someone on the inside of both our communications guys and the telephone company for things like interface protocols and so forth.”

“Inter... what?” the Commander asked with a slightly befuddled look as the lift slowed to a stop and the doors opened.

“Err it's technical” Fuller admitted as they headed down the corridor before proceeding into the incident investigation room which as they entered changed from being a humming centre of activity to silence as the people inside saw them enter.

“Hello mate” Collins called as he and others came over and there was much shaking of hands and comforting arms around Fuller's shoulder “How is Jennifer?”

“Holding her own, thanks guys” Fuller confirmed “How are you guys getting on?” he asked.

“Drawing more blanks than a paper factory with no pencils” Lieutenant Barrett admitted with obvious frustration.

“Let's have a summary of where we are so far” the Commander requested “Everyone find a seat and someone find us a large pot of tea, this could take a while.”

With that declaration everyone in the room duly found a seat whilst the Commander took up position at the front of the room alongside David Collins before he cleared his throat to begin.

“First things first” the Commander asked “What do we know about the bomb near London Bridge?” he asked.

“Barge full of home made explosives to a recipe which is popular with extremists in Afghanistan and other similarly charming parts of the world” Terry Findell, the Chief of the Bomb Squad duly confirmed “I have had a friend of mine in Military Intelligence give the traces we have scraped up a look over and he agrees this has Islamic Extremists written all over it.”

“Which leads us on to our deep frozen Mr Al Masaroute doing his fish finger impression” David Collins added “The Coroner finished his final analysis of what was left of the poor sod about half an hour ago and confirms that despite appearing to have been piloting the tug boat when it exploded, he had indeed been dead for at least two or three days.”

“When was the last time anyone saw him?” the Commander asked.

“His employer reported they had not seen him for about a week” Collins confirmed “Local plod have been interviewing his work colleagues and some of his now very pissed off neighbours but it looks like he kept a very low profile.”

“Why are his neighbours pissed off, may I ask?” Barrett asked.

“Because when Bob and I kicked Al Masaroute's door in earlier we triggered a nasty surprise” the Commander explained, wincing slightly.

“Huh?” Fuller looked up mystified.

“Boom!” the Commander explained “Blew his flat and most of the ones either side and below to dust.”

“All right then, what about the Prime Minister?” the Commander asked.

“Definitely old style IRA type car bomb” Findell confirmed “What we have managed to salvage from the wreckage of the device point to normal components available in any hardware store and thus far no fingerprints on any of it.”

“So nothing much to go on there” the Commander confirmed “Anyone called to claim it?”

“Usual loonies and half wits coming out of the wood work but nothing specific” Collins confirmed “If this was a splinter group of the IRA or similar we would have had a bona-fide claim phoned to us and the BBC with a recognised code word before the echo of the explosion had died.”

“So what about the shooters?” the Commander asked “They managed to turn half the windows in Cannon Street into splinters and then melted into the sunset without a trace.”

“The van they used was found burnt out on waste ground off the M25 near Redhill earlier this morning” Barrett passed across some Scenes of Crime Section photographs of the burnt out vehicle “but whoever shut down our communications across the city at the crucial moment last night also took care of both the traffic and congestion charge CCTV cameras so we have nothing.”

“The fact that they managed to get away so easily with half the City's Security Service surrounding them is what makes me uneasy” the Commander admitted “Makes me think whoever is behind all this may have people within the Security Service itself.”

“I hope that I do not need to remind everyone here to watch their backs” Collins cautioned ominously.

“Speaking of back stabbing” the Commander asked “Any word from our supposed new colleagues from the ISA, Haliford and Co?”

“Nothing” Collins confirmed “I don't understand it. You would have thought a big event like this would have had Haliford and his boys foaming at the mouth to get stuck in.”

The ringing of a telephone momentarily interrupted proceedings and everyone looked across at Barrett as she answered it.

“Incident Room, Lieutenant Barrett” she confirmed upon picking up the call “Right, thanks” she concluded before replacing the handset again

“It's breaking on the BBC now” Barrett called with some urgency as Sir Richard came rushing into the incident room whereupon Collins reached across for the remote control and turned on the television on the wall.

"Chairman of the Parliamentary Procedures and Operations Committee Lord Hainault is expected to make a statement in the next couple of minutes" the news presenter confirmed "This follows the conclusion of over three hours of closed in camera discussions as the Westminster authorities try and resolve what many political commentators have described simply as a huge power vacuum at the heart of the Government in the wake of the assassination of the Prime Minister yesterday evening."

"And with the Home Secretary now officially out of the picture" the Commander grimly concluded as he looked on at that point "It is evens money which way this unpleasant band wagon is rolling inevitably towards."

"Lord Forsyth we can handle" Sir Richard tried all be it rather unconvincingly to reassure the others in the room as he took a seat "It is who else he may bring to the centre table that worries me."

"How is the Home Secretary?" Barrett asked.

"In a very deep coma" Sir Richard confirmed "No one at the hospital has a clue what has caused it but I have unleashed as many expert toxicologists as I can find to test for everything they can think of."

"We now go over live to the central foyer of the Houses of Parliament for Lord Hainault's statement" the news presenter confirmed which made everyone in the room look back towards the television.

"Here we go..." the Commander remarked ominously.

"Following extensive consultation and discussion" the tall and distinguished figure of Lord Hainault confirmed to the press as flash bulbs went off intermittently all around him "it has been decided that the immediate best course of action for the stability of the country and its ruling structure is to appoint a temporary administration."

Both Sir Richard and the Commander knew Lord Hainault well and they could easily tell that the elder statesman was extremely uneasy with what he had to announce.

"After careful consideration of potential suitable candidates for the post of Acting Premier, we are initially inviting Lord Terrance Forsyth to form an emergency cabinet which will take effect from two o'clock GMT this afternoon" Lord Hainault declared but with a look of barely hidden disgust.

"Right" the Commander called with a clap of the hands "Pull Forsyth's files, I want to know everything about this guy before he turns up in my office proffering delusions of grandeur."

"He's red flagged and fire walled up to the kazoo" Fuller confirmed as he checked his laptop having already anticipated the question and got to work "and with systems I don't have access to I may add."

“Haliford's lads at the ISA?” Collins suggested “His primary expertise when he was with Central Op's over at MI6 was data security.”

“Maybe” the Commander remarked “I am still unconvinced that he and his cronies didn't start this whole sorry mess in the first place.”

“Perhaps it is time we brought our reserves into play” Sir Richard suggested “David Howell and Sergei Glasgov are upstairs waiting to get their bite at the cherry.”

“How is our Russian friend?” the Commander asked.

“Very merry” Sir Richard confirmed “They are both in the Diplomatic Suite exchanging old war stories from the great days of the Cold War apparently” he remarked,

“With everything that has happened in the last eighteen hours” the Commander remarked “We seemed to have lost sight of our three amigos, namely that Russian scum bag Cruschov, the Welsh nut Altman and his Mr Muscle, Stevens.”

“Aside from a pretty certain opinion that they are now in London” Barrett confirmed “Your guess is as good as mine” she admitted.

“If I were a betting man...” the Commander began.

“...which you are...” Sir Richard readily confirmed.

“...I would put a monkey on those gunmen in Cannon Street last night being Stevens and his nasty crew” he declared “or at least provided by him.”

“If the cap fits...” Sir Richard admitted.

“All right” the Commander declared “Lieutenant Barrett, I want you and the rest of your Section Fourteen colleagues to keep on Cruschov, Altman and Stevens. Someone somewhere is probably thinking that we have taken our attention off of them during all of this and a false sense of security may be what we need for them to make a mistake which we will use to nail them.”

“Yes Sir” Barrett readily agreed.

“Meantime I better go and make sure the cheap brandy is in my office” the Commander admitted as he reluctantly got up “I have this sneaking feeling that our new Prime Minister will be paying us a visit very soon.”

“Some achieve greatness, others have greatness thrust upon them” Lord Forsyth declared as he walked through the doors of his new office in Whitehall with his two ever attendant advisor's in close formation before he went around to behind his huge desk and slowly sat down, revelling in the moment.

“Why aren't we going to Number 10 Sir?” one of the aides inquired.

“Ten Downing Street is a symbol of the decadent past” Forsyth announced “A past that is now confined to the scrap book of history, this is where a new future for this country will be forged and you gentlemen will be witnesses.”

“The press release Sir?” the other aide proffered a manila file towards his boss.

“Send it out” Forsyth willingly confirmed “Then have my new advisory committee assembled for two o'clock.”

“Yes Sir” both aides confirmed before they duly left the room leaving Forsyth to wallow in his sense of having achieved ultimate power. He allowed the feeling to settle deep within himself before he then leant forward and reached for the telephone.

“Sir John Haliford please” Forsyth requested before quietly looking around at the elaborately decorated walls of his office complete with its antique paintings whilst he waited to be connected.

Fifteen miles away on the western outskirts of London, Sir John Haliford was in his office in the new European Headquarters of the independent privately funded and operated International Security Agency or ISA of which he was just twenty four hours into his tenure as its first Regional Chief Executive.

When the telephone rang, he quickly put down the files he had been studiously reading for the past couple of hours and took a deep breath before taking the call, one he had been waiting for with much eager anticipation.

“Good afternoon *Prime Minister* Forsyth” Haliford called with a wry smirk.

“You know I was just thinking” Forsyth responded casually “Maybe Prime Minister is an old fashioned title, I was thinking maybe I should change it, say Chief Executive or something.”

“Supreme Allied Commander would surely be more appropriate” Haliford jokingly suggested.

“Very good, although I still think I should avoid anything with the word 'Commander' in it” Forsyth remarked “and that goes for the man who carries that legendary title as well.”

“Don't worry” Haliford confirmed “As soon as you give the word, me and my boys will take care of him, his wife and especially that meddlesome little pain in the arse Crowthorne.”

“My friend, the word is given” Forsyth duly confirmed “I knew there was a good reason why I appointed you my Executive Director of National Security.”

“Look I tell you what” Tracy declared over the telephone in the Commander’s office “Tell the lads at Heathrow that if they need something, send someone down the shops to buy it, make sure they get a receipt and I will go into bat with the accountants on the third floor later all right?” she suggested “Just try not to go to mad all right?”

At that moment she looked up and smiled upon seeing the Commander come in and give a friendly wave even if it was accompanied by a somewhat preoccupied look on his face whilst Tracy completed her call.

“So what have the airport lads been up to then?” the Commander asked as he came and sat down alongside Tracy whereupon they shared a much needed hug.

“Apparently a couple of their motors got written off last night” Tracy explained, still clearly not exactly sure what had happened herself “If they do it again, they will be getting bicycles instead.”

“I take it you have heard the news?” the Commander asked.

“One very comatose Home Secretary which means that snivelling little worm Forsyth is now in charge of the country?” Tracy responded “God help us” she remarked.

“Forsyth is a tin pot politician with delusions of grandeur” the Commander remarked “I am not too worried about him, it is who he chooses to bring to the table that worries me more.”

“When do we find out?” Tracy asked.

“Ah” the Commander looked up as Sir Richard came into the office with a very grim look apparent, the source of which was undoubtedly the contents of the press release he had in his hands “Looks like we are about to find out.”

“Seems we have a new boss” Sir Richard announced as he sat down on the other side of the desk and very quickly poured himself an extra large drink from the decanter which he then downed in one gulp.

“Steady old man that's the good stuff” Tracy cautioned him.

“The Government is as of now under the auspices of Lord Terrance Forsyth” Sir Richard began to explain.

“We know” the Commander confirmed.

“However he is merely the appointed so called Chief Executive of the new Parliamentary Advisory Council” Sir Richard continued as he passed across the press release “This hit the news wires two minutes ago, Sir John Haliford is the new Chairman of the National Security Oversight Committee and also as European Chief of the ISA will be heading the inquiry into the death of the Prime Minister.”

“What?!?” the Commander responded.

“No one told us” Tracy confirmed, equally shocked.

“Oh my God...” the Commander exclaimed as he put on his small half lens reading glasses and with Tracy proceeded to examine the press release “This so called advisory committee reads like a who's who of potential inmates of Dartmoor.”

“Is he bloody insane?” Tracy asked “Steven Altman as the Regional Business Development Advisor?”

“Explains why he headed for London yesterday and also why we have not heard anything from him since” Sir Richard remarked as he refilled his glass “Check out which brain of Britain, or should I say Russia he has appointed as his overseas operations advisor...”

“Alexander Cruschov” Tracy read from the press release “Un-bloody-believable!”

“Which of course means that our favourite Russian scum bag now not only has an extremely expensively purchased air of respectability” Sir Richard reminded the others “Now thanks to the generous offices of Lord Forsyth he also diplomatic immunity.”

“Erm...” the Commander began as a thought suddenly occurred to him “Does Sergei Glasgov know about this yet?” he cautiously asked.

Sir Richard merely got up from his chair and casually stepped over to the connecting door that led through to Tracy's office next door and opened it.

“You were saying Sergei?” Sir Richard asked.

“In the name of Lenin's Auntie, what kind of capitalist bullshit is this?” came the demanding voice of Glasgov in a full bodied and every so slightly drunk sounding Russian accent.

“That would be a yes then” Tracy confirmed with a wry smile.

“Get me a secure outside line” Glasgov requested as he entered the Commander's office and made straight for the brandy decanter.

“Here you go” the Commander passed the telephone across the desk “I don't suppose asking you to keep it local would be of any point?”

“None whatsoever comrade” Glasgov confirmed as he took the telephone and went over to the couch whereupon he quickly dialled a number and upon being answered, began to speak quickly and passionately in pure Russian.

“So what do we do now?” Tracy asked.

“Operate as normal” the Commander confirmed “But if we are to have the almighty John Haliford enforced upon us then we should be prepared for all hell to be let loose, remember this guy does not believe in subtlety, due process or procedure.”

“And if he has Altman and Stevens on board his merry little boat then things could get really ugly” Tracy reminded them as Glasgow finished his call and replaced the handset before passing the telephone back to the desk.

“I apologise for my outburst” Glasgow announced “I would not normally use such language in the presence of a lady.”

“Where?” Tracy mockingly asked as she looked around her.

“However when it comes to the subject of my old adversary Cruschov” Glasgow continued to explain “my motives and emotions are admittedly a little over wrought I think is the phrase.”

“Believe me I can sympathise” the Commander reassured him “I have had a few dealings with the criminal fraternity over the years that have wound up getting err personal shall we say.”

“A few?” Sir Richard remarked to himself.

“Alpha One to Eyeball One” the Commander called into his radio “Cassini, you there mate?” he asked.

“Cassini receiving” came the response “Go ahead Sir.”

“Where is our newly appointed leader now?” the Commander asked.

“You put a tail on Forsyth?” Sir Richard asked with some incredulity.

“Are you surprised?” Tracy asked.

“Actually...” Sir Richard thought about it for a moment “No, not really.”

“Forsyth and his band of cronies arrived at their new offices in Whitehall about half an hour ago” Cassini confirmed “Seven cars, powerful and with blacked out windows followed him and the people within filed inside pretty quick before we could get a good look at them.”

“Anyone you recognise?” the Commander asked.

“Well I may be going mad Sir” Cassini admitted “but one of them looked a bit like that Russian guy Sir Richard was trying to find a couple of days ago.”

“Mixed blessings Mr Cassini” the Commander responded “Good news being you are not going mad, the bad news being that was indeed almost certainly Cruschov. Was Sir John Haliford there by any chance?”

“Didn't see him” Cassini confirmed “Then again he is not exactly one to go around in the full glare of the public and media spotlight I would have thought.”

“Not any more” the Commander explained “Haliford is now part of the front line against crime don't you know and his ego is bathing in the oxygen of publicity, believe me he will turn up to the opening of an envelope if it gets his mug in the papers.”

“In which case he is definitely not here” Cassini confirmed “But there would seem to be plenty of other interesting faces around here, would you like me to throw a ring of eyeballs around this lot?” he asked.

“If you can do it without attracting the attentions of Sir John Haliford's ex MI6 colleagues and any watchers that Forsyth and co have gone and hired then I would appreciate it” the Commander agreed.

“Not a problem Sir” Cassini confirmed “Me and my lads can walk through walls, costs a fortune in redecorating mind” he mused.

“Many thanks mate” the Commander responded “Keep in touch.”

“So where the hell is Haliford?” Sir Richard asked once the Commander had finished his conversation.

“I think the question should be more what is he up to” Tracy suggested.

“Given that he seems to have been granted a licence from our glorious new leader to do whatever he likes” the Commander remarked “I would say it won't be long before we find out.”

“Right then gentlemen” Haliford declared with obvious relish as he entered his office rubbing his hands with almost uncontrollable glee “The game begins, lets get to work.”

“Someone is happy” Stevens remarked in his usual gruff voice as he put down the executive desk toy that he had been playing whilst he had been waiting for Haliford's arrival.

“Well it is not everyday that you are appointed head of a major international security agency and then twenty four hours later granted the permission to not only overrule the National Security & Police Service itself but pursue and arrest who I like, how I like” Haliford explained, clearly still enjoying his moment of triumph.

“So when do we get started?” Stevens asked “Only my lads and I are itching to get to work and I for one would like to have official powers when I take down that little Irish bitch who gave me this” he indicated his leg.

“Right away” Haliford confirmed as he produced from his desk drawer a sealed envelope that he handed across “This is the first phase of arrests I want undertaken, all to be taken alive using whatever means are necessary and brought here for questioning, well detention anyway. You know, out of sight, out of mind?”

“This looks like half the extremists in London” Stevens remarked “Trying to start a civil war or something?” he asked.

“These are just some of the proverbial pains in the neck that during my tenure on the Secret Service constantly slipped away from justice thanks to some overpaid smarmy lawyers and so called human rights activists” Haliford explained “Now that I have the power it is time to take out the trash.”

“I am surprised you didn't want the lawyers arrested as well” Stevens commented.

“They are included in the second phase along with some other very well known names” Haliford confirmed with a smug looking smile “Oh by the way if we do come across your little Irish friend, I presume you want to be there when the cuffs are slapped on her.”

“I'll cuff her all right” Stevens promised “With my fist.”

“OK then” Haliford confirmed “Next job, a quick trip to the Yard to see how my subordinates in the Security Service are doing and deliver them the bad news.”

“Anything I should know about?” Stevens asked.

“Oh nothing much” Haliford explained “Just that as of thirty minutes ago Special Branch and the Armed Diplomatic Protection Service were put under my direct command. Do you think that will be enough official fire power for you to handle?”

“That will do nicely” Stevens agreed with an evil filled grin.

Tracy and the Commander were walking arm in arm down the corridor towards the canteen when they rounded the corner and came across one of their colleagues looking lost and bewildered.

“Larry?” the Commander called to Divisional Commander Laurence Silcox, head of the secretive Special Branch Division of the Service “You all right?” he asked.

“Not very often we see you outside of the west block or higher than the fifth floor, let alone in daylight” Tracy remarked.

“I seem to have found myself suddenly at a loose end Sir, Ma'am” Silcox confirmed.

“What's going on?” the Commander asked, sensing like Tracy that something was clearly wrong.

“I thought you would have known Sir” Silcox responded, clearly confused “I have been relieved of command.”

“What?” Tracy exclaimed.

“Larry, you are part of the furniture around here” the Commander replied “You've been in the Service longer than I have for goodness sakes, now what kind of nonsense is this?”

“Under orders from the newly appointed Chief Executive for National Security, Sir John Haliford” Silcox explained “I have been formerly relieved of command of Special Branch which is now an autonomous division of the Central Services Office reporting directly to Haliford.”

“Not if I have anything to do with it” the Commander grimly responded “Where is he?”

“On his way over here right now to talk to you guys” Silcox confirmed “I thought I would come up here to... oh I don't know. I feel lost, like someone has taken my whole life away from me, I live for this job, this service you know.”

“You are not fired” the Commander reassured him “Haliford does not call the shots around here, the only way he could, would be over my dead body. There is only one person in this building with that kind of power.”

“Me” Tracy wryly remarked.

“Exactly” the Commander agreed “So where did this order to relieve you actually come from.”

“A fax would you believe Sir” Silcox confirmed, now seemingly a little brighter following the Commander's reassurances “Take a look for yourself” he passed a unevenly folded piece of paper from his uniform tunic pocket to the others to examine for themselves.

“From the Office of International Security” Tracy read with a somewhat sarcastic tone “Executive Chairman Sir John Haliford O.B.E., National Security Advisor.”

“Sounds like Lord Forsyth is going for the usual jobs for the boys routine” the Commander remarked.

“Effective 14:00 hours GMT operations under the auspices of National Security & Police Service divisions SO13 and SO19 will be brought under the command structure of the new Central Security Committee under the command of Sir John Haliford” Tracy continued to read.

“Special Branch and our Anti-Terrorist Squad” the Commander concluded “The two biggest weapons in our arsenal against any kind of political coup which lets be honest is exactly what Lord Forsyth and his minions have effectively pulled off.”

“First rules of the game” Silcox confirmed “Take the other side's best players and their toys away before kick off.”

“They are not going to get away with this” the Commander promised “I think it is time Haliford and I had a little chat, the sort where I tell him who runs this Service and what his position is.”

“Well you may be in luck” Silcox remarked “Apparently Haliford and a couple of his guys are on their way over here right now.”

“I had better lock up the stationery cupboard” Tracy joked “Garlic and wooden stakes on standby?”

“Excellent idea love” the Commander agreed with a snigger “Larry, have they taken any of your guys on as part of this hostile takeover of theirs?” he asked.

“Only those who have been parachuted into my Department in the last couple of months” Silcox confirmed “Straight A+ candidates from Oxford and Cambridge University with outstanding references.”

“Let me guess” Tracy mused “They came with whiter than white records, passed every test with flying colours and have CV's that are beyond impeccable?”

“That's was what triggered my suspicions a couple of weeks ago” Silcox agreed “I did think about bringing this to you two but I was worried it would turn out to be just the wild imaginations of an old man in the twilight years of his career, guess I should have been a tad braver.”

“Oh come on” the Commander remarked “I know how you work, you put someone on the inside didn't you?” he asked.

“Of course I did” Silcox wryly confirmed “He has been feeding me snippets of intelligence on a secure frequency for the last few hours.”

“Anything we can use?” Tracy asked.

“Nothing definite yet” Silcox responded “Confirmation that Haliford has managed to put together a team of hired 'Private Security' and that apparently a series of significant arrests across the country is planned imminently.”

“Now what is the betting that when Haliford turns up here in full on high and mighty mode” the Commander wondered “that he mysteriously does not know anything about it?”

“Evens money favourite” Tracy confirmed “and this is from a woman who doesn't even understand how gambling odds are even worked out.”

“Sir Richard and some selected others are working in a specialist incident room upstairs on the top floor” the Commander informed Silcox “We could use your help

up there as so far all we have run into is proverbial road blocks, dead ends and frozen corpses.”

“Be happy to help” Silcox agreed “It is not like I had anything else to do anyway.”

“I’ll see you up there” the Commander confirmed “Meantime I best get ready for the arrival of his Lordship” he remarked with more than a little hesitation.

“Well I must say, things are going really rather well” former United States Senator William McAllister remarked as he lit another of his trademark huge cigars in the back of the Daimler limousine that was taking him, Haliford and a couple of his aides through the streets of central London.

“All thanks to your vision of a new and better way of protecting international interests” Haliford readily agreed “plus of course the influence not to mention significant generous financial contributions of our various patrons.”

“Speaking of which” McAllister asked “How is our Russian friend?”

“Enjoying the very expensively purchased air of respectability by indulging in some very expensive vodka in his hotel room” Haliford confirmed “I think he is going to get his Diplomatic Immunity & Protection Certificate framed for posterity.”

“I wanted to talk to you about the third phase of operations” McAllister continued “You can guarantee to me that whatever resistance that may be put up by the old fashioned state Security Services can be dealt with quickly and quietly?”

“Absolutely” Haliford confidently confirmed “Whilst it would be a fool who underestimated the power and respect that the National Administrator General and his wife command, there are ways and means to control them.”

“This idea of yours, using the link with that Irish agent to hold them” McAllister expressed some concern “Can you make it stick without her? I presume your people still haven't tracked her down?” he asked.

“Unfortunately the lovely Amber appears to have gone to ground courtesy of the Commander and Sir Richard Crowthorne” Haliford confirmed “We rather underestimated her abilities, she has taken us by surprise.”

“I should think Stevens is none to pleased about that” McAllister remarked “Still, that may prove useful when the time comes.”

“Indeed” Haliford agreed “Cheaper for us as well, Stevens has already confirmed to me that if we track down the young lady in question, her liquidation will be handled by him personally and he is not even going to charge us his usual fee for it.”

“How considerate” McAllister smirked “Mind you with the amount of business we are asking of him over the next couple of days, we ought to qualify for a good customer discount by now.”

“Money is no object, remember?” Haliford reminded his American Commander in Chief who as the Chairman of the International Security Agency had now become probably the most powerful and influential private citizen in the world.

“Coming up on New Scotland Yard Sir” the driver of the car called back at that point whereupon the men in the back of the vehicle all looked outside to see the familiar sight of the tall glass and steel building along with the famous three sided revolving sign immediately outside the front entrance.

“Take us into the basement access please” Haliford requested “I would be willing to bet we are already expected.”

With that instruction, their driver proceeded directly down the access ramp into the basement car park, the squealing of the tyres on the smooth concrete surface echoing all around the interior until the came to a stop in front of the entrance whereupon the driver duly got out to open the door for his passengers.

“Curious...” McAllister remarked as he exited the vehicle and looked around “No one to meet us. You did tell them we were coming didn't you?” he asked.

“Believe me, I didn't have to” Haliford confidently reassured him before they and their aides proceeded inside the main building entrance.

“Inside man?” McAllister tentatively suggested.

“We have people inside their organisations, they have people in ours” Haliford admitted “Checks and balances, can prove very useful sometimes. The trick is to make them think you don't know which can get awfully confusing sometimes.”

“I don't doubt it” McAllister agreed as they entered a waiting lift car and immediately proceeded to ascend.

“Clever, very clever” Fuller muttered to himself as he busily worked away at the computer workstation, a pile of notes and other scraps of paper littering the desk whilst the screens in front of him were showing multiple different things at the same time.

“Found something?” Lieutenant Barrett asked as she came over upon hearing Fuller's fairly positive sounding mumblings and looked over his shoulder.

“I think I have worked out how they did it” Fuller confirmed “Well to be more precise I worked out how I would have done it and worked backwards from there.”

“The communications blackout?” Barrett asked.

“Exactly” Fuller confirmed “The thing that was odd was how localised it was, normally a computer hacker in his back room would think big, try and take out the entire country and then bask in the resultant glory.”

“Or scream for his lawyer when the sense of humour failures from the Communications and Internet Security Division came around and kicked his door in” Barrett remarked.

“Oh, you've met them too?” Fuller asked.

“The personality bypass squad?” Barrett confirmed “Had a run in with them a few months back over some missing files. All they seemed interested in was what music I had downloaded from the Internet for some reason.”

“That sounds like them” Fuller confirmed “Anyway, I had a think about what I would do if I were asked to pull off the same trick and the one thing that occurred to me first was that in similar incidents, the perpetrators have usually had some kind of trial or dummy run a week or two prior to the main event.”

“Seems logical” Barrett agreed “Iron the bugs out of the system before the big day, check for leaks that way you reduce the chances of something going wrong and even more importantly, getting caught doing it.”

“For this to have worked you needed a very large, sophisticated and well connected central hub of some kind, that is the only way they could have pulled it off” Fuller continued to explain “So I thought, where is the biggest communications hub in the country?”

“GCHQ in Cheltenham” Barrett responded.

“Give the young lady a gold star” Fuller confirmed “So I had a trawl through their connection logs.”

“Err; aren't those supposed to be locked behind the toughest and most impenetrable firewall known to mankind?” Barrett asked, “Even the CIA could not get past them.”

“Yes” Fuller openly admitted “impenetrable to everyone except the man who designed them that is” he confirmed with a wry grin which had Barrett realising the significance of what he was saying.

“You are a dangerous man to know” Barrett remarked.

“The one thing my wife Jennifer always asks me is if I can access and snoop around inside virtually any secure system in the world without being detected” Fuller mused “How come I still can't program the video recorder or work the microwave without cocking it up?”

“Believe me, I can sympathise” Barrett agreed.

“Two things cropped up in the logs that to me registered as unusual and significant” Fuller continued to explain “Bursts of cross frequency activity on several different systems but only concentrated in one particular Department within GCHQ, specifically the one that covers the communications of the Greater London area.”

“Oh yes...” Barrett leaned forward and looked at the screen where Fuller was indicating a very large peak in an activity graph “If this is correct then that coincides with the blackout yesterday evening.”

“The problem is that whoever did that attack were very careful about covering their tracks” Fuller continued to explain “However that brings me back to the 'trial run' theory and so I looked for a similar pattern in the activity logs and voilà!” he declared as with the press of a key he produced another graph on the screen almost identical to the first they had been looking at moments before.

“About a week ago by the looks of it” Barrett agreed “Shorter time period though, our black out yesterday was the best part of ten to fifteen minutes.”

“Yes” Fuller confirmed “Obviously with a dry run you only want to just check the system works, the connections are all going where they are supposed to but at the same time not be online too long otherwise you attract unwanted attention and the game is up before you have even begun.”

“So this was what, a week ago and only about ten seconds?” Barrett asked.

“About that” Fuller confirmed “and at five in the morning. Let's face it, we have all had moments when our phone doesn't work the first time we try a call, we get cut off momentarily, the radio hits a black spot, etcetera. It happens all the time and no one ever notices.”

“So this was done by someone at GCHQ then?” Barrett asked “Only I have a contact there that could do a bit of snooping around if we give him some idea of what to look for.”

“Code name Wall Glass?” Fuller asked with a knowing smirk “also known as Terry 'the human telephone' Burton by any chance?”

“I see you have bought him a large drink or three in exchange for a few favours over the years as well then” Barrett concluded.

“Running up a hell of a bar tab at the Red Lion in Cheltenham I can tell you” Fuller admitted “Yes, I gave him a call about an hour ago and he just got back to me.”

“So, someone on the inside then?” Barrett asked.

“Possibly not” Fuller confirmed “Well not directly at any rate. He checked the London area communications surveillance servers and found that about two weeks ago a technical team from MI6 Operations Support...”

“...which at the time was still under Sir John Haliford's command...” Barrett remarked.

“...installed a new set of equipment” Fuller continued to explain “Now Terry is not sure what it does but he did say that it went berserk last night as if it was suddenly doing a lot of things.”

“So this communications attack could have been coordinated from elsewhere then?” Barrett suggested.

“That was what was bugging me until a few minutes ago” Fuller agreed “Even with the vast amount of technological know how we have access to today, Cheltenham is still realistically too far away to run such a precise and coordinated attack so I reckoned that these boys are local, well certainly within the M25 at the very least.”

“The ISA?” Barrett suggested.

“They have the money, the motives and the connections to pull it off so I would say Haliford's new ego trip bandwagon mob are probably odds on favourite” Fuller agreed “However as I said earlier, the attack was very carefully masked, routed via pretty much every communications hub and wire in the country which is a hell of a lot of cable and rendered it untraceable.”

“But for the trial run, I am willing to bet they weren't so careful were they?” Barrett asked.

“Congratulations, you win a cookie” Fuller confirmed “I returned to the trial run time and looked at communications flows at that exact time in London and Cheltenham as well as points in between. They made two critical mistakes here; firstly they did not bother to cover their tracks all that well presumably thinking correctly that no one was taking any notice.”

“Well we had no reason to” Barrett agreed.

“The second mistake was in the timing of the trial run, five in the morning when data traffic of the amounts that would be needed to pull this off are virtually non existent” Fuller continued “Yet there it is” he produced another graph on the screen with the press of a key which showed a huge peak at the exact time and date of the suspected trial run.

“Wow” Barrett exclaimed “That is just a tad noticeable” she admitted.

“Yeah” Fuller remarked “Just a little bit.”

“So these jokers are based in Greater London then you think?” she asked.

“Indeed” Fuller agreed “and I think I know where, well roughly at least” he admitted as he reached across for a large scale map of Greater London on which various areas had been identified with differently coloured hatching with highlighter pens.

“What am I looking at?” Barrett asked as she looked over the map with some uncertainty.

“These are the regional communications districts that the telephone and digital media networks are divided into” Fuller explained.

“A bit like the telephone directory areas in effect” Barrett agreed.

“Basically yes” Fuller confirmed “I talked to my friend at the telephone company who does all the big corporate contracts, major communication lines for big headquarters type buildings and new developments, that sort of thing and he checked his system and between us we managed to narrow the London end of our communications burst to this section here.”

“The lime green bit?” Barrett asked.

“Indeed” Fuller responded “Now what with the recession at the moment...”

“Government says we are not allowed to call it a recession” Barrett sarcastically reminded him “It is a global economic downturn.”

“Yeah, right” Fuller recalled “Stick the word 'global' on the beginning of it and the Government can just blame their own financial mess on Johnny Foreigner.”

“You've been around my boss Sir Richard too much” Barrett remarked with a wry smile.

“Well anyway the thing is” Fuller continued “there are not many businesses investing in new communications infrastructure at the moment, especially the sort of high grade lines you would need to support a system needed to pull this sort of thing off, so I asked him to check his records and he came up with three possibilities” he confirmed as he passed across a fax he had received to Barrett.

“Sir Richard said he and David Howell were taken to and subsequently escaped from what he described as a very modern like office building somewhere over in the west end of town” Barrett confirmed “These three addresses all fall within that area.”

“The one that is most interesting is the last one on the list” Fuller explained “I checked the invoicing on all three of them, Simon Fuller's rule of investigations number one...”

“Follow the money...” Barrett accurately recalled.

“Exactly” he confirmed “The first two were all paid up front as per standard procedure from legitimate business accounts, nothing shady looking bar someone trying and failing to use a little dodge to get out of paying the VAT but overall they are clean.”

“That leaves this third one” Barrett concluded “So what triggers that nose of yours then?” she asked.

“On the face of it there was nothing obvious” Fuller was forced to admit “It was only when I did a bit of deeper digging that I discovered that the account that this job was paid from was set up only a few weeks ago but had in turn been financed from a second far more long standing account, one with this particular bank in fact.”

“Hawthorne & Pearce” Barrett read from the screen where Fuller was indicating “That is the secure bank that handles a lot of Government and Security Service accounts isn't it?”

“The same” Fuller confirmed “Now whilst I can't trace the account that it came from, I do know that Sir John Haliford was the main signatory on certain accounts there up until three days ago when he stepped down from MI6 to go and get into bed with McAllister and Co.”

“Like you said, follow the money” Barrett agreed “So where is this address?”

“Hounslow” Fuller confirmed as he passed across a copy of the details.

“In which case I suggest you grab your box of tricks and your coat and I will find us some transport” Barrett declared “I think it is time for some good old fashioned snooping around.”

Outside in the corridor the Commander was walking along whilst reading the daily incident log, as a result he was not paying attention when he duly bumped into a speeding Lieutenant Barrett when she quickly emerged from the incident room.

“Oh sorry Sir” she profusely apologised as the Commander dropped the incident log on the floor whereupon she instinctively bent down to retrieve it for him.

“Not to worry” the Commander responded having managed to bend down about half way but had to give up, rubbing the small of his back with some obvious discomfort.

“Are you all right Sir?” Barrett asked concerned.

“All those years of being the good guy and the resultant accident damage is finally starting to catch up with me” the Commander admitted as Barrett handed him back the log “but don't tell my wife that, she will go and insist I have a holiday. I don't do holidays, born workaholic you see.”

“Oh shit...” Barrett suddenly exclaimed under her breath whereupon she quickly ducked out of sight back inside the door causing the Commander to look on somewhat mystified.

“What the...?” he began to ask before looking behind him and seeing what or rather who it was that had made Barrett beat a hasty retreat.

“Ah, Administrator General” called the oily voice of Sir John Haliford as he, McAllister and their aides came down the corridor towards him “Could we have a word in your office Sir?” he politely but firmly inquired.

“By all means” the Commander agreed, on the outside portraying an image of welcome cooperation but on the inside hiding feelings of revulsion for what he considered little more than a jumped up civil servant with delusions of grandeur “You gentlemen go on ahead, help yourselves to a drink and I will be along in a minute.”

“How civilised” Haliford responded before leading his party away down the corridor with the unpleasant sight of the fat pompous McAllister, grinning like a Cheshire cat, bringing up the rear.

“You wouldn't be saying that if you knew it was the cheap stuff” the Commander remarked to himself as he watched them disappear from sight around the far corner whereupon he walked backwards a few steps to the incident room door.

“It's all right, you can come out now” the Commander called behind him whereupon the door opened and Barrett popped her head out and looked slightly apprehensively up and down the corridor.

“Has he gone?” she asked.

“I've sent them to my office to get themselves merry on the company's cheapest brandy” the Commander confirmed “No way am I wasting the good stuff on those idiots. So if I may ask, what was that all about?”

“Are you asking as my superior officer sir?” Barrett inquired.

“No, just as a concerned colleague and a friend” the Commander responded, sensing the difficulty Barrett was having.

“Sir John 'the light shineth from my backside' Haliford and I had a bit of an unpleasant run in a few months ago” Barrett explained without going into any major detail “Call it a err... inter-jurisdictional conflict.”

“Uh huh...” the Commander responded “Perhaps you should tell me about it some time” he suggested “My door is always open as they say.”

“Trouble is your door has Haliford and his herd behind it at the moment Sir” Barrett reminded him.

“Ah yes” the Commander remembered “Unfortunately unlike you, I cannot duck out of the way whenever I see him or his minions coming.”

“You have my sympathies Sir” Barrett confirmed.

“Oh, hello Sir” Fuller called as he emerged from the incident room door, his laptop case slung over his shoulder which told the Commander immediately that he was off on a mission somewhere.

“You two planning a little outing?” the Commander asked.

“We think we have a lead on the communications blackout” Fuller explained “We are going to try and track down the source and see who has been playing games with some very expensive pieces of equipment.”

“Try not to get shot at” the Commander strongly advised “It seems to have been open season on public figures and law enforcement officers around here lately.”

“That is why I am going along” Barrett confirmed “Someone has to watch Simon's back otherwise Jennifer would never forgive us if something happened to him.”

“Well just be careful” the Commander warned “You find anything, you call me or if it looks like it is going to be very urgent, you call in the cavalry. Don't get creative and don't go being a hero, all the heroes I ever knew wound up getting shot and remembered only as a brief report in the Evening Standard, so mind how you go.”

“We will Sir” Fuller readily agreed.

“Good luck with Haliford Sir” Barrett added.

“Thanks” the Commander responded “Well, here goes” he confirmed before departing.

“So what did he mean by brief reports in the Evening Standard?” Barrett asked as she and Fuller headed off down the other way.

“Dates back to when the Commander was a kid” Fuller explained “His first experience of the forces of law and order and the evil that they have to deal with.”

“What happened then?” Barrett inquired, unaware of the Commander's earliest history.

“Technically...” Fuller responded “He died.”

“Was that who I thought it was?” Tracy asked of the Commander's P.A. as she looked around the corner into his outer office, her curiosity peaked by the sound of confident voices that had passed her office door and then into the Commander's office a few moments earlier.

“Sir John Haliford and party” the P.A. confirmed, “Your husband is on his way now.”

“Who does he have with him?” Tracy asked.

“A couple of flunkey's and some fat bloke” the P.A. admitted “I think he might be American.”

“Fat blob of lard, expensive suit, ruddy expression, if you saw him hanging around outside a school you would give the local nick a call?” Tracy inquired.

“Yes, that sounds like him” the P.A. was forced to admit.

“Former US Senator William McAllister in the flesh” Tracy confirmed “This should be interesting” she commented.

“Oh hello love” the Commander called upon finding Tracy in the outer office whereupon they briefly kissed “Are they in there?” he asked.

“Oh yes” Tracy confirmed “I heard them come in just now and popped around to see what the excitement was.”

“In which case I think it is time to get the party started” the Commander declared as a bout of deep laughter was heard to erupt from behind the closed door of his office.

“Sounds like it has already started” Tracy admitted “What do you think Haliford's line is going to be?” she asked.

“Something along the lines of 'I am master of all I survey' no doubt” the Commander responded “This is where Haliford, Forsyth et-al start to turn the screws and we begin to feel like we are the unwelcome relatives at the corporate Christmas party.”

“In which case may I suggest we put a contingency or two into play just in case?” Tracy wisely suggested as the Commander picked up the memo pad from the P.A.'s desk and began to write a message upon it.

“Great minds think alike my love” the Commander agreed as he completed the message and then tore off the page before handing it to the P.A. “Maureen, purloin a company motor and a driver and then go and find Lieutenant Commander Garry Hendrickson and give him this. He is currently Acting Chief of Operations over at the Transport Division so he is probably lurking in an Underground Station somewhere.”

“Yes Sir” the P.A. agreed although she was understandably somewhat surprised being a civilian member of the Service to suddenly find herself being sent out on a mission.

“Make sure you see him personally and that no one else sees that message” the Commander instructed her “Then when it is done, call me to confirm it and you can then go home.”

“I'll track him down Sir” the P.A. confirmed as she rose from her seat behind the desk and grabbed her coat.

“Right” the Commander declared as he and Tracy took each others arms in theirs before turning to face the door “Let's get this unpleasantness over with shall we?”

“By all means my love” Tracy agreed.

“Ah there you are Commander, Ms Caverner” Haliford declared “I must declare, your drinks cabinet is not exactly up to scratch is it?”

“Well considering you have the ear of our glorious new leader” the Commander casually remarked as he escorted Tracy to around behind his desk where he allowed her to take the seat “Perhaps you could suggest that if he ups my meagre budget then I could get in some of the good stuff.”

“I might just do that” Haliford agreed with a smirk “Now to business” he declared which made McAllister raise his glass thinking it was a toast before he quickly lowered it again when he realised his mistake “Ms Caverner, there is no need for you to be here I think.”

“This is my City Mr Haliford” Tracy firmly but politely reminded him “My husband is National Administrator General...”

“Don't remind me...” the Commander remarked to himself.

“...and we come as a pair” she confirmed.

“Never noticed” Haliford mockingly commented under his breath.

“In other words” the Commander added “Don't try any of your back handed divide and conquer tactics with me Haliford, anything you want to say to me you can say to my wife.”

“Very well then” Haliford agreed “As you may be aware, the temporary administration under the leadership of Lord Forsyth has placed me in charge of both the National Security Oversight Committee and also requested that my organisation takes over and investigates the terrorist incidents that have occurred in the last thirty six hours.”

“Oh really?” the Commander responded, not in the least bit impressed “And you have written authority to do this I suppose?” he asked.

“Here it is” Haliford duly confirmed as one of his aides opened a holdall and passed an official document to his boss before he in turn duly passed it across the desk to the Commander. “I do so much like to get things on paper, don't you? Removes a lot of ambiguity which we would otherwise encounter in our line of work don't you think?”

“Of course you do realise that I could give this document to our legal department and hold proceedings up a tad” the Commander warned.

“Best part of a couple of weeks is their record at the last count” Tracy agreed.

“Mr Regent” the gruff and self important voice of McAllister interrupted “Allow me to make ourselves crystal clear, we at the independent International Security Agency have been handed a mandate from the acting Premier of this country and we have been promised unobstructed and unconditional cooperation from all sectors of this country's law enforcement and security agencies.”

“Very well put my friend” Haliford agreed “Under the conditions of the order you have on the desk in front of you Commander” he insisted “you will with immediate effect hand over to my people all evidence, details and other associated material related to the stated investigations and then you will leave us to get on with it.”

“Oh I see” the Commander responded “Now that you have gone all private with this little organisation of yours, you want to make a takeover bid for the long established competition.”

“Nothing of the sort” Haliford dismissed the Commander's concerns with a mere wave of the hand “The National Security & Police Service still has a domestic role in this country, burglaries, muggings, murders, robberies, pickpockets, the everyday crime and that sort of thing.”

“Well that is very kind of you” Tracy mockingly thanked Haliford “So what would be our role be in this glorious new world order of yours?”

“I wish you could understand what it is we are trying to do here” McAllister remarked “We only have everyone's best interests at heart, our goal is justice.”

“And you expect me to believe that” the Commander retorted “This coming from the man who once advocated Guantanamo Bay style detention without trial camps across the world whilst your British associate here, err what is it they call you?” he asked Haliford.

“European Area Operations Director” Haliford confirmed with a power laden sense of pride.

“...is widely credited as having written the book on such nice subjects as illegal detention, torture and extreme interrogation” the Commander duly concluded “Pardon me if that particular combination does not fill me with the greatest of confidence in either your abilities or motives.”

“All right” Haliford responded “If you want to play hard ball then that is fine by me. We are taking over the investigation with immediate effect” he duly informed “That means you hand over everything you have and stay the hell away from anything to do with it unless we ask for your assistance.”

“Non negotiable I presume?” Tracy asked.

“It is all there in black and white” McAllister indicated the document still lying on the desk.

“I should point out that I am a world renowned expert in national and international terrorism you know” Haliford reminded all those present, “It is just that only now have I received the recognition, the funding and the tools to get the job done properly and I for one don't want us to start off this working relationship on the wrong foot...” he declared.

“Could have fooled me” the Commander remarked quietly aside to Tracy who nodded in agreement.

“...and in the spirit of inter departmental cooperation” he continued “I would like to ask you for your help.”

“You need *our* help?” the Commander responded with a raised eyebrow.

“We need to trace the whereabouts of a couple of people” Haliford gestured to one of the aides who duly produced a couple of files from which he extracted some photographs that he then passed to his superior “Firstly I believe you know this man” he passed across the first photograph.

“Our friend from the London station of the FSB” the Commander agreed “Sergei Glasgov.”

“Do you know where he is by any chance?” Haliford asked.

“Haven't seen him for several weeks” the Commander convincingly lied “Tracy?” he asked, passing the photograph to his wife for her to look at.

“Nope, sorry” Tracy duly confirmed “Have you tried asking the Russians?” she suggested.

“Apparently they lost track of him a couple of days ago” Haliford confirmed “We have evidence that suggests that he may be behind the poisoning of the Home Secretary earlier this morning.”

“I find that very hard to believe” the Commander responded “Sergei Glasgov may be an old school KGB man but I somehow doubt he would be interested in, let alone want to get involved with the murkier side of British politics.”

“Very well” Haliford agreed “What about this young lady?” he then passed across a second photograph to the two officers “Do you know this girl? We are anxious to trace her. We believe she may have something to do with the Prime Minister's car bomb.”

“Don't know her” Tracy confirmed with the Commander nodding in agreement “Who is she?”

“Amber McWilliam” Haliford explained “although she does have a number of names that she goes by. We believe she has links to terrorist splinter cells of certain right wing Irish Republican groups and at one point worked as a double agent for MI5.”

“Well I could check our files, see if her name or picture comes up” the Commander offered in a show of cooperation although he of course actually had no intention of doing so whatsoever.

“I would appreciate that” Haliford agreed “There are two other people I need to speak to, one is Sir Richard Crowthorne and the other is one of your junior officers, err a Lieutenant Barrett I believe her name is.”

“If I see them, I will let them know that you want a word” the Commander confirmed

“Well I think that will be all then” Haliford declared as he rose from his seat, scooped up the photographs from the desk in front of him and handed them back to his aide who returned them to the folder “If anything relevant should cross your respective desks, please ensure it is forwarded to my office immediately.”

“I will see what I can do” the Commander agreed but as before inside he knew he had absolutely no intention of pandering to Haliford and McAllister's demands one bit.

“Good day” Haliford duly announced before he and the others left whereupon Tracy and the Commander both let out a huge sigh of relief.

“Thank God that is over” Tracy responded.

“I'll drink to that” the Commander agreed.

“You are not going to let an obnoxious little toe rag with delusions of grandeur like him get the better of us are you love?” Tracy asked.

“Absolutely not” the Commander confirmed “Personally I'd like to nail him and that fat oaf McAllister to the nearest wall by his balls with a nail gun, trouble is it is pretty clear he doesn't have any, and anyway I don't have a nail gun handy for that matter...”

“Hell hath no fury like the Commander scorned” Tracy responded “The ARU Unit is having that engraved in Latin above their office door by the way” she informed her husband which resulted in a mutual giggle between them.

“Actually amidst the bluff, bluster and thinly disguised fishing expeditions, Haliford actually asked one very good question, where is Glasgov?” the Commander asked.

“Well he left the building as soon as he found out about Alexander Cruschov's diplomatic immunity and his shield of Public Interest Control Orders” Tracy admitted “I don't know what popular swear words are in Russian but I think he was uttering quite a lot of them when he left.”

“He is either drowning his sorrows, draining London's vodka stocks dry in the process or he is plotting something” the Commander agreed “Hopefully it involves that Bolshevik nut case Cruschov, a one way ticket to Siberia and a wooden crate.”

“And how the hell does Haliford know about Amber?” Tracy asked with obvious concern “The only people on our side who know she even still exists besides her long lost love Alan are you, me, Crowthorne and Barrett.”

“Walls have ears as my old grandmother used to say” the Commander concluded “and if Haliford is worth one tenth of his reputation, combined with the seemingly

bottomless financial resources he now has at his disposal I would wager that he can afford some very sensitive ears buried in a lot of walls.”

“At least we should be all right in here” Tracy agreed “I had the place double checked for listening devices earlier this morning.”

“Interesting that Haliford mentioned Barrett in conversation” the Commander remarked “She told me that her and Haliford had had some sort of previous dealings in the recent past. She did not go into details but from the impression she gave me it was far from pleasant.”

“I think it may be prudent to let Amber and Alan know that Haliford is looking out for them” Tracy suggested.

“Good idea love” the Commander agreed “Go to the hotel, they are in the Presidential Suite of the Park Lane Hilton. Contact them face to face and advise them to stay put.”

“I’ll go down there now” Tracy confirmed.

“I also think the less we communicate using land lines and mobiles the better for the moment as well” the Commander added “Furthermore I think we should treat all non-secure radio frequencies as potentially compromised.”

“I’ll warm up the carrier pigeons then” Tracy joked with a heart warming giggle that made the Commander smile “See you later love” she confirmed whereupon they hugged each other.

“Be careful my love” the Commander instructed her.

“I will” Tracy eagerly agreed before reluctantly they let go of each others hand and she left.

“All right, lets give the guys some room to work shall we?” suggested Lieutenant Commander Garry Hendrickson, the Acting Duty Chief of Operations for the Transport Division of the Service as he helped move back the crowds on the westbound Central Line platform at Bethnal Green Underground Station.

Behind him as he managed to get the crowds to stand back, a couple of Ambulance Service Paramedics proceeded to board the stationary train of 1992 type tube stock which had been held at the station for over twenty minutes now as a result of an elderly passenger on board collapsing with a suspected heart attack.

“No madam, it's going to be a little while” Hendrickson duly confirmed to an intending passenger on the platform who approached him asking about when the train was likely to leave “We've got an old lad on board who has had a suspected coronary so we need to give the ambulance lads a bit of time to get him sorted out before we can get going.”

“Lima Tango Alpha One Zero One from Control” Hendrickson's radio then called, all be it not all that clearly as being underground in the deepest part of the station meant that even with the best technology, the signal was still pretty weak.

“Control, go for Hendrickson” he responded, stepping back from the scene so that he could take the call.

“Sir, there is a messenger from New Scotland Yard looking for you” the Transport Division Control Room Supervisor informed him.

“That sounds ominous” responded Lieutenant Harry Smitham who joined his superior officer at that point as nearby the paramedics began the process of recovering the patient on a stretcher from the train.

“They have an urgent written message from the Administrator General” came the confirmation.

“Better let them know I am still on site at Bethnal Green dealing with that ill passenger incident but I should be back on the surface in a minute or two” Hendrickson confirmed.

“Understood, Control out” came the response.

“Looks like the old boy is going to be all right Sir” Lieutenant Smitham confirmed as they began to follow the paramedics who accompanied by other officers and station staff, began to move off.

“Well at least something has gone right today then” Hendrickson remarked as they headed up the escalators back to the ticket hall level “I wonder what our beloved chief wants?” he pondered as the two officers allowed the escalator to carry them upwards.

“Seems odd sending a written message” Smitham commented “Hasn't the Commander heard of the telephone?” he asked.

“Telephones can be tapped, radio calls intercepted, e-mails hacked, not that he can operate a computer for toffee apparently” Hendrickson explained as they crossed the booking hall and then headed up the steps to street level, “and when you look at what has happened across this city that we actually know about in the last day or two, that calls for a little more subtle method of working.”

“Have you heard the whispers from the Yard Guv?” Lieutenant Smitham asked a few moments later as they emerged from the station entrance just as the ambulance carrying the stricken passenger departed amid a wail of sirens and with an attendant Security Service escort for good measure “Apparently the temporary Prime Minister has appointed that ex MI6 chief Haliford to oversee all aspects of law enforcement and national security.”

“That should have the civil liberties protest groups look on in horror as their internet servers go into meltdown” Hendrickson remarked “the press are likely to have a field day as well.”

“This must be your messenger Sir” Smitham pointed down Roman Road towards an unmarked Security Service saloon car which with its normally hidden blue lights flashing, came towards them at some pace before being brought to a firm but well controlled halt by the kerbside directly in front of them.

“Hello Bob, what brings you to the charming east end of the town?” Hendrickson asked of the large and formidable yet friendly figure of the head of the ARU Section who was driving the car.

“Hello Garry” Bob responded “Oh just doing the boss a favour” he explained as he got out of the car and went around to the passenger side to open the door which allowed the Commander's P.A. to get out and step up to Hendrickson.

“A message for you Sir” she duly confirmed as she handed across a small plain brown envelope which Hendrickson duly proceeded to open before reading the message written on a standard Service compliments slip that was inside.



The message read simply 'Condition green, natives restless, please stand by and bring a friend. Many thanks.'

“Thank you” Hendrickson responded as he then proceeded to destroy the message having now digested its brief and somewhat cryptic contents “Message received and understood.”

“Right, let's get you home” Bob confirmed as he then opened the door once more for the Commander's P.A. to get back in.

“How is it back at the glass towers of Broadway?” Hendrickson inquired as Bob returned to the driver's seat.

“Tense...” Bob summarised after a moments pause for thought “Anyway I had best get going, if I am lucky I might be able to avoid being seconded to the rolling Haliford bandwagon party.”

“Haliford's not trying to take over the Service is he?” Smitham asked.

“Well he has already used some sort of emergency powers granted by the acting P.M to take control of Special Branch and the Diplomatic Security guys” Bob confirmed “The way I figure it the ARU section could be next.”

“That explains the message then” Hendrickson remarked “In which case I think it is time to get to work” he declared.

“I’ll see you around” Bob responded “Watch your back though” he ominously warned “Haliford and his boys have eyes and ears everywhere.”

“I hear you” Hendrickson confirmed “Take care mate” he called.

“You too” Bob agreed before he started the car and then after checking the traffic flow, drove off and away.

“You’ve worked with the Commander before haven’t you Sir?” Smitham asked as they proceeded back to the Transport Division patrol car that was parked around the corner out of the way.

“Yes” Hendrickson confirmed “Towards the end of last year at the time of that nasty business with his wife and her shooting in Trafalgar Square” he explained as they reached the patrol car and got in with the Lieutenant taking the drivers seat.

“Lima Tango Control to any unit in the Liverpool Street area” the radio in the car suddenly called “Any unit available to deal with a reported violent pickpocket on the main line concourse?”

“Ignore it” Hendrickson mysteriously instructed just as Smitham was about to pick up the call “The radio has developed a fault” he informed the Lieutenant with obvious insistence, backed up by looking him directly in the eyes whereupon he nodded in understanding.

“I understand Sir...” Smitham responded “Actually no I don’t but you are my superior officer so erm...”

“It’s all right” Hendrickson reassured him “It is because of this message I have just received” he explained “I need you to trust me absolutely no matter what I ask you to do, do you understand Lieutenant?”

“Yes Sir” he agreed with a nod of the head.

“Right then” Hendrickson declared “Start the car, let’s get going” he instructed.

“Where to Sir?” Smitham asked as he looked both ways before pulling out into the flow of traffic.

“King William Street” Hendrickson confirmed “and on the way I want you to listen very carefully to what I tell you.”

“Certainly Sir” Smitham agreed as he drove on before a thought occurred to him “Err, where is King William Street Sir?”

“Next door to the Monument, north bank of the Thames near London Bridge” Hendrickson informed him.

“What's in King William Street may I ask?” Smitham duly inquired.

Not so much what is in it as what is under it” Hendrickson replied which caused his colleague to give a rather confused look in response “You will see when we get there.”

“So what is all this about if I may ask?” Smitham asked ever so slightly nervously.

“I've read your record” Hendrickson informed him “Two years on the service, you can handle yourself and you come with excellent references from your previous Guvnor.”

“Thank you Sir” Smitham responded “What do I win?”

“As of this moment you are seconded into X-Ray Division” Hendrickson declared.

“The who?” he responded, completely mystified.

“I always preferred the Rolling Stones” Hendrickson joked “Sorry...” he then apologised “X-Ray Division is a secret internal department within the Service and associated affiliated agencies, set up over twenty years ago at the time of the Hainault Inquiry” he then went on to explain “Very few people both inside and outside the service are even aware of its existence.”

“And you are one of these?” Smitham asked as they passed Liverpool Street Station, heading south through the heart of the City itself and its densely packed financial district.

“The Commander brought me on board a few months ago” Hendrickson continued “It is effectively a sleeping contingency plan, used in dire circumstances whenever there may be a threat to national security either from within the Service itself or from those who oversee it. The last time they were activated was a couple of years ago.”

“That time the Commander was shot at Victoria Station by a sniper” Smitham recalled “The then Home Secretary declared him dead but then when he showed up alive and well realised he had dropped himself well and truly in it.”

“You have a good memory Lieutenant” Hendrickson complimented his junior officer “X-Ray Division has a separate budget, carefully hidden beneath a thousand layers of Whitehall budgetary bureaucracy and its own secret facilities from which we can organise and plan in case of a worst case scenario.”

“And I take it we are facing a worst case scenario now, are we Sir?” Smitham asked slightly apprehensively.

“Let's just say that it is wise to take a precaution or two here and there” Hendrickson confirmed “Like the note from the Commander said, the natives are getting restless.”

“Meaning this chap Haliford and that agency thing that he announced he was starting up yesterday” Smitham concluded.

“Exactly” Hendrickson agreed “Now I need to stress one very important thing here Lieutenant, X-Ray Division is so top secret that only a handful of people are even aware of its existence. Very few get the call to join it and even fewer live to tell the tale afterwards.”

“I won't let you down Sir” Smitham declared, clearly ready for the potentially challenging times that seemed to be forecast as approaching rapidly.

“Look at it this way” Hendrickson added with a smirk “At least it gets us out of the office.”

“You are entering a strange new dimension” Smitham jokingly remarked as they passed the Bank of England and approached the Monument area “Not one of sight or sound but of mind, there is a sign post up ahead, your next stop, King William Street.”

“Is this the place?” Barrett asked as she stopped the unmarked patrol car by the side of the road whilst alongside her Fuller examined the London A to Z map with a studious look.

“I think so” Fuller responded as he folded the map up and chucked it casually over his shoulder onto the back seat of the car “Any further west and we are into the next telephone district.”

“Not exactly a glamorous part of town is it?” Barrett remarked as she looked around their surroundings which consisted of several fairly non-descript and uninspiring modern industrial unit type buildings.

“Well I was not expecting to find a place with a large sign on it saying 'Assassinations R' Us” Fuller admitted “That would just be too easy.”

“All right, you take the lead and I will watch your back” Barrett confirmed as they got out of the car “By the way, are you carrying?”

Uncharacteristically Fuller duly opened the left hand side of his coat and showed off the shoulder holster and its semi-automatic pistol contained therein.

“Since these bastards put my wife in hospital, yes” Fuller admitted grimly “Normally I don't go near the things but now I have certain scores to settle so I want to be prepared if the occasion arises.”

“Well just try not to get yourself shot” Barrett warned him “You know what the Commander said about being heroes.”

“I think we will try this way” Fuller motioned towards one side street in the business park which featured buildings which were more office function in design and appearance than industrial.

“Most of these places look unoccupied to me” Barrett remarked as they walked along the road where she noted the rows of buildings with no signs or any other form of identification on them other than unit numbers and no vehicles parked near them either.

“According to the Land Registry, this place was built late last year” Fuller explained “Completed just at the wrong moment as the economy nosedived into the toilet so most of them are vacant and likely to remain so for some time I would wager, the developers went bust as a direct result.”

“Swings and roundabouts of outrageous fortune dominate the wallets of us all” Barrett mused with a wry smile.

“Witty yet alluringly strange analogy” Fuller responded “Where did that one come from?”

“Oh just some guy I met on a train once” Barrett explained “Very literal chap, would probably make a good author if he put his mind to it.”

“Ah, here we go” Fuller remarked as he stopped and looked over the top of a boundary hedge at one building in particular “This must be the place” he quietly declared.

“How can you tell?” Barrett asked as from her point of view the eight storey glass and aluminium office building that they were both looking at seemed broadly similar to all the others around and about.

“Well for a starter there is an array of high-spec satellite communications dishes on the roof” Fuller indicated upwards “Second, that is a very large cable trunk run they have there running from the street junction box and thirdly there are a couple of guys with MP-7 rifles and a sodding great German Shepherd dog patrolling the grounds” he pointed over towards one side where Barrett could then see the two guards approaching from around the corner.

“Am I imagining things or is that one hell of a CCTV set-up they have running around the building perimeter?” Barrett asked as she scanned the exterior of the building using a pair of binoculars.

“Classy” Fuller remarked “Best that money can buy so definitely not a Government building then.”

“So, do you have a plan?” Barrett asked “Only I don't do dogs, especially nasty great big teeth laden buggers like that one.”

“Yes, I don't fancy going up against that either, especially since it would appear he has a friend” Fuller pointed towards the opposite corner of the building where a second pair of armed guards also with a dog came into view “I think we should take a look at that street junction box” he decided and carefully made his way with Barrett following close behind down the street, the short distance to the large green cabinet

mounted adjacent to the pavement hedge and almost partially hidden from view by the surrounding foliage.

“Telecom Employees Only” Barrett read from the small sign above the secure lock that held the cabinet tightly shut.

“They use a special type of key” Fuller explained.

“So how are you going to get in?” Barrett asked as she watched Fuller begin to fumble about in his pockets in search of something.

“Easy, use a special type of key” Fuller declared as he duly found what he was looking for, a small unusually shaped green coloured metal key which he produced and showed to her.

“You've done this before haven't you?” Barrett wondered as she watched Fuller successfully use the key to open the lock and then access the interior of the cabinet.

“Once or twice” Fuller meekly admitted as he proceeded to look inside where they were confronted by a myriad of labelled wires and connectors.

“I hope you know what you are doing” Barrett remarked “Only I failed basic electronics when I was at school.”

Inside the building that stood just a short distance away from them, an alarm began to sound on a computer located in an office on the third floor. In response, a technician dressed in a white lab coat whose front bore the logo of the new independent International Security Agency, got up and went over to the computer and clicked a mouse to examine what the cause of the alert was.

“Wayne” the technician called to his associate across the room “Is there any maintenance scheduled on the incoming land lines today?” he asked as his concern became increasingly more obvious.

“Not that I am aware of” came the response whereupon the technician duly grabbed a pair of binoculars from the desk and went over to the window that looked out on the street below whereupon he trained them onto the pavement and surrounding grounds until he saw the source of the alert.

“Better get Harcourt down there” the technician called back across “It looks like we have a rodent problem.”

“Why would there be...” Fuller pondered for a few moments when he noticed something in the cabinet that would not normally be there but then he realised its significance and was about to warn Barrett but it was too late.

“Incoming!” Barrett called as a burst of gunfire rang out, bullet impacts striking the ground only feet from where they were and effectively pinning them down with little to no chance of escape.

“Come here!” came the sound of a gruff voice as all of a sudden they were jumped from behind the hedge by a group of armed men who appeared, quickly grabbing both of them and with little regard for their safety, wrestling them to the ground face down and quickly disarming them.

“We are officers of the National Security & Police Service” Barrett called back.

“Shut up!” one of the men responded tersely, kicking her in the side of her ribs for good measure “Do we look like we give a toss?” he asked.

“Oddly enough, no” Fuller remarked.

“Well, well, well, what do we have here?” the gruff voice of Bill Harcourt remarked as he joined the group, his evil snigger and trademark casual swagger being backed up by an array of weaponry adorning his bulky and sinister looking person.

“It would appear we have guests boss” one of the men casually remarked.

“You I know from somewhere” Harcourt informed Fuller having knelt down and looked at his face.

“I’ve read your file” Fuller agreed “Doesn’t make for pleasant reading I can tell you.”

“You on the other hand” Harcourt turned to Barrett and by her hair pulled her head up to look at her “We haven’t met” he gruffly declared “I’m Bill, who the hell are you?”

“Pest control?” Barrett sarcastically suggested after having to stifle a cough brought on by the kick she had received a few moments before which had cracked a couple of her ribs.

“Yeah well” Harcourt responded “I am in charge of internal security around here so you two have some questions to answer. Give us the right answers and you could win big prizes.”

“I am guessing it won’t be a couple of tickets to Barbados then?” Barrett asked as she was roughly hauled back up to her feet by a couple of Harcourt’s less than subtle thugs.

“Correct” Harcourt confirmed “No, your best hope is that you get to keep the use of your legs” he declared “Bring them inside; I am going to enjoy this.”

Upon Harcourt’s orders, his men duly dragged Fuller and Barrett to their feet and then without any care or consideration, promptly bundled them towards a side entrance to the building where the two guard dogs barked furiously at them as they proceeded inside.

“Tie them up” Harcourt duly ordered once they were inside, this being the cue for the men under his command to throw the pair of them into hard wooden chairs in the centre of a dark room before restraining them by binding their wrists and legs.

“I hope you have a damn good lawyer” Barrett defiantly protested.

“I hope you have a very high pain threshold” Harcourt casually responded as he casually picked up a rifle and with the butt of it struck Barrett across the side of her face, rendering her immediately unconscious.

“You are a poster child for vicious bastards everywhere, you know that?” Fuller protested “There is no need for unnecessary violence.”

“No unnecessary violence makes Bill a dull boy” Harcourt responded, revelling in his self imposed importance and power “It's my stock in trade” he confirmed as he proceeded to make a call on a mobile telephone.

“Who are you calling, psycho's anonymous?” Fuller asked.

“You know for a glorified technical support guy, you do a hell of a lot of talking” Harcourt remarked as he waited for his call to be answered “Actions speak louder than words in my book.”

“You on a power trip or something?” Fuller inquired.

“Just merely doing my job as the head of Internal Security for the ISA” Harcourt explained.

“Hah!” Fuller exclaimed “Which nut job let a lunatic like you loose with a job like that?”

“Sir John Haliford please” Harcourt requested over the telephone.

“Explains everything” Fuller admitted in response.

“Sir, its Bill Harcourt” he declared “We have a couple of guests in the interview room down on the ground floor. What would you like me to do with them?” he asked.

There was a tense pause of silence as Harcourt received his response, the time being spent by him stroking his greying bearded chin thoughtfully but then he clicked his fingers over at one of his associates who brought over two identity cards that had been taken from their two prisoner's moments before.

“Yes, the first one is a Commander Simon Fuller” Harcourt confirmed, “The other is a lippy bird by the name of Lieutenant Commander Barrett” he added whereupon there was another pause as a further response came.

“Very well Sir, see you in a few moments” Harcourt responded before hanging up by folding the mobile telephone shut and then tossing it over to his associate nearby.

“Well it would appear that you are going to get the royal treatment” Harcourt informed Fuller as in the chair alongside him Barrett began to come around.

“Oh God...” she muttered as she began to become reacquainted with her unfriendly surroundings “Did I miss anything?” she groggily asked.

“Stand by your beds” Fuller responded “Apparently we are going to be getting the extra 'special' treatment.”

“From who?” Barrett asked “Vlad the Impaler?”

“Worse...” Fuller admitted as the door opened and Haliford appeared, grinning from ear to ear like a man who had found something he had expected never to see again.

“Ah...” Barrett realised upon seeing the man arrive.

“Lieutenant Commander Barrett” Haliford declared, his voice echoing all around the interior of the room in an ominous and evil laced tone “So nice of you and your talented friend here to drop by.”

“Well, we were in the neighbourhood and thought we would drop by and say hello” Barrett mockingly responded.

“I have been so 'eager' to catch up with you” Haliford continued “I never did get the chance to thank you for your hard work on that missing files case a few months ago did I?”

“Just doing my job” Barrett responded with a note of defiance “It is just a pity your Whitehall contacts got to the evidence before I was able to nail your arse to the wall.”

“You two know each other?” Fuller asked, astonished, however for his query, Haliford clicked his fingers towards Harcourt who in response, grinned with evil pleasure as he administered a swift and heavy blow to Fuller's midriff.

“Please, don't interrupt again” Haliford insisted as Fuller could only nod in agreement as he coughed and spluttered in agony as a result of the hit.

“Still getting your boys to do your dirty work for you I see” Barrett responded “Are you ever going to have the balls to do something for yourself?” she asked.

“Believe me my dear” Haliford confirmed “I am just warming up, oh would you mind?” he asked of Harcourt once more, indicating Fuller who was now recovering a bit.

“A pleasure boss” Harcourt duly responded and promptly administered two more hard blows in quick succession to Fuller, the second of which sounded like it probably cracked a rib, a possibility backed up by the look of extreme agony on his face.

“So...” Haliford returned to Barrett, taking a chair and sitting down right in front of her so that they could see each other face to face “Where are those files you gathered?” he asked.

“Your rent-a-thugs got to them” Barrett responded, still as defiant as ever “Whilst you were arranging for that little side show to keep everyone distracted as you brought in that Russian slime Cruschov through Gatwick the other week, a couple of your goons accessed the central system and waltzed off with the lot.”

“I would like to believe you but sadly for you I don't” Haliford responded with a dismissive wave of an outstretched index finger “You know my reputation Lieutenant, you know what I am capable of and believe me when I say that I will not hesitate to utilise any and all of my extensive repertoire of interrogation techniques on you to get to the truth.”

“Bring on your lions, your torture chambers and your thumbscrews” Barrett defiantly responded “You won't get anything out of me, you might as well kill me now.”

“Do you know, I do believe you are right” Haliford calmly agreed as Hoskins joined them “Would you mind?” he then asked the American whereupon he duly took Hoskins' gun and without hesitation, turned to face Barrett, pulling the trigger and shooting her, the impact causing her to fall backwards in the chair to the floor where he then callously emptied the five remaining rounds from the chamber of the revolver into her body.

“Jesus Christ Haliford!” Fuller exclaimed in shock as he looked down at Barrett's lifeless body “You didn't have to do that!”

“Oh yes I did” Haliford calmly responded as he proceeded to return the weapon to Hoskins who even looked on shocked himself “Like I said, just warming up.”

“Nice grouping of shots boss” Harcourt responded admirably “What do you want us to do with the body?” he asked.

“The late Lieutenant hasn't ceased to be useful just yet” Haliford confirmed “Have her placed somewhere in the City where her discovery sometime this evening will cause some 'interesting' reactions, go on, be imaginative.”

“I'll take care of it” Hoskins confirmed before indicating to his associate whereupon they took an end each of Barrett's body before lifting her up and carrying her out of the room with a laughing Harcourt following close behind, leaving Haliford and a seething Fuller alone.

“The words 'William Harcourt' and 'imaginative' are not ones I would ever expect to hear in the same sentence” Fuller admitted, struggling to keep in his anger “You are not going to get away with this” he declared.

“Doing well so far I think you will find” Haliford casually admitted “You forget that the acting Prime Minister has appointed me Judge, Jury and Executioner. I am in

charge of the Security of the nation and its interests now and that makes me your supreme... ahem Commander.”

“So you are going to kill me as well?” Fuller defiantly asked.

“Oh, no, no, no...” Haliford confirmed “You and your skills are of much more use to me with you alive and well.”

“If you think I am going to work for you then you have another thing coming” Fuller responded in disbelief at what Haliford was suggesting.

“Oh I think you will find that it is you who is mistaken young man” Haliford coolly replied as he walked around Fuller, his hands behind his back like an old style school headmaster overseeing a naughty pupil “Everyone has a weak point, something that can be used against them to make them do what we want them to.”

“You're delusional” Fuller declared “In fact I take that back, you are just plain old fashioned insane.”

“No, I am just eccentric” Haliford confirmed with a wry smile “The way I figure it my friend is that you will do anything since I know exactly where your wife is” he suggested with an evil grin.

“You bastard...” Fuller responded, his face full of anger and hatred but controlled, as hard as it was.

“Bit of good fortune really” Haliford calmly admitted “If my learned if slightly ham fisted new friend Mr Harcourt had managed to fully complete his first task then your wife would not have survived and bang would have gone my only leverage, heh, heh, literally.”

“When this is over I am going to kill you where you stand” Fuller defiantly stated, hatred in his eyes “and if you or any or your troglodyte minions even so much as think about going anywhere near my wife again then let me assure you I will hunt you to the end of time and your demise will be very slow and very, very painful.”

“Tsk..” Haliford casually dismissed “Believe me my friend you won't get the chance. Now shall we talk about what you are going to do or shall I call Harcourt and give him the nod?”

Tracy advanced down the sumptuously appointed hotel corridor with a cautious step as she double checked a room number she had written on a scrap of paper with those shown on the otherwise identical doors.

“Ah...” she then declared upon finding the right room number but instead of knocking on the door, Tracy carried on to the next one down and after a brief pause during which she looked up and down the corridor to check she was alone, she duly knocked.

There were a few moments of quiet after she had knocked which for a second or two began to make Tracy think she had got the wrong room but then came the sound of the door being unlocked before it was opened and Amber looked out.

“Hello?” Amber responded with a smile.

“Divisional Chief Superintendent Tracy Caverner” Tracy confirmed, showing off her badge and associated identification although Amber was well aware of who she was if only by reputation if nothing else.

“Amber err... I forget” she admitted “Come in, I believe you know Alan Martin?”

“We met briefly” Tracy confirmed as she came into the room whereupon Amber closed the door before they went through to the dining room part of the suite “Are you two all right?” she asked.

“Well let's see” Martin concluded with a wry grin “We are both back together all be it through a very odd set of circumstances, treated to the best hotel room in London and no one has shot at us since last night so all in all, looks pretty good to me.”

“Just popped by to give you two a heads up” Tracy informed them.

“A heads up that I note is not being done over the telephone” Amber remarked “Not a coincidence I trust what with Sir John Haliford presumably now calling the shots?”

“Ever crossed his path?” Tracy asked.

“Not face to face” Amber confirmed as she tried to recall where she may have encountered the former head of MI6 “I have had the occasional brush with his minions over the last few years mind.”

“Well it would appear he knows you” Tracy explained “He is very anxious to track you down as he has it in his minuscule little brain that you might be responsible for blowing the Prime Minister to kingdom come.”

“What?!?” Amber angrily responded.

“Yeah, I thought it was a load of bollocks as well” Tracy admitted “My guess Haliford and his ISA backers which includes a certain Comrade Cruschov have finally realised they have lost track of you and are using the fact that the bomb was made to *appear* to have been the efforts of an Irish group with an axe to grind as an excuse to get to you.”

“And what would happen if they find her?” Martin asked as he put his arm around Amber for support, his face reflecting deep worry for her well being.

“Well based on the record of Cruschov and those he associates with” Amber had to admit.

“Which we believe includes a nasty piece of work by the name of Bill Harcourt” Tracy added.

“Then the chances are that once they have attempted to extract any potentially useful information out of me, I would be subsequently, slowly and painfully reduced to a pile of very small and very dead pieces” Amber reluctantly concluded.

“My theory is that Cruschov, McCallister and others who are signing Haliford's pay cheques are dictating who is to be targeted” Tracy confirmed “You can bet that now that Lord Forsyth has given Haliford the green light to go forth and wreak havoc, he will have a list of names all ready whose doors are about to be kicked in, or worse.”

“What can we do to help?” Amber asked “After all we can't just sit here all day whilst all this is going on can we?”

“Oh I don't know...” Martin wryly remarked.

“Sit tight for now” Tracy confirmed “My husband and I are putting in place a few contingency measures just in case Haliford's ideas get too big for his boots and he starts getting out of hand.”

“Well I hope it is not too long for Sir Richard's sake” Amber remarked “We are running up one hell of a room service bill on his expenses account.”

“Now that Haliford has taken over 'investigating' the bombings, anything could happen” Tracy admitted “We are being deliberately sidelined so that he can go and apply his whitewash all over the case by the bucket load unhindered.”

“Not a good sign” Martin agreed.

“If something does happen” Tracy informed them “Get yourselves equipped for a long and bumpy ride and make your way discreetly to King William Street.”

“Understood Ma'am” Amber readily agreed whilst Martin looked on and merely nodded in agreement.

“Right” Tracy confirmed as she checked her watch “I had best head back to the Yard before anyone starts asking where I am.”

“Oh, I meant to ask, how is your sister Jennifer?” Amber asked.

“Well she is holding on I think” Tracy admitted “How, I have no idea whatsoever.”

“We will nail them, don't worry Ma'am” Amber reassured her “It may take time but we have plenty of determination to spare.”

“That we have” Tracy readily agreed as she opened the door and prepared to depart “Watch your backs guys” she advised before leaving.

Making her way discreetly down the corridor towards the lifts, Tracy was unaware as she left of a figure lurking in the shadows of a doorway at the far end who as she disappeared from view in the lift, proceeded to make a discreet telephone call.

"So how is our first guest, err the surviving one that is?" McAllister asked as Haliford returned to his office, a distinctly frustrated air about him.

"Surprisingly resilient" Haliford was forced to admit "I mean call me old fashioned..."

"You're old fashioned!" McAllister responded "Sorry, couldn't resist" he then apologised with his usual hearty belly laugh.

"I'll do the jokes, thank you" Haliford replied "Anyway, as I was saying, if I threatened your wife with a slow and painful death, you would co-operate wouldn't you?"

"If it were my ex, hell I would give you her address and upcoming diary" McAllister duly confirmed "Save me a fortune you could."

"Well anyway I think I will let him stew for now" Haliford concluded "We have the first wave of arrests coming up in the next thirty minutes."

"Just in time for a nice splash of positive news across the evening papers" McAllister remarked.

"Exactly" Haliford confirmed "By four o'clock we should have a couple of dozen potential extremists locked up for the London Bridge boat bomb and then by five thirty hopefully we should have a few people in the bin for blowing up the Prime Minister as well."

"What about evidence?" McAllister asked, genuinely curious.

"Whether it exists or not, trust me, it will be found" Haliford grinned confidently "and once that happens we will then have our mandate for further detentions right across the board."

At that point the conversation was interrupted by the telephone on the desk ringing whereupon Haliford duly lent across to answer it.

"Haliford speaking" he coolly confirmed upon answering the call. The change in his expectant expression as he received the news over the telephone, the way it changed to one of extreme interest was obvious to McAllister as he looked on.

"Excellent" Haliford then responded with a smile of satisfaction across his face "Stay there and continue to report all movements on our friends, I'll take care of things this end" he confirmed before hanging up.

"Something happened?" McAllister asked.

“Call it lost property” Haliford cryptically responded as he proceeded to press another button on the telephone “Hello, would you ask Mr Hoskins to come up and see me as soon as possible please, thank you.”

“You look like you lost a dime and then found a dollar my old friend” McCallister remarked as he observed Haliford settle back in his huge office chair, quietly smirking to himself.

“Sometimes there are moments in life that make you just want to punch the air with pure delight” Haliford explained “On a hunch I had a few of our people put on alert across the hotel network in the City. It would appear that our missing Irish headache and her best friend are staying in a very expensive suite on the eighth floor of the Park Lane Hotel.”

“Classy...” McCallister agreed “I am willing to bet that Sir Richard Crowthorne is picking up the tab for that.”

“Oh, but it gets better” Haliford carried on “They just got a visit from none other than Divisional Chief Superintendent Tracy Caverner herself.”

“Probably tipping them off that you are after them I would have thought” McCallister commented “but then again you were expecting that weren't you?” he suggested.

“It was a long shot but it seems to have paid off far better than I could ever have hoped to expect” Haliford admitted when they were interrupted by a knock at the door “Come in!” he then called loudly.

“You sent for me Sir” Hoskins declared as he walked into the office.

“Yes indeed” Haliford confirmed “I need a snatch and extract squad sent to the Park Lane Hotel, Room 803. There you will find a certain young Irish lady who has been causing us a headache.”

“I'll handle the contract personally” Hoskins readily agreed “Do you want her damaged or undamaged.”

“Well, in deference to our friend Mr Stevens who would rather see her pulled into little pieces whilst still alive” Haliford admitted “I think for the moment at least she will be more use to us alive, her and her friend Alan Martin.”

“Anything else Sir?” Hoskins asked as he was about to leave.

“Once Stevens and his men have commenced the first round of major arrests of key detainees” Haliford continued “I want you to place into custody everyone on this list” he handed across a piece of paper.

“This is going to bring down a hell of a storm in certain quarters” Hoskins warned as he read the prominent names on the list he had just received.

“Once the charges are made clear and the – ahem – evidence presented, we won't have too many problems I predict” Haliford confirmed “Call it pest control” he suggested with a wry grin.

“I'll get right on it Sir” Hoskins confirmed “Looks like it is going to be a very interesting afternoon.”

“Indeed it is” Haliford agreed with an evil smirk.

The early afternoon quiet of the streets in and around the Finsbury Park area of North London was suddenly shattered by the sound of racing vehicles, squealing tyres and sirens as a number of plain white vans and cars, distinguishable from normal vehicles solely only by their blue flashing lights with which they were fitted, appeared from all directions.

Passers by scattered to either side and looked on with a sense of shock as the vehicles stopped and a number of men, all heavily armed and clad in black riot gear, emerged before proceeding directly in a number of teams to several different properties along the main road as well off adjacent side streets.

"Who the hell are these guys?" a uniformed Security Service patrol officer remarked to her colleague as in response to hearing the commotion they arrived on the scene just in time to witness doors being rammed in and amid much shouting, properties being forcefully entered by various members of the mysterious forces.

"I don't think they are ours somehow" the other patrol officer confirmed "Special Branch perhaps?"

"Not subtle enough for them" the first officer remarked "Good grief!" she then exclaimed when they both saw along with the progressively more and more angry crowd, a number of people, handcuffed and heavily restrained being forcefully bundled out of the various properties being raided before being unceremoniously thrown into the rear of awaiting vans.

"Better put a call in" the second officer urgently suggested upon seeing the growing crowd's angry reaction to these rapidly unfolding events "This looks like it is about to turn real ugly."

"Good idea" the first officer agreed as she reached for her radio "Lima November Six One Five to Control, urgent message for Command" she called.

Having now returned to New Scotland Yard, Tracy was seated at the supervisors console when she heard that call come in and immediately responded by getting up from her seat and going over to the desk of the operator who was taking the call.

"Control receiving, over" the operator responded "Go ahead."

"We are just around the corner from Finsbury Park tube station" the officer explained as she looked on to see a couple of the vans, now loaded with detainees being driven off at speed under fully armed escort whilst other members of the mysterious group forcefully held back the increasingly angry crowd.

"We have you location on our screens now" the operator confirmed, indicating the main screen on the front wall of the Control Room to Tracy who plugged a headset into the same line so she could join in the conversation.

"Several unmarked vehicles, eight or more equipped with blues and twos and containing a significant number of armed and riot equipped men just turned up and started kicking in doors" the officer confirmed as nearby a couple of bottles were thrown by the angry crowd "Several people from the addresses are being dragged away by force seemingly under detention and the locals are getting angry."

"Dave!" Tracy called across the Control Room to the duty supervisor "Is anyone throwing a paddy wagon party in north London and forgot to tell me?" Tracy asked.

"Nothing on the books about it Ma'am" the duty supervisor confirmed, checking his screens and clipboard to be doubly sure.

"Get me Dave Collins on the line" Tracy requested "and put out a general alert, I want to know if this is a one off or if someone has more surprises like this lined up."

As the Commander sifted through some of the files on his desk, he began to sense that events were begging to overtake him, a theory that would soon be proved more than correct when a few moments later Tracy came rushing into the office, a look of serious concern readily apparent.

"Hello love" the Commander responded to her arrival, obviously glad to see her but from her entrance he could tell instantly something was very wrong "Are we in trouble by any chance?" he asked.

"You could tell?" Tracy jokingly responded.

"You knocked before you came in" the Commander pointed out "So is the sky falling in?" he enquired.

"The Control Room just got a call from a couple of our uniformed guys down near Finsbury Park" Tracy explained "Apparently a van load of official looking riot gear clad thugs just turned up in a fleet of unmarked vans and just started kicking various doors in, and its not the only one either" she confirmed "In the last ten minutes we have been getting calls from all over the suburbs across Greater London, reporting similar raids."

"Have you checked with all our professional acquaintances to see if it is one of their little meet and greet parties that they neglected to tell us about?" the Commander asked.

"Dave Collins confirmed that MI5 have nothing on" Tracy confirmed "not anywhere near London at any rate, MI6 are now refusing to answer the phone to us any more, probably on Haliford's orders and Special Branch are out of commission."

"In which case I fear that we have just seen Haliford's first roll of the dice" the Commander admitted.

"The targets all appear to be areas where there are key ethnic populations, particularly Turks and Muslims" Tracy confirmed "Best guess, Haliford is using his new powers and our dead deep frozen terrorist as a smokescreen to round up anyone he doesn't like."

"He doesn't like anybody" the Commander remarked "Well maybe his accountant, that lunatic McCallister, his mistress in Pimlico and probably his tailor but that is about it."

"This incident could set back race relations by decades" Tracy confirmed "the bottles and rocks are already starting to fly in Finsbury Park."

"Lima Alpha One from Control, urgent message" Tracy's radio called out causing her to answer it as the Commander looked on with an ominous look.

"Lima Alpha One receiving" Tracy duly responded "Pass your message."

"Ben Williams and his boys down Southwark have just reported that they are seeing the same sort of vehicles turn up on the Coralline Way Estate and the doors are being kicked in now" the duty supervisor in the Control Room downstairs confirmed "He wants to know what do you want to do about them Ma'am?"

"Tell them to hold back for the moment" Tracy advised, her instruction receiving a nod of approval from the Commander "but he had best get his guys and gal's into some riot control gear just in case it turns ugly."

"No just in case about it" the Commander grimly confirmed "The last time a coordinated raid was done on that estate was twenty years ago and the resulting riot saw the now Deputy Mayor hospitalised for two weeks whilst the fires took the best part of three days to damp down."

"Haliford is doing this deliberately" Tracy concluded, managing to hold in her anger at the rapidly unfolding developments "He sends around his thugs to round up everyone who have so much as sneezed sideways in the last ten years, no doubt including anyone who he has failed to nail with his dubious investigations along the way and then leaves us to clear up the resulting mess."

"Keeping us nicely occupied whilst he continues on his little power trip with his dubious pals" the Commander agreed "I think it is time I went down there and try to calm things down before it is too late."

"Southwark or Finsbury Park?" Tracy asked.

"I had better take Southwark" the Commander confirmed as he rose from his seat and grabbed his uniform tunic from the back of the chair "The Deputy Mayor will be on the telephone any minute now to ask what the hell is going on down there in his old neighbourhood and I need answers."

"I can get the Bethnal Green office to go and sort out Finsbury Park" Tracy confirmed "Let's hope it is not too late."

"In which case I think it is time to wake up Bob and his lads and see just what the hell is going on before a riot erupts" the Commander declared as they proceeded arm in arm out of the office together.

"Already got him and his lad's downstairs waiting for you now" Tracy informed him.

"What would I do without you love?" the Commander asked as they headed out of the door and then down the corridor towards the lifts.

"I hope neither of us ever has to find out" Tracy admitted "Speaking of which, have you got your vest on?" she asked, her concern obvious.

"String or bullet-proof?" the Commander wittily retorted as they entered the lift.

"Very funny" Tracy replied, not overly impressed with her husband's wry comment "and please gets yourself a decent weapon" she pleaded "that antique revolver of yours is older than I am."

"If it all goes pear shaped, I'll see what Bob has in his parts bin" the Commander promised "Don't worry love" he reassured her "I will be fine."

"Usually when you say you will be fine is when unpleasant people start coming out of the woodwork and shooting at us" Tracy wryly reminded her husband.

"Look at it this way my love" the Commander admitted as the lift reached the basement parking level and stopped before the doors opened and they stepped out "Things can't possibly get any worse than they are now."

"I hope you are right" Tracy admitted "Really I do."

"Ah, here comes the boss" Bob declared to his men as Tracy and the Commander arrived in the basement car park.

"And her husband too" the Commander mocked with a wry smile that made Tracy giggle.

"So, where to then?" Bob asked.

"Southwark" the Commander confirmed "The Coralline Way Estate, someone is throwing a little party and I need to get down there before the party poppers become sawn off's."

“In which case I think we had better get going Sir” Bob suggested as he went and opened the passenger side door of the marked Security Service ARU Division van and allowed the Commander to get into the front passenger seat.

“Do us a favour Bob” Tracy requested as he got into the drivers seat and she came up to the drivers side window “Look after him will you?”

“Don't worry Ma'am, I'll watch his back” Bob reassured her as he started the van's engine and prepared to move off whereupon the Commander gave a reassuring wave to Tracy as they moved off.

“Right gentlemen, it's show time” Hoskins declared as he emerged from the car and was joined in the side street not far from Park Lane by around a dozen suited agents, all of whom were identically dressed in neat suits, black reflective sunglasses and discreetly armed.

“Gerry” Hoskins addressed one of the men directly “Find the security office for this place and get the entire hotel locked down.”

“Yes Sir” the man responded and with a colleague duly departed to carry out their assigned task.

“The rest of you” Hoskins confirmed “I want this to go smoothly and by the numbers, seal off all the exits including the kitchen back doors, delivery points and basement level ramps. Anyone even so much as attempts to leave they are to be held with any and all force necessary.”

“What is our target Sir?” one of the men asked.

“This woman” Hoskins declared showing them a photograph “Her name is Amber, she is an Irish national, five foot six inches tall, slim build, probably armed and don't let the youthful innocent looks fool you, she knows how to handle herself so be careful. At this moment she is reported to be in room 803 on the eighth floor of this establishment.”

“Snatch and extract Sir?” another of the agents asked.

“Absolutely” Hoskins confirmed “She will be with a man by the name of Alan Martin” he then produced a second photograph which had been taken directly from Martin's Department of Transport personnel file, he seems to be quite a bundle of surprises according to reports and they apparently make for quite a team so we will be going in, in force and in numbers.”

“Damage them?” the first agent asked.

“According to our Lord and Master, as long as they can both still command the ability to speak then apparently we can break as many bones as is necessary to bring them in” Hoskins confirmed “So if everyone is ready, let's make this happen.”

Upon his command, the group duly and efficiently dispersed to take on their assigned tasks.

“By the authority of the International Security Agency I hereby seize this facility” Hoskins declared as a couple of minutes later he and two of his men entered the Hotel's Security Office.

“What the hell is all this?” the Head of Hotel Security demanded to know “Who the hell are you?”

“Someone with whom it would be very ill advised to mess with” one of the agents accompanying Hoskins calmly confirmed as he grabbed the Head of Security by the collar and hauled him to his feet before roughly shoving him out of the door.

“Right, shut off all the elevators except the freight one and make sure the basement car park is also sealed” Hoskins ordered “also make sure all external telephone lines are cut as well.”

“On it Sir” the Agent confirmed as he took the centre seat before going to work on the security computer.

“Right, call me when everything is secure” Hoskins requested before leaving the Security Office and exiting straight out into main Reception.

“I hope you have a bloody good lawyer pal” the head of hotel security remarked as he stood by the reception desk.

“Oh the best money can buy” Hoskins casually dismissed the inquiry as he waltzed past and proceeded to the centre of the large reception area “You two” he clicked his fingers at a couple of his agents “make sure the front door is locked, as of this moment no one enters or leaves this building.”

“Alpha, this is spider” came the call over Hoskins' ear piece “All lines secured, elevators stopped, you may proceed when ready Sir.”

“OK then” Hoskins declared to the rest of his agents “Let's go get them.”

“No matter what happens to us I want you to know I love you with all my heart and all my soul” Alan Martin softly told Amber as they looked each other directly in the eyes.

“I know” Amber softly responded with a warm smile “Strange, I never had you down as the romantic type.”

“Probably because I have only ever had one girl on my mind all my life and now that she is back with me, I guess my romantic skills are warming up” Martin admitted.

Amber merely smiled warmly in response and was about to say something when she turned her head away and listened intently, her expression quickly changing to one of concern.

“Is something wrong?” Martin cautiously asked.

“Can you hear anything?” Amber responded as she stood up and began to look around, continuing to listen intently.

“No...” Martin admitted shaking his head after having listened himself to the background for a moment.

“Exactly...” Amber responded in a hushed whisper “Grab our stuff” she then confirmed as she drew her gun “I think we need to be making a move for the exit.”

Silently, over a dozen agents, led by Hoskins himself advanced down the eighth floor corridor until they had reached the door of room 803. With only the click of his fingers, their leader indicated to four of the men to take up position at each end of the corridor before he moved right up to the door.

“On three...” he mouthed quietly once he had seen his men were in position and ready before counting down with his fingers.

On the count of three being complete, the hotel room door was violently kicked in and they rushed inside.

“Nobody move!!” came the loud call from Hoskins and his men as they quickly flooded the suite, guns drawn and pointed directly ahead.

Quickly the individual rooms of the suite were checked and soon loud sharp shouts of 'Clear!' were heard throughout.

“I would appear that no one is home Sir” one of the agents duly confirmed.

“So where the hell is she?” Hoskins demanded to know, looking around with a sense of frustration.

“Sounds like we have some party crashers next door” Amber remarked as she was joined by Martin who had with him a bag and a rucksack, the latter of which he passed to her “I hate it when I am right.”

“Anyone we know?” Martin quietly asked.

“The voices sound distinctly American so my best guess would be Haliford has sent around that ex NSA guy Hoskins and a van load of his goons” Amber confirmed “Good thing we pulled the old wrong room number in the register trick.”

“Well much as I would like to stay and chat to them” Martin commented “Perhaps it would be a good idea to get the hell out of here whilst we still can?” he suggested.

“Couldn't agree more” Amber confirmed “We need to get to the fire exit stairs; they are on the opposite side of the hall from the front door.”

Cautiously Amber opened the hotel suite door just a little, sufficiently far enough to be able to take a look down the corridor where approximately fifteen feet away she could see a couple of the suited agents standing guard either side of the door of suite 803.

“Matching sunglasses and suits” Amber confirmed once she had gently closed the door again “Definitely Hoskins and his ex CIA boys.”

“Armed by any chance?” Martin cautiously asked.

“To the teeth most likely” Amber confirmed “These American guys always pack two guns each as standard issue and believe me, they have no compunctions about using them either.”

“And it was turning out to be such a nice day” Martin remarked “All right, what's the plan?”

“Run across the corridor when they are not looking and hope they don't notice” Amber declared “Ready?” she asked.

“No” Martin admitted.

“Neither am I” Amber confirmed as she drew her gun and held it close into her “Come on, let's get out of here.”

“Right!” a clearly frustrated Hoskins declared as he marched out of the bedroom of suite 803 and headed for the door “We know that little Irish cow was in this hotel, we know she has not left so I want this place searched from top to bottom, every room, closet, lift shaft, air duct, absolutely everywhere.”

“We are going to need more people for that kind of thorough search Sir” one of the agents accompanying him commented as they reached the door and proceeded out into the corridor.

“Get a call into Sir John Haliford, tell him we need more people up here” Hoskins confirmed “and then...” he tailed off as he heard the creak of a door behind him further down the corridor and turned just in time to see the fire exit stairs door just complete closing.

A combination of curiosity and instinct saw Hoskins draw his gun and proceed cautiously down the corridor to the fire exit where he then proceeded to open the door.

Looking quickly down through the spiral of stairs that led to the basement revealed nothing and no one there, it was only then that he heard a noise come from above him that Hoskins looked up just in time to see someone nearing the top floor.

“Whoa!” Martin exclaimed as he and Amber instinctively ducked when three shots were fired in their direction, a couple of them striking not far from them and the close confined space of the stairwell accentuating the noise of the gun shots to almost deafening levels.

“Come on, let's go” Amber duly urged as she kicked open the roof access door and they exited out onto the rooftop as behind them, the sound of urgent quick footsteps began to echo ominously, making their way up towards them.

Quickly Amber looked around the vast rooftop of the hotel and the neighbouring buildings visible in the near distance before hobbling with Martin over to a large air conditioning unit over on the far side and going around behind it.

“I take it there is a plan?” Martin asked as he observed Amber check her gun.

“Yeah...” Amber wryly admitted “Don't get shot!”

“Good plan...” Martin responded as he momentarily looked around the corner of the air conditioning unit to see Hoskins and his men deploy from the doorway and at his instructions begin to spread out across the roof.

“Listen carefully” Amber instructed “When I start firing, I want you to jump over to the next building” she indicated behind her as she watched Hoskins and his men intently.

“You are more important than me” Martin responded “Why don't I provide the covering fire and you escape over to the next roof?” he suggested.

“Because you can't shoot straight for toffee” Amber confirmed “No offence love” she added with a wry smile.

“Good point” Martin was forced to reluctantly agree.

“Ready?” Amber asked but before Martin could reply she made her move “Go!” she then called before proceeding to fire a volley of shots in the air over the heads of Hoskins and his men, forcing them instinctively to duck down and seek cover where they could.

Martin took a deep breath and looked across at the roof of the adjacent building before pressing his back up against the air conditioning unit in order to give himself the maximum possible run up, then after giving Amber a last longing look he began to run towards the edge.

“Arrrghh!” Martin called out as still under the cover of Amber's gunfire he leapt across the four foot gap and crashed into the gravel covered surface on the other side, rolling across until the wall of the roof exit stopped him.

Amber looked back momentarily and smiled briefly seeing that Martin had made it before reloading her gun and offering a second volley of shots to keep Hoskins and his men pinned down before she too proceeded to take the leap across the gap where she quickly rejoined Martin.

“Let's get the hell out of here” she suggested as Martin helped her up to her feet before he opened the roof exit door.

“A very good idea” Martin agreed, allowing her to go first down the stairwell inside before he followed closely behind, their feet clattering down the metal steps with Amber's steps being the heavier as she was still hobbling somewhat due to her still present earlier injuries that had been further aggravated by the leap between the buildings.

“Just out of interest” Martin asked “What happens if there is a reception committee waiting for us at the bottom?”

“I'm err... working on it” Amber admitted sheepishly.

“Well we have seven floors left to come up with something” Martin confirmed “and it had better be good.”

Tracy was about to head into the main entrance of Hyde Park Corner Underground Station when the urgent call came over her radio which caused her to pause on the entrance ramp to listen intently to what was said.

“Once again, this is Lima Alpha Control to all units in the area of Park Lane and Marble Arch” the call from the main Control Room went on to repeat “Reports of shots fired in the area of the Park Lane Hilton Hotel, Armed Response Units have been notified and are on route.”

“Lima Alpha One to Control” Tracy immediately responded with obvious concern as in her mind she joined up the dots on this event and where Amber and Martin were staying, the result being this was probably not a coincidence “Have you got any more details?” she requested.

“Just that gunshots have been heard at the hotel, possibly on the roof” the Control Room supervisor confirmed “Also no one at the Hotel seems to be answering the phone which is rather ominous.”

“Do we have an ETA on the Armed Support?” Tracy asked as she began towards Park Lane at a fast walking pace.

“Estimated time of arrival of the ARU's is at least five minutes as most of them are tied up dealing with the potential near riots that are brewing across the City” the Control Room Supervisor informed her.

“All right” Tracy declared “I am about three minutes away from the Hotel now, show me dealing as senior officer on site and give the ARU lads the hurry up as I have a bad feeling about this.”

“God damn it!!” Hoskins called out loudly, so much so it would not have surprised him if half of London had heard his outburst from the hotel rooftop “You two” he indicated a couple of his men “Stay here in case they double back, the rest of you with me.”

Within moments Hoskins was leading the rest of his men back down through the hotel by way of the stairwell where with an urgent sounding click of his fingers he rounded up the rest of his people who duly followed him out of the main entrance and into the street outside.

“I want this entire area locked down thirty seconds ago” Hoskins declared as two cars pulled up outside the hotel carrying further members of his group “and I want to see a helicopter overhead in the next two minutes, check every roof top for five blocks in each direction.”

The targets of his search were meanwhile reaching the basement parking level of the office building next door to the hotel from which they had escaped minutes earlier.

“National Security & Police Service” Amber duly declared to the car park level supervisor in his little booth, brandishing the badge that had in fact been issued to Martin a few days earlier as part of his cover story when he had gone to find and rescue her “You got CCTV on the main entrance by any chance mate?” she asked.

“Yeah sure” the supervisor confirmed, opening his door and allowing Amber inside to look at the four CCTV monitors above his desk whilst Martin kept watch just outside.

“Are these guys yours?” she asked, pointing out two men who were positioned at the top of the main exit ramp and visible from two of the camera viewpoints.

“Not with us” the supervisor confirmed “Any Security Service involvement around here is usually confined to the Diplomatic and VIP branches what with the nature of this place's clientele” he explained.

“Right...” Amber responded as an idea began to formulate in her mind “Thank you for your help, if anything happens in the next five minutes you didn't see it, understand?”

“Err no...” the Supervisor responded with obvious confusion.

“Good” Amber confirmed with a wry smile before leaving the booth and rejoining Martin in the car park area.

“Do we have a plan?” Martin asked as he followed alongside her across the car park towards a row of parked vehicles over on the far side.

“Maybe...” Amber mused “Tell me, how good are you at impersonating a foreign diplomat?”

“Huh?” Martin responded.

“These guys don't know what you look like” Amber explained “Well at least I hope they don't anyway and that gives me an idea and us a potential ticket out of here.”

“What the hell is going on?” Tracy demanded to know as she arrived at the main entrance of the hotel and looked on in disbelief at the scene of utter chaos that seemed to be unfolding all around, mostly being caused by the actions of Hoskins and his agents who were in the process of harassing, obstructing and generally annoying anyone and everyone in the immediate area.

“Official business” one of the agents on site casually informed her “Get lost.”

“I want to speak to the boss, not the oily rag” Tracy responded, giving the agent a hard stare “Get him here, NOW!” she demanded.

“One from Two Seven” the agent called into his hidden radio microphone “Got a problem here Sir” he informed.

“This is One, go ahead” Hoskins voice was heard to reply.

“There is a Security Service officer here” the agent explained “She is demanding to see you immediately.”

At that moment there was suddenly sounds of urgent voices both around them and over the radio which prompted Tracy to look further up the street in an attempt to try and identify the source.

“All personnel converge on the parking structure exit ramp next door” Hoskins was then heard to call over the radio with much urgency apparent in his voice whereupon the agent Tracy had been confronting duly left her and headed up the street along with many of his colleagues.

The source of the alarm call was in fact a black Mercedes limousine that had emerged from the basement parking area of the building next door to the hotel only for it to be stopped at the top of the exit ramp by two of Hoskins' men where an altercation with the vehicle's driver was now in progress.

“Are you in charge of these idiots?” the driver of the car demanded to know in a thick Germanic accent as Hoskins arrived on the scene.

“These are my men and this” Hoskins duly brandished his identification “is my authority and that means I am seizing this vehicle and all those within it for a stop and search.”

“Take a look at the licence plate” the driver duly responded “That is a diplomatic number, this is a diplomatic vehicle and is therefore foreign soil which means that any attempt to enter it, let alone search it will be considered a diplomatic incident.”

“He's right” Tracy called out as she had now caught up and joined the crowd now gathered around the vehicle where she immediately recognised without giving anything away that the driver of the car was none other than Alan Martin doing a very believable impression of a diplomatic driver from an overseas embassy.

“I have my orders” Hoskins reiterated.

“You lay one finger on that car let alone open it and you could wind up with the sort of diplomatic incident that results in some very nasty scenes” Tracy continued to warn him and his men “If you are lucky you will only lose your job and serve maybe two to three years in jail.”

“She could be right Sir” one of the agents confirmed which made Hoskins scowl aside in his direction in response “I have seen this sort of incident before and it usually ended pretty badly, questions in the Senate, the whole nine yards.”

“I don't think you appreciate Ms Caverner that I am engaged in the pursuit of a dangerous criminal, one with probable terrorist connections and as far as I am concerned that means the gloves are off and there is no longer anything we will not do in order to nail these bastards” Hoskins directly informed her.

“Are you willing to bet your career, reputation and life on that?” Tracy responded, not letting the fact that Hoskins and his agents around her all towered above her mere five foot seven inch frame intimidate her at all “It would not look good for your new paymasters, let alone you and your associates if they had to spend the rest of their first week in the job explaining some very ill advised actions to some of the most powerful diplomats in the northern hemisphere would it?”

There was an awkward silence for a few moments as Hoskins was clearly thinking over what few options he had before he decided to withdraw to one side for a few moments to make a telephone call.

Tracy looked on with an anticipatory look as Hoskins conversed with his superiors during which he cast glances aside at both the car, still waiting on the exit ramp and also across at her.

“Understood Sir” Hoskins agreed “It will be done” he then confirmed before hanging up and the returning to the centre of the scene but not before he nodded silently as some sort of signal to one of his men who promptly left without explanation.

“Enlightened are we?” Tracy asked with a wry smile.

“This time we will play it your way” Hoskins conceded although it was clear from his body language that he did not like it in the slightest “Let them go” he then called.

“All right mate” the agent stood by the driver’s side window of the car informed its driver “Get out of here before my boss changes his mind.”

“Thank you” the driver responded tersely as the agents that had been blocking the way ahead moved aside and he drove off quiet fiercely as if to emphasise his annoyance at the situation he had just found himself in.

As the car carried on off into the distance up Park Lane towards Marble Arch, Martin removed his chauffeur’s hat and looked in the rear view mirror into the rear saloon of the car whose interior was not visible to the outside world because of the blacked out windows and bullet proof glass.

“We are clear, you can come out now” he called into the back whereupon Amber got up off of the floor and moved forward appearing between the front seats.

“See, I told you it would work” Amber declared “and by the way, you were brilliant” she confirmed, giving Martin a kiss on the cheek which made him smile broadly.

“I doubt it would have worked had if Commander Caverner had not put in an appearance” Martin had to admit “Those goons were ready to rip this car apart and us along with it.”

“I heard most of it” Amber confirmed “Speaking of which, where did you learn to speak like a German?” she asked out of curiosity.

“Comes of having watched too many old war films when I was growing up” Martin wryly admitted, “Couldn’t do an Irish accent, the last time I tried that you hit me over the head with a copy of the Belfast Gazette.”

“Still” Amber remarked “It does prove one thing; those goons aren’t too bright are they?”

“Why’s that?” Martin asked.

“You were doing a perfectly good impression of a German diplomatic driver yet if they bothered to check the code on the diplomatic plates they would see this belongs to the Ambassador of Pakistan!” Amber confirmed “The paperwork should be interesting on this one!”

“So where to m'lady?” Martin mocked which made both of them laugh.

“London Transport Left Luggage Office in Baker Street” Amber confirmed “There are a couple of things I want to pick up.”

Hoskins watched the diplomatic car disappear into the distance with an obvious sense of frustration as he knew full and well that there was every chance that his quarry had just slipped past him.

“Looks like you will be going home empty handed” Tracy remarked with a distinct sense of satisfaction.

“Oh I don't know” Hoskins responded rather sinisterly as he spun around on his heels and looked Tracy directly in the eyes whereupon with a click of his fingers two agents took up position either side of her and made an attempt to grab her arms but she pulled back.

“Don't you DARE lay a finger on me” Tracy tersely warned as overhead an unmarked black and silver helicopter swooped over the rooftops and began to descend to make a landing in Hyde Park on the opposite side of the road.

“I am taking you into custody” Hoskins informed her with a distinct swagger about him.

“You or any of your goons touch me again and I can guarantee that you will find yourself in a whole world of hurt” Tracy reassured him.

“Does it look like I really care?” Hoskins casually asked.

“I bet your mother is really proud of you” Tracy sarcastically responded to which in response Hoskins merely shrugged his shoulders “Anyway, what hare brained codswallop could your infinitely tiny imagination cook up as an excuse to take me in?” she demanded to know.

“How about aiding and abetting a known terrorist for a starter?” Hoskins suggested “and before you start, don't worry about any 'evidence' as I can assure you Mr Haliford and his associates will ensure it exists before the day is out.”

“You are out of your mind, you and your insane boss Haliford as well as that fruit loop McCallister, you go well together” Tracy protested “You three would look just perfect together in the right setting, say a padded cell in the nearest loony bin for example.”

“Enough jokes for now I think” Hoskins motioned towards one of his agents who was now standing a short distance behind Tracy whereupon the two agents either side of her quickly moved away.

Before Tracy could react as she realised what was probably about to happen, there was a crack and suddenly she felt something sharp impact her in the back which was almost instantly followed by an electric shock that effectively paralysed her.

For a few moments Tracy tried to fight the pain but she soon collapsed to the ground revealing the barbs and wires of a Tazer device attached to her back.

“I think that should do it” Hoskins confirmed as he took a look at the now unconscious Tracy lying face down on the ground whereupon the agent holding the Tazer launcher duly turned it off.

Hoskins duly bent down and removed Tracy's gun from its holster before tucking it into the front of his jacket and then motioned to a couple of his men.

“All right then, pick her up carefully” he confirmed “Get her to the chopper and then let's get out of here.”

“The Commander is going to go ballistic when he hears about this Sir” one of the agents warned Hoskins as they crossed the road and made their way towards the helicopter that was waiting for them, engines running in the park nearby.

“Trust me” Hoskins confidently responded “Right now he will have far more pressing things to worry about.”

“What the hell...?” the Commander exclaimed as a bottle bounced off the roof of the Security Service van he was travelling in as he and Bob's ARU team arrived to a scene of sheer and utter chaos on the densely populated Coralline Way Estate in the South London Borough of Southwark.

“Looks like the party has started without us Sir” Bob remarked as he brought the van to a halt and they looked ahead at the scene that was unfolding before them.

“These premises are now under the jurisdiction of the Independent International Security Service under orders from the office of the Premier” barked an angry voice over a loud hailer.

“Time to sort this lot out I think” the Commander declared as he got out of the van only to have to quickly duck as a couple of missiles came hurtling past only inches from his head.

“Full tactical gear lads” Bob called to his men in the back of the van “This one looks like it is about to turn ugly.”

“What do you mean, about to?” one of the men remarked as the sounds of a petrol bomb exploding were heard from a short distance away and beyond the line of armed men and protesters an ominous accompanying black cloud filtered up into the air.

“Commander... Commander!!” Bob called after his senior officer having realised that he had already gone on ahead and waded in without any protective gear whatsoever.

“Oh damn it” Bob exclaimed as he hurriedly got out of the van “You lot, get ready, I am going after him” he confirmed before heading off after the Commander in the hope of catching him up before he did something ill advised.

“What the hell is this...?” the Commander openly asked as he reached the front of the crowd and looked up at the balcony's of the six storey block of 1960's constructed flats where it could be seen that several teams of men, all armed and dressed in unmarked black riot control gear were raiding several of the flats and forcefully dragging their occupants out.

On the ground the residents of the estate were reacting violently to these unfolding events and the angry mob that was being held back by further men were now getting violent.

“Oi!” the Commander called to one of the mysterious men “Just what in the name of Omra's auntie are you up to?” he demanded to know “Apart from that is, putting race relations in this area back by about thirty years.”

“Take your hand off me Sir” the man gruffly responded, brandishing a gun to back up his point “You have no business here.”

“Wrong sunshine” the Commander immediately replied “You tell your boss to get you and the rest of your guys out of here before I start arresting the lot of you.”

“Boss!” the man called back into the crowd of men behind him whereupon a tall officious looking man in a suit appeared.

“And you are?” the man asked, his towering height looking down on the Commander with obvious disdain.

“Your worst nightmare” the Commander duly confirmed “Just what the hell are you and your 'associates' doing?” he asked.

“Carrying out the arrest and detention orders as issued by the Central Justice Office under the guidance of Sir John Haliford” the man confirmed as he produced some officious looking paperwork and thrust it into the Commander's hand.

“What in heaven's name are these people supposed to have done to warrant this illegal action of yours?” the Commander demanded to know.

“Sedition to the level of treason to the state” the man declared officiously “Take that individual for example” he proceeded to point out a black man who was being dragged away against his will nearby “He posted a message on a dubious website a few weeks back so we are taking him in for sedition and he is not the only one. You see we are taking out the trash, anyone who so much as thinks the wrong way, we will be there to confine them to a very dark place for a very long time.”

“I never thought I would see the day when we were taken over by the thought police” a man remarked as he joined the Commander in the discussion.

“And who the hell are you?” the man asked.

“Deputy Mayor Joseph Banford” he formerly introduced himself “This is my home neighbourhood and you unwarranted actions here today could have repercussions that would make the Brixton Riots of 1982 look like a Girl Scout picnic.”

“I think we are already half way there” the Commander admitted as they all instinctively ducked when further missiles flew overhead.

“You can't stand in the way of progress gentlemen” the man asserted confidently as the Commander discreetly looked around behind him “We have a job to do here and we will carry it out, anyone who stands in our way regardless of name, rank or stature will be arrested for obstructing an officer of the Justice Service in the carrying out of his duty.”

“Arrest me then” the Commander simply responded whereupon he duly brought up his knee and rammed it into the man's crotch, sending him collapsing to the ground in agony.

“Subtle...” the Deputy Mayor wryly remarked.

“I've heard enough blarney and bluster for one day” the Commander admitted “Bob!” he then called “I want every last one of these idiots disarmed, arrested and out of here right away, this lunacy stops here and now.”

“You got it Sir” Bob confirmed “What about those these bozo's have detained?” he asked.

“Let them go but make sure anyone who has been hurt gets medical treatment first” the Commander instructed.

“All right then lads” Bob called to his men whose number had now been bolstered by further arrivals “Let's gets these idiots off the street shall we?”

“Mr Deputy Mayor” the Commander addressed Banford “If you would be kind enough to speak to the locals, try and clam the nerves before anyone gets out of hand.”

“I'll give it my best shot Commander” the Deputy Mayor agreed.

“And as for you and your cretinous colleagues” the Commander confirmed as he unceremoniously dragged the man on the ground up to his feet and proceeded to handcuff his wrists behind his back “It's the back of a van bound for the funny farm for you.”

Through a combination of the Mayor's appeals for calm over a loud hailer and Bob with his team making swift progress at stopping the armed men and clearing them, the situation soon began to calm down somewhat.

“Shut up and get in the van” Bob ordered one particularly recalcitrant man as he tried to get him in the back of a prisoner van “If I had a quid for every time I heard the old 'We have immunity' line I would be a very rich man.”

It was as the crowds dispersed that the Commander took a look around at the now much quieter scene with a sense of foreboding, this was just the opening gambit of Haliford's operations and it begged the question as to what was still yet to come before this would be over.

“Lima Alpha One from Alpha One” the Commander called into his radio now that he had a quiet moment to himself “Tracy, you there love?” he asked.

Not all that unsurprisingly there was no initial answer which sometimes happened if the person being called was busy so having waited for a minute, the Commander tried again.

“Tracy, can you hear me?” he asked again, a sense of worry beginning to overcome him.

“Is something wrong boss?” Bob asked as he came over to his superior officer, much of the job of clearing away the last of the so called officers now having been largely completed.

“Can't get hold of my better half” the Commander confirmed as he switched to his mobile telephone and speed dialled her number before lowering it again “and her phone is off as well.”

“She will be fine Sir” Bob tried to reassure the Commander as they were both forced to look upwards as a big red helicopter passed overhead evidently intent on making a landing in a park approximately a mile away over on the far side of the estate.

“That's a bit high class for around here” the Commander remarked “Looks like the local car thieves are getting more ambitious.”

“Very ambitious” Bob agreed as he pointed out a classic 1960's Mercedes limousine approach them, the small Soviet hammer and sickle flag fluttering from its little post on the drivers side wing which quickly told the Commander who the occupant was, a theory duly confirmed when the car stopped and the slightly tired and ramshackle figure of Sergei Glasgow emerged from the back.

“I'll give you this much Sergei” the Commander remarked “You certainly know how to make an entrance.”

“That was the one thing about the old Soviet Union, the good old days” Glasgow admitted as he joined them by the roadside “a decent company car.”

“What brings you down to this charming part of the world then?” the Commander asked “Assuming it's not the lively night life and the friendly locals?”

“My Chief wants to discuss a particularly urgent matter with you Commander” Sergei confirmed “Hop in the back, I will take you too him.”

“I'll stay here and finish the clean up” Bob responded.

“Actually you are invited as well” Sergei replied to which Bob exhibited a quizzical expression “If what we fear is unfolding the way we suspect then the Commander here will need an experienced body guard and you are nominated Comrade.”

“My wife is never going to believe this as an excuse for being late home tonight” Bob wryly admitted as he followed the Commander into the back of the classic old car.

“Mine neither” the Commander admitted “But then again...” he added after a moments thought as Glasgow joined them in the spacious interior of the rear of the car before tapping on the glass partition at the front to indicate to his driver to proceed.

“Knowing the way our luck is running, we'll get a ticket” Martin wryly mused as he got out of the car having parked it on a double yellow line in a side street near Baker Street Station.

“I suppose we could always claim diplomatic immunity again” Amber suggested as she joined him on the pavement, taking his arm in hers and smiling “It's got us this far hasn't it?”

“That it has” Martin agreed “Still, at some point someone is going to have to explain to the Pakistani Ambassador exactly what has happened to his official car.”

“Well right now” Amber confirmed “We have more pressing matters to deal with, come on” she urged whereupon they crossed the road and headed towards the London Transport Lost Property office.

The member of staff on duty behind the desk looked up from a box of umbrellas when he heard the door open and watched as Amber and Martin approached.

“Can I help you?” he asked in a friendly manner.

“We are looking for a specific bag” Amber explained “Maroon briefcase, initial SRC on the leading edge of the lid and should have been recovered from a Metropolitan Line train in the Moor Park area.”

“Just a moment please” the member of staff responded as he moved over to one end of the desk “I'll check the computer and see if it matches. Do you have a reference number by any chance?” he asked.

“Err yes” Amber confirmed as she extracted a diary from inside her jacket pocket and looked through it until she found a pink coloured slip of paper “9750763” she then confirmed.

“Ah here it is” the member of staff duly declared once he had input the number “We have it, it is downstairs awaiting collection. If you would care to wait here, I will go and fetch it for you.”

“Thank you” Amber responded as the member of staff duly departed, heading off into the depths of the building.

“What's in this briefcase of yours?” Martin asked out of curiosity.

“Oh the usual stuff” Amber wryly confirmed “Spare pair of socks, twenty grand in cash, spare passports, ammunition, identities, that sort of thing.”

“Not the sort of thing you want to lose on the Metropolitan Line” Martin remarked with some concern.

“The nearest that case has ever got to the Metropolitan Line is here, the lines run right beneath our feet” Amber explained “Sir Richard Crowthorne has a number of these emergency supply dead drops secreted in locations all across Greater London and beyond in case any of his people get into a spot of bother.”

“Like us for example” Martin agreed.

“Exactly” Amber confirmed as the member of staff reappeared and approached the desk, the red briefcase in a clear plastic bag in his hands which he proceeded to place on the desk and pass to them.

“Here it is” the member of staff declared “You should be more careful, nice case is that.”

“Thank you” Amber confirmed as she took the case and with Martin they duly departed.

“Now where?” Martin asked as they exited the Lost Property Office and stood on the pavement immediately outside.

“Somewhere discrete and quiet” Amber confirmed somewhat mysteriously “We need to regroup and await the call.”

“Any unit in the vicinity of St James' Park, respond please to a report from a member of the public of a body in the park” came the call over the radio which caused two Security Service officers who were at that moment proceeding down Buckingham Palace Road to look at each other.

“We'll take that” the driver Frank confirmed “Call it in Steve.”

“Err yes, Lima Alpha Three Six Nine to Control” Steve proceeded to call over the radio “We are just around the corner, show us dealing.”

Amid the sound of sirens and accompanying blue flashing lights, the patrol car made swift progress through the traffic and a matter of a couple of minutes later they had arrived on the scene where a crowd was now gathering around something that was lying on the ground beneath a park bench in the heart of St. James' Park itself, in the shadow of Buckingham Palace.

“All right everyone lets move back here” Frank announced with authority as he and his colleague got out and approached the centre of the scene “Who found it?” he then asked.

At that point one of the members of the public stepped forward and raised their hand.

“Steve, do the honours mate whilst I check this out?” Frank asked of his colleague.

“If you would like to step over here Madam” Steve called to the member of the public who had just identified themselves to them “We’ll get some details off you.”

“All right then” Frank remarked to himself as he approached the park bench and knelt down to look underneath “What do we have here then?” he asked.

Carefully so as not to disturb any potential evidence, he looked at the rolled up carpet that had been hidden beneath the bench, the hand sticking out of the end of the roll the only real outward sign that it contained a body.

It was as he was carefully opening the roll of carpet that he noticed that the protruding hand looked very female, not only that but the end of a jacket sleeve was also just visible and rather unusually it had a band of gold embroidered braiding around it.

“Wait a minute...” Frank remarked to himself with growing alarm readily apparent as he recognised that the part of clothing just visible matched his own uniform in an almost identical way.

Whilst continuing to do the best he could to preserve possible evidence, Frank proceeded to unwrap the roll of carpet as best he could until the body contained within was finally visible and his worst fears were confirmed.

“Control from Lima Alpha Three Six Six to Control, urgent message” Frank promptly called into his radio “Have found the body that we were called out to, it appears to be that of a female uniformed Security Service officer, one of ours and it looks like she has been shot dead and then dumped I think.”

“Err understood” the Control Room dispatcher on the other end of the radio duly confirmed, obvious shock being detectable in her voice.

“We are going to need some more people down here to get this whole area sealed off” Frank continued “Better send down the Scenes of Crime lads as well and inform the top floor, I have a feeling this is going to be a nasty one.”

Sergei Glasgow's old limousine cut quite an unusual sight as it glided through the back streets of the borough of Southwark until the driver turned off into the gateway of an old industrial factory type building, its arrival momentarily disturbing the roosting pigeons who were normally the sole occupants of the site most of the time.

“Charming little holiday spot” the Commander remarked as the car came to a halt in the centre of the vast empty space that was once a former factory floor but was now a disused leaking shell with only crumbling concrete floors and uncontrolled weed growth here and there.

“Discrete, conveniently located and best of all, cheap” Glasgow explained in a way that actually failed to explain anything at all really “All we can afford these days” he went on to wryly admit.

At that point a second vehicle, another black Mercedes all be it a modern model approached them, entering the old factory building slowly by an entrance on the opposite side of the site before drawing forward to a stop with the headlights of the two cars facing each other a mere ten feet apart.

“Is this the point we start flashing headlamps at each other?” Bob asked.

“They only do that in Harry Palmer films” the Commander confirmed “Besides I think they know we are here, the question is who though.”

“Good God” Bob suddenly exclaimed, a look of surprise that was obviously reflected in the Commander's look of equal surprise as they saw someone get out of the car and approach them “Isn't that...?”

“President Vladimir Ivanov in living colour” the Commander confirmed “Either that or a very good double.”

“What is he doing here?” Bob asked as the President reached the car and after Glasgow had got out, he duly got in the back.

“Actually my friend I am not here at all” Ivanov confirmed “and neither are you if you understand what I mean.”

“I do indeed” the Commander confirmed.

“A pleasure and an honour to meet a legend such as yourself Commander” Ivanov declared, warmly shaking the Commander's hand “Your reputation has even reached the distant halls of the Kremlin itself.”

“Well err thank you” the Commander responded, somewhat taken aback by this news “This is my head of Armed Support, Bob.”

“Hello Mr President” Bob responded as he wondered to himself if his wife would ever believe him if he used a meeting with the President of the Russian Federation as an excuse for being late home or whether she would just think he was going a bit mad.

“So if you are not here Mr President” the Commander asked inquisitively “Where are you at this exact moment may I ask?”

“On an inspection tour of our North Atlantic navy fleet out in the North Sea” the President explained “Each ship is convinced I am on one of the other ones so I won't be missed for some time which gives us this invaluable opportunity to talk about a mutual problem we have.”

“Would I be right in thinking the name Alexander Cruschov is about to enter the conversation by any chance Mr President?” the Commander tentatively asked.

“It is a great regret to us that he has been able to enter your country” Ivanov explained “Huge cock up on the part of our Federal Internal Security Bureau amongst others, we had hoped he would remain an internal matter but his escape to UK soil a few weeks ago, his new 'associates' and more recent events have escalated the situation somewhat.”

“I'll say so” the Commander agreed “Cruschov has nailed his flag to the mast of this new independent Security Agency mob” he confirmed “In return for which he is getting full pardons, favours and to cap it all, enough Public Interest Immunity Certificates to sink a battleship.”

“I'd heard” Ivanov grimly confirmed, casting a glance across to Glasgow nearby “No doubt by now this new Agency has already declared itself to be the next big thing I presume?”

“A former head of MI6 by the name of Sir John Haliford is using the UK and European operation as a bandwagon to round up anyone he doesn't like or has crossed swords with over the last twenty years” the Commander duly confirmed “It is kick doors in, beat up some suspects and maybe ask some questions later assuming a) they survive and b) they have not mysteriously 'disappeared' to gawd knows where in the process.”

“Even the KGB was not as bad as that” Ivanov remarked “Well most of the time anyway” he admitted.

“What exactly is Cruschov to you guys in Moscow if I may ask?” the Commander asked “As from what we have seen so far he appears to be nothing more than the money man with some hired muscle thrown in for good measure.”

“Oh he is a *lot* more than just the middle man, let me assure you of that Commander” Ivanov ominously warned “The FSB were on the verge of finally shutting him and his operations down about three months ago when suddenly amid rumours that he had acquired a new line of finance, he vanished along with all the evidence. The next thing we knew was he had shown up in London which is when my friend Mr Glasgow here got the ball rolling this side of the Berlin Wall.”

“I couldn't get anyone down to Gatwick Airport in time” Glasgow confirmed “Sadly our resources outside of mother Russian are not what they once were in the good old days, so I gave Sir Richard Crowthorne a call, tipped him off about Cruschov coming to town and then had to cross my fingers that he and his people would catch him fresh off of the plane.”

“Unfortunately it looks like someone was at least one step ahead of us all” the Commander remarked “It is becoming increasingly clear as recent events have continued that Sir John Haliford and his dubious associates have people on the inside that we have not managed to track down, well not yet anyway.”

“Hence the good old fashioned cloak and dagger routine that I have been forced to adopt Comrade” Glasgow explained “There is no telling how many of my people both here and back in Russia have been compromised in some way.”

“Walls have ears...” the Commander mournfully remarked.

“Precisely Comrade” Glasgow readily agreed.

“Unfortunately the basic conclusion of this matter is that what was once an internal security matter has now been exported world wide” Ivanov confirmed “At this time thanks to the death of your Prime Minister and the carefully co-ordinated movements of certain parties, we now have a situation where your national security has been handed over to an independent unaccountable organisation that is ninety percent funded by the Russian Mafia and associated dark forces.”

“You know him better than I do” Glasgow wondered “Do you suppose Sir John Haliford knows who he is in bed with?”

“I'd put money on it” the Commander agreed “Haliford has been wanting the opportunity to wage his own personal so called war on terrorism for years but up until now he has always had the instruments of procedural law and Government control stopping him, but now that he has found finance, backers and a mutually agreeing buddy in the form of that fat bloating piece of crap McCallister, the shackles have come off and now he has having a field day.”

“So what should we expect from Haliford's group in the next twenty four to forty eight hours?” Glasgow asked.

“Well I have just witnessed some of what he likes to get up to” the Commander confirmed “Send in faceless heavy mobs on mass to 'take out the trash' which presumably means anyone who has so much as looked sideways in a funny tone in the last fifteen years.”

“So how long before he makes some kind of take over bid for the National Security & Police Service itself?” Glasgow asked.

“He has already used powers granted by that idiot Lord Forsyth to take over both my Special Branch and Diplomatic Operations Group sections” the Commander reported “MI6, Haliford's old firm have effectively cut off all communications and cooperation we used to have with them since this crisis began, MI5 has definitely been infiltrated to some extent with his sympathisers and with his new position as National Security Coordinator or whatever it is short of Godhood he has been blessed with, combined with the fact my lads just carted off a couple of van loads of his rent-a-morons down to Southwark nick, I reckon it is only a matter of time before he goes for the big one.”

“What can I do to help?” Ivanov asked with all sincerity, a question that rather took the Commander by surprise.

“Err, to be honest Mr President, I am not entirely sure” the Commander had to admit “Without knowing exactly what Haliford and his minions are planning, it is difficult to know exactly what to do.”

“Despite recent financial crises” Ivanov went on to explain “My country and its Government still possess significant resources both in this country and elsewhere which we can call on if something should occur that poses a potential threat to the security of my nation and its people and in my opinion, anything that has the fingerprints of Alexander Cruschov on it does indeed pose that threat.”

“What's the deal?” the Commander asked, deciding to cut to the thrust of the debate.

“If Haliford and his 'associates' make a move against you and the National Security & Police Service in this country” Glasgow explained “I will place at your disposal whatever resources, be it manpower, money or equipment that we have available which you need to restore the correct balance of power.”

“And what do I have to pay for this generous accommodation?” the Commander asked although he had already figured out the most likely answer to this question.

“Simple” Ivanov confirmed “We want Cruschov, alive preferably but dead if necessary.”

“Accompanied by enough evidence to ensure he and his murky friends back in the mother land go to jail for a very long time” Glasgow added “We can have a plane fly him out of the country with an hour's notice.”

“First class?” the Commander asked.

“More likely the inside of a Diplomatic Bag” Glasgow confirmed with a wry smirk “Helps reduce the number of potentially awkward questions that might arise.”

“I take it that there are other interested parties looking for him?” the Commander asked “Only it seems lately that London has been holding the AGM of Overseas Agents Anonymous and someone forgot to put it in my dairy.”

“Correct Commander” Ivanov confirmed “Our old friend Comrade Cruschov is a wanted man in many countries around the world, some want him to lock him up, others want him because they want access to his address book and services.”

“Well, anything that gets that piece of crap out of my country gets my vote” the Commander readily agreed “When all this is over Gentlemen and I have personally slapped the cuffs on this bastard, you will receive him gift wrapped.”

“In which case comrade” Ivanov confirmed as he reached across and shook the Commander's hand “I think we have a deal.”

“Dam that interfering little man!” Haliford remarked with a tone of anger as he slammed the telephone handset down before looking up at the large screen on the front wall of his agency's main operations control room.

“Something wrong?” William Harcourt asked as he joined his boss, sensing an opportunity to create some chaos.

“It would appear the Commander is sticking his nose in where it is not wanted” Haliford explained “Thanks to him and his officers, my people have just had their Southwark operation shut down, pain in the arse that man.”

“Evidently doesn't know yet” Harcourt gruffly responded with a typical knowing evil grin.

“Ah yes, the other half of the dynamic duo” Haliford remarked “Any word on her?”

“Hoskins called in about ten minutes ago” Harcourt confirmed “They are bringing her in on the chopper, should be here any minute.”

“Get me Central on the video conferencing” Haliford commanded across the room whereupon the centre part of the huge screen changed and after a brief appearance of a 'Stand by...' message, a view of Lord Forsyth and his new 'Advisory Council' duly appeared, sat around a large conference table back in the centre of Westminster.

“Ah, Sir John, I was wondering when you would be calling” Lord Forsyth triumphantly declared “Excellent work so far. From what I understand we have the terrorist and crime committing classes cowering beneath their beds.”

“Whereupon I do hope my people are dragging them out from under their beds and beating them soundly to a pulp until they agree to cooperate” Haliford calmly responded “A couple of gremlins have cropped up in the system though, hence my call.”

“Let me guess” Lord Forsyth mused “A certain Commander in Chief of that outdated dinosaur that my immediate predecessor called a Police & Security Service?” he suggested.

“We may need to move our people fairly imminently if we are to avoid certain complications” Haliford confirmed “Divisional Commander Caverner has already been taken in by my Chief of Field Operations, Christopher Hoskins.”

“Without consulting me first?” Lord Forsyth asked with a sense of some concern.

“Wasn't time unfortunately” Haliford informed with obvious regret “Hoskins and his lads were in the process of tracking down our infamous little Irish headache when Divisional Chief Superintendent Caverner arrived on the scene and basically threatened to arrest the lot of them single handed so we had to take her out of the equation.”

“The Commander will go ballistic when he hears about this” one of Lord Forsyth's advisor's warned off screen to which Forsyth nodded politely in agreement.

“I have the people in place” Haliford continued “We know where most of the key players are and they can be detained at a moments notice, all we need is your word and we can begin.”

“Your people in New Scotland Yard have been fully briefed?” Lord Forsyth asked.

“They know what is at stake Sir” Haliford confirmed “Plus at this exact time thanks to my technical people, we have nearly all of them in locations where we can pick them up easily, the only ones missing are that Russian slob Sergei Glasgov...”

“We won't have any problems from that old relic” Alexander Cruschov advised.

“... and the Commander is somewhere in the Southwark area but as soon as his Oyster Card comes up on the grid we will have him zeroed in as well” Haliford continued “I don't think we have left anyone out have we?”

“Divisional Commander Caverner and her illustrious husband have a kid, an adopted son I believe, Jack” another of Lord Forsyth's advisor's confirmed as he passed across a confidential file across to his superior.

“Were you aware of this young man?” Forsyth asked across the video conferencing link.

“Vaguely” Haliford confirmed as a file was also passed across to him which he then opened to show a photograph of Jack plus a summary of his thirteen year long life “What we have on him though is somewhat sketchy but I do understand he is somewhat clever and canny, much like his adopted father. He could prove a small, err literally problem for us if we don't bring him in as well.”

“Very well” Lord Forsyth declared after a few moments during which he silently consulted his advisor's to his left and right who merely responded with discreet nods of the head “Bring them all in, let's get this wrapped up before the evening rush hour.”

“Yes Sir” Haliford confirmed “I will call you back when I have an update, C&C out” he declared before the call was terminated whereupon he turned to two men who had just arrived and were now standing close by.

“You sent for us Sir” the first of the two men confirmed.

“Divisional Commander Graves” Haliford addressed the shorter of the two men, dressed ominously all in black and looking like he was ready for a fight “I am charging you and your former Diplomatic Service Bureau colleagues with the task of taking into custody the people on this list” he handed across an official looking document.

“Whoa...” Graves responded with some surprise when he saw some of the names on the list “Is it that time already?” he asked.

“It is indeed” Haliford confirmed “I want you to personally take care of the arrest of the National Administrator General. Given that he is your now former Commanding Officer, I need to ask, do you have a problem with that?”

“None at all” Graves confirmed “My section was always semi-autonomous from the main Security Service itself, besides he and I have crossed swords professionally speaking in the past, there is no love for him to be found here Sir.”

“Excellent” Haliford responded “I want you and your team mobile and ready to go in two minutes, I will let you know the intercept point just as soon as the Commander reappears on the grid.”

“Shouldn't be a problem” Graves agreed “It is not like he ever has a large entourage of body guards, not his style you understand.”

“I believe he is travelling with the Chief of the ARU section” Haliford warned.

“My people pack considerably more fire power and the skills to use it than one ARU officer and his MP5 plus one Commander with a six shot revolver” Graves explained confidently “This won't be a problem.”

“Very well then” Haliford confirmed “I want the Commander taken down as soon as possible. At the same time my people inside New Scotland Yard backed up by your second team will move to detain David Collins, Sir Richard Crowthorne and David Howell along with a few others who we need to be put out of our collective misery.”

“Anything else Sir?” Graves asked.

“Yes, there is one other thing, one that will need to be handled a little more subtly given the age of the young man” Haliford passed across Jack's file “This young lad is Tracy and the Commander's adopted thirteen year old son. As soon as we have a positive identification on his location, I want him discreetly taken in.”

“I have some specialists that will be perfect for that job” Graves confirmed after giving the contents of Jack's file a brief look to acquaint himself with some of the details “I'll give them a call.”

“Good luck then gentlemen” Haliford declared “Let's bring them in and then we can *really* get this party started.”

“You've forgotten, haven't you?” Megan asked as she looked to her right at Jack as they travelled together on the Jubilee Line train as it made its way north beneath the River Thames and slowed for the approach to Westminster Underground Station.

“No, I just don't remember, that's all” Jack had to cryptically admit a few moments later after trying to recall what it was he was supposed to have known about his best friend.

“It's my birthday next week” Megan reminded him “You promised you were going to get me a present.”

“Oh...” Jack then recalled, clicking his fingers “The fourteenth, right?”

“Fifteenth” Megan corrected him with a discerning look “Although I could always have two birthdays I suppose, two presents from you.”

“I am going to have enough trouble thinking what to get you once, let alone twice” Jack admitted which made Megan smile.

It was as the train began to depart Westminster Station that Jack looked around the carriage of the 1996 type Tube Stock and casually observed his fellow passengers, noting the silence in the car with little more than low murmurs and the rustle of newspapers being read disturbing the atmosphere.

“Is it me or is everyone around here just a little on edge today?” Megan remarked “Granted I don't get to come to central London as often as you but even still, there is a definite tension in the air.”

“Well I guess it is not everyday that the country has to digest the news that their Prime Minister has been assassinated” Jack confirmed “Apparently the last time it happened according to Tracy was to some chap called Stanley back in eighteen something.”

“Spencer” Megan corrected him “Spencer Perceval, killed by a single gunshot in the Houses of Parliament on 18th May 1812.”

“How did you know that?” Jack asked out of curiosity.

“It was mentioned in history class this morning” Megan confirmed “about the moment you were looking out of the window at the trains going by, plus it gets a mention in the Evening Standard today.”

“We are now approaching Green Park” the automated announcement declared throughout the carriage as the train began to slow, clattering across the points where the old disused Charing Cross spur branched off “Change here for Piccadilly and Victoria Lines, alight here for Buckingham Palace.”

“I must say from what I have heard” Megan remarked as she and Jack alighted from the train as soon as it stopped at the platform and the doors opened “I don't like the sound of this new Prime Minister, sounds like a right Muppet.”

“He's a politician who has made his way up the greasy pole of the Civil Service according to the Commander” Jack remarked “Being a total Muppet is sort of implied automatically in his job description apparently.”

The youngsters waited together for a few moments to allow the majority of the crowd of alighting passengers to go on ahead before they too proceeded down the platform

to make the journey through the complex sub levels of Green Park Station, intending to take a Piccadilly Line train.

“I appreciate I am not as experienced as you when it comes to odd things going on around me” Megan casually admitted a couple of minutes later as they proceeded along one of the tubular shaped passageways “and I could be just imagining things admittedly, however I get the strangest feeling we are being followed.”

“You are not imagining it” Jack quietly confirmed as he cast a brief casual glance at a mirror as they past it which confirmed both their suspicions “Two guys in dark grey jackets about twenty yards back. One has been following us since we left Canary Wharf and his mate turned up at Westminster.”

“Friend or foe?” Megan asked.

“I am about to find out” Jack confirmed “Walk slower” he then suggested as he extracted his Blackberry from his school blazer pocket and began to access it.

“Sir Richard?” Jack called as soon as his call was answered “It's Jack. Sorry to bother you but I just wanted to check something.”

“Sure, no problem” Sir Richard confirmed as he moved over to a quiet corner of the incident investigation room so that his conversation would not be overheard.

“I don't suppose you have put a couple of guys on the street to watch my back have you?” Jack asked as he cast another glance at a further curved mirror as he and Megan passed it “Only Megan and I seemed to have attracted some attention of the discreet variety.”

“Nothing to do with me lad” Sir Richard confirmed “Where are you now?” he asked.

“Green Park tube station” Jack confirmed “About halfway down the long passageway that links the Jubilee and Piccadilly Line platforms, our two mystery guests are about ten to twenty yards behind us and have been for a while now.”

“In which case it might be a good idea to try and lose them” Sir Richard remarked “Look, nothing has happened yet but I have this awful feeling the sky is about to fall in all around us, dark forces are moving their pieces to play and I get the impression this is a game to which we are deliberately not invited.”

“I have an idea” Jack confirmed “Should be able to give them the slip easily enough, the question is what do we do after that?”

“Keep a low profile” Sir Richard confirmed “Your parents have put a couple of contingency plans into play so if it all goes pear shaped, get yourself to King William Street and we will take it from there.”

“Understood Sir” Jack agreed.

“Oh by the way” Sir Richard went on to inquire “You haven't heard anything from Tracy in the last half hour have you? She seems to have disappeared and no one has been able to get hold of her either on the radio or her mobile.”

“Sorry, no” Jack responded, a look of obvious concern beginning to become apparent on his face “Mind you, Megan and I have been travelling on the Underground for the last three quarters of an hour.”

“It's probably nothing” Sir Richard tried to reassure Jack but it was obvious that his real feelings on the subject were a lot less optimistic “When you lose your followers in your own unique way, let me know and we will sort out a safe place for you.”

“Will do” Jack confirmed “Thanks” he responded before hanging up.

“Do we have a plan then?” Megan asked as Jack returned his Blackberry to his blazer pocket.

“Oh yes” Jack confirmed “Stay close by me, do exactly what I say and don't ask any questions, we are going to have to move quickly.”

“Right” Megan agreed as she and Jack took hold of each other's hand as they reached the end of the passageway where they paused momentarily with Jack looking up and down the flow of people, waiting for the right moment to move on.

“Come on” Jack then suddenly urged as he led Megan off to the right, down another passageway that then curved to the left, mingling in among a group of tall commuters who easily hid the two youngsters from clear view until they reached the top of the stairs that led down to the Piccadilly Line platforms.

“Here we go” Jack then declared as instead of proceeding down the stairs as Megan was expecting, he extracted a big bunch of keys which he quickly looked through before finding the one he wanted and using it to swiftly unlock a barred metal gate at the top of the stairs.

Within moments it was open and Jack quickly ushered Megan inside before closing it again behind them whereupon he pushed Megan flat back against the wall with himself alongside.

“Sssh...” Jack motioned with his finger as he looked to his right, through the mesh grilling of the gate to the public passageway on the other side where he observed the two men that had been following them hurriedly making their way past the gate and down the stairs out of sight, obviously anxious to reacquire contact with their quarry and completely missing the seemingly long forgotten gated off passageway as they passed it.

“All right” Jack then declared “Looks like we have lost them, come on” he urged as he led the way further on down the dark dusty passageway “This way.”

“Where the hell are we?” Megan asked as she looked around her very much unfamiliar surroundings as she followed Jack closed as he turned right at the far end of the passageway and carried on past some humming electrical equipment cabinets.

“This is the old part of Dover Street Station” Jack explained “Err that is what Green Park used to be called, this bit is where the old lifts used to be before they rebuilt the station in the 1930's.”

“Have you been reading your father's book collection again?” Megan asked as she looked around.

“Partially” Jack confirmed “Also Tracy used this little diversion to escape the attention of some undesirable people a couple of years back, I made a mental note of it in case it every came in useful which to my surprise I will admit, it has.”

“So now what do we do?” Megan asked.

“I'm afraid we have a bit of a climb” Jack explained as he managed to prise open an access panel that revealed the now abandoned and empty former lift shaft which now contained nothing more than an access gantry across its width, some bulkhead lighting partially shaded by years of accumulated dust and dirt and a metal ladder leading up to the surface.

“I'll say this for you Jack” Megan wryly remarked as she began to go up the ladder following Jack “You certainly know how to show a girl a good time.”

“Why thank you” Jack responded “Err I think...”

“So once we reach ground level” Megan asked “Then what?”

“Then I think we should take a quick trip to New Scotland Yard” Jack confirmed “We should try and find my parents and quickly.”

The cacophony of sirens in and around the St. James Park area was almost deafening as further emergency service vehicles from various agencies converged on the location where a few minutes earlier the body of a so far unidentified female Security Service officer had been found wrapped in a roll of carpet beneath a bench in the centre of the park.

“Lima Alpha Three Six to Control” Frank duly called into his radio as all around the officer, his colleagues were setting up a perimeter and keeping onlookers well back from the immediate area.

“Control receiving” came the swift response accompanied by background noise that indicated that the Control Room only a short distance away at New Scotland Yard was somewhat busy.

“Is there any word on when I can expect a senior officer on site here at St James Park?” Frank inquired with obvious urgency “Only this place is descending into a complete circus.”

“We are having trouble locating any senior officers at the moment” the Control Room supervisor duly confirmed as he indicated silently to one of his colleagues to try ringing around again “Divisional Commander Caverner seems to have gone missing, at least she is not answering her phone or radio and the Commander himself is out of touch for the moment as well.”

“Well we need someone down here Control” Frank warned ominously “I can confirm the body is that of a Security Service officer, female, early to mid twenties and she has been shot twice at close range before being dumped.”

“Terry, try the Commander's radio again” the Control Room Supervisor ordered with some obvious tone of desperation as the unfolding situation became apparent.

“Control to Alpha One” the request was promptly sent out “Urgent message for the National Administrator General, Commander, are you there Sir?”

A few moments later there was a somewhat crackly and interference laden response when the Commander finally responded.

“Alpha One to Control, receiving but only just” he duly confirmed.

“We urgently need a senior officer in St James Park” the Control Room Supervisor confirmed “An officer involved shooting, one dead on the deck in uniform.”

“Well I am just about to get on a train at Waterloo East” the Commander responded “I can be there in about twenty minutes but surely my wife should be closer?” he suggested.

“We can't raise her” the Supervisor duly explained “She was last reported investigating reports of possible gunfire involving some members of Haliford's goon squad in Park Lane which was about thirty minutes ago and we have not heard anything from her since.”

“All right then” the Commander responded with concern as he and Bob paused at the top of the platform access ramp at Waterloo East station “Get the Scenes of Crime lads down to the Park, get the whole area sealed off and keep away the onlookers, I'll be there as soon as I can.”

“Understood Sir” the Supervisor duly confirmed “Control out.”

“I have got a really bad feeling about this Sir” Bob remarked as he and the Commander resumed their journey, proceeding along the walkway that links Waterloo East with the mainline terminal a short distance away.

“You and me both” the Commander was forced to agree “The lunatics really are starting to take over the asylum” he remarked.

"I must say that I have seen wiser choices for such prominent positions in Government" Bob agreed.

"If the people thought the last lot were bad, just wait until the Forsyth & Haliford bandwagon road show gets up to full speed" the Commander ominously warned "If this keeps up the public will be begging to bring the last Government back."

"Never thought I would see the day when the country got *that* desperate" Bob admitted as they turned left at the top of the ramp and began to make their way along the seemingly deserted covered walkway that links Waterloo East with the main station itself.

"Hello, who are these guys?" the Commander asked as they rounded a corner to see a group of armed officers heading towards them with a distinctly purposeful stride "Looks like someone has sent their brain trust to meet us."

"Peter Graves and his merry men" Bob confirmed "My opposite number from the Diplomatic Protection arm of Central Services."

"Why do I get the feeling this is not a social call" the Commander asked as the two men came to a halt whereupon the line of armed officers formed a blockading line across from one side of the walkway to the other.

"Administrator General Sir Edward Regent?" Graves asked as his men drew their weapons and pointed them ahead.

"I must be in trouble" the Commander remarked for he knew like Bob that Graves was very much a by the book type and addressing the Commander by his full formal correct title and name meant this was no ordinary meeting.

"Sorry about this Sir" Graves apologised "I have orders from the ISA and the Parliamentary Oversight Committee to place you in detention, using force if necessary."

"Do I have any choice?" the Commander asked as a further group of armed officers appeared and took up position behind them cutting off any possible means of escape "I guess not."

"Bob, you are not involved with this matter" Graves informed him "You are free to go."

"Where my Commanding Officer goes, I go" Bob politely but firmly responded.

"I know this is going to sound odd coming from me but I don't suppose you happen to have such a thing as a warrant for this do you?" the Commander asked.

"Right here Sir" Graves confirmed as he dutifully produced the required document and handed it to the Commander.

"Signed by Sir John Haliford himself" the Commander remarked as he examined the document "I am frankly amazed he had the balls to do it, still it does mean I will have something to nail him to Nelson's Column by when this sorry mess is over."

"Your weapons please gentlemen" Graves formally requested, holding out his hand.

Bob and the Commander cast a look at each other and both silently agreed there and then that they had no choice other than to do as ordered whereupon they both duly surrendered their weapons, Bob handing over his MP5 once he had taken it off his shoulder whilst the Commander reluctantly withdrew his faithful old six shot revolver from the holster and placed it into Graves outstretched palm.

"I hope you and your boss have a very good lawyer" the Commander warned "You are going to need one by the time I have finished with you."

"In the words of my superior" Graves confidently responded "You are going to have far more pressing things to worry about."

"I told you I had a bad feeling about this" Bob reminded the Commander.

"Shut up and let's get moving" Graves ordered "My boss is waiting to talk to you" he informed them whereupon with armed men providing a full escort but being spared the ignominy of handcuffs, the two men were duly led away.

"And with a simple wave of the hand, the pieces are coming together" Haliford triumphantly announced to the Control Room as he hung up the telephone having received good news.

"I take it we have our prize?" McCallister asked, sensing the momentous importance of the moment.

"We have the Commander in custody" Haliford duly confirmed, unable to contain his glee judging by the huge grin on his face "The Security Service is in chaos and we are in full control. Now there is just the final piece of housekeeping to take care of" he declared whereupon he picked up the telephone again and pressed a single button to connect him with an unseen contact.

"Zero One to hatchlings" Haliford duly called "The word is given, clean out the nest."

A few moments after Haliford had given the order, a number of pagers being carried by a number of uniformed as well as plain clothed Security Service officers based within New Scotland Yard itself began to bleep ominously.

The response to this alert was for these people to leave the location where they were waiting or working and make their way through the building down to the basement level where the group of twenty or so gathered to be met by an officious looking man

who had managed to sneak into the building to meet them without any challenge or query.

“Ladies and gentlemen, this is it” the man declared “We have our marching orders” he confirmed as he produced copies of a document which had the herald of the new International Security Agency at its head and passed them around “You are to detain everyone on that list immediately and transport them to Echo Base for processing, lethal force if necessary is authorised and as of now you only answer to Echo Control.”

There were a few low murmurings between those present as they absorbed the news and it was clear that one or two of them were having some doubts, something the man quickly picked up on.

“Something wrong number seventeen?” the man inquired.

“It's just... this seems a bit dramatic” the officer identified as number seventeen responded “We are going up against the likes of the Commander and he won't take too kindly to this.”

“He has already been dealt with” the man confidently confirmed “We are the new order of law and justice now, the gloves are off and we are taking out the trash but first we have to remove certain roadblocks before we can take over fully.”

“I never thought we would be doing something as drastic as this” seventeen responded, his doubt very much obvious.

“When it comes to drastic, we are just warming up” the man confirmed as he very calmly pulled a silenced pistol from inside his jacket, shot the doubter clean in the centre of the forehead and then re-holstered his weapon without barely a blink.

“Anyone else having any doubts or crisis of conscience?” he asked around to which he received only unanimous shakes of the head.

“Good” the man confirmed “Make sure you all wear these” he proceeded to pass out black arm bands bearing the ISA logo which they duly put on “also ensure that when you move in that you use your new identity cards. The acting Prime Minister has assured Sir John Haliford that we have full unobstructed power of seizure, confiscation and arrest.”

“All right then, let's get on with it shall we?” the man then asked once he had seen that the men were ready to go whereupon he proceeded to read out their assignments “Team One you have the Control Room and Command Floor, teams two and three will secure entrances and exits, in particular the basement car park level and main reception, the rest of you are with me to take down the principal players.”

No further words were either necessary or exchanged as the men and women present duly filed out of the room to set about their dangerous assignments.

A few minutes later the results of Haliford's orders began to take effect when up in the Control Room, the duty supervisor looked around behind him with a look of bewilderment as the team of men charged with taking over arrived on mass.

“What the hell is this?” the Supervisor called as the men moved into the Control Room.

“Under section seventeen of the Emergency Security and Enforcement Act, this facility is being seized and placed under the control of the International Security Agency” the man leading the team duly declared loudly.

“Yeah, very funny...” the Supervisor responded.

“If that is how you want to play it” the man coolly responded whereupon he nodded to one of his associates who with a colleague immediately grabbed the Supervisor and roughly wrestled him to the floor before handcuffing him.

“Let this be a learning moment ladies and gentlemen” the man declared as the Supervisor was unceremoniously bundled out of the door “Co-operation will be rewarded, failure to co-operate will result in consequences.”

Down the corridor in the Incident Investigation Room, Sir Richard was going over some reports with his deposed colleague from the London Station of the CIA, David Howell when suddenly the doors were thrown open and in marched ten officers.

“Shut the door someone, there's a draft” Sir Richard remarked before he realised the seriousness of the situation that had come literally crashing through the door.

“Under the conditions of the Emergency Security Act, you are all under arrest” the man leading them in duly declared, holding his ISA identification up and showing it around the room as he did so.

“What do you want?” Howell asked as he, Sir Richard and the others in the room looked on as the officers proceeded to surround them and cut off all the exits.

“Resisting arrest would be nice” the leader of the group honestly admitted.

“With pleasure” Sir Richard admitted before striking the officer who was about to take hold of him to arrest him.

“Get them!” the man ordered whereupon a major fight between the two sides duly broke out during which punches and kicks were freely exchanged.

Despite his mature years, Sir Richard managed to wrestle free of one of the men trying to restrain him, kicking him in the crotch before unceremoniously throwing him onto the desk which collapsed into a crumpled heap on the floor.

“Go” Sir Richard called to Howell and the others whereupon those in the room not already detained, tried to make a run for it.

“How tedious...” the man in charge of the arrest team calmly remarked as he stepped out into the corridor to witness David Howell trying to escape.

Howell's attempt was good but did not get far, no sooner had he got within sight of the emergency fire escape stairs than he was struck down by a jolt from a Tazer gun in the back fired by one of the men who appeared from a side office and hit him.

Back in the Incident Investigation Room, the fight was all but over as three men finally managed to overpower Sir Richard, bringing him down on the floor with his hands held up behind his back whereupon plastic restraint bands were duly applied to both his wrists and ankles.

“I'm getting to old for this crap” Sir Richard remarked with a sense of defeat as he winced from his injuries, a trickle of blood running down the side of his face from where he had been heavily struck down.

“Sir John Haliford would like to talk to you” the man in charge confirmed having knelt down alongside Sir Richard to deliver his menacing message “You and certain others both in this room and elsewhere in this building have some interesting questions to answer concerning your roles in the murder of the Prime Minister and conspiring to obstruct the course of justice.”

“Your boss is a deluded power hungry loon with all the charisma of a peeled potato” Sir Richard defiantly responded through bloodied gritted teeth.

“I'll be sure to pass on your complements” the man confirmed “You'll get an extra ten years in jail for that.”

“Please don't bother on my account” Sir Richard responded.

“Right” the man in command declared as he looked around to see that all those in the room had now been detained all be it with the fixtures and fittings now somewhat badly damaged through the fight to detain them “Get this lot down to C&C for processing.”

Down in the main reception area, the Receptionist looked on with serious concern as she observed the two guard duty officers being brought inside the building in handcuffs by four other officers whose only additional distinguishing marks were the ominous looking armbands that they were wearing.

Discreetly she reached under the desk and extracted a little black electronic device, no bigger than a small box of matches and pressed a little button that was mounted into the front of it, this resulting in a red LED type lamp becoming illuminated and blinking.

Once she had given a quick glance down to ensure the device was active, the receptionist slid it discreetly into her handbag and resumed her duties as best as she could under instruction from the ISA officers now taking over the building.

The bleeping noise that had begun only a few moments earlier echoed all throughout the near deserted passageways of the former King William Street station complex which saw Lieutenant Smitham emerge from the office and go over to the computer control centre to examine the source of the noise.

“Sir!” Smitham called whereupon he was joined by Commander Hendrickson who had been in the lavatory at the time “I think we have got something.”

“An alert from the Yard” Hendrickson duly confirmed after checking the computer to identify the source of the mysterious signal “Looks like the balloon is going up.”

“Why is it always a balloon?” Smitham wondered at that point.

“Probably sounds good without really meaning very much” Hendrickson reasoned “Then again someone once told me that clichés are a refuge for the unimaginative which is probably why our political masters are so fond of them.”

“So what do we do now Sir?” Smitham asked.

“We find out exactly what is going on, who is behind it and most importantly of all, who we can trust” Hendrickson confirmed “First thing's first though, we need to find the National Administrator General and his wife.”

“There was a report on the radio about ten minutes ago” Smitham responded as he consulted some notes “Apparently Divisional Commander Caverner has not answered her radio or her mobile for nearly an hour now.”

“Her last reported position?” Hendrickson asked as he went over to a map of central London that he had put up on a board on the wall.

“South end of Park Lane” Smitham confirmed “She reported in that she was going to investigate a report of gunshots being fired in the area and that was the last anyone heard of her.”

“Why wasn't an ARU unit sent out to that call?” Hendrickson wondered “I know us Transport Division boys rarely have need for their talents but even I know that would normally be standard procedure wouldn't it?”

“Yes Sir” Smitham agreed “The only reason they would not have been called was if someone cancelled it or overrode any orders.”

“And that could only come from the Chain of Command or worse still the central Control Room at the Yard” Hendrickson grimly confirmed as he stuck a red pin in the map right on top of New Scotland Yard which joined the green pin he had just put at the point where the south end of Park Lane met Hyde Park Corner.

“The Commander was last reported trying to placate a potential riot in Southwark” Smitham continued “Then he went off air for about twenty minutes until he came back again, reporting his location as Waterloo East station.”

“Which is right there” Hendrickson duly put another pin in the map, this time a blue one on the appropriate location “Sir Richard Crowthorne and the CIA man Howell are or possibly by now were in the Incident Room at New Scotland Yard, that leaves Divisional Commander Jennifer Caverner in the secure unit at Charing Cross Hospital” he confirmed as another pin went in.

“According to this list that we got from the Commander” Smitham ticked off the names as he went on his clipboard mounted piece of paper “that leaves the head of operations at MI5, David Collins and some girl named Amber unaccounted for.”

“Put a call into MI5” Hendrickson requested “Use the green phone over there” he indicated the nearby desk “Don't tell them where you are calling from, just state the access code six of twelve and say that Chief Bill requests location status on Zulu One.”

“Err yes Sir” Smitham confirmed before heading over to the telephone to make the call leaving Hendrickson to look across the room at the map on the wall and take in a deep intake of breath, clearly now deeply concerned not only with the speed with which events were unfolding but also their seriousness.

“Understood, thank you” Smitham was heard to conclude his call whereupon he rejoined his superior officer.

“Give me the bad news then lad” Hendrickson instructed for his instincts already told him what he was about to hear.

“The response was 'Serpents in the nest, big bird missing' and then they hung up” Smitham confirmed “I take it that means something Sir?”

“Bad news and good news, more of the former than the latter mind” Hendrickson grimly responded “It means that the same type of hostile take over bid that just occurred at New Scotland Yard has just taken place at Thames House as well, the only good thing would appear to be that their head of operations, David Collins is unaccounted for so with any luck he is on his way over here right now.”

“This is bad isn't it Sir?” Smitham asked.

“A text book example of the enemy within” Hendrickson remarked “Wasn't that a film with Kurt Yurgens in it?”

“That was The Enemy Below I think you will find Sir” Smitham responded “The old war film with the submarine.”

“Well we are going to need a submarine before this is over at this rate” Hendrickson replied “With so many potentially unfriendly eyes out there it could wind up being the only way to get around unnoticed.”

“So where do we go from here?” Smitham asked.

“Monitor all the communications channels” Hendrickson confirmed after a few moments of thought “If I am right, Sir John Haliford will have his people on every street corner looking for the good guys. When one is sighted you can bet the airwaves will run red hot with excitement and that is when we must do whatever we can to help them out.”

“Just us two down here on our own Sir?” Smitham asked, decidedly unconvinced.

“I think you will find there are more of us out there than you realise” Hendrickson reassured him “Some will come to us, others will need to be helped so keep them peeled as we have a long night ahead of us.”

"Whoa..." Jack suddenly exclaimed as he and Megan came out of the Broadway entrance of St James' Park Underground Station whereupon they stopped on the corner having seen the unfolding scene ahead outside the main entrance of New Scotland Yard.

"I appreciate that I am not exactly an expert on these things but I would wager that that doesn't look good" Megan remarked.

"Definitely not good" Jack agreed as they both observed the group of armed uniformed men who were wrestling over a dozen restrained people from the building with little obvious care for their well being.

"That looks like some pretty heavy handed work" Megan remarked "I presume those are the bad guys then?" she asked.

"That would be my guess" Jack agreed as ahead, the detained personnel were unceremoniously bundled into a succession of rather sinister looking black Range Rovers before, amid screeching tyres, revving engines and sirens, they departed at speed for an unknown destination.

"So I take it our visit to Scotland Yard is off then?" Megan asked, looking across at Jack and seeing his thought filled expression.

"Let's find out" Jack confirmed as he took Megan by the hand and together they proceeded to walk up the street on the pavement on the opposite side of the road to New Scotland Yard.

Outside the main entrance there was now a much calmer scene, the last vehicle containing its unwilling detainees having now departed a few moments earlier but there still remained a formidable presence of ISA armband wearing armed guards and other personnel signifying that thanks to their swift and expertly executed takeover, they were now very much in control.

At that point Megan observed one of the armed men outside the main entrance look across in their direction before with a quizzical look consulting a number of pages on a clipboard he was carrying.

“Come here” Megan quickly grabbed Jack by the hand and hauled him off down the side street that runs alongside the Post Office before pushing him into a closed doorway.

“What the...?” Jack began to protest before Megan put her arms around him and much to his surprise kissed him.

“Have they gone yet?” Megan asked a few moments later whereupon the still somewhat shocked Jack looked over her shoulder back up the road towards New Scotland Yard.

“Still there but no longer looking this way” Jack confirmed whereupon Megan kissed him again briefly just to make sure.

“What was that for?” Jack asked.

“Firstly because I wanted to” Megan admitted “and secondly we needed to distract the attention of the nasty guys with guns back there before they realised who you were.”

“Right...” Jack responded “Well now that is over and before I faint from the shock, I think we had better get the hell out of here” he suggested.

“Where to though?” Megan asked, looking around “We can't go back to your place because they will probably have that covered, the Yard is crawling with unfriendlies and I am willing to bet if they know who you are, they probably know about me as well by now.”

“Mind if I make a suggestion?” a voice called from behind them which made both Jack and Megan jump as from the shadow of an adjacent doorway David Collins made an appearance.

“My God, you really do walk through walls don't you?” Jack responded.

“Indeed” Collins agreed “Cost's me a fortune in redecorating though and my dry cleaner is constantly complaining about the plaster in the fabric of my suits” he mocked.

“Oh, introductions” Jack realised “Mr Collins, this is Megan my friend, Megan, this is David Collins who is big in MI5.”

“Well I was until about twenty minutes ago that is” Collins admitted “I pop out for five minutes for some fresh air, a cigarette and some coffee and the next thing I know the lunatics have taken over the asylum.”

“I take it this is the work of that mad man Sir John Haliford that the press are raving on about?” Jack asked.

“That would be the fellow” Collins grimly confirmed “Mind you he is just the front man, the conductor of the orchestra, it is the dubious company lurking in the wings that I am most worried about.”

“Perhaps we ought to get the hell out of here?” Megan suggested.

“Absolutely” Collins agreed “Any of us who have not been rounded up should be aware by now that the sky is falling in so we should all be heading for the same place.”

“King William Street?” Jack asked.

“Exactly” Collins duly confirmed.

“What is in King William Street?” Megan asked, duly puzzled by this reference.

“Not in but under” Jack confirmed as the group proceeded to make their discrete departure away from New Scotland Yard “Hopefully a way out of this dark mess we seem to have found ourselves in.”

“Looks like our guests are beginning to arrive” Cruschov remarked with an evil chuckle as he looked out of the office window down the height of ten storeys to the car park below where he could see an armoured prisoner van which was in the process of being unloaded and its occupants being roughly taken inside.

“In which case let's not keep them waiting” Haliford duly confirmed as he reached for his jacket and put it on “I have been waiting twenty years for this moment.”

“You know you have a real attitude problem” the Commander remarked as he and Bob were roughly man handled through the side door and into the building before being escorted to a detention area in the lower basement.

“Do I look like I give a toss?” the lead guard who was taking them to the cells gruffly responded as he opened the door before they were unceremoniously shoved inside and the door slammed shut behind them.

“You know, as Neanderthal knuckle dragger's go” Bob remarked “Haliford really does employ from the bottom end of the gene pool doesn't he?”

“Hired muscle, no brains” the Commander responded as Bob helped him up off the floor and onto the crude wooden bench “Even back in his MI6 days, Haliford never liked having people under his command who had too much ability to think, just take orders and don't ask any smart arse questions.”

“My wife is never going to believe this” Bob wryly remarked as he and the Commander looked all around their dire new surroundings “We are supposed to be going out for our wedding anniversary meal tonight.”

“I wonder if they have got Tracy?” the Commander wondered, clearly worried for his own wife.

“If they tried to grab her Sir, I can guarantee that she will put up one hell of a fight” Bob reassured his commanding officer.

“Someone is coming” the Commander suddenly responded as he heard approaching footsteps which was followed a few moments later by the lock of the large metal cell door being opened whereupon with two armed guards, Haliford and Cruschov entered the large holding cell looking very pleased with themselves.

“Well if it isn't tweedledum and tweedledummer” the Commander remarked as he looked up at the face of the enemy with little respect.

“Can I break his legs?” Cruschov demanded to know of Haliford who calmly raised a hand and wagged his finger at his Russian counterpart.

“No Comrade” Haliford responded “We need the Commander here undamaged and the picture of health...”

“That should make my doctor laugh” the Commander remarked.

“...there are other ways of hurting someone” Haliford continued with calmly implied menace “Everyone has a weak point, you just have to find out what it is and then squeeze.”

“I am going to break every bone in your body when I am finished with you” came a familiar voice from further down the corridor which caused both Bob and the Commander to look up.

“Ah, right on cue” Haliford declared as Hoskins and Harcourt appeared with a bound Tracy at the doorway “Come in my dear, we were just talking about you.”

“This bitch is a handful” Harcourt warned as Hoskins backed off and he took sole charge of her whereupon he shoved Tracy towards the cell door.

“Is she causing you problems?” Haliford asked seeing the struggle.

“I can handle this” Harcourt responded, pushing Tracy inside the cell by administering a hard kick to her midriff which caused her to fall to the floor at the Commander's feet who in response went instantly to her aid.

“You are on notice” the Commander declared, cool and controlled anger readily apparent “My wife's threat to you will be carried out before this is over” he informed Harcourt “Maybe not by any of us but be assured that sooner or later someone will ensure you pay in full and with interest.”

“Threats are of no interest to me or those under my employ Commander” Haliford casually dismissed this response as if it were a merely hinted at suggestion of little consequence.

“As I once remarked to a former colleague of yours a couple of years back” the Commander calmly reminded him “I don't do *threats*, only promises.”

“Haliford, you little weasel” Tracy managed to respond defiantly despite being in some pain “When I am finished, I am going to run you through with my best ceremonial sword. That is a promise.”

“I'll try to remember that” Haliford responded before turning to Hoskins “Get over to New Scotland Yard, take charge of operations there and inform the Command Floor to prepare for my arrival as the new Chief of National Security.”

“Yes Sir” Hoskins readily agreed.

“Chief of National Security” Cruschov remarked as he inhaled on his large cigar “That has a very nice ring to it.”

“Yes, I though so too” Haliford admitted “Ah, more distinguished guests joining our little party” he declared as further armed men escorted additional prisoners into the detention area.”

“You can't keep us all locked up down here forever” the Commander warned.

“It would appear he is doing a pretty good job so far” Sir Richard Crowthorne admitted rather dejectedly as he was shown into the adjacent cell along with former CIA boss David Howell.

“Where is Collins?” Haliford asked as he looked up and down the cells.

“He was not with the principal targets when we took the place down” one of the guards explained.

“Your Top Trumps set missing a card or two is it?” the Commander asked.

“He won't evade us for long” Haliford reassured them “I have eyes and ears everywhere. Thanks to careful manoeuvring, I have managed over the last year to put people in every agency of Government, security and justice sympathetic to our new cause, our crusade against the tyranny of international crime and terrorism.”

“You really are a power crazy fool” Sir Richard responded, shaking his head in disbelief.

“Poor people are crazy Mr Crowthorne” Haliford advised him “I have the keys to the proverbial castle and all the power and control that goes with it so at best I am merely eccentric.”

“You will be dead meat when I get my hands on you” Tracy warned.

“Enough of this preposterous posturing” Haliford declared “Guards, if anyone here acts up you have my permission to take it out on the young lady here. She already knows how a Tazer feels so I am sure she will be more prepared next time.”

“I am going to enjoy this...” Harcourt evilly remarked with a grin that showed his badly distorted and incomplete teeth that merely emphasised his nastiness.

“Sorry to spoil your fun Mr Harcourt” Haliford responded “I am in need of your talents elsewhere, don't worry, they will wait and you will have your pound of flesh before this is over. You have my word on it.”

“Hmmm...” Harcourt almost growled in response before reluctantly withdrawing and leaving the cell block, muttering obscenities under his breath.

“You know you really should check the references and CV's of some of the people you are hiring” the Commander suggested in all seriousness “That one in particular I warn you now will turn on you in an instant if he doesn't implode first and if that happens, believe me he will take out anyone within a five mile radius with the shrapnel.”

“I'll grant you that Mr Harcourt is rather err abrupt and direct in the way he goes about his business but he does understand two important things” Haliford went some way to explain “power and money, he knows he is working for the winning team.”

“Hah!” Sir Richard suddenly exclaimed from the adjacent cell in response.

“You'll see” Haliford calmly informed him “Soon you will all see that my new order of justice will be right, but I must be getting back to work. So much to do, so many people to haul off the street in the name of saving society as we know it.”

“I've dealt with people who have had delusions of grandeur, god hood or just plain good old fashioned greed before” the Commander remarked as he cradled Tracy in his arms and tried as best he could to help her “They too ended badly.”

“Hmm...” Haliford responded before departing whereupon the cell door was duly slammed shut behind him.

“Funny fella” Bob casually remarked “Reminds me of a mad auntie I once had.”

“Well let's just hope while he is settling in your office Commander” Sir Richard pointed out “he doesn't find the decent brandy supply, we are all going to need a few stiff drinks before this is over.”

“Too late” Tracy called over “Sergei Glasgow cleaned out the entire supply of alcohol in the Yard with the exception of the bottle of meths in the cleaner's cupboard last night.”

“That's a point” David Howell remarked as he looked around “Where is our Russian friend?”

“Alcoholics Anonymous?” Bob wryly suggested

“Are you all right love?” the Commander asked as he helped Tracy back up to sit upright.

“Well I'll say this for one thing” Tracy responded as she rubbed her aching back “I'll never contest another complaint from anyone who has been hit with a Tazer gun ever again, damn those things hurt.”

“Harcourt used a Tazer on you?” the Commander asked, only just managing to suppress his anger.

“Too subtle for his tastes, no you can chalk that one up to that ex NSA bloke Hoskins and his loony lynch mob” Tracy explained “I ran into them at the hotel where we put Amber and Alan up, managed to cover their escape and then got zapped for my troubles.”

“At least we have someone on the outside” Sir Richard remarked “Has anyone seen David Collins?” he asked.

“Not since he went out for coffee at the Yard” Howell confirmed “That was about five minutes before Haliford's heavy mob showed up and started taking over the place.”

“So at least we should have some people on the outside” Sir Richard remarked.

“No one seen Simon Fuller by any chance?” the Commander asked.

“Nope” Tracy confirmed, a reaction mirrored by the shakes of the heads of the others “I'm worried about Jack, he is going to be wondering what has happened to us.”

“Yeah, I am worried about him too” the Commander agreed “but he is a tough kid so I am sure he will be all right.”

“We are now approaching Monument” the automated announcement came over the P.A. System aboard the newly refurbished six car train of District Line 'D' type stock as it slowed for its next stop. “Change here for Northern and Central Lines and Docklands Light Railway.”

“Our stop I believe” Jack declared as he allowed Collins to rise from his seat and go on ahead to the door before Jack took Megan by the hand and they followed just as the platform came into view and the train slowed to a halt.

“This is all terribly cloak and dagger isn't it?” Megan asked as the doors opened and they alighted onto the eastbound Circle & District Line platform where amongst the crowds of other passengers, they blended in with no one taking the slightest bit of notice of them.

“Don't worry, I'll make sure you are all right” Jack reassured her as they followed Collins and the crowd to the exit before heading up the escalator to the ticket hall level.

Amid the crowds in the ticket hall that were both exiting and entering the station, Collins' eager eyes quickly picked out a familiar face in the form of Alan Martin who along with Amber were emerging from the Northern Line escalators and also approaching the ticket barriers.

“I see you guys had the same idea” Collins remarked as they met at the ticket barriers where Megan was just about to automatically swipe her Oyster card across the reader to exit when Jack suddenly stopped her.

“Use the card ticket” Jack quickly reminded her “If they know who you are by now, it is a fair bet they have a tracer on wherever your Oyster Card may turn up.”

“Believe me” Collins confirmed “If the Civil Liberties lot had even a hint of one tenth of the information the Oyster Card system stores and makes available to the authorities, they would probably have a major heart attack.”

“Mr Collins” Martin responded as they passed through the ticket barriers, all using card tickets “It is a pleasure to see a friendly face at last, I was beginning to think nobody liked us.”

“Believe me, I know the feeling” Collins admitted as they began to head out of the exit and up the steps to street level “You must be the legendary Amber?” he asked.

“I have been described as many things over the years” Amber responded “Legendary most definitely isn't one of them.”

“To finish off the introductions” Collins continued “Amber, Alan, this is Jack Regent who is Tracy and the Commander's adopted son and Megan, his friend.”

“Ah, the man from the Department of Transport who likes to travel in style on Class 442's from Polegate to London Bridge” Jack recalled much to Amber and Martin's surprise “I was the one who worked out what train you were likely to be on so that my father knew where to find you” he explained.

“Oh, err right” Martin responded, somewhat bemused whilst Amber merely smiled in response.

“I take it we are all heading for the same place then?” Jack asked as the group crossed the road and headed down London Bridge Road towards the Monument.

“Looks like it” Collins confirmed as he led the group, turning left into Monument Street and crossing over to the corner of an office building.

“So what is this place?” Megan asked Jack as in front of them Collins proceeded to unlock what appeared to be an unremarkable maintenance access door situated in the ground floor of the building.

“The last refuge for lost sheep like us I think” Martin remarked as with the door now open, they proceeded inside, passing along a narrow passageway with electrical equipment humming away to itself either side and reached an old wooden elevator gate whose obvious age contrasted sharply with the much more modern nature of the building in which it was situated.

“One in, all in” Collins declared as he opened the gate to reveal the old wooden panelled lift car behind it whereupon everyone squeezed into the rather small space where once they were in, he proceeded to operate the old lever control whereupon the car began its descent to the mysterious lower level.

“Is this thing safe?” Megan asked as the lift car creaked alarmingly, showing its age which prompted her to reaffirm her grip of Jack's hand for reassurance.

“Don't worry, I've done this before” Jack reassured her just as the lift car jolted and then slowed as it reached the bottom of the shaft.

“House wares and Electrical” Collins jokingly declared as he opened the lift gate and stepped out into the tile lined tube shaped passageway before they proceeded through to the office accommodation area which occupies two levels in what was once the large platform tunnel of the former King William Street Underground Station.

“Ah!” Commander Hendrickson declared as he and Lieutenant Smitham looked up from the desk as the others came into the conference room “Reinforcements!”

“Looks like we are it I am afraid” Collins admitted “It would appear that Haliford and his boys have been most thorough to ensure as many of the key players on our side as possible have been removed from the field of play before we have even had the chance to bat.”

“Dear oh dear, it will be the sticky wicket cliché next” Amber remarked aside to Martin “Sir Richard is always coming out with the cricket ones.”

“So we really are on a sticky wicket then” Hendrickson responded which caused Amber and Martin to look at each other with a smirk.

“Anyone have any idea where either Tracy Caverner or the Commander are now?” Collins asked around the room where he was met with mostly negative responses.

“There was a garbled alert report on the standard patrol frequencies about forty five minutes ago” Smitham remarked as he slid the headphones he was listening through off the top of his head for a moment “Apparently the body of a female in a Security Service uniform was found in St James' Park and the Commander was alerted but then he promptly disappeared and about five minutes later the standard frequencies were shut down.”

“Can we access the central switchboard at New Scotland Yard?” Amber asked.

“Maybe...” Smitham admitted but it was obvious he was reluctant on the subject
“There is a potential danger however.”

“Let me guess” Jack remarked “We plug into the New Scotland Yard system from here and Haliford's technical guys start following the proverbial yellow brick road right to our front door here.”

“Whereupon we get unwelcome visitors and our only chance of getting out of this mess, this place, the ace up our sleeve goes down the proverbial pan” Collins grimly concluded.

“This Haliford guy” Hendrickson commented “From what I have seen on him on the TV in the last couple of days, he strikes me as a power junkie who is little more than hot air, sound bites and clichés. Is he really running the show?”

“I don't think so” Howell responded “He is just the front man, being given his podium, his illusion of power and his pay cheque, the real driving force are the ones lurking in the background.”

“You mean that piece of old Soviet shit Cruschov” Amber asked “Him I can understand, after all thanks to his new friends Haliford and 'Prime Minister' Lord Forsyth plus no doubt a very generous financial donation from his dubious bank accounts he now has respectability, immunity and is probably grinning like a Cheshire cat.”

“What about that Welsh guy you were telling me about?” Martin asked Amber
“Altman wasn't it?”

“You mean Terrance Altman?” Hendrickson asked “The organised crime boss who basically runs most of the rackets in Wales and the south west?”

“The same” Amber duly confirmed “He and I had a bit of a run in and I don't particularly want to meet them again seeing as he and his boys want to see me skinned alive, hung, drawn and quartered and then roasted and that is before they turn really nasty.”

“Do you get a kick out of annoying the criminal community to the point of potential suicide?” Collins asked out of curiosity.

“I am seriously considering retirement” Amber wryly admitted “Settle down and start a family or something” a remark that made Martin look on somewhat goggle eyed.

“I don't get it” Collins responded “According to our Organised Crime Bureau, Altman and his motley crew made at least six million pounds sterling clear profit from his various rackets last year alone. He would never risk hooking up with the likes of Cruschov unless he had some sort of guarantee of some kind.”

“A 'Get out of Jail Free' card I presume?” Martin asked before something occurred to him “Oh my God, the USB stick.”

“The what?” Hendrickson responded, a response mirrored by everyone else present.

“Good God, I had forgotten all about it” Amber realised with shock.

“Would someone mind telling me what the hell we are talking about?” Collins asked as he collapsed into a chair and looked around.

“When Cruschov entered the country Sir Richard asked me” Amber explained “Well I sort of volunteered really to infiltrate the operation that he and that Welsh piece of slime Altman have been setting up. Before I was sold out by someone in the system I managed to download the contents of Altman personal laptop onto a USB memory stick, the data was encrypted but I do believe it contains every piece of dirt that he has assembled on his new friends, accounts, photographs, everything.”

“So where is it?” Howell asked.

“It should be with the Security Service's IT guy I believe” Amber duly confirmed.

“That would be Simon Fuller” Jack responded.

“Who disappeared along with Lieutenant Barrett about an hour before the lunatics took over the asylum” Collins duly confirmed “They had a lead and were going after the source of the communications disruption that occurred when the Prime Minister got blown to bits.”

“We need that information” Howell strongly suggested “Can we access the computer network at the Yard from here.”

“Maybe” Smitham responded “Trouble is we risk the same problems that would occur if we accessed the communications channels, unexpected visitors kicking the door in.”

“Wouldn't work anyway” Jack pointed out “I've spent a bit of time with Uncle Simon and I know his methods and his systems, he uses some very clever encryption techniques, isolated systems, all very secure and no doubt separate from the main system.”

“So presumably the only way to access it would be from Fuller's own computer in his office then?” Collins asked.

“It sure looks that way yes” Smitham agreed “Furthermore we would also need to have someone who knows how Commander Fuller works to try and figure his system out and access it.”

“Well I don't have much else to do this evening” Jack wryly admitted with a reluctant shrug of the shoulders.

“Oh no you don't” Megan responded, quickly realising exactly what it was Jack had in mind “If they catch you they will do God knows what to you, maybe even kill you to get to the Commander.”

“No they won't” Jack reassured her and everyone else who seemed to be sharing the same sentiments “Look, who in their right mind would shoot a little kid like me, I mean when was the last time a schoolboy got shot dead at New Scotland Yard in the full public gaze?”

“March 7th 1969” Collins quickly responded, causing Jack to look slightly annoyed.

“Ah, I had forgotten about that” he remembered “Well anyway he survived, technically speaking, sort of...”

“No, simple as that, you are not going” Megan responded with emotional insistence.

“I will be fine” Jack responded “All I have to do is sneak in through the back way, get into Fuller's office, access his computer and download the files and then get them to you lot and then slip out again, simple.”

“Then I am going with you” Megan insisted.

“You are staying here where it is safe” Jack quickly replied.

“You know I never thought I would see the day when the future of the criminal justice system hung in the balance on two thirteen year old school kids having a domestic argument” Collins remarked aside to Howell who responded with a wry smirk.

“I hate to break this up but time is pressing” Hendrickson suggested “If you are serious about doing this Jack, then now would be the best time as there will be less people about between five and six o'clock.”

“I agree” Jack confirmed “I need a couple of things first.”

“I think I can help there” Amber confirmed as she placed the case she had earlier retrieved from the London Transport Lost Property Office on the desk and opened it “Everything for the secret agent on her holiday” she declared.

“Wow...” Jack remarked “All I need really is a torch” he confirmed.

“Here you go” Amber duly extracted a torch and passed it to him “Just be careful with it, this is an MI5 special job.”

“Click the switch three times and it turns into a hand grenade?” Jack asked.

“Hardly” Amber confirmed “This one has a homing beacon on it which we can use to track where you are. It may come in handy and will reassure your girlfriend into the bargain.”

“Why have you got a Thermos flask with a tartan pattern like my granny used to have in about 1976?” Hendrickson asked as he picked up the flask out of the case and looked at it with bemusement.

“Probably because it contains a spare gun and ammunition” Amber explained as she took it and removed the top to reveal the weapon and spare bullets contained within.

“I don't think I will be needing that thank you” Jack responded “There are enough kids with guns floating around London as it is and I have seen at first hand the damage they can do.”

“So what's your plan then young man?” Collins asked.

“Try not to get caught” Jack admitted.

“Good plan” Megan readily agreed.

“I am going to slip out the back way” Jack continued “Take the Underground to Westminster, walk to the Yard and then use the deliveries entrance to get in as it should be quiet this time of night.”

“We've got to figure on Haliford's lot planning on someone from our side paying a visit at some point” Collins warned.

“That is why I am perfect for this” Jack insisted “Who the hell is going to take the slightest bit of notice of a kid wandering around London? If it were one of you guys you would be arrested and dragged off to God knows where before you were able to cry for help.”

“He's got a point” Collins had to admit.

“Good” Jack responded “In which case, let's get on with it shall we?”

“Good luck” Megan told Jack, giving him a hug and then a kiss that made him go all red faced and embarrassed much to the amusement of the others in the room.

“See you later ladies and gents” Jack duly declared before taking his leave of them and heading out of the room.

Having left the room, he made his way along the former station platform tunnel towards the far end where the way ahead was blocked by a large round metal barrier which covered the former left hand running tunnel portal.

Inset into this was a small access door of riveted steel construction which Jack proceeded to open before he switched on the torch and shone it around the dark and damp former running tunnel on the other side.

“Urgh, lovely” Jack remarked to himself as he stepped inside and pulled shut the door behind him which meant he now only had the light of his torch to illuminate the tunnel which despite the fact it had not seen a train since February 1900 still had some

old rails lying on the ground whilst stalactites hung from the ceiling thanks to over a hundred years of water seepage from the nearby river Thames beneath which the tunnel passed.

He proceeded cautiously along the tunnel, following its diving curve and past the old construction access shaft, beneath the river and then up the other side until he reached a source of light that shone from the lower right hand side into the tunnel.

“Stand clear of the doors” came a familiar sounding message from the location below which caused Jack to pause and bend down to look through the grill and see down into the modern day Northern Line platform at London Bridge station where the usual throng of evening rush hour commuters were waiting for their train home, no doubt completely unaware of Jack watching them or even that this old tunnel was even there immediately above and in front of them.

After a few moments Jack moved on and reached a very modern looking door set into the side of the old tunnel wall. It took him a few moments to get the lock to budge as it was designed to only be opened normally from the other side but he soon got it freed and managed to open the door, exiting out into a passageway in the heart of London Bridge Underground Station where he was surprised that no one took the slightest bit of notice of a school boy suddenly appearing from behind what was to all intents and purposes a blank wall panel.

With the throngs of rush hour passengers making their way along the passageway to and from trains, it was easy for Jack to merge into the crowd and disappear.

“With the time coming up to five thirty, here are the main news headlines” the presenter on the BBC's twenty four hour news channel duly announced “Civil Liberties groups across the UK and the United States are in uproar this afternoon following the implementation of acting Prime Minister Lord Forsyth's 'special security measures' which has resulted in numerous raids in both countries on suspected terror cells as well as other groups.”

“Security Service Officers in several parts of London and Manchester have confirmed that the situation is now calmer after earlier near riotous protests which followed in the wake of the new International Security Agency's coordinated raids on several different locations across the two cities at around lunchtime” the presenter continued backed up by edited footage from the various scenes.

“Security Service investigators working in St James Park in Central London have still yet to formally identify the body of an officer found shot dead beneath a bench there by a member of the public at around one o'clock” the next headline was duly announced, the view on screen changing to one of the cordoned off scene in the park.

As the news broadcast continued, Peter Fisher, the BBC News duty editor looked up from his desk at the screen and was taking in the news when one of the junior reporters burst in suddenly.

“Some people bother to knock before charging into their boss's office” Fisher studiously suggested.

“Sorry chief but this couldn't wait” the reporter confirmed, a mix of emotions being readily apparent ranging from nervousness through to deep concern.

“All right, this had better be earth shatteringly good” Fisher responded as he sat back in the large leather arm chair and looked the anguished reporter squarely in the eye.

“Take a look at this” the reporter explained as he put a laptop on the desk, opened it and then after tapping a few keys on the keyboard, rotated it towards his superior “This was put up on YouTube about fifteen minutes ago.”

“What am I looking at exactly?” Fisher asked as he squinted at the screen.

“Well at first I and David from net research thought it was nothing” the reporter confirmed “Then the usual chat forums suddenly lit up with the news and that was when I looked a bit closer, the best bit is this section coming up here.”

“Jesus Christ!” Fisher suddenly responded, almost choking on the coffee he had just taken a gulp of “Is that really who I think it is?”

“It would appear to show National Administrator General Sir Edward Regent being taken away in handcuffs by some of those armed thugs that Sir John Haliford's new unit are using” the reporter duly confirmed “It's a bit shaky, taken on a camera phone at Waterloo Station about three or four hours ago but it also ties in with this bit that is about three minutes in.”

“That looks like Park Lane or somewhere” Fisher remarked as the footage changed to a wide view of several vehicles and a helicopter on the edge of Hyde Park before it zoomed in to a group of people, many of them similar in appearance to those that appeared in the previous clip that appeared to show the Commander being detained.

“Oh Christ...” Fisher exclaimed as he saw the rather shaky but unmistakable scene of someone receiving the wrong end of a Tazer in the back before slumping to the ground unconscious “That's Divisional Commander Tracy Caverner.”

“In living colour” the reporter grimly confirmed “Assuming she survived that nasty little surprise party that the ISA's thugs threw for her before bundling her into a chopper.”

“No, this has got to be fake” Fisher went on to dismiss the thought simply through overwhelming disbelief “There is no way Sir John Haliford would take out the two most respected Security Service officers in the land.”

“In which case try and explain why no one has seen or heard from either of them or several other key notables in the justice system since early this afternoon then” the reporter suggested “and then try and explain why the ISA pulled the footage from the net with a file bot less than five minutes after it first appeared?”

“Shit...” Fisher retorted under his breath “If we broadcast this we open ourselves to all sorts of potential trouble.”

“You taught me when I first started this job that the most important thing is the truth” the young reporter responded “No matter what the cost, the truth must always be our number one priority.”

“The last time I authorised something like that, a couple of very unpleasant people popped around and started lobbing explosives at us” Fisher reminded his young counterpart “Building services are still fixing some of the dents in the brickwork even now.”

“Look, at the rate we are going by this time tomorrow we will be in a Police State with Haliford and his thugs in charge” the reporter passionately continued “Right now, out there somewhere must be the right people and it is our duty to get this information out there so that they can see it and use it.”

“All right” Fisher agreed after a few moments silent pause for thought “We put this out in ten minutes but I strongly suggest we issue tin hats to everyone first.”

“You won't regret this Sir” the reporter confirmed before hurriedly picking up his laptop and leaving the office.

“That is what I was told about my first marriage” Fisher remarked with a wry smile before turning the television volume back up again.

Lieutenant Smitham took off his headphones and finished scribbling notes on his clipboard before hurriedly getting up from his seat and making his way into the main meeting room next door which was a hive of activity as the various people present worked through what intelligence on the ongoing situation they had.

“Gentlemen” Smitham called as he joined the group gathered around the table “Two things I can confirm, not official yet but as good as.”

“Shoot” Collins responded as everyone stopped what they were doing to listen.

“Although Haliford and his ISA boys are controlling all the radio frequencies, it would appear that some of our people on the ground out there, mostly Security Service and some MI5 Departments are being somewhat sneaky, putting in little snippets of information in their seemingly routine transmissions here and there presumably so that we can pick it up” Smitham explained.

“Well there was no way that the regulars of the Service were going to go blindly along with the Haliford bandwagon” Hendrickson agreed.

“I can confirm that the Security Service officer found shot dead in St James Park was a Lieutenant Commander Rosemary Barrett and that she did not die at the scene” Smitham confirmed “Anyone know her?”

“Sir Richard Crowthorne's number two” Collins confirmed “Last I saw of her she was following up a lead with Commander Fuller on the communications blackout, a possible source of it which could mean he is dead as well.”

“The other snippet of information that came through concerns the National Administrator General and Divisional Commander Caverner” Smitham continued “Whisper on the street is that the big wigs at the ISA and some civil servants in the Justice Ministry who have been parachuted in by Lord Forsyth are going ape about some YouTube footage that has turned up and subsequently been rapidly pulled which apparently shows both of them being apprehended by force by Haliford's goon squad.”

“We need to see that” Howell strongly suggested.

“Already being taken care of” Smitham confirmed “Someone at the BBC Monitoring Section saw it as soon as it was posted and managed to get a copy of it before Haliford's people pulled it again, they are going to air it in the next few minutes.”

“Someone turn the telly on” Collins instructed whereupon Amber and Martin duly went over to the television and switched it on, tuning it into the BBC News Channel in the middle of the six o'clock bulletin.

“...whilst Government officials have confirmed that the Home Secretary was hospitalised with a form of Swine Flu possibly picked up during a recent stay in the Caribbean where he was on a trade mission over the last couple of days” the reporter announced, the switching on of the television having come in the middle of the broadcast.

“And I am a Chinaman” Collins responded.

“At this point we break away from today's coverage of ongoing events to bring you this exclusive that has come to light in the last couple of minutes” the other news presenter declared with that sincerity that all BBC news reporters do when something they are not entirely sure about has begun to surface, accompanied as ever by the large red flashing 'Breaking News' banner across the bottom of the screen as if anyone watching was in any doubt of what was about to be announced.

“Reports are being received that amateur footage has been released on the Internet in the last hour which appears to show the arrest and detention by force of both the National Administrator General of the Security & Police Service Sir Edward Regent and also his wife, Divisional Commander Tracy Caverner” the presenter explained with some hesitation as if he was not really believing what he was reading, this despite the fact that the recovered footage, now cleaned up a bit to provide a much sharper image was now being played alongside him in split screen format.

“At this time we do not know exactly when or where these pictures were taken” the presenter continued, reading his copy from some hastily written notes that the editor was passing him as the broadcast continued “However what is certain is that those who are detaining them appear to be representatives of the new independent

International Security Agency or ISA who were appointed by acting Prime Minister Lord Forsyth this morning to oversee the investigation into the recent terrorist attacks and it is believed other areas of investigation, the exact mandate of which has not been made public at this time.”

“We should point out” the other presenter remarked “that at this time there is no official confirmation of anything at this time, however we do know that ISA representatives have refused to comment and that they indeed attempted to remove this footage from the Internet almost as soon as it appeared.”

“In fact we are now getting reports that Sir John Haliford and Acting Premier Lord Forsyth are about to make a statement live from Downing Street so we are going live over to Number Ten for that” the main presenter confirmed as the view on the screen changed to that of the BBC's Chief Political Correspondent Adam Rhodes who was clearly slightly unprepared for this suddenly assembled news conference as he was seen consulting hurriedly scribbled notes and fiddling with his ear piece.

“Err yes, welcome back to Downing Street where in a few moments we are expecting to heard from Sir John Haliford and the Acting Prime Minister” Rhodes confirmed having now got his composure together and addressed the camera directly as in the background the throngs of the press could be seen gathering behind a low metal barrier with the door of Number Ten Downing Street ahead of them.

As they awaited the press statement during which Rhodes merely re-summarised the events of the last couple of days so far, Collins watching the television noticed something.

“Well that explains why we can't find either Tracy or the Commander. Tell me that is not Haliford's goons on patrol duty outside Number Ten?” he asked with a very worried look.

“Appears to be” Hendrickson reluctantly agreed “Christ that means they have taken over all parliamentary and close diplomatic protection, we will need a miracle to get past them now.”

“Worse...” Amber pointed out one of the armed men on the door just viewable on the screen “That is William Harcourt and the equally unattractive thug to his right is Bill Stevens.”

“The most viscous rent-a-thug in the history of South London organised crime and that Welsh scum-bag's bag man working together on Haliford's personal security and hit squad?” Collins exclaimed in disbelief “Jesus Christ...”

“We got problems then” Martin agreed “I have seen this Stevens character and his guys at their best or worst depending upon your point of view and they do not take prisoners, well not ones that live for very long anyway.”

“Lieutenant Smitham” Hendrickson called across the room “Get hold of that YouTube footage, run it thought everything we have got and get me something, anything that can give us a clue as to where they may have taken them.”

“On it Sir” Smitham enthusiastically confirmed as on the screen the beaming faces of Sir John Haliford and Lord Forsyth appeared from the door of Number Ten Downing Street, waving as though they had just won a general election.

“Ladies and gentlemen” Lord Forsyth began, holding up his hand for silence but not immediately getting it, his level of respect from the press being far below that the Commander would have been able to command had he been there “Ladies and gentlemen” he reiterated, finally resulting in the silence and attention he was seeking “I shall be making a short statement and then my learned colleague here will address further disturbing issues of which the public of this great nation need to be aware” he confirmed, doing his best Winston Churchill impression and failing miserably.

“What a pompous twat...” Megan casually remarked which made everyone else in the room smirk in agreement.

“It was with a heavy heart and great regret that this afternoon I signed arrest warrants for two of this country's most senior officers of the law which were duly prosecuted” Lord Forsyth announced with false regret “Following the receipt of this dossier of intelligence and evidence” he brandished an official looking folder in the air with a ISA agency logo emblazoned upon its front cover “I had no choice but to order the immediate detention for questioning of National Security & Police Service Administrator General Edward Regent and his wife, Divisional Chief Superintendent Tracy Caverner on charges of being involved in a high level plot to assassinate the Prime Minister of this country, other key notable figures and collusion with certain terrorist suspects including an Amber McNeil, an activist within the terrorist division of a highly dangerous Irish Republican splinter group who we believe is responsible for the car bomb that killed Hugo Davidson, the Prime Minister in Cannon Street yesterday evening.”

“What kind of babbling bullshit is this?” Amber exclaimed in disbelief as Martin put his arms around her to show his undying support for her.

“What is this guy on?” Hendrickson asked, equally amazed.

“Not this planet, that much is for certain” Collins quickly quipped in response.

“Needless to say these developments have resulted in a vacuum in the justice and law enforcement service of this great nation that I so humbly serve” Lord Forsyth continued to ramble on as the press looked on with a mixture of disbelief and boredom apparent on their faces “Therefore in order to ensure stability and the continued determination to fight the war on terror, crime and disorder I have exercised emergency powers and am placing both MI5 and the National Security & Police Service, its personnel, resources and operations under the direct command of Sir John Haliford and his International Security Agency organisation.”

“Well, there goes the neighbourhood” Collins muttered under his breath, an echo that was being shared across the country by anyone watching that press conference at that point.

“At this point I would like to thank my colleague and friend Sir John for his undying devotion to the difficult task that he has faced in the last couple of days” Lord Forsyth confirmed, making a very public show of shaking Haliford's hand in the full glare of the press attention “It has not been an easy task dealing with these shocking and tragic events but he has held firm and has the determination to get the job done.”

“Thank you Prime Minister” Haliford responded, beaming a smile in the glory and undeserved praise that was being heaped upon him “At this time I ask the public for calm, I also ask for their support and their help as there are still dangerous people, collusionists, suspects, traitors who continue to evade our forces and we need your help to find them and bring them to the justice the people demand and deserve.”

“In the next few minutes we will be issuing a dossier of evidence to the press and on our website” Haliford then went on to announce which caused Hendrickson to extend his arm towards Lieutenant Smitham and click his fingers, the request to obtain that data not requiring any further words “It contains damning evidence against the former senior officers at the head of the Security Services, details of intensely interwoven corruption from top to bottom of the justice and law enforcement system and also pictures and what information we have on those still at large.”

“Well that is me off the streets until further notice” Amber reluctantly remarked “Haliford is splashing my mug shot all over the place by the looks of it.”

“In taking command of this nation's crime fighting forces, I make this humble promise” Haliford continued like an over enthusiastic General prior to a battle “I am the iron fist in the velvet glove” he promised, brandishing his fist in the air to theatrically emphasise the point “No more limits, no more rules, the gloves are off and I hereby serve notice to those that would oppose us, oppose justice that I will clamp down on them hard, no one will hear you scream for mercy. The time for action is now, so let's get to work.”

“Turn it off” Collins ordered whereupon Amber gratefully switched off the television.

“Well as you can see, we are getting more and more information on this breaking story all the time” the main news presenter confirmed to the audience when a few moments later the BBC News coverage returned to the studio “For the latest reaction we turn to our Security Correspondent Adam Jenkins.”

“Good evening” the smartly attired correspondent responded, having crept into the studio off camera to appear magically in the seat that had also managed to appear out of thin air just across the desk from the main presenter.

“You have been covering the life and times of the Security & Police Service for the last twenty years and have interviewed many of the major players involved on countless occasions” the presenter reminded the audience “Your initial reactions to these bewildering developments of the last half hour?”

“Well literally as we speak I have been handed a copy of the ISA Agency's evidence and suspects file” Jenkins confirmed as he leafed through the extensive document on

the desk in front of him with an obvious look of utter disbelief “Quite frankly this has got the foul stench of 'Dodgy Dossier' all over it, I mean, come on. The Commander and Tracy Caverner? Traitors? Colluding with terrorists? Complete and utter bollocks of the first water, pardon my language.”

“Sort of reaction I expected to be honest” Haliford remarked to Harcourt as they made their way in his official car from Downing Street towards New Scotland Yard whereupon the henchman leaned forward and turned off the small television in the back of the armoured ministerial escort car “But don't worry, the Commander won't be in any position to do anything about it for a very long time, if at all.”

“I had a call from our people at Camp Foxtrot a few minutes ago Sir” Harcourt confirmed “The new facility is ready, we can move the key prisoners there first thing in the morning.”

“Excellent” Haliford responded as he poured himself a self congratulatory drink “Once we have them in the detention centre, no one will hear them scream and you and Mr Stevens will be free to do with them what you wish.”

“I am looking forward to that” Harcourt responded with a very prominent and evil grin of expectation.

“Just one condition my angst laden friend” Haliford insisted “Make sure when you execute Tracy Caverner it is slow and painful and that the Commander has a front row seat, I want him broken and smashed mentally as well as physically before the end, oh and don't forget to send me a copy of the tape, I want to be able to enjoy the moment for ever more.”

“What about that Irish bitch?” Stevens asked from the front passenger seat.

“Don't worry” Haliford confirmed “She will turn up sooner or later and when that happens” he drew the six shot revolver he had taken from the Commander earlier that day and checked it “I will take care of her, personally.”

“You know you would think for a multi million dollar operation they could at least send out for some decent coffee” Howell remarked with disdain as he attempted to drink the rather poor quality coffee that had been provided.

“Oh strewth...” Sir Richard screwed up his face at the bitter drink he had also just been trying “And to think I thought the stuff they served in the MI5 coffee machine broke the Geneva Convention.”

“Ah, you and I, we are old school” Howell defiantly reassured his colleague “We have been through worse and survived, now those two on the other hand I am worried about” he looked across through the bars towards the adjacent cell where the Commander was looking at Tracy who was asleep across his lap, her head resting on his right arm as he caressed her face ever so gently.

“As long as those two are alive and together we still have a chance my old friend” Sir Richard reassured him “However if that crackpot Haliford manages to get rid of them, then we should start worrying.”

“Oh hello love” Tracy responded as she awoke, opening her eyes slowly to see her husband looking down at her, his face full of expressions of concern and love in equal measure.

“Hello Tracy” the Commander softly responded “Stay there, you need the rest” he then insisted as she was about to sit upright but in deference to him then chose to remain resting in his arms.

“You look like you are lost in thought” Tracy remarked “Tenner for them?”

“That inflation really is getting out of hand” the Commander responded.

“The Prime Minister is dead, the security of the nation is in the hands of lunatics and power hungry mad men who are being secretly funded by the Russian Mafia and generally speaking the entire country is being packed off to hell first class, special delivery in a hand cart so I figure let's push the boat out” Tracy neatly summarised.

“I was thinking about you actually” the Commander admitted.

“That was going to be my first guess” Tracy agreed.

“I was thinking that for the first eleven years of my life I was just an ordinary kid from the east end who through courage or stupidity, I still am not sure which to this day got himself killed and reborn” the Commander explained “Then from that day onwards the only thing that mattered to me was my job, this” he pulled at the Security Service crest on the front of his uniform tunic “Serving the public, putting their needs first. It was all I had, this job.”

“You did mention that workaholics run in your family” Tracy reminded him to which he merely nodded in admission.

“I was the one that always volunteered for extra shifts, overtime, swapping my shorter turns for other officer's longer ones so they could spend more time at home with their families as I didn't have one” the Commander continued to explain “I eat all the wrong things and never looked after myself because as someone pointed out to me one day many years ago, I never had anyone in my life to look after myself for.”

“And then one day I walk into your office” Tracy responded.

“Strangest feeling in my entire life at that moment” the Commander frankly admitted “For the first time in my life, I suddenly found I cared about someone and I knew I would give everything up for her.”

“Hang on a minute” Tracy backtracked a bit at this point “If I read you correctly, are you saying that I am the only person in your entire life you have ever loved?”

“Yes...” the Commander softly admitted.

“Blimey...” Tracy responded.

“I want you to know that for you I would give up everything” the Commander told her, looking directly into Tracy's eyes “This job, my position, even my soul and my life for you.”

“So it is just thee and me against the world then” Tracy confirmed “Oh and Jack of course.”

“I am sure wherever Jack is right now, he is keeping his head down some place well out of harms way” the Commander agreed.

“Oh Jack, what the hell are you doing?” the young lad asked himself as he emerged from the top of the escalators that led from the District & Circle Line platforms into the sub level ticket hall of Westminster Underground Station and look around the bustling surroundings, taking particular note of the group of armed ISA guards on duty near the ticket barriers in the distance.

Not wanting to draw any attention to himself, Jack merely took a deep intake of breath before proceeding towards the ticket barriers, merging within the crowds of people in the midst of the evening rush.

Managing to pass through the ticket barriers without incident or hindrance, Jack thought he had managed to get out of the station undetected, ascending the steps up to street level in the shadow of Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament when he suddenly realised someone had stepped up behind him.

“Good evening Mr Thornton, I have been expecting you” came a voice from behind him causing Jack to look up in the air with a frustrated expression before turning around where to his relief he found Cassini standing there.

“Oh thank God” Jack exclaimed “For a moment there I thought I was in the proverbial brown smelly stuff.”

“We will be if we don't get out of here pretty sharpish” Cassini confirmed “Haliford has his boys all over the place and if we hang about too long we really will be in for it.”

“I'm heading to Scotland Yard” Jack explained as they proceeded to walk down the side of Parliament Square heading in the general direction of St James Park “I could use a bit of help” he admitted.

“Well my guys have Lord Forsyth and his brown shirts pretty much buttoned up at the moment” Cassini confirmed “Lead on.”

A few minutes later, the ISA guard on the back door to New Scotland Yard off of Victoria Street moved away from his post for a few moments to snatch a crafty cigarette which was Jack's cue to sneak in.

As the guard lit his cigarette, Cassini walked past him and faked a trip on the pavement, stumbling momentarily which took the guards attention away from the door as Jack quickly swiped his personal identity card in the slot reader and gained admittance.

By the time Cassini had moved on, the guard turned back towards the door a split second after it had closed again, Jack now being safely inside and he none the wiser.

Being early evening and with most of the daytime civilian staff already having gone home, Jack had no difficulty sneaking up by the rear fire exit stairs of the building to the top floor where he nervously opened the fire exit door just a small amount in order to look up and down the main command corridor, ducking back momentarily as someone passed by.

Seeing his chance he quickly slipped into the corridor and moved swiftly down to Fuller's office where he managed to get in easily and secure the door behind him.

Tentatively Jack switched on the computer terminal with its three separate monitors and watched for a few moments as it started up before reaching a complicated looking log on screen that was way beyond the normal you would expect to find on any ordinary computer.

“Level One Security Access Clearance Required” a computerised voice duly announced whereupon Jack reached forward and pulled the microphone that was on the desk forward.

“User name” the computer then requested.

“Jack Five One Zero” Jack duly confirmed, looking around him slightly nervously hoping that he was not being overhead and as a result discovered.

“Password” came the next request.

“Sigma Nine Five Seven” Jack then responded.

“Pass phrase for Voice Recognition authorisation” the computer finally asked which made Jack swallow hesitantly before responding.

“I love Megan” he declared “just don't tell anyone all right? Especially her” he then added with a decidedly embarrassed look.

“Authorisation granted” the computer confirmed as the log on screen duly disappeared and access was granted to the desktop screen.

“One video message waiting” the computer then announced “Do you wish to play message?”

“Might as well” Jack admitted whereupon he confirmed his decision by using the mouse to click on the 'OK' button on the screen.

“Hello Jack” came the voice of Fuller as he appeared on the screen “I am sending this recorded message into the system to activate only on your authorisation because I figure sooner or later you will try and access the computer somewhere but I don't have much time” he confirmed as the fuzzy video showed him looking nervously around “so make sure you forward this and the data files attached to wherever our guys are gathered.”

Jack duly checked the system for the files he had been sent to find to discover they were there already waiting for him as Fuller had long anticipated this move.

“I am being held by Sir John Haliford and his International Security Agency morons at their head office which I think is somewhere over towards Heathrow judging by the aircraft I keep hearing” Fuller went on to explain his predicament “They are holding me under threat of harming Jennifer and forcing me to do some work for them but I have managed to override their security to get this message to you.”

“Although I cannot confirm anything visually” Fuller continued “From what I have heard from the whispers around here, they have taken the Commander, Tracy, Sir Richard Crowthorne, David Howell and a number of others into custody, the idea being to wipe out the top levels of control at the Security Service and MI5 so that Haliford and his buddies can roll on in, in effect a sort of hostile takeover but all strictly cloak and dagger like.”

“I can also confirm that Lieutenant Barrett has been executed” he then confirmed with a resigned look of sadness “Haliford pulled the trigger himself, he is a real bastard that guy but although he thinks he is in charge and enjoying his ego trip, it's that Russian guy Cruschov and the America senator McCallister who are really running the show so I suggest we start worrying a lot.”

“Already way ahead of you” Jack grimly confirmed as he reached into the desk drawer and extracted a biscuit from the packet that was secreted there and proceeded to munch on it.

“They are using the threat to kill Jennifer to force me into doing things with the computer and communications networks across all agencies and other areas that they are into” Fuller went on to explain, “Ironically this has given me the chance while they have not been looking to have a poke around and see what is going on behind the bluff and bluster as the Commander would put it.”

At that point in the recorded message Fuller went silent and could be seen to look around his surroundings nervously for a few moments as if he had heard someone coming before he leant closer to the camera.

“Somewhere in all this is a construction company called Corbiere Specialist Security Construction” Fuller almost whispered as he continued “Their name crops up on some invoices I came across whilst having a rummage through the system. I think they may be owned by McCallister and could be the company that is constructing this ISA mob's facilities so it may be of help.”

“Get this information to the right people quickly” Fuller then quickly went on with urgent insistence “and for God's sake watch your back all right? Got to go, oh don't forget the big red 'X'” he then declared whereupon the recording abruptly stopped.

“Right then...” Jack duly declared as he proceeded to attach the message he had just viewed to the file folder that contained the information that he needed.

A few clicks of the mouse later and the data was on its way whereupon Jack looked across to the lower right hand side of the screen where there was a bright red 'X' icon just as Fuller had mentioned. Although he did not know precisely what it did, he had a fairly good idea and so tentatively clicked on it.

“That's all folks...!” the computer suddenly announced in a Bugs Bunny voice whereupon the hard drives sparked and shorted out before the whole assembly went dead.

“Thank you and goodnight” Jack wryly responded before pulling back from the desk and returned to the door where he cautiously looked out into the corridor outside to see if the coast was clear.

The corridor outside appeared empty so Jack decided to chance it and make a hasty exit from the premises, making swift progress along the deserted corridor and was about to reach the fire exit stairs when suddenly a door opened behind him and before he could react Hoskins had grabbed him firmly around the neck and lifted him clear of the floor, the barrel of a gun firmly pointed at his head.

“I think young man you will find that this was a very bad idea” Hoskins calmly informed him.

“You don't say” Jack remarked with a resigned look as he was unceremoniously manhandled away.

“Come in” Haliford called from behind the Commander's desk in his office as he responded to an urgent knock at the door whereupon immediately Hoskins appeared, pushing Jack forwards ahead of him accompanied by two armed guards with guns drawn.

“Look what we found lurking around the upper floor Sir” Hoskins informed his boss.

“My, my” Haliford remarked as he removed his reading glasses and relaxed back in the large chair “We must get this place fumigated, there are rodents all over the place.”

“So I can see” Jack remarked with a wry smirk.

“Why don't you...” Haliford began whereupon Hoskins promptly threw Jack into a chair “...erm take a seat.”

“What are you doing in my father's seat, sitting at his desk?” Jack asked.

“Evidently with your adventures today you have not been paying attention to current affairs young man” Haliford responded, sliding across the desk that evening's edition of the Standard newspaper “There is a new force of law and order in charge, the days of your father and his associates is now in the past and I am in charge of all security, policing and justice in this country now.”

“Which psychotic idiot put you in charge?” Jack responded as he read the front page of the paper with little enthusiasm whereupon the intercom on the desk buzzed into life.

“Prime Minister Lord Forsyth on Line Three for you” came the message.

“Forget I asked...” Jack added.

“Ah Prime Minister...” Haliford declared.

“Acting Prime Minister” Jack quietly reminded him which caused the senior man to glower momentarily towards him.

“Yes, yes” Haliford then went on to confirm over the telephone “Everything is now in place, the key players we needed to detain are out of the picture and Mr Altman is about to unleash enough merry hell to keep the Security Service on the ground well and truly occupied for weeks. I am just ironing out a few last minute problems, most of them pretty small, indeed one of them happens to be sitting in my office right now.”

“Give him my regards” Jack mockingly called over which earned him a clip around the ear from Hoskins who was still stood behind him watching over him.

“Yes Sir, we are ready to move them to our new facility first thing in the morning” Haliford then confirmed over the telephone “Then we rid ourselves of that particular little headache once and for all, oh speaking of which, I have to go now Sir, good night.”

“I take it Sir we are about to unleash hell?” Hoskins asked.

“Indeed we are” Haliford confirmed with smug over confidence practically oozing from him “You may inform our Welsh friend and his violence loving associates that it is time for them to go and have some fun, a lot of it in fact.”

“What about this little problem?” Hoskins indicated Jack who merely looked up in response.

“If I am in your way lads...?” Jack responded.

“Well being a bit of sentimentalist” Haliford responded “I think it is time for a proper family reunion, ironic really.”

“Oh and why is that?” Jack asked out of curiosity.

“Because if my team three years ago had completed the job according to my instructions” Haliford calmly explained with an evil smirk “You would have been dead along with your natural father and the rest of your family and I would not be stuck here dealing with you and this tedious conversation.”

“Sorry for being alive” Jack mocked “Life is kind of inconvenient like that sometimes isn't it?”

“Indeed it is” Haliford agreed “but at least by this time tomorrow I will be able to relax in this chair safe in the knowledge that you and your meddling foster parents will have been safely put out of our collective miseries” he informed him menacingly “Take him away” he then casually dismissed.

“Be seeing you” Jack responded as Hoskins grabbed him roughly and hauled him up off the chair before dragging him from the room.

“Not if I have anything to say about it you won't” Haliford responded with an evil smirk.

“My God, it's all here” Smitham exclaimed as a long list of files streamed across the screen in front of him as Hendrickson, Amber and Martin all looked over his shoulder at the information cascade that had been sent over minutes earlier by Jack.

“Looks like we have accounts, video files, records, building plans, the works” Amber remarked as she recognised some of the file names that were scrolling across the screen.

“Err guys” Collins called with a worried look as he came into the room having just finished a conversation on his mobile phone “Commander Cassini just confirmed that Jack has been captured.”

“Let's hope his idea works” Hendrickson remarked “Brave kid.”

“What do we tell Megan?” Amber asked, looking through into the adjacent room where she was visible sitting at the large conference table, unaware of this development.

“To be honest, I have no idea” Collins was forced to admit “Jack specifically asked me not to tell her he was deliberately walking into the trap but we have to tell her something.”

“Leave it to me” Amber responded “This is a woman's job” she declared before leaving the room to give the young girl the bad news in the best way she could.

“Meantime” Collins then declared “we need to come up with a plan to rescue Tracy, the Commander and the others ready to go at a moments notice.”

“Without a starting point, ending point, numbers involved etcetera, we don't have much to go on Sir” Hendrickson warned “and even if we did, we have bugger all resources, manpower and weaponry available.”

“Well we have a couple of Bob's ARU teams dotted about the City who we can call on but you are right” Collins was forced to agree “If we are to pull this off, we are going to need some serious help, not to mention a few miracles as well.”

“I wonder how much Jack realises how much his girl loves him?” Amber wondered as she came back into the room and cast a look back to where they could all see Megan looking blankly out into space, a tear running down her face despite her best efforts to hide it.

“Well I think we can safely say there will be a lot of upset and worried relatives and friends out there tonight and more before this is all over” Collins admitted but then had to step back as his mobile telephone rang and he withdrew to answer it.

“Are you all right love?” Amber asked Martin as she sat back down at the table alongside him and they put their arms around each other for comfort.

“I was just wondering how on earth I am going to explain where I have been and what I have been doing for the last few days to my boss” Martin admitted with a wry chuckle “I just popped out for a few days to rescue my long lost Irish girlfriend from the clutches of a bunch of gun toting loonies in the depths of the Welsh countryside who since then have been the orchestral parts in a political coup to take over the entire security and justice system in the United Kingdom, but don't worry Guv, I will be back on Monday.”

“Yeah” Amber admitted with a giggle “That should just about cover it, I'll even put in a good word for you if you like.”

“Thanks love” Martin replied whereupon they kissed.

“Eyes down for a full house sports fans” Collins declared as he returned to the table “Looks like the game is afoot, they are moving the prisoners including Tracy and the Commander in a convoy scheduled to leave the ISA Headquarters building first thing in the morning” Collins declared as he entered the conference room.

“Are you sure?” Commander Hendrickson asked.

"Let's just say that this information comes from a very reliable source" Collins went on to explain "Not everyone in Haliford's band wagon collective dances to his tune."

"I bet he likes to think so though" Amber suggested with a wry smile "Sometimes the weakest chink in the armour of those in charge are their self belief that they really are in total charge of everything and everyone under their command."

"This could be the opportunity we have been waiting for" Hendrickson suggested "Does your well informed contact have any ideas of what sort of guards and consist we are looking at?"

"He suggests we are looking at approximately twenty detainees, ten plus vehicles and a hell of a lot of mean bastards with guns" Collins confirmed "Anyone know where we can rustle up an army?"

"Get me a secure mobile, thirty minutes and a dip in the collective contact books of Sir Richard and your good self and I will see what I can do" Amber responded with a hint of mystery.

"Well there is this one I was given by Sir Richard before I set out to find you the other day" Martin retrieved the mobile telephone from his coat pocket, blew some dust off of it and then handed it across.

"Alan, I love you" Amber declared "Time to start making some calls."

"In the meantime we need to come up with a plan" Collins declared whereupon he looked around the room as Amber and Martin withdrew to one side to make calls "Someone get me a map" he then declared.

"Roger, it's Amber McWilliam" Amber called over the telephone as soon as her call was answered "Apologies for the lateness of the hour old mate but I need to call in some favours, well all of them actually" she admitted "I need shooters, wheels, muscle and anything else useful you may have in your garden shed and I need it in the next two hours."

"Hello Simon" Jack called as he was escorted along a dark and rather foreboding looking corridor where he was met by Simon Fuller coming the other way, also under the watchful escort of three armed ISA guards.

"Evening Jack" Simon duly responded as they met and it became clear that they were both being taken to the same destination "You got my message then?"

"Oh yes" Jack duly confirmed "Unfortunately I was on my way out when Hoskins and his brain trust showed up and I got nabbed."

"One sympathises" Fuller admitted as they reached the entrance to the detention area and were roughly shoved inside.

"Jack?" Tracy asked as she saw the little lad come in through the door whereupon the cell door was unlocked and he was unceremoniously thrown inside "What happened to you?"

"I got caught" Jack rather embarrassingly admitted as the cell door was slammed shut behind him "Mind you there is method in the madness" he discreetly showed Tracy and the Commander the tracking device secreted beneath his wrist watch.

"There is indeed" the Commander duly agreed with a smirk that was also reflected by Tracy's equally happy reaction.

"So what have we missed?" Tracy asked.

"You mean apart from me?" Fuller asked as he was equally unceremoniously thrown into the adjacent cell with Sir Richard and Howell.

"Where the hell have you been?" the Commander asked.

"Helping Haliford and his moron squad" Fuller apologetically admitted "Under duress I might add, they are threatening Jennifer by way of a pretty damn convincing bargaining chip."

"Any word on her condition?" the Commander asked through the bars that separated the cells.

"Well whilst I was 'helping' out Haliford's mob" Fuller explained "I took the opportunity to do some discreet eavesdropping on their communications and the reports that were coming in from the guys guarding her were that she was stable yet still unconscious."

"She's all right" Tracy reassured Fuller with a warm smile, "I can feel it, something to do with being an identical twin I guess."

"I will tell you something else" Fuller continued "These guys are seriously well equipped and funded."

"I'd gathered as much" the Commander was forced to admit "Getting ourselves and the rest of us out of this mess is going to be a very up hill task."

"We will find a way out of this" Tracy tried to reassure everyone.

"As a betting man, I would not want to wager too much on that" Sir Richard remarked which resulted in Tracy giving him one of her trademark Paddington Bear style hard stares.

"Thanks for that overwhelming show of support Dickie" the Commander cut in.

"Sorry" Sir Richard responded "Born pessimist you see, goes with the territory."

"Still" Fuller continued with a wry smile on his face "At least the baby is all right."

“I’m sorry?” Tracy, the Commander and Sir Richard all responded at once in stunned surprise.

“Jennifer is pregnant” Fuller went on to explain “We are going to have a baby!”

“Pregnant?” the Commander asked with amazement “Blimey, how did that happen?”

“Don’t tell me you want me to explain the birds and the bees to you again?” Jack asked with a wry smile which helped enlighten the mood.

“Very funny...” the Commander responded “I know where babies come from thank you, it is just I always assumed Jennifer was like Tracy and not able to have kids.”

“Oh my sister can” Tracy explained “It’s just a somewhat remote chance thereof whereas with me it’s no chance at all.”

“I hate to point this out ladies and gentlemen” Howell remarked as he sat up wearily on the bench in the cell he was sharing with Sir Richard and Fuller “but it is now gone midnight and I suggest if we are to be in any fit shape to fight the good fight tomorrow, assuming we get the chance that is, then we really ought to try and get some sleep.”

“Good idea” Tracy agreed as she rested back up against the Commander and they snuggled up together.

As the others tried to get some rest, Jack reached inside his pocket and pulled out a photograph of Megan that he always carried with him and looked at it with a worried look readily apparent.

“I wonder what she is thinking about right now?” Jack wondered out loud.

“She’ll be all right” Fuller reassured the young lad, “I just hope my girl is all right too” he admitted with obvious intense worry.

There is always a sense of confusion and disorientation whenever someone awakes to find themselves in a strange place. An almost out of body sense where that individual questions for the first few waking moments if their unfamiliar surroundings are the results of a dream or an unaccustomed and unexpected reality.

For Jennifer Caverner, this was very much one of those moments as she opened her eyes for the first time in days with a sudden start to find herself looking up a clinically white ceiling and being surrounded by beeping and whirring machinery.

“What the hell...” she mouthed silently as her consciousness and senses slowly returned and she looked around the single bed hospital room in which she found herself all alone.

Her confusion was understandable as her last memory that she could recall was driving up to the front door of Number Ten Downing Street, as is common with traumatic events, all memory of what happened after she had left there with the Prime Minister up to the point of the explosion having been blanked out.

"Hello?" Jennifer weakly called out when she realised that she was unable to easily get up off of the bed at which point the extent of some of her injuries began to become apparent to her.

At that point the door opened and a young man looked around the edge of it into the room with a somewhat surprised look on his face.

"Well don't just stand there looking all surprised" Jennifer called from the bed as she tried unwisely to at least sit up "Find me someone who knows what the hell is going on around here."

"That could take a while" the young man admitted as he tentatively entered the room whereupon Jennifer could see that he was a Security Service Officer however she was unable to identify the configuration of his uniform as it had been modified with elements of the new ISA organisation.

"Start of with where the hell am I" Jennifer instructed as with his help she managed to sit upright "Make your way through via what the hell happened and then get to where the hell is my husband or indeed anyone else I recognise for that matter."

"Like I said" the man openly confirmed "That could take a while."

"And what the hell happened here?" Jennifer asked with a look of shock as she went to lower her legs to the floor to sit on the edge of the bed only to then realise that one of them was for some reason not reaching the ground.

Looking down with a mix of shock and disbelief, Jennifer realised for the first time that she had lost the lower part of her right leg.

"What do you remember Ma'am?" the officer asked.

"Arriving at Downing Street to pick up the Prime Minister" Jennifer confirmed "I take it this" she asked, indicating her heavily bandaged but still obviously shortened leg "has something to do with it?"

"Your car was ambushed by some sort of terrorists" the officer confirmed "During the confrontation in Cannon Street, a bomb was attached to the underside which a few moments later exploded. The worst of the explosion went through the back of the car killing the Prime Minister instantly whilst you received burns and the leg injury."

"Looks like my ballet dancing days are over" Jennifer admitted, trying to make light of the physical situation she now found herself in "So where is everyone then?" she asked.

"Most of the senior staff of the Security Service, MI5 and associated agencies have been placed under permanent arrest courtesy of Sir John Haliford and the International Security Agency" the officer explained as he produced his identification "Under Acting Prime Minister Lord Forsyth..."

"Oh no, not that grease ball..." Jennifer commented with a look of disgust.

"That's the chap" the officer confirmed as he passed across his joint ISA/Security Service identification to Jennifer to inspect "The Security Service is now under the jurisdiction of the ISA and we are required to toe the party line with anyone who fails to do so being very discreetly vanished if you know what I mean."

"Sounds like we are having a few problems around here officer..." she looked at the identification in her hand "...Elliot. So where do your loyalties lie?" she asked.

"You can trust me Ma'am" Elliot confirmed as he took back the identification and opened part of it to reveal a different identity beneath which revealed him to also be a member of the specialist 'X-Ray Division' of the Security Service.

"I can indeed" Jennifer duly agreed "So tell me, what are your orders?"

"From our new paymasters at the ISA" Elliot admitted "Watch over you and to execute you if you decide to make a recovery and then go and do anything that threatens their cosy existence in their ivory towers" he confirmed "In my capacity as an honoured member of X-Ray Division however, my mission is to guard over you and provide any and all assistance as required, I come with the compliments of David Collins and your husband" he explained.

"They are under arrest as well?" Jennifer asked, understandably concerned.

"David Collins is coordinating what few resources we have left from King William Street" Elliot confirmed "At the moment it is the only place with secure communications which Haliford and his ISA loonies either don't control or know about, your husband however I regret to inform is currently missing although the working theory is that the ISA have him along with the Administrator General, your twin sister and others."

"So how the hell did Forsyth worm his way into the centre seat at Downing Street?" Jennifer asked, still in a bit of disbelief "The Parliamentary Ombudsman and the Procedures Committee would not touch him with a bargepole surely?"

"The only other candidate for the position was the Home Secretary" Elliot explained "He however fell 'mysteriously' ill at the airport, poisoned tipped umbrellas being mentioned if you can believe it."

"Given what I have learnt in the last few minutes" Jennifer admitted "I am probably now in a position to believe anything."

"Dead?" she asked, fearing the worst.

"He is in an induced comatose state two doors down the corridor" Elliot confirmed quietly "The medical staff have been instructed to make sure he stays that way, direct orders from Forsyth himself."

"In which case I believe it is time you called into your new superiors and reported my untimely demise from my injuries" Jennifer suggested "and whilst you are doing that, I am going to pop in and see my new next door neighbour."

"I'll get a chair" Elliot confirmed.

"I'll tell you something" Jennifer remarked as Elliot brought a wheelchair over and she rather unsteadily lowered herself into it "I am going to be hopping mad when I catch up with whoever is responsible for this mess, err literally."

"Echo Control from Lima Charlie Seven One Nine India" Elliot called into his radio as he helped push Jennifer's wheelchair towards the door.

"Echo Control receiving" came the very formal sounding voice a few moments later.

"Advise Echo One that Divisional Commander Jennifer Caverner died of her injuries about ten minutes ago" Elliot duly advised "I am standing down the sentry guard as a result."

"All received, thank you, out" the officer at the other end of the conversation confirmed.

"Reports of my demise have been greatly exaggerated" Jennifer mused as in some pain which she was trying with not a great deal of success to hide, she made her way with Elliot's assistance out into the corridor of the secure section of the hospital.

"Don't worry" Elliot reassured her as Jennifer saw there was a guard on duty in the corridor "He's is one of the family."

"Why do I get the distinct impression that there are far more vipers in Sir John Haliford's nest than he may think" Jennifer mused.

"Gives him a nice false sense of security" Elliot confirmed "There are a lot more of us loyal to the Service than he may think and for the moment that may be the only ace still up our sleeve" he remarked as they reached the door of another single bed ward whereupon he opened it and wheeled Jennifer inside.

"Wake him up" Jennifer requested of the doctor who was in the room monitoring the Home Secretary's condition.

"What are you doing here?" the doctor asked, surprised somewhat to see his other patient there in the room with him.

"I'm not here" Jennifer quickly replied "I died about ten minutes ago, check with your boss if you don't believe me."

"I am under strict orders to keep him sedated and in an induced comatose state until further notice" the doctor explained.

"And I am ordering you to bring him around" Jennifer reiterated, brandishing a very burnt, battered and generally distressed looking warrant card and badge "Oh..." she then remarked when she realised the state it was in.

"I could lose my job over this" the doctor warned with obvious apprehension.

"And right now people out there are losing their lives" Jennifer responded almost in protest "In case you hadn't noticed, the world is being sold down the river in a hand cart, first class so you might want to consider the bigger picture here."

"All right..." the doctor reluctantly agreed after a brief pause to consider his position whereupon he reached for a medicinal bottle and a syringe that was on a tray atop a trolley adjacent to the bed.

"Just try not to kill him off" Jennifer remarked as she watched the doctor draw the fluid from the bottle into the syringe before pressing it until a drop emerged from the end of the needle "I have had enough bad news for one day and I have only been conscious for about twenty minutes."

All three of them watched nervously for a minute or two once the doctor had administered the injection before the Home Secretary began to show signs of coming around.

"Home Secretary?" Jennifer called, leaning forward so that she could see the man's face closely, looking for any positive signs of life.

"Oh my head..." the Home Secretary mumbled quietly as he began to stir slightly much to the relief of those present.

"Welcome back to the land of the almost living" Jennifer declared, still wincing in pain despite the painkillers she had taken a short time earlier "Do you know where you are Sir?"

"Up shit creek without a paddle I expect" the Home Secretary quietly admitted as he slowly opened his eyes and took a look around his unaccustomed surroundings.

"Sums it up rather nicely I reckon" Elliott agreed.

"What happened?" the Home Secretary asked.

"To put it rather non technically" Jennifer responded frankly "You were nobbled by the opposition, namely Lord Forsyth and his little gang of power hungry lunatics."

"Where am I?" he asked.

"Secure unit of Charing Cross Hospital" Elliott confirmed "Out of harms way as Sir John Haliford would like to think."

“I see you are back on your feet then” the Home Secretary remarked, seeing Jennifer clearly for the first time now that his eyesight had cleared sufficiently.

“Feet...” Jennifer looked down at her legs and the extremely heavy bandaging that was covering the end of her right leg where her foot had been amputated at the ankle “Err no, foot singular yes.”

“Oh...” the Home Secretary realised as he looked over the edge of the hospital bed and saw the damage “Sorry.”

“To say I am hopping mad about it would be in extremely poor taste but rather appropriate” Jennifer wryly remarked “Always look on the bright side of life, my mother always says.”

“So where are we then?” the Home Secretary asked.

“See previous remarks about proverbial waterways and lack of propulsion equipment” Jennifer reminded him “Elliott?” she called over to the young officer “Fill him in whilst I down another truckload of painkillers as these ones are starting to wear off alarmingly fast.”

“The Government is now under the control of Lord Forsyth” Elliott began to explain.

“We are all doomed...” the Home Secretary remarked with a depressed sigh.

“He has placed responsibility for all domestic security, intelligence and counter terrorism in the hands of the Independent Security Agency and subsequently authorised Sir John Haliford to take command of the Security Service itself, placing the Commander, Divisional Commander Caverner and several notable others under arrest” Elliott continued “The only potential opposition to Lord Forsyth forming a new administration was you, taken care of with a poison tipped umbrella, and Lord Hainault.”

“Poison tipped umbrella?” the Home Secretary asked with a somewhat surprised look “Classy.”

“The question is what does Lord Forsyth have on Lord Hainault to persuade him to give him the proverbial keys to the castle” Jennifer remarked as she rejoined them.

“Lord Hainault is one of the most incorruptible and honourable men I have ever had the pleasure to meet” the Home Secretary responded “I can not and will not subscribe to any theory that he has been corrupted in any way.”

“So whatever hold they have over him must be a real doozey” Jennifer agreed “We need to get to him and find out what the hell is going on but first we need to make contact with X-Ray Control.”

“Try this” Elliott responded as he produced a secure mobile telephone from a hidden compartment in his jacket and passed it across to her “Courtesy of Sir Richard Crowthorne.”

“Thought I recognised the style” Jennifer remarked with a wry smile as she took the telephone and using a code know only to herself and a few select others, managed to unlock it before simply dialling a single digit to make a call.

“Do we have a plan?” the Home Secretary asked “because I will sign up to anything that wipes the smile off of that smug git Forsyth's mush.”

“Maybe” Jennifer admitted as her call was connected “X-Ray Control, this is X-Ray Echo” she declared “Pardon my directness but what the hell is going on around here?” she asked.

“Jennifer?” Collins called over the link having frantically run into to the communications room at King William Street as soon as Smitham had realised who was calling and shouted it across the complex “I am sure I have a report lying around here somewhere on a post it note that says you died twenty minutes ago.”

“Reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated” Jennifer wryly responded “You know I have always wanted to say that!” she added with a chuckle which helped distract her from the constant pain she was still in despite the painkillers.

“Are you in any fit state to help us?” Collins asked “Only we have a bit of a crisis on...”

“That's putting it mildly” Hendrickson was heard to remark in the background.

“...and we could use someone from the higher levels of the Security Service out there in the big wide world who isn't corrupted or locked up by Haliford and his lunatics” Collins explained.

“Well I won't be walking anywhere” Jennifer admitted as she looked down at her legs “and I am a bit battle scarred and bandaged up to the nines but if I can rustle up some transport with my new friend here then I may be able to help.”

“We've got intelligence that the ISA are going to move our people they have detained to a new location sometime early tomorrow morning” Collins continued “Your husband is believed to be among them.”

“I am guessing they won't be doing this discreetly with minimum personnel” Jennifer summarised.

“Armed escorts, gun toting guards and some trigger happy thugs thrown in for good measure” Collins duly confirmed “Haliford has an unlimited funding source of dubious origins and he has brought in the best muscle he can buy.”

“What about the Security Service and our own people?” Jennifer asked.

“Haliford has got them tied up in knots” Hendrickson confirmed as he brought his assessment of the ongoing situation to her attention “Add to that the fact he has secreted sympathisers to his lot within the service and he seems to have ears everywhere, we are almost powerless.”

“And another thing” Collins returned to the conversation “The number of emergency calls to 999 have increased alarmingly in the last hour or so and there are reports of numerous incidents on the streets that are keeping what resources the Security Service still has well and truly stretched.”

“That will be the active disruption forces that were mentioned a few hours ago” Elliott confirmed “There are rumours going around that Haliford has hired some big time organised crime boss to wreak as much criminal havoc as possible to keep the Security Service well and truly occupied for the next few days.”

“That will effectively swamp them” Collins continued “Then Haliford can declare the Service inefficient and if he words it right, with Lord Forsyth's signature, disband it altogether and then nothing will stop them.”

“We need friendly bodies and a plan” Jennifer responded “Any ideas where we can rustle some up?”

“One possibility” Hendrickson suggested “Bob Argent, the head of the ARU Section disappeared at the same time as the Commander which looks like from the YouTube footage that the BBC briefly broadcast yesterday evening he must be holed up with the rest of our people.”

“What about the rest of Bob's team?” Jennifer asked.

“That was where I was heading” Hendrickson continued “We picked up a call from his deputy about two hours ago querying where he was as apparently he was due to meet his guys and a training group from the Specialist Weapons School for an exercise tonight and of course failed to turn up.”

“Where are Bob's team right now?” Jennifer asked as the beginnings of a possible plan began to come together in her mind.

“Battersea Power Station” Hendrickson confirmed “Apparently they have a rendezvous there set for about an hour ago at Stewart's Lane, just around the corner.”

“See if you can get a hold of them and anyone else we can make contact with” Jennifer responded “Tell them to stay put and I will meet them there, then we will take things from there once we find out where we are with this prisoner transfer.”

“I think we can manage that” Collins agreed “Besides we had better do something sooner or later as it is now three in the morning and we are running out of coffee.”

“All right” Jennifer concluded “I'll stay in touch, X-Ray Echo out” she responded before disconnecting the call.

“We are going to need some transport” Elliott suggested.

“Agreed” Jennifer duly confirmed “Consider yourself duly appointed as my Deputy for the time being, we will sort out the overtime later. Meantime find us a back way out of here away from prying eyes.”

“Yes Ma'am” Elliott agreed.

“And while you are about it, rustle me up a uniform, a truck load of painkillers, a gun and a pair of...” Jennifer paused as she remembered the state of her right leg and looked down “...err a left shoe.”

“Back in five minutes” Elliott confirmed before swiftly departing to set about his task.

“He could go far that lad” Jennifer remarked as she returned to the telephone and made a new call.

“Is it really three in the morning?” the Home Secretary asked as he looked around, still somewhat disorientated by it all.

“Search me” Jennifer admitted as she waited slightly impatiently for her call to be answered “At the rate these painkillers are kicking in I doubt I will be able to tell you what day it is in half an hour. Actually now I come to think of it, I don't know anyway.”

“Must be Thursday” the Home Secretary wryly remarked as he laid back on the bed and stared upwards at the uninspiring ceiling as a quote from one of his favourite novels came to him “I could never get the hang of Thursdays.”

“Jim, it's your boss” Jennifer called as soon as she was eventually answered by her colleague from the VIP Protection Division.

“Ma'am?” Deputy Divisional Commander Jim Preston responded as he reached wildly across to the bedside table to switch on the lamp, it taking him three attempts to do so “What the hell is going on boss?” he asked.

“Lunatics on the grass it would appear” Jennifer admitted “Look, sorry for the early wake up call but I need some help and quickly.”

“Name it” Jim duly confirmed now that he came to his senses having been abruptly awoken from deep sleep by the call.

“Have you got one of the company motors to hand?” Jennifer asked.

“Parked in the driveway where it has sat for the last two days” Jim duly confirmed as he got up and went over to the bedroom window where he pulled aside the curtain to look down on the ministerial escort car parked in his driveway, the moonlight reflecting almost ghost like off its immaculately polished metallic black paint finish “No way was I going to let those assholes from the ISA get their grubby paws on it.”

“Knew I could depend on you mate” Jennifer responded with a sigh of relief “Do me a favour, trash the tracker on it then round up as many of our guys you can find that we can implicitly trust and get them to meet me at Battersea Power Station, Stewart's Lane entrance at four thirty” she instructed “then come and pick me up, back door of Charing Cross Hospital in twenty minutes.”

“Quite a few of us are off roster at the moment ever since Haliford's guys took over all responsibility for Ministerial Security yesterday” Jim explained “Should not be too much of a problem to get us together.”

“Good” Jennifer responded “Whatever you do though, don't use any of the regular channels and also if you have a company mobile, I suggest you treat any conversation you have on it as being potentially compromised as from what I am hearing, Haliford and his boys have eyes and ears everywhere.”

“I'll bear it in mind boss” Jim duly confirmed “Is this going to be one of those mornings?” he asked as he began to get some sense of what was to come amid some apprehensive feelings.

“More than likely” Jennifer admitted “I'll see you later” she responded before disconnecting the call.

“What do you want me to do?” the Home Secretary asked as Jennifer grabbed the wheel handles of the wheelchair and swung herself back around.

“Cross your fingers” Jennifer admitted “Anything could happen in the next twenty four hours and if we are successful then we will need you to take command of the Government.”

“And if we are unsuccessful?” the Home Secretary almost was afraid to ask.

“Then get yourself out of the country as fast as possible as all hell is likely to be breaking loose and a lot of people are going to get killed in the crossfire” Jennifer was forced to admit ominously.

“Now that is what I call the chaos theory” McCallister remarked with a proud look as he raised his whiskey glass up to the wall of screens ahead of him which were showing numerous live CCTV feeds from across Greater London and beyond.

“Thanks to the efforts of Mr Altman and his extremely expensive thugs” Haliford confirmed as he joined the oily former American Senator in admiring what was on the screens “we should have that old fashioned dinosaur of a Security Service completely overwhelmed and broken within the next twenty four hours.”

“Leaving us to march on in as the new force of justice, trampling the remains of the old order into the dust” McCallister confirmed with a deep chuckle “and net a very nice tidy profit in the process.”

“Which reminds me” Haliford asked “How are your plans for overthrowing the CIA coming along?” he asked.

“Oh I have something a little more subtle planned for them” McCallister responded with a knowing grin “Destroy them from within is my game, there are so many internal divisions, little chiefs with their own mini empires and agendas that to play one off against the other in a old fashioned power play is devastatingly simple.”

“Quite scary really when you think about it” Haliford remarked as they were joined by Hoskins.

“I must say Sir, those thugs that Altman and that loony Harcourt have hired really know how to kick the shit out of people” Hoskins remarked.

“Indeed” Haliford agreed “Harcourt in particular has turned out to be a particularly useful thug, highly motivated and extremely violent.”

“A couple of his lads just mowed down a traffic warden in the east end about twenty minutes ago” Hoskins confirmed “Didn't even flinch, laughed and then calmly drove off, lamping a passing freelance press photographer in the process.”

“The Security Service control room at New Scotland Yard apparently is going absolutely crazy” Haliford agreed “We have got them chasing their tails all across Greater London and beyond, it's just a matter of time now before the entire structure just implodes.”

“By this time tomorrow we should have chaos and panic in the streets” McCallister confirmed “the citizens clamouring for salvation and justice and then we all we have to do is ride in on our white chargers and save the day.”

“Excellent” Haliford remarked, rubbing his hands with pure glee “Now with the entire Security Service well and truly tied up in knots, it is time we moved out esteemed guests to their final destination.

“We are ready to mount up Sir” Hoskins confirmed as his superiors got up and he joined them in proceeding through to the reception area of the ISA Headquarters with Haliford looking extremely pleased with himself.

“In which case I think it is time I took my leave of our esteemed guests” Haliford duly declared as he, McCallister and Hoskins proceeded to the stairs leading down to the basement detention area “This is going to be a beautiful morning my old friend.”

“It is indeed” McCallister firmly agreed as they arrived in the detention area whereupon the guard on duty escorted them to the cells where Tracy, the Commander and the others were being held.

“Evenings must be interesting in your household” Howell wryly remarked.

“Well let's put it this way, take the other evening for example” Tracy summarised, “of the three of us, see if you can guess which one of us was cooking the supper, which one was playing with Lego and which one was reading the latest crime statistics.”

“Pick pocketing was up three percent last month” Jack admitted.

“You've run out of 1x2 smooth red plates you know” the Commander confirmed.

“See what I mean?” Tracy responded with a wry smile.

“Heads up, eyes down for a full house, the Landlord has arrived to collect the rent” the Commander remarked as they heard the main door into the detention area open ominously whereupon, accompanied by a number of heavily built armed guards, Haliford, McCallister and Hoskins arrived.

"This had better be breakfast in bed" Jack remarked as he looked up from the hard wooden bench on which he had been lying trying to get some sleep since his arrival some hours earlier without much success "The room service in this joint is appalling."

"I think I can safely say it won't be appearing in the next edition of the Good Hotels Guide" Tracy agreed as she and the Commander both proceeded to sit up straight, their arms firmly around each other.

"I felt given your status and position" Haliford explained "Well up until yesterday that is, I thought it only right and proper that I see you off personally."

"How kind" the Commander mockingly responded "Remind me to show you the same courtesy when I kick your sorry arse out of here when this is all over."

"Cute sentiment" Haliford replied, distinctly unimpressed "I just wanted to wish you all bon voyage as you make your way to our new secure detention facility."

"My, my" the Commander responded "You have been splashing the cash around haven't you?"

“Oh, I think you will find it fascinating, you may even grow to like it given enough time” McCallister explained with an obvious element of pride “The first in a new line of detainment camps being set up both here and in the United States where we will permanently house the undesirable without trail or charge, leaving the trash to rot.”

“Indeed” Haliford confirmed “Makes Guantanamo Bay look like Butlins by comparison.”

“Oh I don't know, have you been to Bognor Regis lately?” Sir Richard wryly remarked.

“Haliford, you are a nut you know that?” the Commander remarked “So when all this is over, what does this make you?”

“Supreme allied, err Commander?” Haliford responded with an amused grin “Oh which reminds me, I thought you all ought to know, Jennifer Caverner died of her injuries about an hour ago.”

Sir Richard reacted quickly to grab Fuller and pull him back down to his seat before he angrily did something that would have seen the guards either side of Haliford gun him down on the spot.

“I would like to say I am sorry but quite frankly I am not” Haliford responded with an evil smirk, deliberately stirring it up as much as possible “The less of your irritating family there are still in existence along with your various misguided allies the better as far as I am concerned.”

“Before this is over I will personally run you through with my sword” Tracy angrily responded with an evil stare which the Commander and others did notice slightly unsettled Haliford for a few moments before he regained his overpowering composure.

“What the hell are you doing all this for?” the Commander asked.

“My dear Commander” Haliford responded “I am a loyal subject and I am doing this out of my heart felt loyalty to defend justice, freedom, my country...”

“...your wallet” Sir Richard cheekily cut in.

“Very funny” Haliford tersely replied “At least soon I will have the pleasure in knowing you will all be out of my misery once and for all. Guards, make sure they don't get any sleep” he ordered.

“Be seeing you” the Commander calmly remarked as Haliford, McCallister and Hoskins duly left the cells.

“Mr Hoskins” Haliford called over “With these prisoners secure, please inform all of our people that we will be upping the threat level. That means anyone still at large on lists Alpha and Beta are to be shot on sight, is that understood?”

“Yes Sir” Hoskins agreed before he duly followed his insane bosses up the stairs and out of the room.

“Bloody hell boss, you are a mess if you don't mind me saying so” Jennifer Caverner's deputy Jim Preston remarked as he got out of the car having arrived at the deserted rear entrance of the hospital just as Elliott emerged pushing Jennifer in a wheelchair.

“When all this is over” Jennifer admitted, grimacing in pain as Jim and Elliott helped her from the wheelchair into the front passenger seat of the car “I am going to take a very long vacation.”

“If Sir John Haliford gets his way we could wind up being on permanent vacation by the looks of things” Jim admitted as with Jennifer now safely in the car, he returned to the drivers seat and started the engine whilst Elliott got in the back.

“Over my dead body” Jennifer grimly responded with obvious determination “and I am not dead yet although the day is still young mind.”

“I took the liberty of passing by our office and picking up a few things” Jim informed his superior as he proceeded to drive off whereupon Jennifer duly looked over her shoulder at the plastic container on the back seat alongside Elliott.

“Good thinking” Jennifer responded seeing her spare uniform and a number of weapons tucked away in the container “Heading an operation in a hospital dressing gown would have looked inherently daft.”

“Who is our new friend?” Jim asked looking back in the rear view mirror at Elliott sat in the back.

“This is Lieutenant Elliott” Jennifer explained “He is a friend of the family shall we say.”

“Ah, one of Sir Richard Crowthorne's secret army” Jim realised.

“That's me...” Elliott admitted.

“Speaking of friends” Jim continued “I have arranged for some to meet us at the specified location, they haven't been briefed or anything. They've only been told to turn up there and not to tell anyone.”

“If all this goes wrong” Jennifer warned ominously “Technically we could be done for treason to the state and thrown in the Tower of London.”

“If the whispers that are going around about the ISA boys are correct” Elliott informed them “I think you will find that Haliford and his pals have a far more permanent solution in mind for us should we put our heads above the parapet.”

“That's what I am afraid of” Jennifer admitted.

“You are never afraid of anything boss” Jim reminded her.

“Normally that would be the case” Jennifer agreed “But I fear the proverbial dark forces are out there tonight and we are about to wake them up.”

“In which case we really are in trouble” Jim admitted as he drove on through the deserted streets of the City.

A couple of miles to the south in the shadow of the semi-derelict Battersea Power Station, located on the south bank of the River Thames, an anonymous looking black Ford Transit van was parked by the old gas works entrance.

Inside this inconspicuous looking vehicle were the Deputy Chief of the ARU Division of the Security Service, Commander William Boseman who was sat in the drivers seat looking out of the windscreen as the rain began to start, resulting in a tapping of rain drops on the glass and the thin metal roof of the van that as a result echoed all around the interior.

“I spy with my little eye something beginning with 'R'...” ARU Trainee Lieutenant Michelle Franklin remarked as she gave up checking her weapon for the umpteenth time and joined her superior officer in looking at the dark and now damp scene outside.

“Don't even think about it lass” Boseman wryly responded.

“At least you can play I Spy out the front” one of the eight trainee ARU officers in the back of the van called forwards as if to remind them that they were still there as well “Some of us haven't even got any windows back here.”

“Anyway, the answer is rain” Boseman confirmed.

“Ah Sir” Franklin responded with a mock irritated click of the tongue “You got it.”

“Well it was either that or give up and go back to Hendon where we are more than likely to run into Haliford's ISA thugs” Boseman admitted “All things considered, I think here is actually marginally preferable.”

“Why could we not have had a training simulation in a pub?” Franklin asked “Preferably a well stocked one with a good selection of real ale on tap?”

“Nice idea” Boseman agreed “Thing is though, shooting holes in the abandoned remains of Battersea Gas Works is less likely to wake the neighbours and also means a lot less paperwork.”

“There is that Sir” Franklin agreed “Still, life could be worse I suppose.”

“Indeed” Boseman confirmed “We could have been arrested by those ISA guys like the Commander.”

“Oh, you saw the YouTube footage on the BBC as well then Sir?” Franklin asked.

“Well the BBC got told to can it after about twenty seconds but even still these days something only has to appear somewhere briefly and whoever wants it gone will be spending their days chasing it around the Internet from here to eternity” Boseman explained.

“Boss, we got a vehicle approaching” came a call over Boseman's radio.

“What do you make of it?” Boseman then asked in response.

“Looks like one of the saloons the VIP Division use to me Guv” the look out who was positioned up on a scaffolding tower attached to the side of the old shell of the power station reported.

“All right” Boseman responded “Keep an eye on it and make sure it has no accompanying surprises along for the ride.”

“Show time boss?” Franklin asked sensing the time had come.

“The rest of you stay here” Boseman ordered “Franklin, you are with me.”

“Do I bring my little friend Sir?” Franklin asked indicating her MP7 weapon.

“Yeah” her superior confirmed “You are the best shot in the training school and I want someone who can shoot straight if this turns out to be anything other than extremely friendly” he explained as they proceeded to get out of the van before walking up the damp and dimly lit side street towards the far end.

As they approached the junction, the dark coloured saloon car turned into the end of the street whereupon as soon as the two armed officers appeared ahead in its headlights, it came to a stop, dipping its lights as it did so.

There was a tense and nervous few moments of silence for both sides before anyone moved, the first indication being the opening of the front passenger door and Jennifer Caverner appearing, supporting herself as she struggled up by leaning on the door frame.

“Evening guys” Jennifer duly called “Lovely weather for it isn't it?”

“I think morning would be more accurate” Franklin responded as she looked up at the rain falling upon her.

“Pardon me for asking Ma'am” Boseman asked as he and Franklin arrived at the side of the car where Jennifer had now sat back down again, the pain becoming too unbearable “but the word on the street is you are supposed to be dead.”

“I am” Jennifer responded “Just don't tell that fruit loop Haliford all right? Don't want to ruin his breakfast in a few hours time. Besides he will have much more pressing things to worry about if we can muster the resources.”

“What do you have in mind Ma'am?” Franklin asked.

“Dave Collins is organising a little meet and greet party for first thing in the morning” Jennifer explained “The problem is we can expect some very heavy resistance from Haliford's paid thugs so we need not only some serious man and woman power but also people we can unequivocally trust.”

“With the Security Service effectively under Haliford's thumb now, that isn't going to be easy” Boseman warned “Where do we fit in amongst all this?” he asked.

“According to what I have heard” Jennifer went on to explain “You are supposedly Bob's best team of Armed Response Unit trainees he has ever had, couple that to the fact that he is one of those being held and I reckon that pretty much guarantees not only your loyalty but your skills as well.”

“Even still” Boseman commented “There are but twelve of us, we are going to need more than that I would have expected.”

“That is why I called in a couple of the Commander's favours” Jennifer continued just as at the top of the road a dark coloured 1960's Bentley saloon followed in close formation by two anonymous unmarked vans appeared and approached them before slowing to a halt a short distance from them.

“Friends of yours Ma'am?” Franklin inquired.

“In a way” Jennifer confirmed as from the classic old Bentley emerged the tall and distinguished figure of Roger Field, one of the city's most well connected and respected figures in the organised crime community and also the Commander's God Father.

“Good evening ladies and gentlemen” Field declared as he removed his gloves and shook hands with Jennifer “Lovely weather for it.”

“Thank you for coming” Jennifer responded “I take it you are aware of the situation we find ourselves in Sir?”

“Oh call me Roger my dear” Field responded with a warm smile “It would appear the country has had a sudden influx of morons with delusions of grandeur.”

“Well that is about as concise and as accurate a description for what has happened over the last few days as we are likely to hear tonight” Jennifer wryly admitted “I take it Haliford's heavy mob has been making their presence felt in the east end then?”

“Not only these new ISA thugs but also some very unpleasant out of town talent with some very nasty criminal tendencies” Field confirmed as he took out a silver hip flask and took a small swig before offering it around to a round of polite refusals.

“I'm on medication” Jennifer explained “A hell of a lot of it in fact” she admitted as she continued to wince in pain.

“Some nasty piece of work from Wales” Field continued “Steven Altman was a name a couple of my lads managed to get out of one of his thugs we caught trying to mug a granny on the Stratford High Road yesterday evening, his reputation for being someone who sends in muscle who like to shoot or thump first, rob second and ask questions much later unfortunately precedes him.”

“Part of Haliford's little game plan apparently” Jennifer confirmed “He is using this Altman guy and his dubious associates to stir up as much domestic trouble, preferably the more violent the better so that the Security Service or whatever is left of it is so

overwhelmed that the acting Prime Minister will be 'forced' to roll on in and allow the ISA to take over everything.”

“If they do that then a lot of innocent people are going to get hurt or worse” Field warned ominously “As it is several people have already mysteriously disappeared in the last twenty four hours and the ISA have been in the immediate area every time.”

“Well in that case I think it is time we got this party started” Jennifer declared “Who have you brought with you?” she asked Field.

“Two van loads of my finest lads” Field confirmed proudly “They can be trusted, I can vouch for every single one of them.”

“Zodiac Control, this is Lazarus” Jennifer proceeded to call into the radio set in the car “Have met our friends, what we need is directions.”

“Lazarus from Zodiac Control” Collins duly responded from the control room at King William Street “Eyeball One has secured us an advanced staging area approximately two miles from the vipers nest” he informed her, being careful not to use anything obvious to describe the current situation despite it being a secure and scrambled frequency “I am sending the location to your mobile now” he confirmed.

“Got it” Jennifer responded as she checked her mobile telephone for the new message just as it arrived “Are there any other invites being sent to this little party of ours?” she asked.

“Just trying to round up a few friends now” Collins confirmed “With any luck we should have enough bodies to make this work.”

“All right” Jennifer agreed “I’ll get our friends here moving and suggest we meet at four for a briefing?”

“I’ll bring the coffee and doughnuts” Collins confirmed “See you later, Zodiac Control out.”

“Right guys” Jennifer called as soon as she had got everyone's attention “We are gathering at the old candle factory in Wrathby Street near Hammersmith” she informed the others “Breakfast is being provided, briefing is at four and wagons roll at four thirty. Any questions?”

“I think I can safely say on everyone's behalf that we are ready to stuck in” Field duly confirmed.

“In which case” Jennifer duly declared “Let's get this party moving shall we?”

“Glorious...” Haliford remarked to himself as from the Commander's office on the top floor of New Scotland Yard, he relaxed back in the chair behind the desk and watched as the sky began to redden with the sun rising above the city.

He continued to watch for a few more minutes as the sky continued to lighten and the outline of the city's buildings became clearer before looking at his watch and, realising the time, rotated around in the chair to return to the desk where he was about to pick up the telephone when he looked across at one of the two photographs on the desk in the antique silver frame.

“Last sunset you two will ever see my old friends” he remarked with a positively evil smirk to the picture of Tracy and the Commander taken on their wedding day a few years earlier before he carried on.

“Get me a secure line to the Prime Minister's office please” Haliford declared with a very smug look once he had picked up the telephone and pressed the speed dial button for the central switchboard.

Swinging slowly around in the chair, Haliford took the opportunity to use the time as he waited to be answered to look around his commandeered office which was still at that time pretty much just as its proper and rightful occupant had left it complete with the Lewisham station sign over on the far wall and the small model steam locomotive in a clear glass case at the front of the desk.

“Good morning Sir John” the voice of Lord Forsyth called back prompting Haliford to put the call on speaker-phone so that he could get up and walk around whilst he talked to the acting Prime Minister “How is your new office?” he cheekily asked.

“Needs a few alterations I will admit” Haliford confirmed “Although I cannot fault its previous occupant on his taste in biscuits which he kindly left me in the desk drawer.”

“Good thing for you he won't be coming back then” Forsyth responded with a deep chuckle “He'd have you torn apart if you touched his biscuit supply, I heard what happened to the last man who tried it.”

“Indeed” Haliford agreed as he opened a side cupboard “Ah, there it is” he then declared triumphantly as he spotted something that he had been searching for.

“Sorry?” Forsyth replied, not quite catching Haliford's last remark.

“Oh, I just found out where the soon to be late Commander hides the good stuff” Haliford explained as he extracted two crystal glass decanters from the back of the cupboard and looked at them with a little pride “I always understood he used to only put out the cheap and nasty stuff whenever he was expecting politicians, lawyers or anyone he doesn't like around.”

“I think you will find that the third category there covered the first two as well” Forsyth suggested “Not that it matters any more, he will soon be in no fit state to complain.”

“That is a fact” Haliford admitted as he poured himself a drink “Anyway, I wanted to call you and update you on where we currently stand.”

“I am all ears” Forsyth confirmed with hungry anticipation.

“We have managed to secure most of the major principles” Haliford confirmed as with a fully charged glass of brandy he returned to the chair and sat down “There are a couple of outstanding stragglers but they will have to come up for air sooner or later and when they do we will have them.”

“I don't like loose ends Sir John” Forsyth cautioned “You are sure these won't present a problem?”

“No Sir” Haliford reassured him “Jennifer Caverner is dead, Sir Richard is a dodderly old man with a liver problem, Dave Collins is cut off from his MI5 resources, I have personally seen to that and anyone else we don't directly control is alone with no back up and no communications that we don't either own or extensively monitor. One call, one breath, one sneeze even and we own them. The only one we can't find is that ancient old Soviet Yuri Glasgow but it will be a race to see which gets him first, my people or his heart condition.”

“Excellent” Forsyth responded “You my friend have been worth every penny.”

“So have our friends” Haliford continued “Our Welsh colleague has duly delivered on his promise to reign seven levels of hell on the Security Service, we have anarchy on the streets whilst the organised crime community is suddenly finding itself being overwhelmed by our Russian friend's associates.”

“Altman and Cruschov may be devious evil bastards” Forsyth agreed “but they do have they good qualities, in the former case his talent with crime and in the case of the latter, his extensive and easily accessible bank accounts.”

“Indeed” Haliford responded with a chuckle “Well I can safely report that we will start shipping our old friends to the camp in an hour's time after which they will be removed from our collective miseries forever, meanwhile I predict largely thanks to Altman and Cruschov's efforts the Security Service will be on the brink of collapse before lunchtime.”

“I fielded a very strongly worded call from the Secretary General of the United Nations Security Council late last night” Forsyth informed Haliford with an amused grin “He seems to think I have no authority to, and I quote 'ride roughshod over established international security and crime fighting protocols' or some such rubbish.”

“Ooooh, I'm quivering in my boots...” Haliford mocked.

“I told him I am the Prime Minister, I can do what I damn well like and that he could go forth and multiply for all I care and then I slammed the phone down” Forsyth confirmed with obvious satisfaction.

“He's not going to like that” Haliford responded “He may even do something really intense like issue a press release or something.”

“Can't wait to see his reaction when he finds McCallister has usurped the established Security Agencies in the US and Canada with our own people next week” Forsyth agreed “A powerless tin pot nobody with delusions of grandeur suddenly finding himself all alone with no friends any more, I never even dreamed we would have this much an effect on the world.”

“It's a new era my friend” Haliford agreed “and we are the new force for good. However there is still a little housekeeping to be done.”

“Make sure that the Commander and his friends never see daylight ever again” Forsyth insisted “I want them buried so deep that they will be nothing more than forgotten memories by the end of the week.”

“Of that you can have my complete and unequivocal guarantee” Haliford agreed.

“In which case I think I will call a news conference at about eleven o'clock” Forsyth announced “Make sure I get the news out in time for the afternoon free sheets and the lunchtime news, but right now I can safely declare you to be the new king of the castle.”

“I like the sound of that” Haliford responded.

“Congratulations Sir John” Forsyth announced with pride “You are here by promoted to Supreme National Administrator General, the Security Service and all the power that goes with it is all yours.”

“Thank you Prime Minister” Haliford replied as he relaxed back in the chair with a smile that exhibited pure pleasure as he relished in Forsyth's words which had bestowed his ultimate ambition of power upon him “I'll let you get back to bed Sir, I have work to do.”

“Don't let me down” Forsyth warned “There is an awful lot riding on this you know.”

“I won't let you down, you know that” Haliford confirmed “Good day Sir.”

After disconnecting the call and hanging up the telephone handset, Haliford allowed himself a moment to take in the full realisation of the momentous words he had just heard.

“YES!!!” he then cried out loudly, thrusting his arms up in the air in triumph before regaining his composure and picking up his drink when he caught his own reflection in the office window “Here's to you old boy” he toasted himself before downing the contents of the glass in one gulp.

Haliford allowed himself a brief moment to think before returning to the desk once more and picking up the telephone where he quickly dialled a number, a call that was swiftly answered.

“Hoskins” Haliford called “You can move them out now, nothing stands in our way any more” he triumphantly announced.

In the shadows of a dark alleyway, a brief moment of light broke out as Cassini lit a cigarette, the flickering flame from the lighter momentarily illuminating his face and showing an unusually worried looking expression.

As he inhaled deeply with some regret, this was one of the first cigarettes he had had since giving up a few months earlier, his well trained and experienced eyes spotted a couple of vehicles approaching which as they got closer revealed themselves to be an ordinary looking dark coloured saloon car and a black taxi cab which came to halt in front of the gates on the opposite side of the street which led into the old Hammersmith Candle Factory.

Cassini reached for the hidden radio microphone in his jacket to report on the new arrivals.

“Mobile Control from Eyeball One” he called “Friends at the door” he simply confirmed.

A few moments later, the battered and neglected looking old gates were opened from the inside and two armed Security Service officers appeared from within the old industrial complex. They preceded one each to the two vehicles where Cassini observed them make a careful check of their occupants before a few moments later they were duly waved inside.

The cars proceeded across the yard of the old works to one of the main former factory buildings where they entered through the large access doors which were quickly and firmly closed behind them once they were inside.

“I must say” Hendrickson remarked as he got out of the drivers seat of the saloon car “I hate all this cloak and dagger nonsense.”

“Welcome to my world mate” Collins confirmed as he emerged from the front passenger seat and together with the other officers they proceeded across the broken and crumbling concrete floor over to the far side of the building where stood parked one of the Security Service's mobile operations units, based on a single deck bus and manned by a number of trusted officers that Hendrickson had brought in from his Transport Division.

“Your world is a scary place if you don't mind me saying so Sir” Hendrickson responded as he showed Collins inside the operations unit.

“That it is” Collins was forced to agree “So guys” he addressed the officers manning the communications systems on board “Are we all patched in and ready to go?”

“We have a secure link that connects us to Zodiac Command at King William Street, Jennifer Cavener who by now should be mobile and also Cassini who is Eyeball One and the Renegade Squad” Hendrickson explained.

“Who are the renegade squad when they are at home?” Collins asked.

“Some outside help that Amber and Jennifer Caverner have apparently called in” Hendrickson confirmed, clearly not entirely sure himself “Some chap called Roger Field apparently.”

“Ah...” Collins realised with a wry smile “Looks life is about to get interesting this morning.”

“Eyeball One to Mobile Control” Cassini's voice echoed throughout the mobile operations unit interior “Gemini Two and friends have arrived” he confirmed.

“We thought it would be wise to keep real names off the air as much as possible” Collins explained “It may be a secure and unregistered channel but that is no guarantee these days, especially with the likes of an experienced back stabbing desk spook like Sir John Haliford and his odious colleagues in the mix.”

A few moments later three more vehicles joined them in the old factory floor area from which emerged Boseman and his trainee ARU team, some of Bob's regular ARU officers who they had collected on the way and also Elliott who went around to the passenger side of the VIP Protection Division saloon car and opened the door to allow Jennifer Caverner to clamber out into a wheelchair that her deputy had unloaded from the boot.

“Garry, you owe me more favours than I can even count” Jennifer declared on her mobile telephone as she clambered, still obviously in some pain into the waiting wheelchair “All I want to do is borrow a helicopter for a couple of hours, is that too much to ask?”

“Someone is going to let Jennifer Caverner loose with a helicopter?” Hendrickson asked aside to Collins who looked on with equal mild concern.

“Could be worse I suppose...” Collins remarked.

“Could be Tracy” they then both commented in unison.

“Yes, roof top of Hammersmith Hospital in about half an hour” Jennifer confirmed “Thanks mate” she declared before hanging up whereupon with her deputy's assistance she wheeled herself over to them.

“Good to see you back on you're...” Collins began and then realised the unfortunate nature of his initial comment and paused in mid sentence before correcting himself “Erm, I mean good to see you back” he concluded with a slightly cringed and embarrassed look.

“It's all right” Jennifer confirmed “I have gone through all the hopping mad and no leg to stand on jokes already” she reassured him with a wry smile “Anyway, where the hell did you come up with Gemini Two as a description code?” she asked “Am I about to be strapped to the top of a rocket and fired into space or something?”

“Hardly” Collins reassured her “Although given what has happened in the last week or two anything is possible these days” he admitted “We were thinking Gemini as in twins, Tracy is coded Gemini One by the way.”

“Cue the arguments between me and my sister” Jennifer wryly mused “Still, better than my deputy here's suggestion of Ironside.”

“Sir!” called one of the communications officers from the mobile operations unit “It's Eyeball One on the line.”

“Coming” Collins confirmed as he headed back inside with the others following although Jennifer in her wheelchair did have some initial difficulty scaling the ramped doorway entrance but managed it in the end.

“Mobile Control, receiving” Collins confirmed once he had taken the radio.

“That should be the last of your guests to arrive” Cassini confirmed from his observation post “I have a couple of my guys watching your front door in case of any gatecrashers, meanwhile I and the rest of my team are going to move to location one and see what is going on in the vipers nest.”

“All right mate” Collins confirmed “Be careful and keep in touch.”

“I take it we have a plan then?” Jennifer asked.

“It is a bit rough and ready” Hendrickson admitted as he looked over the table in the centre of the vehicle with some concern “We are talking speculation, guesswork and back of an envelope scribblings here.”

“That, oh and tea is what this Service usually runs on so I wouldn't worry about it” Jennifer reassured him “It's not like we are short of other things to worry about at the moment.”

“Is this thing on?” Collins asked one of the communications officers, indicating the equipment desk in front of him.

“All you have to do is speak Sir” the officer confirmed.

“Testing, testing, one, two, three” Collins announced, his voice as a result echoing all around the interior of the King William Street centre “This is the overseas service of the BBC, today the Queen had kippers for breakfast.”

“Zodiac Control receiving you loud and clear” Amber responded “You are just in time, we've just put the kettle on.”

“I'm about to brief everyone on the plan and I wanted you guys there to listen in so that you are up to speed on where we are” Collins confirmed.

“We are all ears” Amber confirmed as Martin arrived in the room and handed her a freshly made mug of coffee as nearby, Smitham continued his monitoring of the

communications channels and scanning data whilst in the adjacent room, Megan was fast asleep on a couch.

“All right then” Collins duly declared as he went over to the centre doorway of the communications unit and looked out across the former factory floor at the various officers and others who had been gathered “Can I have everyone's attention please” he called, using his hand to bang on the body side of the vehicle to get their attention.

“Apologies for the early hour and for some of you the rude awakening but unfortunately time is short and our rag tag fugitive little band here is pretty much all we have to stave off the ever growing disaster we and this country are now facing” Collins declared defiantly.

“Map is up Sir” Hendrickson confirmed as he finished attaching a blown up copy of the London A to Z page for the target area on the outer wall of the vehicle.

“Thank you” Collins responded “Right, make sure you can see this everyone” he called out “Here is where the ISA have their headquarters” he indicated on the map “This ladies and gentlemen is the vipers nest and for our purposes our starting point for this little operation.”

“We are not going to roll on in and take them head on are we?” Boseman asked with obvious apprehension.

“Not bloody likely” Collins confirmed “Be well aware people that this ISA and its associated clowns are the best money can buy, bribe or steal and they are packing state of the art fire power and the willingness to use it. No, our angle will be to rescue the hostages when they are at their most exposed which will, according to our sources be in about an hour's time.”

“Do we know what route they will be taking?” Boseman asked.

“What we have managed to glean from what little information we have is that a construction company closely linked to one of the supporters of this new ISA has been working on some sort of compound or similar like facility at a location approximately twenty five miles north as the crow flies from the vipers nest” Collins explained “Sensible money says that is their most likely destination.”

“That gives us options then” Boseman confirmed “or rather limits theirs in terms of routes they can take which means we may be able to cut them off at a key point, the question is how do we ensure they go where we want them to.”

“Well for once it would appear that the combined efforts of the Borough Council Highways Department and the Gas Board are actually working in our favour for once as there are major works in progress both on this road here” Collins indicated one route on the map “and here, which really only leaves this route through the middle of town plus a few minor side streets but those should be fairly easy to take care of.”

“What sort of numbers are we looking at Sir?” trainee ARU officer Franklin asked with apprehension.

“We have identified at least fourteen potential hostages” Hendrickson consulted his notes as he added to the briefing “Including the Commander himself, his wife Tracy as well as Sir Richard Crowthorne, your boss Bob, David Howell of the CIA and possibly also Simon Fuller, Jack Thornton and others.”

“In terms of how much protection will be surrounding them during transit however” Collins admitted “Your guess is as good as mine ladies and gentlemen however you can bet it won't be light and low numbers that much is for certain.”

“We should prepare for some serious opposition then” Boseman agreed.

"May I remind everyone before we continue that what we are about to do is go up against the duly appointed law enforcement agency for this country" Collins reminded his audience "An agency that has taken over by usage of illegal documentation and orders but will not hesitate to shoot us on sight as traitors if this all goes pear shaped."

"With all due respect Sir" Hendrickson remarked as he looked around "I think I speak on behalf of everyone here present when I say to hell with Sir John Haliford and his ISA lunatics."

"Very nicely put" Franklin remarked.

"Thank you" Hendrickson casually responded.

“So, the game plan” Collins declared “Over to you my dear” he passed on the briefing to Jennifer who moved forward in her wheelchair to the front edge of the doorway so that she could be more easily seen and heard by her audience.

“We are going to split this job into teams” Jennifer began her briefing “Eyeball team is under the command of Eyeball One, Commander Cassini who, along with his specialist covert surveillance team will be watching the prize all the way from when it leaves the ISA building to where we intercept it, they will also keep us informed on any incoming uninvited guests if they should show themselves as Haliford has his little pixies secreted everywhere it seems.”

“I guess we get the close quarter’s protection and escort job then?” Boseman asked.

“Got it in one” Jennifer confirmed “You are Teams One and Two, Team One will secure the perimeter once our outside contractors have stopped and sufficiently distracted the ISA people whilst the second team will move in and secure the hostages.”

“You up for leading the perimeter team Lieutenant?” Boseman asked Franklin.

“Yes Sir” she enthusiastically responded.

“All right, the job is yours” Boseman confirmed “Don't let me down.”

“I won't Sir” Franklin readily agreed.

“As you secure the hostages” Jennifer continued “I want you to report in as soon as each one is secure but don't use any real names over any open or secure channel, walls have ears and all that.”

“Got it” Boseman confirmed.

“I am willing to bet that they will transport Tracy, the Commander and Jack together in one vehicle so they will be first group” Collins declared “Coded Angel One, Eagle One and Eagle Two respectively.”

“Group two will encompass, if they are there that is Sir Richard Crowthorne and CIA London Station Chief David Howell who are respectively Johnny Walker and Black Night” Jennifer added “Group three meanwhile will be my husband, Bob and whoever else is in that car whilst Group Four and Group Five will cover whoever else is being transported.”

“What sort of vehicles are we likely to be looking at?” Boseman asked as he leant forward to study the map carefully.

“We have to reckon on the rest being split across multiple vehicles” Jennifer confirmed “They are using some of those bozo's from the Diplomatic Service Section and they are nothing if not predictable so we can expect to see Range Rovers or similar, probably bullet resistant and with three or four hostages in each plus a driver and a guard.”

“I think we can take care of them” Boseman duly agreed “The question is what do we do with them once they are secured as I don't think we can just stand around until the cavalry arrives as I am pretty sure there won't be one.”

“That is where I and my Transport Division lads come in” Hendrickson confirmed “Zodiac Command from Lima Tango One Zero One” he called over the radio link “How are we doing with out transport Number Two?” he asked Lieutenant Smitham back in King William Street.

“All lined up and ready to roll Sir” Smitham duly confirmed “Just say the word and I will get things moving.”

“Looks like we are ready at my end Sir” Hendrickson duly confirmed.

“Target area will be here” Collins indicated a specific location on the map “Cassini and his team are going to try and get a discrete message to the hostages somehow to give them the heads up on what is about to happen, meanwhile our staging area will be here, a private car park about a hundred and fifty yards to the east of the target location.”

“I'll be watching you all from up in the air” Jennifer added “I've arranged to borrow a helicopter from a mate at the Coast Guard Rescue section who owes me a favour, it also gives us options for a fall back plan if we get cut off from our planned escape route.”

“That escape route involves proceeding from the target area along this street” Collins continued to brief using the map to illustrate the plan “to this location here which will have been secured by Commander Hendrickson here and his Transport Division lads.”

“And then what Sir?” Franklin asked.

“You will see” Collins confirmed with a knowledgeable smile “Call it deep cover if you like.”

“Oh, very clever” Boseman remarked as he leant forward and noticed what was specifically interesting about the location marked on the map “I like it.”

“One further thing” Collins declared “These guys are likely to be well armed, hence why I am more than relieved that we have ARU officers on our side this morning however, and I need to stress this unreservedly, under no circumstances is ANYONE on our side to fire first, only if the bad guys open fire are you allowed to use firearms, there are likely to be civilians about as well as the hostages and I don't want anybody getting shot in the cross fire, is that understood?”

Looking around at the crowd of officers in front of him and getting unanimous nods of agreement, Collins could comfortably see that his important point had hit home.

“All right then, unless anyone has any questions, I reckon everyone now knows what they are doing?” Jennifer asked all around to which she received unanimous agreement “Okay then, let saddle up and show these ISA morons how real coppers kick arse.”

Upon her rousing cry, the various officers and other personnel dispersed to their various vehicles and the confined space of the old factory building more than amplified the sound of the engines being started and the squealing of tyres as the various vehicles proceeded to depart.

“Of course you do realise what just happened” Collins remarked aside to Jennifer as they watched the vehicles depart.

“Oh yes” Jennifer confirmed with a giggle that did little to hide the fact she was still in tremendous pain despite the painkillers she was on “A one legged woman just declared an arse kicking contest!”

“Understood Sir” Hoskins confirmed before hanging up the telephone whereupon he duly turned around to address the ranks of armed men assembled in the room “All right, that was the Chief, we have a green light so lets get these people on the move shall we?”

The leader of the group, the Sergeant at Arms immediately stood to attention and saluted his superior before proceeding to bark his orders to the rest of the men.

“You heard what the man said, lets fall out and get on with it” the Sergeant loudly declared “You know your assignments. Move it! Move it! Move it!”

Down in the detention area, the sound of the approaching hard soled military type boots hammering down the stairs to their level awoke some of the detainees and immediately it became apparent that something ominous was about to happen.

“What is that?” Howell asked sensing the approaching menace.

“I don't think that is room service with out breakfast somehow” Sir Richard admitted.

“Don't these guys know what time it is?” Jack wearily asked as he woke up and slowly raised himself back upright.

“Somehow I get the distinct impression they don't really care” Tracy confirmed as both she and the Commander, hand in hand stood up and watched the doorway to their shared cell with growing concern.

“Oh, this is new” Bob remarked as he saw the armed men appear through the doorway and proceed in teams of three each to the cell doors “Looks like they have invested in some nice snazzy storm troopers.”

“I think we can safely say our taxi is here” the Commander confirmed.

“Sir, why can't we have nice uniforms like that?” Bob asked in jest as he attempted to lighten the mood.

“If you had seen the budgetary restraints I have to work with you would know” the Commander admitted “I tell you what, if we defeat these loons you can have first pick from their toy cupboard afterwards.”

“Right, you lot” the armed man who opened the door of the cell which contained Tracy, the Commander and Jack called gruffly “Out, now!” he barked.

“You forgot to say the magic words” Jack admonished the armed man who towered over the small lad.

“...oh I will blow your brains out all over the walls” the armed man calmly but with implied menace duly added, pulling his gun out and aiming it generally to back up his point.

“And those are the magic words” Jack agreed in submission.

“Stick close to us lad” the Commander informed him.

“Any chance of breakfast before we go?” Sir Richard asked “I hate travelling on an empty stomach, gives me terrible wind don't you know.”

The man in his cell merely looked on unimpressed whilst brandishing his firearm.

“Ah, the strong silent type routine for us I see” Howell confirmed

“Guess that is a no then” Sir Richard agreed before the armed man was joined by two colleagues who roughly grabbed the arms of both him and Howell and hauled them to their feet before escorting them from the cell a short distance behind the Commander's group.

“Come on mate, time to go” Bob tried to rouse Fuller to his feet but he seemed to be taking little if any notice of what was going on around him.

“What's the point?” Fuller asked, clearly and understandably distraught at the thought that he had lost his beloved Jennifer, unaware at that time that she was in fact still alive.

“Because if we don't stand up to them, then they will have won and all this pain and suffering will have been for nothing” Bob explained.

“Get up and get out before we turn nasty” the armed man in their cell then intervened whereupon he grabbed Fuller and violently hauled him to his feet before throwing him against the opposite wall.

“Oh you want nasty do you?” Fuller angrily responded “Because believe me you will be mere amateurs compared with me when I get the chance to show you just how God damn nasty I can be mate!”

“Whoa there...” Bob tried to intervene but failed.

“Because when I do get the chance I am going to be right here in your face and I am going to look into your eyes as I watch you, Haliford and the rest of you cretinous pieces of worm ridden filth die very slowly and very, very painfully” Fuller went on to warn.

“All right, that's enough” Bob managed to successfully intervene this time and pull Fuller away from the armed men before he did something really unwise “I think they get the message but now is not the time or the place for revenge all right pal?”

“I'll be seeing you” Fuller angrily warned the armed men before he and Bob were duly escorted from their cell, following at a short distance the others as they headed up the stairs to the basement level car park where a number of vehicles were awaiting them.

“There must be a car dealership around here somewhere who has made a very tidy fortune in the last week or two I would have thought” the Commander remarked to Tracy as they were shown to their waiting vehicle, a black Range Rover, one of a number of identical vehicles in the loading bay area.

“Well I think we can safely say that Haliford has a very large budget to play with” Tracy agreed as they got in the rear of the vehicle where together they held each

others hand for support with Jack between them as if trying to protect him from whatever was to come.

There were no further outbursts from any of the other captives as they too were loaded into the waiting vehicles whereupon the Sergeant at Arms, his automatic weapon ominously holstered across his chest clearly ready to shoot anyone in an instant and without question or hesitation duly blew a shrill whistle.

“All right people” he called across to his men “Let's go” he declared before getting in the front of a black saloon car that was to lead the convoy out of the building, a blue flashing light on the roof the only distinguishing marks upon it.

“Caravan One ready for roll out” the Sergeant then confirmed over his radio whereupon with the sound of a warning klaxon the roller shutter door that sealed them off from the outside access began to raise.

As soon as the door had been raised enough, the Sergeant signalled to his driver to move off, leading the convoy up the slope to the yard outside where there was a further escort of vehicles including a number of motorcycle outriders waiting to add to the already substantial numbers of ISA personnel charged with the duty of transporting the prisoners.

The convoy of vehicles duly swept out of the main gate of the ISA Headquarters compound at some considerable speed amid a cacophony of sirens and revving high powered engines and whilst there were few people on the street to observe the departure, they were being watched from an overlooking roof top just a short distance down the street.

"All units from Eyeball Two" Cassini's deputy Iggy called over the secure frequency "They are leaving the nest now" he confirmed, his message being broadcast over the radios of everyone involved in what was potentially a traitorous if not deadly act of defiance.

"Eyeball Two, this is Mobile Command" Collins responded "What sort of numbers are we looking at?" he asked.

"Six, no seven black Range Rovers" Iggy confirmed as from his position he panned his binoculars along as the convoy continued on its journey along the street below him "Those probably contain our principal targets, they are accompanied front, middle and rear by black saloon cars, look like the sort the CIA usually use so they probably contain the armed heavies."

"Can you see who is in which Range Rover by any chance?" Collins asked although from his tone of imminent disappointment, he already knew the answer.

"Not from up here, sorry" Iggy apologetically responded "Although it looks like each one has a professional driver and an armed thug in the front passenger seat."

"All right" Collins responded "Any other surprises we need to know about?"

"Hey Igg's" one of the other Specialist Surveillance officers called across to Iggy as he indicated over to one side "We have a problem."

"Oh sh..." Iggy exclaimed as he trained his binoculars over to where his colleague had indicated "Mobile Control, be aware that the convoy also now has eight, repeat eight motorcycle outriders and two armoured vans of what looks like their elite ass kicking squad."

"Roger, understood" Collins responded with obvious growing concern "Jesus, these guys are serious" he remarked.

"Sounds like they are pulling out the family silver for this one" Hendrickson remarked "I had better get to our transport" he then confirmed "Good luck" he wished before leaving.

"We are all going to need a hell of a lot of luck before this is over" Collins agreed to himself as he thought for a few moments before returning to the radio "Mobile Control to Gemini Two" he then called into his radio "Any luck finding some suitable transport?"

"Gemini Two to Mobile Control" Jennifer Caverner responded as she was helped into the front of a Royal Air Force helicopter atop the roof of the nearby Hammersmith General Hospital as it was the only local helipad in the area which she could use without rousing any suspicion "I seem to have been moderately successful, yes" she wryly admitted as behind her a couple of ARU trainees she had taken with her as back up all piled into the back.

"Nice work" Collins replied "Looks like our ISA friends are heading in the direction we reckoned, trouble is they seem to have brought an awful lot of friends to the party."

"Escort cars and armed thugs by any chance?" Jennifer asked.

"And motorbikes" Collins added "plus according to Eyeball Two it looks like they are using the sort of escort cars the CIA heavies like."

"If they are using the same talent then they certainly know how to handle themselves which means this is going to get messy" Jennifer admitted "All right, I'll get things moving at this end" she confirmed whereupon she turned to the pilot "Get up off the ground and err burn air" she commanded.

"Looks like the convoy is coming up on this checkpoint here in a minute or so" one of the communications officers in the Mobile Operations Unit pointed out on the map.

"All right then" Collins confirmed "Time to send a message" he declared whereupon he returned to the radio "Eyeball One from Mobile Control, time to hit the headlines" he cryptically instructed.

Progress through the narrow streets of that part of London proved to be swift thanks to the combination of the early hour of the morning and the formidable, intimidating and well armed escort that accompanied the group of black Range Rovers that were transporting the prisoners.

"At the rate these guys are driving, we will be pulled over by the Traffic Division lads" the Commander remarked as he looked out of the side window at the street scene whizzing by outside.

"They wouldn't last long against these guys I reckon" Tracy responded, looking around at the armed guards in their own vehicle as well as the escorting vehicles and motorcycles "Probably get about as far as asking if they have any valid insurance and then bang."

"Looks like Haliford has been on EBay and bought himself a chopper as well" Jack remarked looking upwards through the sunroof as a black helicopter swooped nosily overhead, shadowing the convoy "He really is pushing the boat out isn't he?"

"Money definitely appears to be no object with this bunch" Tracy agreed.

"You had better believe it" one of the ISA guards in the front of the vehicle gruffly confirmed.

Tracy looked across at her husband when she realised that he had not responded in the last few moments, instead he appeared to be either distracted or deep in thought as something seemed to be attracting his attention as the convoy had now paused briefly at a junction.

"Anything interesting out there?" Jack asked, leaning across to see out of the same window as the Commander.

"Depends upon your point of view..." the Commander cryptically responded.

"Oh, I see what you mean" Jack agreed as he too saw what it was that had caught the Commander's attention just moments before the convoy moved off again.

As the convoy left the junction, the man at the newspaper stand on the corner of the street bent down to the front of the podium and removed the headline sheet poster from it, looked briefly at the message written on it with a wry smile before screwing it up and tossing it casually into an adjacent rubbish bin.

With the convoy disappearing out of sight in the distance, the man removed his coat and hat to reveal the mystery stranger to be Commander Cassini who once he was sure he was not being observed, reached for the radio microphone which was hidden in his lapel.

"All stations, this is Eyeball One" he called discreetly into his radio "Message delivered. Be aware that Eagle One and the family are in the leading Range Rover, repeat the leading Range Rover."

"Well then gentlemen" Roger Field called to his men as he put the radio set down on the front passenger seat of his Bentley and looked around at his men with almost a sense of pride "Time to do our bit for Queen, Country and the Commander I think" he declared.

As the men dispersed into various cars and vans as well as two large articulated lorries and began to depart, Field calmly reached inside his long leather coat and extracted a personal radio.

"Mobile Control, this is Renegade One" Field calmly declared "Ready to get this party started on your word, out."

"What the hell was that?" Sir Richard exclaimed as he awoke with a sudden start as the sounds of screeching tyres, sirens and shouting accompanied the sudden stop that the driver of the Range Rover he and Howell were being transported in was forced to make.

"Well, either we are now in even deeper shit than we already were or the cavalry has arrived" Howell remarked as he too surveyed the rapidly unfolding scene outside the vehicle.

The convoy had been brought to its abrupt halt at a major junction when an articulated lorry had crossed its path, colliding with and subsequently taking out the lead escort car and two of the motorcycle outriders before coming to a stand completely blocking the whole width of the street.

At the rear of the convoy, the ISA vehicles then quickly found themselves boxed in as a second large lorry jack-knifed and blocked off any possible chance of escape to the rear.

"All right everyone" Jennifer called over the radio as she surveyed the scene below from the helicopter with the aid of binoculars "Containment is confirmed, Renegade One, get in there and create some chaos, all snatch and exact teams stand by to move in."

"Right then gentlemen" Roger Field called to his guys "Let's show these amateurs from out of town how we do business in the west end."

With his encouraging words ringing in their ears, Field's people duly poured out of the pub on the south side of the road and the news agents shop on the other side and quickly set about ambushing the ISA officers amid exchanges of gunfire, hand to hand combat and, hurled in from the rooftops above, smoke grenades.

"Excuse me" Jack asked as he leant forward between the front seats and simultaneously tapped both the driver and ISA guard in the front seats on the shoulders which caused them both to instinctively look around whereupon both Tracy and the Commander ambushed them from around the opposite sides of the front seats, grabbing them by the throat.

There followed a short struggle as the ISA men attempted to break free or reach for their weapons but before they could get anywhere, Jack had already crawled forward and grabbed their guns from their holsters.

The final blow to the ISA men was administered a few moments later when two of Field's men opened the front doors either side and simultaneously punched them out cold.

"Morning guys" Field calmly announced amidst the noise and chaos as the fighting in the street continued behind him as he opened the passenger side door "I think now may be the opportune time for a swift exit" he suggested.

"What the hell is going on?" Tracy asked in amazement as without hesitation she, Jack and the Commander quickly got out of the vehicle.

"It's a rescue my friends" Field confirmed, allowing himself a brief moment to look around in admiration at his lads handy work before reaching for a radio "Renegade One to all units, roll on in" he then called.

"All right boys and girls" Jennifer duly called over the radio "lets get our people secured and out of there fast."

"Here we go guys" Boseman called to the various armed officers around him "You heard the lady, let's go and get them!"

With the ISA personnel being overwhelmed thanks to Field's men, the assigned snatch and extract teams quickly moved in and proceeded to round up their assigned targets.

"Team One to Control" Franklin called into her radio as soon as they had reached the Commander and his family "Eagle Group are secure."

"If there is one thing I hate it is over paid and over enthusiastic amateurs" Bob was heard to call amid the smoke and chaos as he unceremoniously dispatched one of the ISA guards with a right hook to the jaw that saw him collapse to the floor out cold "Someone give me a gun" he then called.

"Here Sir" Franklin quickly passed her superior her side arm which he then proceeded to use against an ISA officer who at that point tried to tackle him.

"Thank you" Bob responded "Franklin, what the hell are you doing here?"

"Saving your arse Sir" Franklin admitted with a wry grin as she and Bob then proceeded to wrestle another attacking ISA man to the ground where he was promptly knocked out cold and disarmed.

"Well at least you can shoot straight I suppose" Bob was forced to admit with a wry smile.

"Team Two to Control" came the next call over the radio to "Targets secured and ready to move."

"I take it there is a plan?" the Commander asked as all around them a containment situation was put in place as the various prisoners were released and secured whilst the remaining resistance from the ISA personnel was dealt with.

"Ring my wife would probably be the best thing to do first" Bob suggested as he joined the Commander's group "She is going to kill me for being out this late without calling her."

"I hate to break up this little class reunion" Sir Richard remarked as he and Howell joined the group along with Fuller "Only I suggest we get the hell out of here before any more of Haliford's thugs arrive."

"Agreed" Tracy confirmed.

"Standard flanking deployment?" Bob asked Boseman and the rest of his ARU colleagues as he had not been briefed on the plan.

"Indeed" Franklin confirmed before turning to the other officers "All right people, let's get this party moving, full containment and watch out for any unpleasant surprises."

"Gemini Two to Transport Team" Jennifer called over the radio "Is the station secure and our transport in place?" she asked.

"Control this is Hendrickson" the head of the Transport Division called as he looked out from the main entrance to Golders Green Underground Station "Just removing the last ISA Neanderthal from the premises now" he confirmed as one of his officers dragged the unconscious ISA man out into the street and unceremoniously dumped him on the pavement.

"Gemini Two to all units" Jennifer duly declared "Wagons roll!"

"Right, let's go" Franklin called and with a surrounding ring of armed officers, the group moved off at a quick pace ahead down the street to the end where the blocking lorry had now been moved back to let them out.

"Everyone clear out of the way!" came the shouts from several of the armed officers as the group made rapid progress along the street forcing passers by to move quickly out of their way.

"Stay with me Jack" the Commander urged the young lad as with the pace they were moving there was a danger that he could have been either left behind or trampled upon.

"Don't worry about me" Jack responded "I can take care of myself."

"Where are we going?" Tracy asked.

"Golders Green tube station" Franklin explained as they rounded a corner and reached the front entrance of the Station where Hendrickson was waiting anxiously for their arrival.

"All right, we have a clear route through to platform five" Hendrickson confirmed as they arrived "Everyone stay close to me" he ordered before leading the way across the ticket hall before they proceeded through the barriers and then on up the short flight of stairs to the platform level.

"Haliford's going to spitting chips when he realises what has happened" Sir Richard remarked as they reached the platform level.

"Well then with any luck the bastard will choke" Tracy angrily responded "Actually strike that" she then remarked "I owe him a very slow, painful and unpleasant death for my sister."

"Here we go" Hendrickson declared as they arrived on platform five where several armed Transport Division officers were closely guarding an empty seven car train of 1995 Tube Stock "All aboard."

"This could get me into trouble" Howell sarcastically remarked as they all boarded the specially commandeered train "I only have a travel card for zone's one and two!"

"Everyone on board?" Hendrickson called into his radio whereupon a number of confirmations from the various officers involved in the extraction operation duly confirmed their status "All right then, let's go mate" he called up ahead to the driver who with a nod of the head in confirmation, got back in the front driving cab whereupon a few moments later the doors closed and the train moved off.

"So who is organising this little party then?" the Commander asked as he, Tracy and Jack sat down together as a family.

"This particular operation comes courtesy of Jennifer Caverner, David Collins and a significant number of loyal supporters from across the various divisions of the former Security Service" Hendrickson explained as the train plunged into the darkness of the tube tunnels beneath Hampstead Hill.

"Wait a minute" the Commander responded "Haliford told us late last night, well actually the very early hours of this morning that Jennifer had died of her injuries?"

"I thought you guys knew?" Hendrickson informed them "Jennifer is alive, a bit battered and missing the bottom of one leg but still very much with us, she helped David Collins co-ordinate this little party."

"Oh thank God" Fuller responded who up until now had remained silent throughout the rescue process as his thoughts and grief were understandably elsewhere "So where is she then?"

"Tracking our progress in a borrowed helicopter" Hendrickson confirmed "Collins and I have been running what effectively amounts to an Underground resistance, err

literally as it happens whilst Jennifer being on the outside has helped round up whatever help she could muster."

"Nice operation" Bob admitted as he looked around at his exhausted looking ARU trainees "Don't think this gets you out of the night exercise though if that is what you are thinking" he wryly added.

"Ah nuts..." Franklin responded with a wry smile.

"I hate to interrupt the celebratory atmosphere here" Jack warned as he looked around the interior of the carriage as the train continued on its non stop journey "but when I last looked, it was awfully easy to trace where trains travel and we are underground."

"Good point" the Commander readily agreed "I take it there is a plan?"

"A little bit of a shell game actually Sir" Hendrickson admitted "We take three identical trains, a little bit of subterfuge, a stop at a station that does not exist and then finally Camden Town Junction and play a little bit of 'They went that a way...' for our ISA friends."

"One thing is for certain" Howell remarked "Haliford is not exactly going to like this."

At the scene of the convoy interception, a Mercedes saloon car screeched to a halt having forced its way through the perimeter of the sealed off area. No sooner had it stopped than Haliford got out of the front passenger seat, his face full of anger as he looked around the scene.

"Would someone care to explain just how the hell this was allowed to happen!?" Haliford demanded to know.

"We got done over boss" one of the ISA officers admitted as he got back to his feet nursing some obviously severe bumps and bruises.

"No shit!!" Haliford responded "Hoskins!" he then called over "Who is responsible for this?"

"Looks like a combination of Security Service officers plus some gangland help with the muscle work" Hoskins confirmed as he examined the scene carefully, showing his superior some bits of Security Service uniform that had been lost in the fight earlier.

"Who was in charge of this operation?" Haliford demanded to know.

"Him" Hoskins pointed out one of the armed ISA men nearby whereupon with a stern look and wag of the finger, Haliford ominously ordered him over.

"Sir?" the man indicated by Hoskins asked when he joined his superiors.

“Let me see if I have got this right” Haliford began, looking down and rubbing his temples with his thumb and index finger as if nursing a major headache “You and your men let yourselves get turned over by a bunch of renegade rejects from that dinosaur of a Security Service plus a bunch of hired numb skulls from the east end?”

“Erm yes Sir, sorry” the officer man rather mumbled in response.

“You're fired” Haliford calmly replied, drawing a revolver from within his jacket and quickly opening fire, striking the man with a bullet straight to the forehead whereupon he collapsed to the ground stone cold dead.

“Let this be a learning experience gentlemen!” Haliford called about generally which thanks to the gunshot he had everyone's undivided attention “Failure will NOT be tolerated.”

“Nice shot Sir” Hoskins remarked slightly uncomfortably at what he had just witnessed although he did his best to hide it.

“It must be working in the Commander's office” Haliford remarked “I have been there less than twenty four hours and already I am firing people, heh it is even his revolver!”

“Now what Sir?” Hoskins asked.

“Let's see” Haliford concluded as he looked at his watch thoughtfully “It has been twenty five minutes since we lost them, travel options are limited so I want to see this entire area nailed down beneath the tightest lid you can create.”

“Yes Sir” Hoskins confirmed.

“Seal off every road, railway line, storm drain and heliport for a twenty mile radius” Haliford ordered “Nothing and no one is to move one inch without a complete search of person and vehicle, anything so much as a suspicious carrier pigeon is to be tracked down and brought in.”

“And if we find them?” Hoskins asked “Err I mean when Sir?”

“Kill them” Haliford sharply and coldly ordered “All except the Commander, I want him alive as I fully intend to deal with him personally although not before he has seen his wife die in front of him of course.”

“Consider it done Sir” Hoskins reassured his superior “I will take charge of it personally.”

“And Hoskins...” Haliford called ominously after him as he headed back to his car “Remember the price of failure, no one is expendable” he nodded to the dead body of the man he had executed a few moments earlier to emphasise his point before getting in the back of his car.

“I’ll try and remember that Sir” Hoskins admitted to himself, a tone of doubt and concern now apparent in his mind for the first time as he watched his superior’s car depart the scene.

“Everybody off” Hendrickson declared as the train came to halt seemingly in the middle of nowhere, a dark tunnel over two hundred feet beneath Hampstead Hill.

“What, here?” Tracy asked as they all got up and followed Hendrickson and two escorting ARU officers to the front drivers cab.

“North End...” Jack remarked “Also known as...”

“Bull & Bush” the Commander confirmed “You have been doing your homework lad.”

“Not really” Jack responded “I have just been reading through your book collection again.”

“Isn’t that the station that they never built or something?” Tracy asked as she followed the others as they alighted through the cab door onto a small concrete platform alongside the track.

“Oh they built it” the Commander explained “Well the lower levels anyway.”

“Well seeing as we are near the Bull & Bush pub, perhaps we could stop off for a quick half?” Sir Richard wryly suggested.

“Do you always think with your liver Sir Richard?” Howell asked with amazement.

“First order of business my old friend” Sir Richard admitted “Survival.”

“Right, is everyone off?” Hendrickson asked looking around the dusty area around alongside the track that at one time was intended to be a service platform but was never completed, a fact that the bare unfinished walls of over a hundred years in age testified to easily despite the poor lighting.

“Well we are all here” Boseman confirmed as he double checked his ARU team.

“All right then mate” Hendrickson called to the driver “Thanks for the lift.”

“No worries, good luck” the driver confirmed before closing his cab door and with the whine of electric motors pulled away to disappear into the running tunnel portal with buffeting turbulence and screeching echoes in his wake.

“Pity I can’t get this one on my Oyster Card” Jack remarked “Serious bragging points in any game of London Underground Top Trumps I would have thought.”

“If they were expecting visitors, the least they could do was pick the place up a bit” Sir Richard remarked as he looked around the dusty interior where what were always meant to be passenger access tunnels to lift shafts that never were, albeit never finished tailed off from the intended platform space into seemingly infinite darkness.

“Here comes our fresh ride now” Hendrickson declared as looking around the end wall down into the approaching tube tunnel, the headlights of another train could be seen approaching accompanied by the turbulent wind forced ahead of it and the noise of its motors winding down as it slowed on approach.

“So working on the theory that Haliford and his boys will be watching all the local transport routes for any signs of our escape, he will be following that one I take it?” Tracy asked, pointing down to where their earlier ride had set off towards less than a couple of minutes earlier.

“Exactly Ma'am” Hendrickson confirmed “The idea of some guy named Alan Martin apparently.”

“Nice work” the Commander remarked as the train stopped and the cab door opened alongside them allowing them to board the train “Truly nice work.”

“Remind me to buy Martin a drink when we get the chance” Sir Richard remarked.

With little news available thanks to the limited communications by virtue the escapees and their escorts were travelling underground, the last ten minutes since they had set off from Golders Green had been beset with an understandable sense of apprehension and nervousness amongst those at King William Street.

Amber was tapping her finger gently on the edge of the meeting room table, a worrying sign considering the usual sense of confidence she normally displayed.

Sat next to her, holding each others hands for much needed support was Martin who even though inexperienced in such operations was also feeling the nervous tension that was readily apparent.

"Where are they now Lieutenant?" Amber called back as she checked her watch.

“Left North End about ten minutes ago and are two minutes behind the train that they left” Lieutenant Smitham confirmed from the communications room next door “With any luck that will be the one Haliford and his boys will be following.”

“The empty decoy should be approaching Camden Town Junction any moment now” Martin agreed "I just hope to Christ this works" he remarked as he and Amber got up and went through into the communications room where they joined Smitham at the communications desk.

"It's a great idea" Amber reassured him with a friendly smile "It'll work, have faith."

"Here we go" Smitham declared as on the diagrammatic representation of the Camden Town area of the Underground Northern Line in front of them, the train shown running as empty stock which had been carrying the escapees was shown to be slowing down as it approached the complex junction.

Alongside on the screen could be seen another train this time approaching the complex junction from the Kentish Town direction as this complex junction is where four different sections of the Northern Line meet, cross over and then disperse again.

Deep below ground, over a hundred feet beneath Camden High Street, the normally dark tunnels of the complex Camden Town Junction were filled with the sound of two approaching trains, their headlights piercing the darkness as they slowed to a halt alongside one another.

Unseen by anyone, the two respective drivers opened their cab doors, exchanged jocular greetings and then switched places before they headed off once more, both continuing their journeys southbound by diverging routes.

"There they go" Martin remarked as on the screen in front of them there was a momentary blip as the train description codes mystically changed, swapping between the two trains shown on the screen as they continued their journeys.

"Now if Haliford and his people are any good" Amber commented "by now they will have realised that the only way our guys will have escaped barring the sudden invention of teleporters is to have jumped on the tube so I would expect there to be some disruption on the Embankment branch of the Northern Line in the next ten minutes.

The early morning rush hour was well under way in and around Tottenham Court Road Underground Station when several vehicles containing armed ISA officers suddenly arrived in the midst with sirens blaring at an almost deafening level.

The usual busy scene was as a result seriously disrupted as the area was flooded with over a hundred ISA officers who immediately moved to seal off the station and surrounding area with little or no thought as they carelessly barged members of the public out of the way with one man who initially resisted being butt stroked to the ground for his troubles.

There were screams, shouting and panic in the relatively confined space of the ticket hall as the ISA men forced their way through the crowds before heading down the escalators to head for the Northern Line platforms.

"Clear out of here!" the leading ISA officer called, violently and assertively waving his gun about as he led his men on to the southbound platform "Move it, people before I get angry!"

Wisely many of the waiting passengers on the platform got out of the way quickly as they became overwhelmed by the arrival of the ominous and mean looking black

dressed armed men who immediately proceeded with military like precision to take up positions blocking all entrances and exits as well as lining the platform edge.

A few moments later Hoskins arrived on the platform and looked around. For the first time it was clear he was disturbed by something, he no longer displayed the icy cool and controlled demeanour that he had done up until now.

“Very unsubtly done Sergeant” Hoskins remarked “So where the hell is this train then?” he asked as he stepped forward to the platform edge and looked up and down the track.

“Control from Scorpion One” the Sergeant coarsely called into his radio “Location of target?”

Hoskins looked on as the Sergeant received the response through his earpiece before turning to his men “All right everyone, look sharp and get ready to move, they are rolling to us now” he confirmed.

A few moments later the wind turbulence, rumbling and the hiss from the running rails soon heralded the approach of the train whereupon the Sergeant duly nodded towards one of his men at the far end of the platform who duly ripped open a secure access panel and using the butt of his gun rammed the electrical apparatus inside which instantly saw the signal immediately above him revert to red just as the front coach of the train emerged into the platform area.

There was a sudden screeching noise from the train in response as a combination of the automatic safety systems and the driver’s quick responses applied an emergency brake application bringing the whole train to a stop just inches away from the top end of the platform.

“Move in!” the Sergeant called which saw his men duly force open the doors of the train and with military like precision enter only to find to their understandable bemusement that the train was completely empty.

“Something is missing from this picture methinks...” Hoskins quietly remarked as he moved a couple of the armed men aside to step aboard the front carriage and looked around only to be distracted by a commotion a short distance away outside on the platform which saw him step back out again.

“Where the hell are they?” the Sergeant was demanding to know of the train driver who had been roughly and unceremoniously hauled from his cab and thrown up against the outside of his own train.

“I don't know what you are talking about mate” the driver responded to which response the Sergeant nodded to one of his men holding the driver who proceeded to thump him hard in the midriff “I'm running empties from Mill Hill East to Kennington, honest.”

“Kill him” the Sergeant then coolly ordered as he drew his gun and brought it up to the driver’s forehead.

“Stop!!” Hoskins immediately called out upon seeing the drastically escalating situation on the platform “Just what the hell do you think you are doing Sergeant? Put that thing away!” he ordered.

“Thanks...” the driver responded slightly sarcastically as the Sergeant reluctantly let the man go and stepped back, holstering his weapon in the process.

“Your work is done here” Hoskins calmly informed the Sergeant “Take your men, fall back to the vehicles and RTB, I will join you shortly” he instructed.

“Yes Sir...” the Sergeant replied with a distinctly unimpressed sneer before turning to his men “All right everyone, you heard the man, let's get the hell out of here!”

Hoskins looked on rather unimpressed as the Sergeant led his men off of the platform leaving him alone with the train driver who was still rubbing his throat where it was sore from having been roughly manhandled moments earlier.

“So Mr Hoskins, where did you find those guys, Thugs 'R' Us?” the driver asked causing Hoskins to turn to him with a look of some surprise.

“I think they were in the Yellow Pages under Neanderthal” Hoskins admitted “It would appear Sir you have me at a disadvantage, you seem to know my name but I am fairly certain we have never met.”

“Let's just say I am a friend of the family” the driver cryptically responded “and you, my American friend have been recognised, in a manner of speaking” he then produced a small piece of card that he then passed across to Hoskins before climbing back inside the cab.

“Ah...” Hoskins declared with a realisation of what this all meant, the card explaining much of this cryptic conversation to him.

“Mind the doors...” the driver called across the driving cab with a cheeky cockney smile “and stay by the phone” he then added before closing the cab door.

A few moments later the tube train departed, making its way out of the platform area, plunging into the darkness of the running tunnel leaving Hoskins alone to look down at the card he had been given which showed it to be an official business card emblazoned with the Security Service crest, the name on the front Sir Edward Regent G.C. whilst on the back was a hand written message which made him smirk with admiration.

“Nice one Commander” Hoskins remarked to himself, allowing himself a little chuckle as he proceeded to walk up the platform towards the exit “Truly nice one.”

“Whoa...” Amber remarked with a look of appreciation as she listened to the radio traffic that they were monitoring at King William Street “Would you listen to that.”

“What have I missed?” Martin asked as he returned to the communications room.

“Haliford's boys are going completely ape” Smitham explained “Those are some seriously pissed off guys out there I can tell you.”

“Oh yes...” Martin remarked with an amused smile as he picked up a radio headset and took the opportunity to listen to the radio chatter for a few moments.

"Zodiac Control from Gemini Two" Jennifer's voice called over the radio link with some apparent sense of urgency "I've got some good news, some bad news and some really bad news" she confirmed as from the helicopter she viewed an unfolding situation below her with increasing concern.

"Eyeball One confirms" Cassini agreed from the front passenger seat of a van as he headed across central London through the congested streets of the city "I think it is fairly safe to say we may have a whole world of problems heading in your direction."

"I'll take the good news first" Collins called across the Communications room as he arrived in the lower levels of the King William Street facility along with Roger Field.

"Well the good news is that the little meet and greet party that Haliford sent to Tottenham Court Road has now retreated looking thoroughly confused" Jennifer confirmed "or just good old fashioned pissed off, I couldn't really tell the difference from up here."

"What's the bad news?" Collins asked.

"Haliford's boys seem to have gone for broke and are now in the process of sending armed teams to every Tube station in central London" Jennifer confirmed as through her binoculars she watched as below a black Transit van pulled up sharply outside the main entrance of Leicester Square station before the armed team it contained deployed inside, a feature that she could see was also being repeated at nearby Covent Garden.

"Fits in with their radio chatter Sir" Smitham agreed "They have been going totally ape shit for the last twenty or thirty minutes."

"Look like they are putting particular emphasis on the major stations" Cassini added "Which means..."

"...the even worse news is that they are all but right on top of us" Collins grimly concluded before pausing for a brief moments thought.

"Back door?" Amber suggestively asked.

"Back door" Collins agreed.

"Good morning ladies and gentlemen" the train driver announced over the P.A. system to his distinguished if unusual passengers "Be aware that we shall be arriving at Monument in just a few moments."

"Better get ready guys and gals" Bob called to his ARU officers as he checked both his body armour and his weapons.

"Expecting trouble?" Howell innocently asked.

"Anything involving those two?" Bob indicated across the interior of the carriage towards Tracy and the Commander "Most of the time yes plus throw in this little fella" he nodded towards Jack "and it becomes an odds on certainty."

"Oh, thanks a lot..." Jack responded with more than a hint of sarcasm to which Bob merely looked across the carriage at him with a wry grin.

"How did you get involved in this mess then if I may ask?" Howell inquired, the contrast between the two being outstanding where the American towered over the small lad, his six foot seven frame easily outclassing Jack who barely reached four foot two inches tall.

"Do you want the long version or the short version?" Jack wryly asked.

"Between you and me" Tracy remarked "I think he is just doing all this to impress his girlfriend.

"Megan is not my..." Jack began in a typical response to such a jape "Oh all right then, she is" he then surrendered and admitted.

"And that dearest husband is a tenner you owe me" Tracy confirmed to the Commander who reluctantly reached into his pocket and found a ten pound note before passing it to her whereupon she took it and held it briefly up to the light with a look of delight.

"Coming into Monument platform now" Bob called from the front of the carriage as the train began to slow and the blackness of the running tunnel gave way to the lit interior of the station itself.

"This train is not in public use, please do not board" the automated announcement declared throughout the platform as the train appeared and initially in reaction some intending passengers stepped forward before reluctantly stepping back again.

As soon as the train had come to a stand, only the first door of the first carriage was released whereupon both Bob and the Commander, weapons ready stepped out onto to the platform to the surprise of those commuters who noticed but unnoticed by many others who seemed more intent on reading their newspapers.

"There they are" Collins remarked as on the screens in the King William Street centre they saw the live CCTV feed from the station platform at Monument "All right, take it away."

Smitham duly pressed a button on the keyboard in front of him and within a couple of seconds the effect of that would be heard on the platform itself.

“Would Inspector Sands please go to the back door” came the officious sounding recorded announcement across the platforms which then repeated identically three more times but the Commander had already got the message the first time.

“Change of plan ladies and gentlemen” the Commander declared as he and Bob got back on board the train “All right mate” he then called forward to the driver “Next stop, we are now on Plan B.”

“You are the boss mate” the driver remarked to himself as he duly closed the door and proceeded to drive the train on towards the next stop.

“Rumbled?” Tracy asked as she got up and joined the Commander over by the door.

“Looks that way” the Commander admitted whereupon he checked his gun to make sure it was loaded just in case.

“So how are we going to get in then?” Tracy asked.

“Through the back door” the Commander confirmed “Jack, looks like we are going to need you again.”

“Oh wonderful...” Jack responded “You do realise that I am the only one here with no body armour or any way of keeping myself from getting shot?” he pointed out.

“Lieutenant Franklin, front and centre” Bob duly commanded whereupon the young ARU cadet duly stepped forward and stood to attention.

“Sir” she responded.

“Our young friend here is going to have to lead us through the station and unlock out little exit strategy” Bob informed her “From now on I want you to be by his side the entire way, your priority is to see to it he gets home tonight unharmed in any way, understood?”

“Yes Sir” Franklin agreed.

“Will that be satisfactory?” Bob asked.

“How good a shot are you?” Jack asked the young ARU officer.

“Best in class apparently” Franklin sheepishly admitted.

“In which case you're hired” Jack confirmed “So let's do it shall we?” he then generally suggested.

“Ready?” Tracy asked the Commander with an unusually apprehensive tone to her voice and expression.

“Err to be honest, no...” the Commander admitted as the train began to slow once more and the platform at London Bridge station appeared through the carriage windows.

“All right” Bob instructed “Franklin, Jack and Team one, you are our front runners while Andy brings up our rear with the rest. Keep your weapons hot and your eyes peeled.”

“Eyes down for a full house” the Commander remarked as the train stopped at the platform and the doors opened.

“Go! Go! Go!” Bob called whereupon in one large unstoppable mass of people, the entire party disembarked and quickly rushed along the platform towards the sign posted exit.

Members of the public and station staff all wisely got out of the way quickly as they came through the passageway to the central access way between the northbound and southbound Northern Line platforms amid much shouting, screams and confusion.

“Uh oh...” Jack called as they stopped suddenly near the stairs when they saw coming from the other direction a couple of armed plain clothes men, guns drawn and running towards them from the far end of the station complex.

“Jack, get behind me” Franklin quickly ordered before she and two colleagues moved forward to intercept.

“Under the powers of the ISA Alliance Act, you are under arrest!” one of the men confidently ordered.

“Think again...” Bob responded as Franklin and the other armed officers brought their arms to bear.

“Drop your weapons, take two steps back with your hands up!” Franklin ordered with a look of steely determination to which the two ISA men merely looked back with little respect “Do it, now!” she then reiterated “It has already been one hell of a morning so please do not test me all right?”

“All right, all right, we are doing it” one of the ISA men reluctantly agreed after looking across at his colleague where as soon as they had dropped their guns on the floor, Bob and Hendrickson had gone around behind them and wrestled them to the floor to be restrained and searched.

“You guys get going” Hendrickson ordered as he and a couple of Transport Division officers who had now joined them proceeded to take over “We can take care of these two.”

“All right, let's go” Franklin called back whereupon the party made its way up the stairs.

“Turn left here” Jack called as they rushed around the corner sending more unsuspecting commuters flying out of the way whilst he reached into his pocket and pulled out a key which he then used to unlock a seemingly unremarkable wall panel in the left hand side of the passageway, the small enamel number plate on the top corner the only sign that this was in fact a door.

“I hope you know where you are going” Franklin remarked as she looked back to see Jack working on the small lock in the wall panel.

“Always trust the little guy” Jack confirmed as with a look of determination he finally managed to get the lock to work and opened the panel “All right, everyone jump in” he then declared.

Quickly they all piled inside through the access panel before Jack firmly closed it behind them leaving the station passageway quiet once more with only some stunned onlookers wondering just what the hell had just occurred and whether it really had happened at all.

“All right, follow me everyone” Jack called back as he made his way to the front of the group in the dingy old running tunnel, the smell of damp and over a hundred years of decay and disuse very much apparent.

Jack shone a torch ahead along the tubular tunnel and with the ARU team using the torches mounted on their rifles to provide further illumination, the party made their way along the tunnel.

“What the hell is this place?” Howell asked as he looked around in between masking his nose from the awful stench that he had not been expecting whatsoever.

“This is the one of the old running tunnels to the former King William Street terminus of the old City & South London railway” the Commander explained “There hasn't been a train along these tunnels since 1900.”

“Last refuge of the scoundrel” Sir Richard remarked with a wry grin.

It took some twenty minutes to make their way along the confined and twisty tunnel, the worst bit being the curved uphill section where the former line ran back up the other side of the Thames having passed beneath the river and ironically because of its gradient as it approached the former terminus station, the reason why it was quickly abandoned after only ten years of service.

They soon reached the door that blocked the former running tunnels from the old station platform area and proceeded through it swiftly into the warmth and light of the King William Street centre.

“I hope someone has got the kettle on” the Commander remarked as he led the way into the command centre.

“I’m on it” Martin readily agreed “I may have to order in mind” he remarked before leaving the room to sort out some breakfast.

“If you don't mind Sir” Bob asked “I am going to take my lads and lasses upstairs for a look see and check the perimeter.”

“By all means” the Commander confirmed.

“Where's Jennifer?” Fuller asked with obvious concern.

“Her chopper is landing on the roof now” Amber confirmed.

“You will have to go up to her though” Collins added “She can't get very far unaided I am afraid.”

“As long as she is alive and still smiling, that is the most important thing” Fuller agreed before he left, following hot on the heels of the ARU officers.

“That was brave and stupid all in the same move” Megan was heard from the adjacent room admonishing Jack as they were reunited “You didn't have to do that to impress me you know.”

“How long have those two been married?” Howell jokingly asked as he, Sir Richard, Tracy and the Commander joined Collins and Amber in the briefing room and each took a seat around the main table.

“What happened to Commander Hendrickson?” Amber asked.

“Oh, he is back at London Bridge seeing off some party crashers” the Commander confirmed.

“The lunatics are coming out of the woodwork by the van load it seems” Tracy confirmed “Trouble is they are very well trained, financed, armed and motivated.”

“And there appears to be a hell of a lot of them too” Sir Richard agreed.

“All right then ladies and gentlemen” the Commander asked “As my old man used to say, what's the S.P. then?”

“Haliford's boys basically control the Security Service, MI5, MI6, the Central Services operations, Diplomatic Security & Protection Service and most if not all communications systems nationwide” Collins confirmed.

“We have been monitoring their radio traffic from here” Amber added “From what we can gather there seems to have been a lot of serious violent incidents across the city, we believe organised by our old Welsh friend and his hired thugs.”

“Stir up trouble on the streets, see the Security Service overwhelmed and then watch as Haliford and his crusaders ride in on their trusty chargers to save the day” Tracy summarised.

“That would appear to be Haliford's game plan” Collins agreed “and it is working too.”

“What about our people?” the Commander confirmed.

“Security Service officers on the ground are finding themselves increasingly locked out of the loop, cut off from any back up if or rather when they get into serious trouble and if any of them question the ISA boys, they disappear” Collins explained “As for MI6, well that was Haliford's domain for many years so many of them are loyal to his line of thinking as he has loaded the place with his drones, MI5 on the other hand thanks to a timely warning from me has managed to put up the shutters to a certain extent and go on voluntary gardening leave.”

“So we still have people out there on our side?” Tracy asked.

“We have managed to establish communications with some Security Service officers, MI5 people and a few others including some of the CIA London Station people who worked under Mr Howell here” Amber confirmed “effectively it forms a sort of underground resistance which we can call on when we make our move.”

“Which leads me to the big question” the Commander remarked “Has anyone got any idea how we are going to extract us, this Service and this country from this complete and utter mess?”

“Well we could do it the old fashioned way” Tracy remarked “That is find the bastards and lamp them. Alternatively there is the modern way which is collate a focus group and set up a campaign on Facebook.”

“I'll go for the old fashioned way” the Commander quickly confirmed.

“There could be a legal recourse we could use” Sir Richard tentatively suggested.

“I'm all ears” the Commander confirmed.

“Well the way this all started was because Haliford along with that obnoxious fat slime ball McCallister set up their independent ISA outfit which is fine, they can do that within certain boundaries” Sir Richard explained “The problem is that not only does it appear to be financed by, well lets be honest, dubious sources...”

“Money laundered from the Russian Mafia for a starter” Tracy remarked.

“...exactly” Sir Richard confirmed “but he manages to set himself up in prime position to roll on in just as the Prime Minister is killed.”

“As I understand it” Howell remarked “your Home Secretary was first in line to take over upon the Prime Minister's death was he not?”

“Correct” the Commander confirmed “unfortunately he met with a mysterious health issue at the airport only an hour before the central parliamentary committee meeting to confirm his acting premiership, a poisoned tipped umbrella would you believe.”

“Very old school” Sir Richard remarked “Makes you yearn for the good old days of the Cold War and the KGB doesn't it?” he commented.

“Those were the days” Howell agreed “At least you knew who you were fighting and what the rules were.”

“My money is on Cruschov or one of his ex KGB buddies being the brains behind the umbrella gag” Amber remarked “I have studied the man in excruciating detail and this is right up his street.”

“So not only is Cruschov providing the finance for this little party of Haliford and McAllister's, he also is providing a few of his old party pieces as well” the Commander concluded.

“So with the Home Secretary hospitalised, what happens?” Sir Richard continued “As if by magic a replacement arrives in the form of Lord Forsyth. He duly gets approved, promptly wheels in his old buddy Haliford to put the house in order, Q.E.D.”

“What do we have on Lord Forsyth?” the Commander asked.

“Very little beyond the official biography” Amber reluctantly admitted “Every inquiry and search has resulted in us hitting road blocks if you know what I mean.”

“And we dare not go any deeper into certain central systems for fear of it being traced back here” Collins added “The last thing we want is for Haliford's goons to find out about this place and our little party.”

“We certainly do not want to run the risk of unexpected guests” the Commander agreed.

“Just in case however” Collins responded “I am having Jennifer Caverner taken in her helicopter to a secure medical facility we use sometimes, very private. I will then have my people move the Home Secretary there as well.”

“Could you take Jack and Megan there too?” the Commander asked “We would feel a lot more reassured about what we have to do in the coming hours knowing they too were safe.”

“Lieutenant Smitham” Collins called through to the communications room whereupon the young officer appeared at the door.

“Yes Sir?” he responded.

“Inform the helicopter that when Mr Fuller has finished seeing Jennifer, they are to wait until our two young friends here are on board as well before taking off.”

“Aye Sir” Smitham confirmed.

“Thank you” the Commander responded.

“Not a problem” Collins agreed “I think the less people we have floating around the better for the time being, I think it is safe to say there is considerable danger ahead.”

“What I want to know is how the hell did Lord Forsyth get the job?” Tracy asked “As far as I can tell he is a no-body.”

“A world class pain in the butt with a lot of connections would be a lot more accurate” Amber responded.

“Obnoxious little cretin was my first impression” the Commander admitted.

“So when the Home Secretary was knocked out of the running” Tracy asked “Presumably the central parliamentary committee had no choice but to endorse Lord Forsyth then?”

“There were other options” Sir Richard explained “They could have appointed an interim Government for seventy two hours under Lord Hainault who as Chair of the committee has final say, all approved by the Queen of course.”

“I’ve known Lord Hainault ever since I won twenty quid off of him at poker when I was fourteen years old” the Commander responded “He is a man of unbending honesty, dedication and loyalty to this country and its people. He knows what Lord Forsyth and his cronies are capable of which makes his decision completely unfathomable in my view.”

“There is one possibility” Amber ventured cautiously “About three weeks ago when Cruschov arrived in the UK, Lieutenant Barrett was doing some research for Sir Richard. Apparently certain files were going missing from the Central Registry in Whitehall but we never found out where they went or who was taking them.”

“What sort of documents were they?” Tracy asked.

“Most of it appeared to be low level stuff” Amber confirmed “General reports, some public inquiry documents, nothing terribly exciting.”

“The best way to hide the theft of a particular document is to lose it amongst lots of others that no one will miss” Tracy remarked “Believe me, it has been done before.”

“Has anyone got a list of the missing documents by any chance?” the Commander asked with some obvious apprehension as it was clear he was beginning to have a bad feeling about something “I just want to check a theory.”

“Err yes” Sir Richard confirmed as he reached inside his coat pocket and produced a old battered and clearly well used leather bound notebook from which after looking through it for a few moments he extracted a piece of yellow paper “here it is” he then confirmed, passing it across.

“Yep, yep, and that one, yep, that one too” the Commander then muttered to himself as he proceeded to look down the list he had just been given until he reached one particular entry on it and stopped, “Oh bugger...” he then remarked.

“Something wrong?” Sir Richard asked.

“Well for a starter these seemingly random missing files all have one connection” the Commander explained “They are either reports filed by or documentation concerning public and private official inquiries conducted by none other than Lord Hainault.”

“So I don't really need to ask what the 'Oh bugger...' moment was about then do I love?” Tracy asked knowingly.

“File AH1213454B” the Commander confirmed with a resigned sigh “The infamous and much buried Hainault Inquiry.”

“Long story by any chance Sir?” Amber asked sensing the mood.

“Longer than you could possibly imagine” the Commander was forced to admit “Believe me ladies and gentlemen there is enough political dynamite in that proverbial can of worms alone to have a hold over Lord Hainault let alone what may be lurking in any of the other files listed here.”

“I don't understand?” Howell remarked “What is so significant about this guy?” he asked.

“Lord Hainault is the 'go to guy' for any public and Government inquiry that involves dealing with unpleasant people and even more unpleasant facts” Sir Richard explained “For the last thirty years he has taken on every dirty political hot potato there has ever been and along the way encountered some really nasty people.”

“The Hainault Report itself was a particularly juicy one” the Commander continued “It became so sensitive in the end with the names that came up as having been complicit in the events it investigated that it had to be all but buried, there are only four known copies of it in existence and one of those is safely locked in my safe.”

“So that must be the deal then” Tracy concluded “Forsyth and his cronies are using some form of blackmail to overrule Lord Hainault.”

“But what specifically?” the Commander asked “I have known him for so long, it is near impossible to work out what it might be. Some of the things he investigated were so classified even I have no access to them.”

“Something you don't have access to Commander?” Collins remarked with a surprised, indeed almost shocked look “Definitely time to start getting worried methinks.”

“Would you ladies and gentlemen excuse me for a few moments please?” the Commander requested as he got up from the table and looked across at Tracy “The wife and I need to have a few moments alone” he explained.

“Alan has just come back down with some breakfast for us” Amber confirmed “It's through in the next room” she indicated.

“Thank you” the Commander responded as those in the room proceeded to depart until after a few moments and with the door closed as they left, he and Tracy were left alone.

“Go on then darling” Tracy declared “What lovely little secret from your past is about to get unearthed this time?” she asked.

“I think we can safely say everything with my name attached to it is well and truly out in the open now” the Commander reassured her “Did you ever read the Hainault report?”

“I skimmed through to the highlights” Tracy confirmed “Mostly the bit where you save the day but get shot and thrown off a roof top for your troubles.”

“Don't remind me...” the Commander joked as he felt his lower side where even after all these years there was still a bullet lodged from that infamous day many years ago.

“So what is on your mind then love?” Tracy asked, putting her arms around him for reassurance.

“I am concerned, and that is putting it mildly” the Commander admitted “If those files that Forsyth et al have contain even one tenth of the things that Lord Hainault has been responsible for investigating over the last thirty or forty years, and that is just the things I know about, it could mean he has a hold over almost everyone.”

“Well except me I guess” Tracy confidently responded but then saw the apologetic look on her husbands face at her remark.

“About two weeks after you graduated from the Officer's Academy?” the Commander suggested.

“Ah...” Tracy responded “You know about that?” she asked.

“Came up in my initial research when I first met you” the Commander admitted “Don't worry love, I made sure any copies I could find were destroyed and if it is any comfort, in the same situation I would have done exactly what you did.”

“Even if it was extremely politically inconvenient?” Tracy responded.

“Well you know how I enjoy putting the wind up politicians” the Commander confirmed with a wry grin “I just wanted to warn you that there might be a remote possibility that some skeletons from your past as opposed to mine for a change may suddenly fall out of a cupboard or two.”

“We have to find out what Forsyth has on Lord Hainault” Tracy responded “It may be our only way to get rid of this man and his cronies, and if that means making sacrifices then that is what must be done.”

“All right” the Commander agreed whereupon they kissed “So do you want to hear my idea?”

“Hit me with your best shot my love” Tracy confirmed.

“Oh that must have been a good one” Sir Richard remarked as he scoffed on a croissant when he and the others heard Tracy laughing manically from the next room.

“Probably that one you told me the other day about the Foreign Secretary and the German Alsatian” Collins replied as he poured himself a second cup of coffee.

“Yes, that one was rather good wasn't it” Sir Richard smiled with amusement as he recalled the joke just as Tracy and the Commander, arm in arm came into the room.

“Gentlemen” the Commander declared to those in the room “We've got a plan.”

“Oh shit, we are in trouble now...” Collins remarked quietly aside to Sir Richard who merely maintained a grin.

“Dave, I need to borrow your Raspberry thing” the Commander then requested.

“Err I think you mean Blackberry darling” Tracy quietly corrected him.

“Well whatever the thing is called” the Commander confirmed “I need to send a secure text message, if I can remember how to do it that is.”

“Here you go” Collins passed across his Blackberry to the Commander who tried his best to fiddle with it but to no avail “Only text messages are so last year, these days we send e-mails instead.”

“Now you tell me” the Commander responded with a slightly annoyed expression “Technologically I am so far behind the times I only just gave up using carrier pigeons last week.”

“You can't get the Security Service website on a carrier pigeon” Tracy wryly added.

“We have a website?” the Commander responded.

“Along with a Facebook account, a twitter feed and an online photo gallery” Tracy confirmed.

“Tracy my love” the Commander admitted defeat “I have no idea what you are talking about.”

“Give it here” Tracy took the Blackberry from her husband with a giggle and looked at it “So who are you trying to contact?”

“X-Ray Victor One Five” the Commander confirmed “I think it is about time we check exactly where his real loyalties lie.”

“Okay, we are hot” Tracy responded as she managed to open a new message on the device “So what do you want to say?”

“Need current location of Falcon One within the hour for a lift” the Commander dictated “Would prefer no uninvited guests at the party.”

“That’s it?” Tracy asked as she finished typing the message on the Blackberry’s miniature keyboard.

“That’s it” the Commander confirmed.

“All right then” Sir Richard asked “So what is the plan then?”

“I’m going to kidnap Lord Hainault” the Commander calmly announced to initially and understandably stunned silence.

“Right...!” Collins responded a few moments later once this announcement had had the chance to sink in whereupon he was first to react “Two words for you Commander, IN – SANE!!”

“I don’t think he likes your idea darling” Tracy remarked aside.

“Oh I don’t know” Amber remarked.

“Sounds like typical Commander-esque logic to me” Roger Field agreed.

“The guy is protected up to the nines” Collins began to reel off the list of reasons for his response to the Commander’s announcement “Haliford’s boys are going to be watching him around the clock assuming they haven’t bumped him off already that is and if you go wading in there you will most likely either be captured, killed or both because lets face it Commander, you are not exactly high up on Haliford’s Christmas card list at the moment. In case it had escaped your attention he doesn’t really like you very much.”

“The feeling’s mutual believe me” the Commander responded.

At that moment, the Blackberry in Tracy’s hand bleeped as a response was received whereupon she duly read it.

“Gants Hill in one hour” she confirmed to her husband.

“Lieutenant Smitham” the Commander called across the room “Get onto our secure channel and have Commander Cassini meet me outside Gants Hill Underground Station in forty five minutes, tell him to come alone, the less of our people we drag into this the better.”

“What do you want me to do?” Tracy asked as she grabbed her uniform tunic.

“You are not coming” the Commander confirmed with a hint of reluctance but he knew it was the right decision.

“Like hell I am not” Tracy responded almost instantly “Someone has got to watch your back.”

“I’m a big boy, I can take care of myself” the Commander tried to reassure her.

“Oh yes!” Tracy responded with more than a hint of sarcasm “That is what I say to myself every time the endless bits of metal that are holding you together along with the couple of bullets still inside you sets off the metal detector at Scotland Yard each morning.”

“Look, I don’t want you there because if it does go pear shaped, you could wind up getting hurt” the Commander tried to explain “If anything ever happened to you I would never be able to live with myself, you are all I have and I am not going to lose you if I can help it.”

“Isn’t love a pain the backside?” Collins remarked aside to Sir Richard.

“It is indeed” Sir Richard concluded “and I have two divorce lawyers frequently leaving messages on behalf of two ex wives on my voice mail to prove it” he added with a smirk.

“All right” Tracy very reluctantly withdrew her objections “but please for my sakes if no one else’s, watch your back love?” she asked.

“I will” the Commander confirmed as they hugged each other.

“And make sure you take a decent gun with you” Tracy then produced her weapon and a couple of spare clips of ammunition before passing them to her husband, placing them in the palm of his hand with deep insistence.

“I just hope I won’t need it” the Commander agreed before holstering the weapon.

“Transport is waiting outside for you Commander” Smitham then reported through from the communications room.

“Jennifer, Simon and the kids?” the Commander asked.

“Already on their way to a safe location” Smitham confirmed “Commander Hendrickson is taking an ARU team around to the hospital to collect the Home Secretary within the hour and move him there as well.”

“Won't he still be heavily guarded?” Tracy asked.

“That's been taken care of from another angle” the Commander cryptically explained “I still have a couple of aces up my sleeve that Haliford and his cronies don't know about, at least not yet anyway.”

“I am willing to bet Haliford is probably throwing things at walls by now” Collins remarked with a satisfied smirk.

“Entirely possible” the Commander agreed as he put on his best dress uniform tunic and then proceeded to attach the ceremonial sword to the belt attachment “Still, redecorating the walls will be the least of his problems by the time I have finished with him” he promised “Anyway, how do I look?” he asked as he put on his cap.

“Like you are about to kick someone up the jacksi in quite some elegant style” Sir Richard commented.

“Here” Tracy stepped forward and helped straighten his collar until it was neatly in the correct place “Be careful, please?” she pleaded.

“I will love” the Commander confirmed before they kissed “I'll be back soon, I promise” he then declared before reluctantly letting go of Tracy's hand and departing.

A couple of minutes later, the Commander emerged from the discrete doorway set into the side of the building that sat over the top of the former King William Street station where outside was Sir Richard Crowthorne's Aston Martin with Lieutenant Barrett behind the wheel.

“Aren't you supposed to be dead Lieutenant Commander?” the Commander duly asked, understandably surprised and confused to see her as he got in the front passenger seat.

“Never underestimate the power of friends in low places Sir” Barrett confirmed “My unfortunate demise made sure I was put out of Haliford's misery and therefore by default disappeared off of his radar.”

“Explain it later” the Commander responded “I have had enough surprises for one week as it is.”

“Yes Sir” Barrett confirmed as she started up the powerful V12 engine of Sir Richard's DB9 “So where to then Sir?”

“Gants Hill Underground Station” the Commander ordered “and don't spare the horses.”

“You got it Sir” Barrett responded with an enthusiastic grin as she put the powerful car into gear and floored it, roaring out into the flow of traffic and disappearing off into the distance.

Hundreds of feet below, Roger Field was just coming out of the toilet when he came across Tracy in a side office, arming herself with at least two guns and obviously preparing to leave the premises.

“So where are you going my dear?” Field asked even though he already knew the answer, the determination that Tracy was showing on her face was evidence enough.

“Where do you think?” Tracy casually responded as she cocked the MP7 she had in her hand and checked it before slinging it over her shoulder “Don't try stopping me” she insisted.

“I never argue with a woman holding a gun” Field confirmed “I tend to find I live longer that way, so instead I shall come with you.”

“Are you sure?” Tracy asked.

“Of course I am my dear” Field duly confirmed “I have a lot of friends and contacts in this town who owe me a lot of favours and I think in the name of a good cause it is time I cashed a few of them in.”

“Better grab your coat then” Tracy advised “I get the feeling we are likely to be in for a cold reception out there.”

With armed ISA guards posted at each of the four corners of the roof of New Scotland Yard looking out through dark glasses across the city, Prime Minister Lord Forsyth stepped out of his helicopter and moved across the roof to one side whereupon it took off again just as Haliford emerged from the roof access doorway.

“Well Mr Haliford” Forsyth greeted him as they met and formally shook hands “Word reaches me that you seem to be having a few domestic problems.”

“Nothing that can't be taken care of given time and little bit of money spread about Sir” Haliford attempted to reassure.

“Money we have plenty of” Forsyth confirmed as the sound of the departing helicopter died down and they were able now to speak and hear without having to raise their voices “Time on the other hand is in rather short supply.”

“Well I think I can safely say that we have the Security Service pretty much sewn up” Haliford confirmed “Losing track of the Commander and the others was however a major blow to the strategy.”

“I shouldn't worry to much old friend” Forsyth reassured him “Even if he could muster some support, the Service he once commanded from this very building is now

in tatters. We have the superior numbers, the strength and the fire power. This is our time, this is our era.”

“Then perhaps it is time to move onto the final phase of the operation?” Haliford tentatively suggested “Seal the deal once and for all?”

“Once Lord Hainault is err how shall I put it?” Lord Forsyth began suggestively.

“Retired?” Haliford prompted.

“As good a word as any” Forsyth duly agreed before continuing “then there will no longer be any legal or parliamentary course of action available to unseat our new Government, we will be here to stay.”

“Mr Hoskins, would you be so kind as to join us” Haliford called discreetly into a two way radio at that point.

“I want it done cleanly, no evidence, nothing more than a tragic accident. Is that understood?” Forsyth insisted.

“It is not like I haven't arranged such things before Sir” Haliford proudly confirmed.

“So when do I get to enjoy the final demise of the Security Service on my television then?” Forsyth asked as Hoskins appeared at the roof access doorway and crossed across towards them.

“With any luck the great Security Service fire sale should take place around about lunchtime” Haliford confirmed with an evil glint in his eye.

“Fire sale?” Hoskins asked.

“Everything must go” Haliford explained with an evil chuckle “One spectacular last hurrah for a dying outfit that should have been put out of my misery before it was ever created.”

“So what is the plan?” Forsyth asked.

“About twelve o'clock there will be a sudden flurry of 999 calls” Haliford went on to explain “Concerned citizens in central London will report that there have been sightings of large groups of armed thugs in the streets, terrorising tourists, passers by, anyone and everyone.”

“Presumably our Welsh friend and his hired rent-a-thugs?” Forsyth asked.

“Along with that supreme piece of work Harcourt I presume?” Hoskins asked.

“Indeed” Haliford confirmed “That man is the best bone crusher in the business and best of all because he enjoys his work so much, he is also extremely cheap to hire and maintain.”

“So let me guess the scenario” Forsyth summarised “The Security Service, by now already extremely overstretched and on its last legs responds to a man to the call to defend the citizens of London only to find...?”

“To find that our friend Mr Harcourt has brought along some well tooled up friends who will ensure that there is a bloodbath in the streets” Haliford confirmed “What is left of the mighty Security Service will be cut down in their desperate bid to protect the public and with any luck some photogenically acceptable innocent victims will be involved as well which should look good with the grieving relatives on the front pages of the tabloids in the morning.”

“And then presumably with the Security Service all but dead in the water the ISA ride in on their chargers and rescue everyone from the evil bad guys?” Forsyth ventured.

“Wiping out the bad guys in the process of course in a huge show of strength which has the added bonus that if they are dead, we won't have to pay them” Haliford concluded with a stifled laugh.

“With a sharp financial mind like that I have a good mind to put you in charge of the Inland Revenue” Forsyth commented.

“Pay up your tax or I send the boys around...” Haliford remarked “It could work I suppose.”

“You wanted to see me Sir?” Hoskins asked.

“Oh yes” Haliford agreed “It is time for Lord Hainault to be retired, after all he is getting on a bit. Withdraw our close protection people and make sure it is quick, clean and painless. Nothing must be traceable back to us. Take care of it personally.”

“Personally” Hoskins confirmed “Yes Sir” he agreed before turning smartly on his heels and leaving the roof.

“Can you trust him?” Forsyth asked as they watched Hoskins disappear from view.

“For now at any rate” Haliford confirmed “I have however put in place a couple of, well lets call them loyalty checks just in case our American friend there decides he no longer subscribes to our world view.”

“Remind me never to cross you” Forsyth remarked with a wry look.

“Trust me my old friend” Haliford confirmed with a wry smile “Anyone who ever crosses me never lives long enough to even realise what has happened to them.”

“Speaking of old friends” Forsyth asked “Has anyone managed to track down Sergei Glasgov yet?”

“Oh he will turn up sooner or later” Haliford replied “Probably drunk as a lord and unable to remember which country he is in let alone whether the Soviet Union still

exists.”

“I only ask because a strange report passed across my desk an hour or so ago” Forsyth explained “Apparently the Russian President went missing for almost thirty six hours a day or two ago and seeing that he and Glasgow are old friends, coupled to a rumour that a Russian Government jet was sighted in UK airspace about the same time by an RAF patrol, I just wondered if that old Bolshevik soak was up to something?”

“Can't see it somehow” Haliford dismissed his superior's concerns “I'll put a call into a friend on the MI6 Russian desk, see if there are any whispers on the back channels through.”

“If you would be so kind” Forsyth confirmed as he indicated with his hand towards one of the guards to call back the helicopter as he was now almost ready to leave “I don't like unpleasant last minute surprises so lets be sure no one has anything planned shall we?” he asked.

“Indeed Sir” Haliford readily agreed as the helicopter returned to the rooftop and came back into land.

“Well, you will have to excuse me” Forsyth declared, having to raise his voice once again to make himself heard over the roar of the helicopter landing behind him “I have to return to Downing Street and prepare for a long and profitable period in Government!”

The distinguished figure of Lord Hainault stood out on the relatively quiet street as he approached the roundabout in Gants Hill where Woodford Avenue crossed Eastern Avenue.

It occurred to the elder and experienced statesman as he approached the subway entrance to Gants Hill Underground Station that his usual discreet escort which in the last few days had been handed over to ISA control were noticeable by their absence in the last thirty minutes not that he was in any way bothered about that.

Stepping smartly down the subway steps brought Lord Hainault into the near deserted sub surface ticket hall located directly beneath the roundabout before using his Parliamentary Issue Oyster Card to pass seamlessly through the ticket barriers and onto the escalators which with their accompanying motorised humming took him down to the famous 1930's built vaulted section between the two Central Line platforms often compared to the Moscow Subway because of its similar grand style.

Oddly there was no one else about as Lord Hainault stepped off the bottom of the escalator and took a moment to look around the vaulted ceiling and the Art Deco bronze lamps standards that formed a line down its centre.

Disregarding the quietness of the station he proceeded to walk towards the southbound Central Line platform, his intention being to take a train into the centre of London in hope that he would be back in his office in Whitehall by lunchtime.

It was as he passed through onto the deserted platform that Lord Hainault became aware of someone lurking the shadows behind him at the far end of the platform whereupon he turned around to see Hoskins appear, a gun in his hand and a very serious look on his face.

“Nobody moves” the voice of another called from the opposite end of the platform whereupon the Commander emerged, his gun also drawn and pointed directly at both Lord Hainault and Hoskins just behind him “Take it real easy” he strongly suggested.

“Good morning Commander” Lord Hainault remarked as with his hands raised as he looked around, clearly sensing the impending danger here “I thought it was a little quiet around here even for this time of day.”

“I don't like gate crashers” the Commander explained.

“Speaking of which” Lord Hainault calmly inquired “Is he with you?” he nodded back towards Hoskins.

“That's a far more interesting question than you might think” the Commander confirmed “Well, Mr Hoskins, where do you loyalties lie?” he asked.

“I think you know Commander” Hoskins confirmed as he lowered his weapon and approached closer.

“Hold it a second” the Commander then suddenly held his hand up and both Hoskins and Lord Hainault stopped still in their tracks.

A noise that had caught the Commander's attention saw him quickly turn to his left and fire two shots into the darkness of a connecting service passageway much to the others shock. A few moments later the reason for this action was duly revealed as a masked man dressed all in black stumbled forward into the light and collapsed dead onto the platform surface, a loaded weapon with silencer falling from his hand in the process that the Commander quickly proceeded to kick away from the body just in case.

“Friend of yours?” Lord Hainault inquired as he and Hoskins joined the Commander standing over the dead body which was gradually leaking a trail of blood onto the platform.

“Can't say I have had the pleasure” the Commander confirmed as he knelt down and lifted the dead man's head up to pull off the balaclava before dropping it back down again.

“Harry Targa” Hoskins confirmed as he recognised the deceased with some sense of disdain “One of Harcourt's lethal thugs.”

“Looks like Sir John Haliford has some doubts about you my friend” the Commander commented to Hoskins “either that or the plan was to gun you down after you had assassinated Lord Hainault here and thus take the fall for the whole thing.”

“Would someone please explain to me what the hell is going on around here?” Lord Hainault politely asked.

“It would appear that someone doesn't like you Sir” the Commander explained “Don't worry, you are not the only one in that boat, it seems to have become somewhat full in the last week or so.”

“I had sort of noticed Commander” Lord Hainault admitted “So what's your story young man if I may ask?” he turned to Hoskins.

“Oh, I am the bad guy” Hoskins responded “Well at least that is what Sir John Haliford, former US Senator William McCallister and others think I am at any rate.”

“Although judging by our gate crasher here” the Commander indicated the dead body on the platform in front of them “I think it is fairly safe to say that Haliford is starting to live up to his reputation as actually managing to be more paranoid than the entire CIA put together.”

“Hello Mike” Barrett called as she arrived on the platform and recognised Hoskins straight away “I see you have left me with a mess to clear up as usual.”

“Oh, hi Rosie” Hoskins replied “How are you keeping?”

“Considering you maniac boss shot me dead yesterday, can't complain” she admitted wryly “By the way could you not have got one of the goons to have dumped me somewhere a bit more convenient than St James Park, it took ages to get back to the motor afterwards.”

“Next time I am faking the death of a fellow deep cover colleague in front of the eyes of my supposed boss I will try to remember that” Hoskins confirmed “Meantime may I make a suggestion people?”

“Let's get the hell out of here?” Lord Hainault suggested.

“My thoughts exactly” the Commander agreed.

“Commander Cassini awaits you upstairs in a company van Sir” Barrett confirmed.

“Very well” the Commander agreed “Give us ten minutes to get clear then get this entire place locked down and make sure the two bodies that are 'found' are identified as Lord Hainault and the late Mr Hoskins here” he instructed.

“Done Sir” Barrett agreed whereupon the Commander duly proceeded to lead the other two off of the platform and back up the escalators to the surface.

“Well I must say Commander” Lord Hainault remarked as they emerged into the ticket hall and made directly for the exit steps to street level “Even after all these years you still never cease to surprise me. I haven't had this much excitement in years.”

“You may not like what I have to say in a minute Sir” the Commander responded “Suffice to say I have some extremely awkward questions for you before this is through.”

“I thought you might...” Lord Hainault confirmed with a slightly resigned sigh as they reached the top of the subway steps at street level where over on the opposite side of the street, Cassini signalled his presence by twice flashing his headlamps.

“That's our ride” the Commander confirmed “Hoskins or whatever your name is, you get in the front and keep a look out for any of Haliford's Muppets.”

“You got it” Hoskins readily agreed as he proceeded around to the far side of the van and got in the front.

“Meantime Sir” the Commander confirmed as he slid open the side door that led into the back of the van “You and I have a lot to talk about.”

“I had a feeling you were going to say something like that” Lord Hainault remarked as he duly got in, quickly followed by the Commander who then closed the door and signalled for Cassini to drive on.

“Where to Sir?” Cassini called from the front as he drove up the road just as the emergency services including a large contingent of ISA officers came the opposite way.

“Somewhere quiet and out of the way” the Commander suggested “and where we can get a decent cup of tea” he added.

“I think I should warn you Sir” Hoskins called back “Haliford is planning one last finale for the remaining Security Service officers that are still left on the street, a fire sale he called it.”

“What does he have in mind?” the Commander asked.

“Lots of very nasty people, many of them provided by Altman and Stevens with that obnoxious piece of crap William Harcourt leading the party” Hoskins explained “He plans to lure what few pieces of the Service remain on the streets into a trap with reports of violent incidents on the streets and when they get there, they send in the heavy mob and wipe them all out.”

“Sounds like Haliford's style” the Commander remarked “and with Harcourt involved that will mean lots of civilian casualties as well.”

“The theory apparently is that when things look like they are beyond control, Haliford sends in the ISA hit squads and wipes them all out, saves the day and gets granted carte blanche to take over the policing and security for the entire nation.”

“Thus completing his hostile take over plan and leaving him in the unassailable position of being number one” Lord Hainault added “All with the blessing of his new Lord and Master, Prime Minister Forsyth.”

“I hate to be the bearer of bad news gentlemen” Cassini cautiously announced as he rechecked his rear view mirrors as he turned left at a roundabout “but I think we are being followed.”

The Commander clambered out of his seat and went to the back of the van to look out of the rear window which had protective film on it which meant he could see out but no one could see in.

“White Ford Mondeo about two cars back?” the Commander called forward after taking a few moments to look at the traffic behind them.

“Yes Sir” Cassini confirmed “and I think we may also have a motorbike shadowing us as well.”

“Oh I see him” the Commander confirmed before moving to the front of the van and looking out over the front seats through the windscreen for an opportunity to deal with this problem.

“What do you want me to do Sir?” Cassini asked as he continued to drive on.

“Pull in to that yard just up ahead” the Commander indicated approximately two hundred yards in the distance to a nearby building site “Are you carrying?” he asked.

“Certainly Sir” Cassini confirmed, momentarily opening his jacket to show off the semi-automatic pistol in its shoulder holster.

“What about you?” the Commander then asked Hoskins.

“Never leave home without them” he confirmed showing off two weapons with a wry smirk “Benefits of a classical FBI education you see.”

“All right then” the Commander declared “Pull in here, then stop. Once they realise we have come to a halt, I am hoping they will show their hand. Then we surprise them.”

“What do you want me to do Commander?” Lord Hainault asked “It's just I am getting to old for this sort of thing you see.”

“Just keep your head down” the Commander responded reassuringly “We will take care of this.”

Cassini duly turned right, pulling across the flow of opposite traffic and pulled into the building site where the tatty old van fitted in well with its surroundings before stopping a short distance inside the gates.

Once stationary, the Commander clambered into the central front seat and with Cassini and Hoskins observed the view behind them through the wing mirrors.

Sure enough a few moments later the white Ford Mondeo that they had identified passed by the entrance, stopped sharply and then reversed back into view again where the two men in the front could be seen talking and pointing towards the van.

A few moments later the car then pulled into the builder's yard and came to a stop immediately behind them.

Before the occupants of the car had time to get out, the Commander gave the nod and within moments he and the others had got out and had them confronted at gunpoint.

"Good morning gentlemen" the Commander calmly called "If you would do us the honour of stepping out of the vehicle, placing your weapons on the roof of the car and taking two steps back with your hands on your head, it would be much appreciated."

"Bollocks..." the driver of the car was seen to utter in frustration before he and his colleague slowly did as instructed and got out, following the Commander's instructions to the letter all be it somewhat reluctantly.

"Thank you" the Commander responded as they duly surrendered whereupon he proceeded to search the driver whilst Cassini did the same with the passenger as Hoskins provided cover "So who are you guys then?"

"Oh classy" Cassini remarked as he found an identity card on the man he was searching which he then tossed across to the Commander.

"International Security Agency Specialist Covert Operations" the Commander read from the identity card "Mmm, nice logo" he mocked.

"Drop dead..." the driver gruffly responded "You won't leave this place alive" he warned.

"Thanks for the advice" the Commander replied but at that moment the sound of a motorbike revving loudly became readily apparent which then appeared at the gateway whereupon its rider immediately opened fire with a machine gun sending Hoskins, Cassini and the Commander instantly ducking for cover behind the car.

"I hate machine guns..." Cassini remarked as they cowered behind the car whilst the indiscriminate hail of bullets flew through the air impacting into the vehicle and also catching the two ISA men from the car in the crossfire.

"I'm not too keen on them myself" Hoskins admitted.

The Commander momentarily took the opportunity as the gunman paused his assault to get off of his motorcycle to fire a few shots in his direction but all he got for his trouble was another hail of bullets aimed in his direction.

"Look at it this way" the Commander remarked as he reloaded "It could be worse."

No sooner were his words said than another white Ford Mondeo and two motorbikes appeared in the street from which further armed men appeared, all clearly intent on killing them.

“It's worse...” Cassini duly confirmed.

“You two fall back to the building site” the Commander called “I'll cover you.”

“Ready Sir” Cassini confirmed.

“All right, go!” the Commander called whereupon he opened fire on the encroaching gunmen, forcing them to duck for cover which gave Cassini and Hoskins just enough time to make a run for it towards the building site itself where an office block stood which was at that stage little more than a partially fitted out concrete frame of twelve storeys high.

The Commander duly followed a few moments later, only just managing to outpace the gunfire that followed his path to the relatively safe cover of the partially completed building.

“Where is Lord Hainault?” Cassini asked looking around.

“In the back of your van in theory” the Commander confirmed.

“Actually I am over here” Lord Hainault called from behind a nearby pillar “Transit vans aren't very bullet resistant in my experience so I decided to make a tactical retreat.”

“Can't argue with that” the Commander agreed “Here they come” he then declared as the gunmen could be seen spreading out and heading in their direction.

“I'm running out here” Cassini cautiously announced as he checked his ammunition.

“Same here” the Commander confirmed “Hoskins, what have you got left?” he asked.

“Two rounds and one full clip” Hoskins duly confirmed as they moved further inside the partially completed building to find better cover “Not enough against these guys.”

With the ISA gunmen gradually getting closer as they made their methodical way through the skeletal shell of the building the Commander looked on with a feeling of the inevitable approaching as he heard sirens and the screeching of tyres as further vehicles arrived on the scene.

“We appear to becoming rapidly outnumbered” Lord Hainault remarked “I don't suppose negotiation would get us out of this mess still breathing would it?” he asked.

“Considering these guys odious boss wants me dead, thinks you are dead already and doesn't care one way or another who lives and who dies as long as he gets his power and profit, I think we can safely say that negotiation is not going to do us much good

Sir” the Commander duly confirmed whereupon they ducked behind a concrete wall as the ISA men showered the interior of the lower floor with a hail of gunfire for a few moments.

“I see what you mean” Lord Hainault agreed.

It was then that further gunfire erupted but this time outside the building, accompanied by a lot of shouting which in turn saw the ISA men who had been bearing down on their position turn back.

“What the...?” Cassini asked, a feeling shared by the other three there with him.

“Nobody moves!” a familiar voice was heard to cry out loudly “Put the guns down, do it NOW!”

“That has a certain familiar ring to it I must say” Cassini remarked as they listened to the unfolding conversation, all be it somewhat one sided that was taking place outside the building.

For the most part the gunfire had ceased except for the occasional shot that rang out as it appeared a few of the ISA gunmen tried their luck and attempted to escape from whoever it was had surprised them from behind with overwhelming fire power.

“It has already been a hell of a bad day so far so *please* don't try my patience or that of any of my officers” Tracy was heard to call as the Commander duly led Lord Hainault, Cassini and Hoskins out of the building where they found her with an MP5 rifle in her hand pinning one of the ISA men to the ground with the barrel tip against his temple, backed up by over two dozen heavily armed Security Service officers including many from the ARU section.

“Tracy my love” the Commander asked “What the hell are you doing here?”

“Saving your arse again darling” Tracy duly confirmed with a wry smile as she stepped back from the man she had pinned down on the ground “Someone take this gentleman away” she called back whereupon a couple of ARU officers duly tied his hands with plastic straps before unceremoniously hauling him to his feet whereupon he came face to face with Hoskins.

“Traitor to the cause!” the ISA man angrily spat at Hoskins.

“Try looking in a mirror sometime pal” Hoskins coolly responded “Then you will see who the real traitor here is.”

“Nice work” the Commander commended her as he and Tracy embraced and kissed “What would I do without you?”

“Here's hoping you never get to find out” Tracy admitted as behind them the last of the captured ISA men were duly dragged away, many of them still vainly trying to resist arrest “I did have some help mind” she admitted.

“Well I must say I haven't had this much fun in years” Roger Field remarked as he arrived on the site to see for himself the aftermath.

“We have had to bolster the numbers a bit” Tracy explained “Some of Mr Field's guys have been temporarily seconded into the Security Service as I figured we are going to need everyone we can muster before this is through.”

“That may be more true than you realise” the Commander admitted.

“Lord Hainault” Field greeted the elder statesman with a warm handshake “It's been a long time.”

“It certainly has old friend” Lord Hainault agreed.

“My car is waiting if any of you need a lift?” Field duly offered.

“Sounds like a good idea” the Commander confirmed “Roger, Lord Hainault and Tracy you all come with me” he requested “Cassini, take Hoskins with you and round up as many of our people as you can find, and quickly as time is short.”

“This is about to get worse isn't it?” Tracy asked apprehensively.

“Yes my love” the Commander confirmed as they walked out of the building site and crossed the road towards where Field's classic 1960's Bentley was parked.

“I'm afraid someone will have to volunteer to drive” Field admitted “My driver got his leg broken in that little fracas just now and my licence has expired.”

“I got it” the Commander duly confirmed as he got in the driving seat with Tracy alongside him whilst Field and Lord Hainault got in the back.

“Are you sure you can drive this old thing?” Tracy asked slightly apprehensively.

“Of course I can” the Commander reassured her “I've driven it before, admittedly I was eleven years old at the time and it was on an old closed airfield but it will come back to me.”

“I take it you don't want the blocks of wood to reach the pedals this time?” Field asked “Only I think I still have them in the back.”

“You know what my love” Tracy remarked with a giggle as the Commander started the car and put it into gear “You never cease to amaze me.”

“Nor I myself” the Commander readily agreed as he proceeded to drive off down the street.

In the streets of central London, it seemed just like any normal day as with the approach of lunch time heralded by the striking of Big Ben declaring twelve o'clock,

the streets were filled with lunching office workers mingling amongst the many tourists.

The more eagle eyed however would have spotted something not quite right amongst the regular sights of the centre of the City. Dotted about here and there were gatherings of people, small discrete groups gradually assembling in an evenly spread pattern at key points.

Most of these people were dropped off at these locations from a variety of unremarkable vehicles which would then move discreetly on, leaving behind the groups to quietly mingle amongst the regular passers by.

Two off duty Security Service plain clothes officers were amongst the first to notice something did not seem quite right as they walked along Charing Cross Road

“Here Steve” one of the officers remarked to his colleague “What do you make of that little lot over there” he indicated a short distance ahead across the road to where one group of men had just been dropped off by an anonymous white van before it had sped away, disappearing quickly back into the flow of traffic.

“If you mean that lot over by the bus stop then I have no idea Terry” Steve confirmed “Something not right about them though, they just seem to be standing there waiting for something or someone.”

“And they all have earpiece radios by the looks of it as well” Terry confirmed “Could be an undercover op of some kind.”

“There would have been something on the boards about it I would have thought” Steve remarked “Although having said that given that the entire Security Service is in the process of being sent to hell in a hand basket by that Halifax guy I suppose anything is possible.”

“Looks pretty heavy handed for an undercover operation” Terry looked across with an obvious sense of growing concern as something else had then caught his attention “If I am not mistaken that is another group over there” he nodded further back down the street to where a similar number of individuals had just been dropped off by another vehicle on a street corner about a hundred yards behind them.

“I don't like the looks of this” Steve remarked.

“Two swallows don't make a summer Steve” Terry reminded him “My grandmother always used to say that.”

“Well how about three swallows then?” Steve asked as they crossed the end of a side street where looking down it revealed a further group gathering in the shadows.

“You are right” Terry quickly agreed “No I don't like the looks of this; I don't like the looks of this at all.”

“Something getting ready to go down you reckon?” Steve asked.

“That would be my bet” Terry agreed “Come on, let's get to a land line and phone this in before anything kicks off.”

As the two officers made their discreet way along the street, the mysterious groupings continued to discreetly grow in numbers all across the city as it became clear that something was growing, waiting in anticipation for it to be revealed.

“All right then” the Commander declared as he handed Lord Hainault a drink before sitting down directly opposite him in his office in the depths of the King William Street complex “What has Forsyth and Haliford got on you that made you capitulate and hand over power to those morons?”

“Documents, plain and simple” Lord Hainault simply confirmed “For over forty years I have been digging up the dirt of virtually every influential politician and civil servant this country has ever known. If it required a public or closed camera inquiry, I always got the dubious honour of chairing it and writing the report.”

“So what happened?” the Commander asked.

“Three weeks ago there was a fire at the central data and information registry in Whitehall” Lord Hainault began to explain.

“I remember the mess” the Commander recalled “Jammed traffic throughout Westminster for hours and left a very big hole in the roof of the archive building.”

“Not to mention a lot of water sloshing around in the basement” Lord Hainault agreed before continuing “The Fire Brigade Service investigation into the cause of the blaze was got at by one of Lord Forsyth's people, it was deliberate, let me assure you but the official report blames it on an electrical fault which is pretty impressive considering the seat of the fire was some hundred feet away from the nearest electric cable.”

“Let me see if I can guess where this is going” the Commander summarised “Someone, presumably one of Haliford's ex MI6 buddies goes into the central archives and extracts certain files then sets the place alight to cover the theft?”

“That is about the size of it” Lord Hainault agreed “Haliford knows it, I know it and he knows I know it too.”

“So do we know what was taken?” the Commander asked,

“Oh yes” Lord Hainault confirmed “Pretty much every report or inquiry I have ever worked on and that includes...”

“The Hainault Inquiry files...” the Commander concluded with a resigned sigh.

“Haliford and Forsyth came to me on the evening of the Prime Minister's assassination” Lord Hainault continued to explain “I saw some of the documents he

had with him and he claimed that it was apparently just a 'sample' of what he had access to.”

“So what was the deal or should I say blackmail proposal they put on the table then?” the Commander inquired.

“Ensure that Lord Forsyth got the top seat” Lord Hainault duly confirmed “Otherwise my reputation and that of many others would be duly fed through the proverbial shredder on their way to the tabloids.”

“And just to make sure” the Commander added “They took the Home Secretary out of the equation for good measure before he could get in there as a potential opponent and ruin their plans.”

“Believe me Commander” Lord Hainault stated most apologetically “I did not capitulate to save my own skin; I'm far too old to care any more about what happens to me, I did it for all those who would have been destroyed by what may have come out had those documents hit the streets, you included.”

“All I ever did was get shot and fall off a roof if I recall correctly” the Commander remarked.

“In which case I suggest you re-read your copy of my inquiry report” Lord Hainault strongly suggested.

“I am afraid I skipped over most of it” the Commander admitted “Painful memories and all that.”

“Understandable I suppose” Lord Hainault agreed “However did you know that one of those that died was Lord Forsyth's grand daughter?”

“No I didn't” the Commander admitted with obvious surprise at this revelation “Don't tell me he blames me for it?”

“You survived, admittedly only just mind and she didn't” Lord Hainault confirmed “When it comes to grief, close family etcetera, etcetera I guess anything is possible. Of course there is also the fact that Sir John Haliford was a close personal friend of Trevor Sharman.”

“One of the guys who orchestrated the whole thing and then many years later got shoved underneath a Northern Line train at Mornington Crescent station for his troubles” the Commander recalled “A fitting end for a very unpleasant guy, pity it didn't happen to him fifteen years earlier is all I can say.”

“Whilst you have made many friends along the bumpy road that has been your life Commander” Lord Hainault continued “You have also notched up some significant enemies, many of them don't hold a grudge lightly and there are some you don't even know exist.”

“Unfortunately one of the nastier ones has been brought along to this little party of Forsyth and Haliford's” the Commander explained “A particularly violent and blood thirsty man by the name of William Harcourt.”

“That guy who tried to kill Tracy last year?” Lord Hainault recalled “I read about him, used to be the fixer and muscle for some very unpleasant people at one time and overly fond of getting his gun off if I remember.”

“That's the fellow” the Commander confirmed “Unfortunately Haliford has sprung him from the padded cell I threw him, chucking away the key in the process and given him the money, support and ability to not only act out his blood thirsty hobbies but also get his revenge on anyone he doesn't like which is a pretty damn long list.”

“With you and Tracy probably quite near the top I would wager” Lord Hainault agreed with obvious concern “Definitely going to need a stiff drink I think” he concurred as he poured himself a second brandy from the decanter on the desk in front of him.

“But enough dining on ashes for one day” the Commander declared “How do we get Forsyth, Haliford and their buddies out and replace them with something resembling stability and justice?”

“I'll need to make a few telephone calls but I think there is a legal route we can take which may see Forsyth's tenure declared void and as such dissolved from beneath him” Lord Hainault explained

“And Sir John Haliford?” the Commander asked “After all he is still firmly ensconced in my office which is bad enough and probably eating my biscuits which is even worse.”

“If I understand correctly” Lord Hainault asked “Haliford has set up the ISA as an independent operation with no political or national affiliations?”

“Supposedly independent but supported by former US Senator William McCallister and we believe with funding from the Russian Mafia by way of an unpleasant scum bag by the name of Alexander Cruschov” the Commander duly confirmed.

“With Forsyth placing the Security Service under the direct command of Haliford and his independent ISA he is breaking the United Nations Domestic Security Regulations for a starter” Hainault confirmed “If you can confirm the Russian Mafia funding connection then a whole menu of legislation takes precedence and he can be arrested for that as well.”

“We have a number of recovered files which were err... liberated shall we say from the laptop of a welsh organised crime magnate by the name of Steven Altman” the Commander duly confirmed “He and another man, an ex SAS hard nut by the name of Bill Stevens are providing the muscle for Haliford's operation along with a few other services.”

“I must stress to you Commander it is vital that if we are to shut down these people and their ramshackle bandwagons, all elements must be either neutralised or detained indefinitely” Lord Hainault stressed most insistently “If even one of them escapes then they could easily return and create more and violent havoc than they are achieving now.”

“Well the Russian angle I have covered” the Commander confirmed “I have an agreement with...” he paused at this moment, deciding whether to reveal just with whom the deal he had reached actually was “...a prominent Russian official” he then continued “once we find Cruschov he is to be handed over to them for immediate deportation to a very dark cold cell somewhere in deepest Siberia.”

“William McCallister may not be quite so easy to get rid of however” Lord Hainault warned “His name has come up in high level conversations before, he is very well connected politically both this side as well as the other side of the Atlantic.”

“There is a representative of the FBI in town” the Commander responded “It turns out that the former US Senator is being secretly investigated by a specialist team in the US for various potential offences and if we can prove he is involved in the ISA mess over here then they will be more than happy to take him away and bury him so deep in indictments he is unlikely to see daylight again for at least another thirty years.”

“I would love to see the look on his face when you arrest him” Lord Hainault laughed “I crossed swords with him a couple of years back whilst looking into an illegal arms trade deal that had gone sour taking a few prominent US politicians down with it. An obnoxious little blob isn't he?”

“That was my first impression as well” the Commander confirmed but at that moment there was a knock at the door whereupon Tracy came in looking somewhat worried.

“Sorry to interrupt guys” Tracy declared apologetically “We are picking up some reports that I think you need to see.”

“I'll let you two get on with business” Lord Hainault confirmed “Meantime, mind if I use your telephone to make some calls?” he indicated the old 1930's style Bakelite telephone on the desk.

“By all means” the Commander confirmed before leaving with Tracy, closing the door behind him and then following his wife to the communications room where it was clear from the gathering in there that there was a lot of tension and concern amongst those present.

“We started getting sporadic reports about ten minutes ago” Tracy explained “Some of our people on the ground, mostly off duty and some who have managed to stay off Haliford and the ISA's radar have been calling in with reports of gatherings taking place across the city.”

“This could be what Haliford calls his fire sale of the Security Service moving into place” Hoskins warned.

“Initially it was just a couple of vans containing some dodgy looking guys here and there” Tracy continued “but in the last few minutes some alarming developments have taken place.”

“I hacked into the central control system and the CCTV feed that the congestion charge operation uses” Lieutenant Smitham explained “I used Simon Fuller's back door entry program to get in and this is what I found.”

“It looks like they are placing people at every key junction and pinch point across central London” the Commander confirmed as he scanned the numerous CCTV feeds, most of which clearly showed the same type of groups of individuals gathering as had been reported about fifteen minutes earlier in Charing Cross Road.

“A couple of our guys who first noticed this lot says they seem to be keeping themselves to themselves for the moment but they are growing in number” Tracy confirmed “Also one of our undercover boys says he has spotted at least some of them equipped with ear piece secure radios and they are definitely tooled up.”

“Whoa...” Smitham then exclaimed “Take a look at this lot” he pointed to a computer screen in front of him which was listing a huge number of vehicle registration numbers with red markers next to them.

“Looks like someone is in trouble for not paying their Congestion Charge I would say” Sir Richard wryly remarked “I don't suppose these numbers are traceable are they?”

“The vast majority seem to have entered the zone in the last forty five minutes and there are more of them coming in all the time” Smitham confirmed as he analysed the data he was receiving “and according to the DVLA system, most of these are registered to a shadow company that appears on the files we have from Steven Altman's laptop.”

“Looks like the heavy mob are about to arrive” Tracy confirmed.

“If it is Altman providing the muscle” Hoskins warned “You can place safe money that these will be his bully boys and that they will leave with nothing less than a thorough fight. Be warned ladies and gentlemen, a lot of innocent people are about to be in for a very nasty surprise.”

“Yeah thanks” Amber finished a call she was taking nearby and returned to the group “Bad news people” she confirmed.

“We seem to be having a run on it lately” the Commander remarked.

“One of my sources claims he just saw Bill Stevens and a team of hard nuts floating around Parliament Square” Amber informed them “They may be about to set about the environment protesters camped out on the lawn as a kick off for whatever shit storm we are about to get dropped into.”

“Quick, swing that one back” the Commander suddenly called out, indicating one of the CCTV feeds as it was panning across a general view of one particular location.

“It's on a pre-programmed loop” Smitham confirmed “I can rewind back the footage if you like Sir?”

“Do it” the Commander confirmed “I just thought I caught a glimpse of an old friend.”

“Here we go” Smitham declared as he worked on the controls “What are we looking for Sir?” he asked.

“There!” the Commander suddenly pointed out whereupon Smitham froze the image “Okay, knock it back a tad” he then instructed.

“Oh hell...” Tracy remarked as she too noticed what had also caught the Commander's attention “Can you zoom in a bit please?” she asked.

“Not a lot but I think I can get the front passenger at least” Smitham confirmed.

“Is that who I think it is?” Amber asked with obvious apprehension as a face became reasonably clear on the screen in front of them.

“William Harcourt” the Commander confirmed “and his boys by the looks of it as well.”

“Oh my God, this could become a blood bath” Tracy agreed.

“Well that is what Haliford and Forsyth wanted” Hoskins confirmed with much regret apparent “The Security Service or whatever he thinks is left of it will go down in one last final fight with a lot of innocent civilians mown down in the cross fire and then he and his ISA buddies will come rolling in to save the day.”

“So Harcourt and Williams are under orders to gracefully stand down when Haliford's cavalry turn up I suppose?” Tracy asked “Does Haliford really think he has those two under his control?”

“He thinks he does” Hoskins remarked “Oh how little does he know.”

“We need to rustle up reinforcements and fast” the Commander declared “Looks like the two key flash points when presumably Haliford gives the word are going to be Trafalgar Square and Parliament Square.”

“The number of tourists about in those areas at this time of year” Amber ominously warned “The potential casualties don't even bear thinking about.”

“What do we have available now?” the Commander asked.

“Commander Hendrickson has a tactical group of officers and some ARU units from the Transport Division along with a few others he has managed to round up located

here” Amber marked a point on the map near Victoria Station “Most of them are hiding in the back streets, he has set up an observation point in the top of that new office building on the corner of Wilton Place.”

“Lima Tango One Zero One from Eagle One” the Commander called into the radio “Garry, you got your ears on down there?” he asked.

“Yes Sir” Hendrickson confirmed from the empty top floor of the Peak office development through the huge glass windows of which he had a view via binoculars across a wide area of that section of London.

“Can you see anything brewing in your area?” the Commander asked “Only we are getting unpleasant reports down here.”

“Lots of thugs in lots of vans” Hendrickson reported, the concern apparent in his voice even over the radio link “Looks like someone is planning a little party and we haven't been invited.”

“You could be right” the Commander confirmed “They are turning up all over the place and waiting presumably for someone to give them the nod to starting kicking heads in, main concentrations seem to be at Parliament Square near you and Trafalgar Square fairly near us.”

“I'll round up the troops” Hendrickson confirmed “It is about time we showed these scum how real cops kick arse.”

“That's the spirit” the Commander readily agreed “Try and detain them if you can but don't put your lives or especially those of any innocent bystanders at any risk. We have got to be seen to be putting the protection of the public first or Haliford will have his publicity victory in the bag.”

“Consider it done Sir” Hendrickson confirmed “Lima Tango One Zero One out.”

“I'll take Bob's ARU team and go down to Trafalgar Square” Tracy immediately volunteered.

“Err no you won't love” the Commander responded “Harcourt is my responsibility, you two have history.”

“Which is why I should be the one to take him down” Tracy confirmed.

“And also why you should not as well” the Commander insisted “Look, this is going to get violent, a lot of people are going to get hurt and if Harcourt sees you and gets his chance he will rip you to pieces.”

“All right...” Tracy reluctantly capitulated “How about a compromise, I go to Parliament Square instead?”

“Agreed love” the Commander confirmed, sealing the deal between them with a kiss.

“One condition though” Tracy insisted as she put on her uniform tunic and checked her gun and ceremonial sword “Do him in...”

“On that my love, you have my word” the Commander confirmed.

Haliford looked up at the huge screen at the front of the main Control Room which was showing multiple live CCTV feeds from across the City and smiled as he relished the utter chaos he was about to unleash with just a single word.

He picked up the radio headset and put it on whereby he issued a simple declaration.

"Mr. Harcourt, Mr. Stevens" he calmly called "Now..."

With that he then took off the radio headset and sat back in his seat.

"I want everyone to watch this" Haliford called across the room "This is history about to be made here this afternoon and above all it is going to be one hell of a show."

Just over a mile away in Trafalgar Square, Harcourt nodded in confirmation to his associate seated in the driver seat adjacent to him before he and a number of others emerged from the minibus that was parked illegally on double yellow lines on the south side of the square.

"Err excuse me Sir" a traffic enforcement officer calmly called over as Harcourt and his associates gathered on the pavement alongside their vehicle "I'm afraid you cannot park that there, you will have to move it."

"Oh really?" Harcourt gruffly disregarded this request "and what are you going to about it?" he asked.

"Well..." the traffic enforcement officer began to respond.

"That is what I thought" Harcourt confirmed before opening his jacket to reveal two automatic machine guns slung over his shoulders, one of which he quickly brought to bear on the officer before calmly opening fire, shooting him dead.

Instantly there were screams from eyewitnesses in response to the sound of the gunshots but it was clear to anyone present that Harcourt and his men who were in the process of appearing all over the Square and in the surrounding streets that they didn't care one bit.

“Anarchy rises!!” Harcourt duly declared loudly as all around him and for some distance in every direction, passers by in blind panic ran for cover “Who wants a piece of it?” he then demanded to know before randomly opening fire with his automatic weapons, quickly followed by his associates resulting in shattering glass in vehicles and surrounding building windows and the cutting down of anyone who had not managed to get out of the way quick enough.

“The van boss?” one of the men called over as they moved across the Square before pausing to reload.

“Absolutely” Harcourt agreed with a huge smile of amusement on his face whereupon one of his men duly produced a remote hand held detonator device.

“Boom!” he declared as the switch was pressed, resulting in a large pack of explosives within the minibus they had travelled there in being detonated and instantaneously destroying the vehicle in a huge fireball of flames and shrapnel that also consumed a number of other vehicles nearby.

“Nice!” Harcourt declared as he momentarily shielded his face from the heat blast as it passed him before looking around “Right lads, get stuck in, lamp anything that moves and when the filth get here, burn them alive!”

As the sound of the van exploding echoed through the streets and chaos began to appear throughout the city, in Parliament Square, Stevens blew a whistle and immediately sent his men into action.

“Okay everyone!” he called loudly though a loud hailer as his men surrounded the lawn section in the centre of the Square which was temporary home to a tent encampment of environment and anti-war protesters “wake up everyone, the exterminators are here!”

“What the hell do you think are doing?” one of the protesters asked in response as Steven's men began to set about them with bats, knuckledusters, guns and cosh's.

“We are taking out the trash” Stevens duly declared as he brandished a large wooden baseball bat with menace “Batter up!” he called whereupon without remorse or hesitation he duly smacked the protester who had confronted him, violently around the head, breaking their neck and killing them instantly.

Chaos, screaming and bloodshed on an almost unprecedented scale was unleashed almost instantaneously across the city and it seemed there was nothing that could be done about it.

“Lima Tango One Zero One from Angel One” Tracy called into her radio as she got off of her Security Service motorbike at the end of Parliament Street on the edge of the unfolding disaster area “Hendrickson, are you in position yet?” she asked.

“Just running up past Westminster Abbey now” Hendrickson confirmed as due to the traffic in Victoria Street having come to a complete gridlocked standstill, he and his officers had been forced to cover the last part on foot, running up the road as fast as they could, not an easy feat with all the tactical gear, body armour and weaponry they were carrying.

“Have we got anyone on Westminster Bridge?” Tracy then requested.

“Angel One from Renegade Team” the always polite and businesslike voice of Roger Field was heard to respond “I have a little meet and greet party from various sources at your beck and call on Westminster Bridge and The Embankment, available at your discretion my dear.”

“I’ll give old Roger his due” Sir Richard remarked as he calmly strolled up to Tracy’s side, his trusty old wartime issue revolver in his hand “He is always remarkably polite.”

“All right, I think we will do this the old fashioned way” Tracy confirmed over the radio “Angel One to all units, get in there and nick the lot of the bastards.”

“Very subtle” Sir Richard remarked “Mind if I join in and have a bash?” he indicated his gun.

“Join the party” Tracy agreed “All right everyone” she then called back to the various Security Service officers she had managed to gather together “Let’s do it!”

With that she led the charge into Parliament Square and it was clear from the reactions of Stevens and his men that they were somewhat taken by surprise by the Security Service’s response both in terms of size and determination, way above what they had been expecting or indeed had prepared for.

“Everyone fall back” Stevens called to his men who only managed to hear amid the shouting, screams and mayhem that the Square had descended into by virtue of their ear piece radios “Seems we have been a bit misled with our intelligence on the enemy” he confirmed.

“Put your weapons down, you are all under arrest!” Tracy called loudly and with undoubted authority.

“Burn in hell!” Stevens defiantly shouted back, drawing his gun and along with his men, offering a burst of covering fire and smoke grenades towards the approaching officers who were nearing them from both the Parliament Street and Westminster Abbey directions making them move back towards Westminster Bridge.

“Hendrickson!” Tracy called across amidst the gunfire as she ducked behind an abandoned bus “Get those civilians clear whilst we kick the crap out of this lot” she ordered.

“You have got to give the lady her due” Stevens remarked as the two sides gradually grew closer in the shadow of Portcullis House “She is certainly determined, pain in the arse but definitely determined.”

“Angel One to Renegade Team” Tracy called into her radio as she shielded her face when a further burst of gunfire shattered the bus window directly above her and the rest of her team of officers “close up the back and box them in.”

“Roger that my dear” Field duly confirmed before turning to his men gathered on the Embankment “All right lads, lets get stuck in” he declared.

“Give it up Stevens” Tracy called around the corner of the bus “You are surrounded and pinned in on all sides” she informed him.

“Angel One from Zodiac Control” came an ominous sounding message over Tracy's radio “ISA storm troopers moving in on your position, looks like Haliford is springing the trap.”

“Control from Angel One” Tracy responded with a resigned sigh “Thanks a lot. If you have any miracles available now would be a good time to warm them up and send them in.”

With things looking bleak in Parliament Square, there was an equal sense of potential disaster facing the Commander in Trafalgar Square only a couple of miles away.

"Bloody hell, looks like the circus is in town" the Commander exclaimed as the vehicle he was travelling in reached the south end of The Strand in the shadow of Charing Cross Station and he saw for the first time the violent conflict unfolding within Trafalgar Square.

"These guys are serious" Bob agreed as he brought the vehicle to a stop by the side of the road, the other vehicles in the convoy following suit line astern.

"Well I guess the old fashioned 'put your hands up approach' is probably not going to work" the Commander admitted as he opened the door and stepped out onto the pavement "Looks like we shall just have to wade in and lamp the bastards."

"Shoot to kill or just shoot to piss them off Sir?" Bob asked as he and his substantially bolstered ARU team now numbering over fifty gathered together.

"Whatever stops them from injuring or maiming anyone else will do fine" the Commander duly confirmed "Just get me an air tight perimeter and I will go in, grab Harcourt and then we can close in and cut them off."

"Sounds reasonable to me Sir" Bob agreed before turning to his officers "All right ladies and gentlemen, you heard the boss, let's get to work."

As the ARU officers prepared to deploy, the Commander noticed a uniformed Security Service officer appear from the direction of Trafalgar Square, his uniform a tattered and blood stained mess.

"Covering fire!" the Commander requested whereupon he and a number of other officers duly opened fire to protect the injured officer as he escaped the scene and joined them.

"Thanks Sir" the officer responded, clearly exhausted but also mightily relieved at the same time.

"You all right mate?" the Commander asked, all sense of rank and position forgotten as they were all equal in these extraordinary conditions.

"I would normally say I have been through worse but I am afraid Sir I would be lying" the officer duly confirmed.

"There is a paramedic unit just down there" the Commander confirmed indicating down the Strand where further emergency service vehicles were now arriving including further armed Security Service officers.

"If it is all the same to you Sir" the officer confirmed "I'd like to get some fresh ammo and get stuck back into it."

"All right" the Commander slightly reluctantly agreed, affording a knowing smile because he knew had the situation been reversed and he had been the young officer standing there, he would be doing exactly the same "What is the situation in there?" he asked.

"Initial response of half a dozen foot patrol officers and a couple of squad cars got well and truly hammered" the officer confirmed "These guys are armed to the teeth, ruthless and up for one hell of a fight" he explained as in the background the sound of continuing random gunfire filled the air.

"Is there anyone still in there?" the Commander asked, sensing the urgency of the situation even more now.

"My partner managed to grab some school kids who were trapped in the Square and pull them back to Northumberland Avenue" the officer explained "There are a few others in there but at least four dead and one of our patrol cars is upside down in the fountain on fire and another is a Swiss cheese."

"Dear God..." Bob remarked.

"You remember all those worst case scenarios that they teach us in riot training school Sir?" the officer remarked "I think we just came up with one that we had not thought of."

"All right then" the Commander called "We stick with the plan, surround them and shut them down, you stick with me" he informed the young officer who despite his obvious battle scars was keen to do his duty and rejoin the fight.

"Ready when you are Sir" Bob confirmed as he checked with his own officers that they were all set.

"All right then" the Commander declared "Here we go" he called before leading off with the young officer following alongside as Bob and his team began to deploy all around the outer perimeter of the square as per the plan.

"Tell me lad" the Commander asked "You got a name then?"

“Lieutenant Eddie Lock Sir” the young officer confirmed.

“Good choice of name” the Commander agreed “It is like my wife always says; in a major crisis two Ed's are always better than one!”

“Well, well, well...” Harcourt remarked with an evil smirk as smoke from burning wreckage billowed across the square and he caught sight of the Commander approaching from over the Charing Cross side “Looks like someone let the big cheese out to play, so much the better.”

“Watch out Sir” Lock called as he saw two gunmen approaching them from the left hand side whereupon they both opened fire with single shots, taking one each out instantly.

“Nice shooting lad” the Commander commended.

“Who the hell invited you to this little party Commander?” Harcourt gruffly and defiantly called as the Commander neared him, gun pointed directly ahead.

“This is my turf” the Commander calmly informed him “Here we play by my rules so how do you want to play it?” he asked.

“Just you and me” Harcourt offered, indicating to his men to keep back and then tossing his guns to the ground.

“I'm amenable to that” the Commander duly confirmed, passing his gun back to Lock and taking off his uniform tunic before taking out his ceremonial sword which he duly brandished in front of him.

Harcourt responded in kind by also shedding his jacket and bullet proof vest before taking out a large hunting knife with a blade that must have measured at least two feet with a serrated edge that led up to a vicious looking point of incredible sharpness.

“Today I write myself into the pages of history Commander” Harcourt declared as the two men stood up to each other only eight feet apart as they prepared themselves for the imminent fight “Today is the day I kill the mighty Commander, I narrowly missed with your wife but you are the top prize.”

“Even if you kill me” the Commander warned “You will never get out of this Square alive, my men will see to that.”

“Don't be so certain Commander” Harcourt gruffly responded “I still have aces up my sleeve and when I am finished with you and out of here, your wife will be next on my list of people to kill slowly and painfully, it is just a pity you won't be there to see it.”

That was the moment the Commander charged towards Harcourt whereupon they bounced off each other with a loud clang as their respective weapons clashed.

“What the hell is he doing?” Lock asked generally as all he and the other Security Service personnel could do was look on as the two men struggled in a fight that was so obviously going to result in the death of one of them.

“Defending the woman he loves I think you will find” Amber confirmed as she joined the rest at the front of the large cordon in the centre of Trafalgar Square observing the fight unfold “Love can be a right bitch sometimes, believe me.”

Back in Parliament Square, Stevens cheekily pointed ahead at Tracy and her officers as they were encroaching on their position in the shadow of Portcullis House, indicating that the ISA had arrived and were about to cut them off.

“Cheeky bastard...” Tracy remarked as looking behind her duly confirmed the worse as three large vans of armed ISA officers duly arrived and deployed, their leader, the Sergeant at Arms from Tottenham Court Road earlier at the front.

“If it moves, it dies gentlemen!” the Sergeant called back to his men whereupon the cocking of weapons filled the air and with a number of his officers, he began to advance forward only to pause when not only did he see Tracy and her officers through the smoke smirk with knowing expressions, the majority of his men had not advanced forward with him.

“Oh dear” Tracy mockingly called over “You appear to be having some personnel problems it would seem.”

Turning around, the Sergeant realised that a significant proportion of the men he had arrived with had now formed a perimeter around him and his few trusted aides.

“What the hell is this?” the Sergeant demanded to know.

“What's the matter?” Tracy called over “Don't you like surprises?” she asked as the ISA officers forming the perimeter discarded their black jackets to reveal proper Security Service uniforms on underneath before bringing their weapons to bear on the Sergeant and the few he still had loyal to him.

“Traitors!” the Sergeant called before turning back towards Tracy and bringing his gun to bear “You will all die for this outrage!”

“Think again Sarge” the ISA officer stood immediately alongside him called as he pulled out his handgun and aimed it squarely at the side of the Sergeant's head.

“You scum, you won't take me alive!” the Sergeant defiantly called.

“Fine by me” Tracy admitted whereupon she calmly brought her gun up and shot the Sergeant twice, both bullets striking him in the kneecaps and sending him to the ground.

“Uh ah...” she then advised those ISA officers present still loyal “Unless you want to join your boss in the back of a meat wagon, I strongly suggest you stand down.”

Reluctantly they did as they asked and with a nod of Tracy's head, the Security Service officers behind them immediately moved in to disarm then and take them away which left her to deal with Stevens and his mob.

Turning smartly on her heels, Tracy resumed back towards Stevens who was by now looking on thoroughly frustrated.

“I know” Tracy remarked as she approached “Isn’t it terrible when things don't work out the way your paymaster had told you they would?” she explained “See the thing is that whilst your obnoxious boss Haliford thought he had taken over and completely absorbed the Security Service, he reckoned without one thing, a little old fashioned idea called loyalty, something far stronger than anything that can be controlled with a big pay check or a large stick so you see from day one the much vaunted and hyped ISA has had vipers in its nest all along, sorry.”

“I am going to break every bone in your body” Stevens defiantly stated, waving the baseball bat in his hand to back up his point.

“That's no way to speak to a lady” Sir Richard commented.

“Stevens” Tracy commanded “you have two choices, surrender, place your weapons on the ground and come quietly or else die where you stand.”

With extreme reluctance, Stevens indicated to his men to stand down and then subsequently he lowered the baseball bat he had in his hands whereupon Tracy and her officers moved in to arrest them.

“Now there is a good boy, that didn't hurt did it?” Tracy remarked as she took hold of Stevens' wrists and was about to handcuff him when in a sudden move he produced a knife, hit Tracy in the side of the face and pulled her towards him, holding the sharp blade at her throat.

“Everybody backs off now!” Stevens then warned shoving Tracy forwards in front of him with the knife firmly pressed against her throat “Do anything stupid and your boss bleeds slowly to death right here.”

“All right people” Sir Richard responded “Let's back away and give them some room” he suggested whereupon everyone else moved back.

“You are not going to get away with this you know” Tracy warned Stevens as they moved forwards along the pavement “Look around you, if you kill me the fire power alone will cut you to shreds before I even hit the ground.”

“Thank you Ms Caverner” Stevens responded “I'll take my chances if you don't mind.”

“Why should I mind at all...?” Tracy remarked to herself as she looked ahead along the pavement to something a short distance ahead that had attracted her attention.

Staggering along as Stevens forced her ahead of him Tracy seized her chance and deliberately stumbled on the edge of a manhole cover meaning that he lost his grip on her momentarily.

It was only a split second but it was enough for her to force the arm which was holding the knife away from her as she kicked back, smashing the sole of her boot into his leg.

Stevens, immediately in pain dropped the knife which was kicked away by a quick thinking officer nearby as Tracy then reached behind her, grabbed his upper arms and shoulders and in one almighty heave, pulled him over the top of her and slammed him into the adjacent plate glass window of the supermarket in front of her.

“Let's add criminal damage, breaking and entering, resisting arrest and assaulting a senior officer to the list of charges as well shall we?” Tracy suggested as she looked down through the broken window frame at Stevens who was lying on his back on the glass covered floor.

“Up yours bitch!” Stevens retorted, obviously in agonising pain with bits of the glass from the window he had just been thrown through embedded in his legs and back.

“You have the right to remain silent” Tracy calmly reminded him as a couple of officers duly proceeded inside the store to handcuff him “So please do us all a favour and exercise that right.”

“What?!” Stevens responded, still defiant.

“Shut the hell up in other words” Tracy confirmed before turning to her officers “Gentlemen, take him away!”

The Commander was struggling now as Harcourt had him up against the vertical wall at the base of Nelson's Column with his hands around his throat whilst the Commander had his arms on Collins shoulders at full extent pushing him back as best he could.

They had been fighting hand to hand for almost five minutes now and both were obviously beginning to tire, unfortunately it was the Commander who was starting to lose the battle the most, a fact that became even more obvious when with a sharp blow to the back of the head with his mighty fist, Harcourt sent him collapsing to the ground.

“For God's sake Sir” Amber called as she and Bob along with other officers looked on apprehensively “Let us take him” she insisted.

“No!” the Commander called back “This is personal” he confirmed as Harcourt knelt down on the ground, straddling the Commander's torso whereupon he grabbed his head and lifted it up.

“I just want you to know that when I am finished with you” Harcourt informed him determinedly “No matter that it takes the rest of my life to track her down that bitch of yours is going to die by my hands slowly, painfully, bit by bit.”

“Not if I have anything to say about it you won't” the Commander responded, his response keeping Harcourt's attention focused on him and away from his right hand which was just within touching distance of his sword lying on the ground next to them.

Harcourt looked down and was ready to kill the Commander where he lay when suddenly he felt a screaming pain in his side. Looking down he saw the Commander had managed to grab his sword and ram it into him to almost half way along its length.

In response Harcourt rolled off and collapsed to the ground, the sword coming out as he did so leaving a nasty gaping wound in its place.

The Commander got back to his feet and looked on, the bloodied sword still in his hand as Harcourt shuffled back up against the wall and using it to support his weight, managed to struggle back to his feet.

“Nice try...” Harcourt responded “Still standing thought” he defiantly pointed out.

“Well try this” the Commander declared as with anger in his eyes at the thought of his beloved Tracy, he swung the sword across and brought it down hard on Harcourt's neck sending him once more to the ground before wielding it firmly in both hands and bringing it down through his chest.

“You will never get near my wife” the Commander advised Harcourt as he pulled the sword out again and stepped back, allowing his enemy to collapse and die in a pool of his own blood.

There was a stunned silence in the Square at that point which Bob and his ARU team surrounding the area used as an opportunity to quickly take down and subdue the remainder of the enemy whilst the Commander looked on and saw the last flicker of life disappear from Harcourt's still evil looking eyes.

“Finished Sir?” Bob asked as he came up to stand alongside his commanding officer.

“I haven't even started yet” the Commander responded as he put his sword back in the scabbard on his belt, still covered in blood “Someone get this piece of crap out of here” he then commanded.

“Well I guess that is the last we will be seeing of Harcourt” Amber remarked as she joined them and saw the mess “Can't say I will miss him much.”

“Oh, no doubt some idiot will set up a tribute page to that piece of scum on Facebook before the day is out” Bob remarked as he, Amber and the Commander walked away from the scene.

“This country is going to hell isn't it?” the Commander asked.

“Hopefully not” Bob responded “but I have just received a report from our guys in Parliament Square, it's getting pretty heated down there apparently.”

“In which case, lets get out of here” the Commander confirmed as he picked up his uniform tunic off of the side of the fountain and put it back on “There is still much work to do.”

A few minutes later, the Commander and the others arrived in the shadow of Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament just in time to see Tracy and Sir Richard unceremoniously wrestle Stevens back out through the smashed front window of the supermarket.

"Give those guys a hand clearing up" the Commander told the ARU team he had brought with him from Trafalgar Square upon which they duly proceeded to help out with the removal of the last of Steven's men who were still resisting as best as they could despite the fact that their leader was now unconscious and in no fit state to offer any leadership of any kind for the foreseeable future.

"Having fun love?" the Commander asked as he joined Tracy in the shop doorway and looked on as she proceeded to restrain the barely conscious Stevens, rolling him over onto his front so she could disarm and handcuff him.

"Oh I am having a smashing time dear" Tracy confirmed, the adrenaline of her fight with Stevens still pulsing through her.

"And our friend here?" the Commander asked.

"He decided to do something really silly" Tracy responded "In this instance resisting arrest."

"Naughty boy..." the Commander agreed.

"You are under arrest" Tracy reminded Stevens even though he was unconscious and could not hear a thing "You have the right to remain silent, anything you do say isn't going to be worth bothering to write down and used in evidence as we have plenty to be going on with as it is."

"I think we have the area secured Sir" Bob confirmed as he joined them and helped Tracy wrestle the now semi-conscious Stevens to his feet now firmly secured by both hand cuffs and leg restraints.

"Any stragglers?" the Commander asked.

"One or two of this fellow's muffins have escaped and there are a few unconscious on the deck who need to be collected up but overall I think we have the situation under control" Bob confirmed.

"One thing bothers me" Tracy remarked as she and Bob handed over custody of Stevens to a couple of the ARU team officers who duly took him away to a nearby Security Service prisoner transport van "Where did Haliford's supposedly undefeatable goons get to? I know we had our people laden in his initial response that turned up but even then we should have been blasted out of existence by overwhelming numbers according to all reports."

"Excluding those that had re-defected back to our side, which is to say those who were never really on Haliford's side in the first place" the Commander explained "Lets just say they conveniently got stuck in traffic whilst the rest ran into some trouble just down the road."

"That's putting it mildly" Bob agreed "It will take the works department weeks to fix the damage to Trafalgar Square" he confirmed.

"Oh my head..." Sir Richard remarked as he joined the group and together they surveyed the wreckage strewn lawn and surrounding streets of Parliament Square.

"What happened to you?" the Commander asked seeing Sir Richard holding a bloodstained handkerchief to a wound on his head.

"Someone mistook my head for a baseball I think" Sir Richard explained "Easy enough mistake to make I suppose."

"So now that we have made a sizeable dent in their foot soldiers" Tracy summarised "What next?"

"We remove the squatters from Scotland Yard, Thames House and Downing Street" the Commander confirmed, his determination readily apparent.

"And for that we are going to need something a bit more brain than brawn" Sir Richard explained "Speaking of which..." he declared as he took out his mobile telephone which had begun to vibrate, indicating an incoming call of some importance.

"Are you all right?" Tracy asked her husband as Sir Richard withdrew from the group to take the call whilst Bob went over to help his colleagues with the clean up.

"A bit bashed and battered love" the Commander ruefully confirmed "I err ran into an old friend of yours."

"Harcourt?" Tracy asked with obvious concern.

"He sent you his regards" the Commander remarked "All be it in somewhat gentlemanly like language."

"So you had a little chat then?" Tracy asked.

"I ran through a few points with him, yes" the Commander looked down at his ceremonial sword on the exposed blade of which, traces of drying blood could be clearly seen "He won't be troubling you ever again."

"Can't say I will miss him" Tracy duly agreed as within she felt the overwhelming relief that a particularly painful chapter in her life had now been firmly closed forever.

"You two okay?" Sir Richard asked as he rejoined them seeing Tracy and the Commander hugging each other in a comforting embrace.

"I think we will be, yes" Tracy confirmed, managing a meek smile.

"That was Lord Hainault on the line" Sir Richard confirmed "He has some paperwork that needs signing if we wish to remove certain problems."

"He's found a way?" the Commander asked, he had most certainly had some doubts as to whether Lord Hainault would have been able to find anything "Some legal recourse I presume?"

"He has called in a lot of favours" Sir Richard explained "really pulled out the family silver on this one and believe me, we don't just have one legal recourse, we have several."

"In which case I suggest we get this party started" Tracy remarked "Hendrickson" she called over "Take charge of the clear up and rounding up of any stragglers."

"Yes Ma'am" Hendrickson confirmed before heading off across Parliament Square where the last few ISA people were being led away under the watchful eye of dozens of armed Security Service officers seemingly drawn from across the broad spectrum of its various divisions.

"Dave Collins has arranged for Lord Hainault and the Home Secretary to be brought down under heavily armed guard" Sir Richard explained "They will be meeting us in the foyer of Westminster City Hall in fifteen minutes."

"Let's get to work then" the Commander agreed before, arm in arm with Tracy, they followed Sir Richard off in the direction of Westminster Abbey.

"Has there been any word from Bill Stevens?" Haliford asked with, unusually for him a sense of concern becoming apparent in both his voice and body language.

"Nothing from either him or his team since it all kicked off thirty minutes ago" the Control Room supervisor confirmed.

"And what about Mr Harcourt?" Haliford enquired as he noticeably paced the floor of the New Scotland Yard control room, his fingers twiddling behind his back.

"Our observer on the ground at Trafalgar Square confirms that the Commander killed him" the supervisor responded.

"Pity, if he had survived we would have had to have paid him. Remind me to send him a thank you card" Haliford mused "He has just saved me five million quid."

"Mr McCallister for you on a secure line Sir" one of the ISA control room officers called across the room.

"Have it put through to my office" Haliford confirmed before departing with an obvious worry in his step, making his way down the corridor before entering the Commander's office whose name was still on the door such had been the speedy nature of the ISA takeover.

Sitting down behind the desk, Haliford swallowed slightly nervously before leaning forward and picking up the call via speaker phone.

"William" Haliford called, feigning a confident voice and attitude but before he could continue, he was abruptly cut off.

"What the hell kind of Keystone Cops type of operation are you supposedly running down there?" the angry voice of the formidable former US Senator demanded to know.

"Well I thought..." Haliford began to respond but once again he was abruptly cut off in mid sentence.

"You are not paid to think, you are paid to do" McCallister quickly responded "I am hoping my eyes deceive me as it looks very much to me live on the BBC that your so called best that money can buy storm troopers are getting their backsides well and truly kicked by the supposedly defeated and demoralised old Security Service. Any explanations you care to offer?"

"We underestimated the size of the Security Service officers resolve and resistance" Haliford was forced to admit "It appears that having strong figure heads like the Commander in charge of them and the loyalty that he earns makes for a formidable force. Damn it! I knew I should have killed him when I had the chance twenty years ago."

"Yes, I remember you mentioning it" McCallister recalled "A missed opportunity of immense proportions when you consider how many of our friends and allies he and his wife have brought down in the intervening years."

"I expect the Commander will at some point be heading this way" Haliford confirmed "I don't know exactly what his angle will be but I have an idea that should quickly see him brought around to our world view, or dead which is even more preferable."

"Remember you and your Service hold the rule of law now" McCallister reminded him "No one can overturn that. I am getting on a plane to Washington in one hour with our Soviet friend, our plans for the great ISA revolution are about to go live there

and we will personally overseeing the launch stages so I expect to hear good news before wheels up."

"And you shall have it Sir" Haliford responded enthusiastically "Victory, not to mention a very tidy profit will be ours before the day is through."

Lord Hainault and the Home Secretary arrived in a Security Service VIP Protection Division ministerial car with a formidable escort of marked motorcycle outriders and two patrol cars outside the main entrance of the 1950's built Westminster City Hall in Victoria Street, only a few hundred yards away from New Scotland Yard.

With members of the press and passers by looking on who could sense that something big was breaking here, the two important men were quickly escorted in through the main entrance of the building under heavily armed escort where inside they were met by Tracy, the Commander and Sir Richard Crowthorne.

"I must say I haven't had this much fun since I was in Aden in '67" Lord Hainault remarked with a wry smile "Certainly not seen this many guns since then that is for sure."

"An unfortunate but necessary hazard in the current climate" the Commander regrettably admitted.

"I hate to be seen as being ignorant" the Home Secretary asked "but what exactly are we doing here?"

"Fighting back" Tracy confirmed "The last throw of the dice I fear as well."

"In which case ladies and gentlemen" the Commander confirmed as he ushered the group through to a conference room down the hall that he had requisitioned "We should get on with it whilst there is still time."

As they made their way through into the conference room, Tracy held back a short distance and retired to one side to make a call on her radio set.

"Angel One to Zodiac Control" she called into her radio "Meeting about to take place that should not take more than five minutes."

"Roger that" Collins confirmed from the King William Street complex "I'll get our people into their final positions now."

"Thanks" Tracy confirmed "Meanwhile have everyone cross their fingers as well whilst you are at it."

"Will do" Collins responded "For the record, latest intelligence from very reliable sources puts Haliford in New Scotland Yard, McCallister, Altman and Cruschov are believed to be on their way to the airport and Forsyth is in Downing Street, no doubt emptying the drinks cabinet as usual."

“Understood” Tracy confirmed “Keep in touch, Angel One out.”

By the time Tracy entered the conference room, all of the key players were already sat around the table with Lord Hainault at the head and the discussions were already under way.

“Now you can definitely prove beyond all reasonable doubt with evidence that would stand up in court of law that Sir John Haliford is running the Security Services of this country by way of his ISA organisation using funds supplied by this Alexander Cruschov?” Lord Hainault asked sincerely.

“We have evidence obtained from Altman's laptop” Sir Richard formally confirmed “plus we have further evidence of the exact nature of Cruschov's finances that have been provided by the Russian FSB and Fiscal authorities.”

“That is Haliford and the ISA dealt with then” Lord Hainault duly confirmed “Aside from the fact that by either assuming or being given command he has broken the articles of operation and principles laid down in the original United Nations charter that formed the Security Service, he has also contravened numerous UK and European statutes on the justice process, the enforcement of law and correct detention and prosecution procedures.”

“So we can place him under arrest along with anyone who is under his direct command?” the Commander asked “I want to make doubly sure that if we take him in, he is not going to wriggle out of it in any way.”

“You have more than enough physical evidence, witness testimony and a computerised paperwork trail to keep him locked up for a very long time” Lord Hainault confirmed “All it needs is for I and the Home Secretary here to sign the arrest warrant and the 'cease and desist' order.”

“Allow me to loan you my pen then Sir” Sir Richard duly produced an antique fountain pen from inside his jacket and passed it across whereupon Lord Hainault and the Home Secretary proceeded in order to sign the documentation on the table in front of them.

“All right then” the Commander declared “That takes care of the viper in my office, what about the one at the head of the Government?”

“To remove Lord Forsyth take two requirements” Lord Hainault went on to explain “Firstly we must prove that his actions as acting Premier have been both unconstitutional and also done without the consent of the overseeing authorities.”

“Little doubt about that I would have thought” Tracy remarked “He has been riding roughshod over pretty much every parliamentary principle in the book in the last few days.”

“Precisely my dear” Lord Hainault confirmed “I have the power to dissolve his temporary administration but only if there is a replacement option available that is

ready to take over immediately and has the blessing of Her Majesty the Queen and the majority of the Governmental Ombudsman Committee.”

“I had a feeling this was coming...” the Home Secretary reluctantly responded.

“I think you have been volunteered” the Commander remarked.

“I have already spoken with the majority of the Committee which thanks to Lord Forsyth's over confident actions consists of just me and Sir Richard here” Lord Hainault confirmed “Furthermore the Queen has confirmed she is ready to accept you as the next acting Premier if you so desire, all you have to do is sign here” whereupon he passed across a very formal looking document across the table to the Home Secretary along with a pen.

“What was it you were saying the other day about greatness Commander?” the Home Secretary wryly asked as he slowly picked up the pen and looked down at the bottom of the document where all but one space had already been filled with a signature of confirmation.

“Some achieve greatness, others seem to have it thrust upon them” the Commander confirmed “I think you will find you have just been made a member of the latter category.”

“Well there you go ladies and gentlemen” the Home Secretary duly confirmed as he signed the document “That is my life signed away, my wife is going to kill me when she finds out.”

“Considering what happened to the last Prime Minister we had, you will be getting off lightly believe me” Tracy remarked.

“You have a point” the Home Secretary duly conceded.

“Now all we have to do is serve notice on Lord Forsyth that his tenure has been terminated” Lord Hainault duly confirmed.

“...and hope he comes quietly” the Commander added with a sense of foreboding.

“That still leaves McCallister and Cruschov” Tracy warned “According to Collins, they are on their way to an airport, if we don't hurry they will be out of the country and out of our reach wreaking God knows how much havoc somewhere else in the world.”

“Which in turn could see part of our case against Haliford collapse” the Commander agreed “The Russian evidence is dependent on us handing over Cruschov to them, without it we could lose badly.”

“In which case I suggest there is no time to waste then” Lord Hainault declared as he pushed his chair back from the table and stood up “Sir Richard, Home Secretary, I need you to accompany me to Downing Street to serve the eviction notice.”

“Sounds like fun” Sir Richard agreed.

“I’ll make sure you have a full armed escort” Tracy confirmed as they all prepared to leave “I don’t want anything happening to you at the last minute.”

“Nor do I” Lord Hainault agreed “Your assistance my dear is much appreciated, thank you.”

“Meantime, I need to clear some unwanted trash out of my office” the Commander grimly confirmed as he looked at the signed orders Lord Hainault had just passed him “If he has eaten my biscuits he won’t know what has hit him.”

“We need him alive” Sir Richard reminded them.

“Oh don’t worry, alive we can guarantee” Tracy responded “Undamaged is an entirely different matter” she confirmed with a wry smile that hid a look of determination to exact the level of revenge against Haliford that she had promised him earlier.

“Err, Lord Hainault” the Commander called upon the senior statesman as they all left the room “I wanted you to take a look at this” he produced from his uniform tunic pocket an old tatty looking envelope with a lot of writing and diagrams hand drawn on the reverse that he then passed across to him.

“What’s this?” Lord Hainault asked, understandably curious.

“The last couple of days have given me a chance to look at how we work and I have come up with some ideas that I would like you to consider” the Commander explained “For the future” he confirmed.

“On the back of an envelope?” Lord Hainault asked to which the Commander merely smiled and shrugged his shoulders “Well the guy who invented the jet engine did his first sketch on the back of a napkin so I suppose there is a precedent there. I’ll look into it as soon as this is all over.”

“Thank you Sir” the Commander responded before he moved on quickly ahead to meet up with Tracy immediately outside the main entrance where she was waiting for him.

“Are you ready to go and serve an eviction notice or two?” Tracy asked, obviously eager to get started.

“Absolutely my love” the Commander readily agreed.

“We will move in as soon as you confirm that you have Haliford under arrest and the Security Services back under your command” Sir Richard confirmed as he went by.

“Stay by the phone” the Commander responded “and watch you back” he reminded them.

“Don't I always?” Sir Richard asked as he followed the Home Secretary and Lord Hainault in getting in the car before they set off with a huge Security Service escort down Victoria Street.

“Meantime, where are our people?” the Commander asked.

“Amassed around the corner” Tracy confirmed as she and the Commander proceeded across the road to the side street where over twenty Security Service vehicles of various types were waiting, full of officers from across the broad spectrum of the Service and associated agencies.

“Ready to go when you are Sir” Bob confirmed as his senior officers joined them by the side of the street.

“What have we got?” the Commander asked looking down the street.

“Two of my ARU teams, one from the Transport Division with Commander Hendrickson there plus a team from the CIA London Station and I believe you know this gentleman” Bob gestured behind him whereupon Hoskins stepped forward in full Security Service body armour and uniform.

“I got deputised Sir” Hoskins went on to explain, his broad US accent making for an odd contrast with the British uniform he was now wearing “and I wasn't the only one” he confirmed.

“Good afternoon Comrades” Sergei Glasgov declared as he got out of his 1960's Mercedes limousine as it stopped on the opposite side of the street where he was joined from the car by a small group of heavy looking minders who seemed to have come straight from the pages of Cold War history.

“Welcome to the party” the Commander confirmed “It looks like Cruschov may be attempting to leave the country, would you like the honour of grabbing him at the airport along with that fat piece of crap McCallister?”

“It would be a pleasure” Glasgov confirmed.

“Amber McWilliam is already on her way down to Heathrow with a specialist snatch and extract team” Tracy confirmed “I'll let her know you are joining in the fun.”

“In which case I think I and my Comrades should get going” Glasgov declared, rubbing his hands together with expectant glee “See you later my friends” he confirmed before he and his men returned to the limousine and with a quick squeal of the tyres as it accelerated away, swiftly departed.

“You ready for this?” the Commander asked Tracy, looking each other in the eyes.

“Oh yes...” Tracy confirmed.

“Let's do this then” the Commander responded “Bob” he instructed “Give me a perimeter all around the New Scotland Yard site and the immediately surrounding buildings.”

“You got it Sir” Bob confirmed before dispatching his officers as requested,

“Commander Hendrickson” the Commander then called “You are hereby officially promoted to permanent Divisional Commander of the Transport Division and as such I want St James Park station shut down, evacuated and sealed within the next two minutes.”

“No problem Sir” Hendrickson responded before turning to his group “Well you heard the Chief, lets make it happen shall we?” he declared.

“Right then” the Commander called as he took Tracy's hand in his “Show time...”

There were four heavily armed ISA guards on duty in the shadow of the famous revolving three sided sign outside the main entrance to New Scotland Yard when Hoskins arrived, walking down Broadway with two armed ISA officers in tow.

“Afternoon Sir” the leading man on guard duty called “We were told you had been shot.”

“Believe me, the day is still young” Hoskins confirmed “Isn't it?” he then called to the two officers with him.

Before they knew what had happened, three of the ISA officers found themselves overpowered, disarmed and restrained on the ground whilst the fourth one also revealed himself to be a Security Service insider by drawing his weapon and aiming it at the ISA guards.

“Very nicely done” the Commander remarked as he and Tracy arrived on the scene a few moments later to see the ISA guards being restrained and prepared to be taken away “All right, get them out of here but keep it quiet” he then instructed.

A few moments later, the seemingly ever on duty receptionist in the main entrance foyer looked up when she heard the automatic doors open and looked on with a mixture of surprise and delight when she saw Tracy and the Commander come in, the three ISA guards on duty in there however were not so pleased to see them and as the Receptionist instinctively ducked behind her desk there was a quick exchange of gunfire which saw two of the guards quickly neutralised whilst the third one duly surrendered as soon as further armed Security Service officers flooded in and overwhelmed him.

“Afternoon” the Commander called as and Tracy went over to the Receptionist who had re-emerged from behind the desk once the brief outbreak of fighting had ceased, now with a military Kevlar helmet on her head which she had stowed down there since the last time something like this had happened on her watch “Is your boss in?” he enquired.

“You just arrived Sir, Ma’am” the Receptionist happily replied “If however you mean the loiterer in your office, he is up there right now” she then confirmed.

“Get a hold of the central switchboard and have them cut off all outside communications for the next twenty minutes” Tracy instructed “We don't want anyone calling on for extra backup except us” she explained.

“Mike, it's Annie in reception” the Receptionist duly called over her telephone “The landlord has just arrived so you can cut the lines now” she instructed.

“Thank you” Tracy responded.

“I should warn you Sir, Ma’am” the Receptionist cautioned “There are numerous more ISA guys throughout the building, Haliford had all the Security Service personnel bar me and a few others cleared out of here as soon as he moved in and they have orders to shoot both of you on sight.”

“Looks like we could wind up putting a few holes in the décor Sir” Bob warned.

“Well the place needs redecorating anyway” the Commander admitted “Bob, put a couple of guys down here and guard reception, also secure the ground floor in its entirety as I don't want anyone coming up behind us and springing any unpleasant surprises.”

With a few clicks of his fingers at his men, Bob dispersed his ARU officers to their assigned tasks.

“All right then” the Commander confirmed as he checked his gun “Tracy, Hoskins, you two are with me, let's go.”

The top floor of the building was unusually quiet as the lift doors opened and Tracy, the Commander and Hoskins deployed out into the corridor, guns drawn and pointing straight ahead.

“Where is everyone?” Tracy quietly asked as they looked up and down in the three different directions it was possible to see from where they were in front of the lifts “I mean I know everyone likes to go to lunch at the same time up here but this is ridiculous.”

Suddenly a door opened ahead of them up the corridor and an officer appeared whereupon almost instantly the three of them brought their weapons to bear upon him.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa!” the officer quickly responded “I am one of the good guys” he confirmed, his hands raised.

“You carrying?” Tracy asked, recognising the officer as one of theirs and someone they could trust.

“Yes ma’am” the officer confirmed.

“Join the party” Tracy motioned whereupon he duly joined them before they headed as a group down the main corridor bound for the main Control Room a short distance ahead.

“There are three of our guys in there, four ISA officers and the Supervisor who is also on their side” the officer quietly confirmed as they reached the door to the Control Room.

“Let's hope they realise what is happening when we go in there and help us” the Commander remarked.

“They should do” the officer confirmed “We have been waiting for you guys to get here, we knew it would only be a matter of time so most of us hung on in here and kept our heads down.”

Just as the Commander was about to lead the way in however, two ISA men appeared at the opposite end of the corridor and immediately responded to seeing them there by opening fire which saw Hoskins struck in the shoulder before they could respond, shooting them down.

“Are you all right?” Tracy asked Hoskins as he sat back against the corridor wall, looking at the bloody wound to his shoulder in obvious pain.

“I think so” Hoskins confirmed “The vest got the worst of it.”

The sound of gunshots out in the corridor had the desired effect in the Control Room as the friendly forces within took the opportunity to rush the ISA men which meant a few moments later when Tracy and the Commander rushed in the door, the takeover was already all but over.

“Someone grab the Supervisor guy!” one of the Control Room officers called across, he and his colleague already having their hands full restraining one of the ISA men on the floor by effectively sitting on top of him.

“Come here!” Tracy called, charging towards the Supervisor and jumping on top of the man, forcing him to the floor where he promptly struggled until she rammed his head against the console and rendered him unconscious.

“Is that all of them?” the Commander asked around.

“Yes Sir” one of the officers present confirmed as he and his colleague pulled one of the ISA men back to his feet now in handcuffs.

“Right” the Commander called “Get them out of here and into a cell but do it quietly.”

“Corridor and the adjacent office look clear” Hoskins confirmed as he came into the Control Room.

“Tracy, take over here, get us back in business” the Commander called “I have a rodent to remove from my office.”

“Be careful love” Tracy called as she took the centre seat in the Control Room and put on the radio headset.

“I will” the Commander confirmed with a warm smile “Hoskins, you are with me” he then called before leading the way out of the room.

“Right then” Tracy declared as various control room operators returned to their stations “We are back on the air, Lima Alpha One to all Security Service units and officers on all general frequencies” she called “We are back in business. All ISA operatives are to be detained and locked up immediately, the old gang is back in town and we are here to stay.”

“Do you know I could have sworn I just heard a cheer go up” Hoskins remarked as he and the Commander entered the outer office, guns drawn.

“I know someone who won't be cheering in a minute” the Commander confirmed as he considered turning the door handle but then decided just to kick it in instead.

“Ah, Commander, how tiresomely predictable” Haliford remarked, sitting back in the office chair as he and Hoskins entered “Some people use this newfangled device called a door handle you know.”

“Get the hell out of my chair and out of my office Haliford” the Commander demanded as he stood defiantly on the opposite side of the desk and stared his opponent down.

“No...” Haliford simply responded.

“All right then, you want to make it official” the Commander declared as he took out the documentation “I have a warrant for your arrest on charges ranging from aiding and abetting to murder, illegal detention, assault with a deadly weapon and treason plus a complete cease and desist order for your organisation” he confirmed, slamming the documents down on the desk in front of Haliford.

“I see” Haliford responded giving the documents a casual and dismissive look over “So Mr Hoskins, I see you were not all that you appeared to be?”

“Sorry to disappoint you” Hoskins confirmed “A specialist investigation unit in the US has been watching your friend McCallister plus your operations for the last six weeks. You both have a hell of a lot of questions to answer on both sides of the Atlantic.”

“If either of you think any of this is ever going to come to trial then gentlemen I think you will find you are all seriously deluded” Haliford responded.

“That's pot calling the kettle black if ever I heard it” the Commander replied “Now are you going to come quietly or should I just let my wife loose on you because believe me your kneecaps will not survive the experience.”

“Very well Commander” Haliford remarked as he pushed himself back from the desk and slowly stood up “You win this round but let me assure you that I have some very powerful friends and I will be enjoying freedom very, very soon.”

At that point Hoskins opened the office door and gestured to two ARU officers to enter.

“Take him away” the Commander called whereupon the two officers stepped forward and took an arm each and were preparing to take Haliford when he stopped, face to face with him.

“I should have got that nut job brother of yours to kill you first twenty years ago when I had the chance” Haliford defiantly declared.

“Pardon me for breathing” the Commander responded, not raising to the bait but maintaining a firm determined stare on Haliford that would probably have frightened lesser men than he.

“Don't worry Commander, I very much doubt you will be breathing for too much longer” Haliford warned “We shall meet again, next time on my terms and you will not survive so lightly.”

“Get him out of here” the Commander duly gestured towards the door whereupon the two escorting armed officers duly proceeded to take him away.

“You know I am going to miss him” Hoskins jokingly remarked as Haliford with his escort left the office and the door was closed leaving the two men alone with the Commander going around behind his desk and sitting down where he belonged once more.

“Lima Alpha One from Eagle One” the Commander proceeded to call over the radio “I am back in my nest, you may send out the word to our friends in Downing Street that they may proceed when ready.

“Message received and understood” Tracy's voice confirmed with obvious delight back over the radio.

“Mr Hoskins, take a seat” the Commander indicated one of the chairs in front of his desk which Hoskins duly took as he rearranged the items on his desk back into the right place including sitting up the antique silver photograph frame with his ever present picture of Tracy in it.

“Of course you know Haliford is right, don't you Sir?” Hoskins warned ominously “It doesn't matter how much evidence we have on him, a man like him will inevitably wriggle free sooner or later.”

“Yeah I know” the Commander admitted “That is why I have some plans for the future, some changes in the way we do things around here.”

“Sounds interesting” Hoskins remarked.

“I like the way you work” the Commander explained “If you are amenable, I'd like to offer you job” he confirmed.

“As Mr Spock said to the Captain, I am all ears” Hoskins agreed.

“Bloody hell, that’s the Home Secretary and Lord Hainault!” the BBC Political Correspondent remarked to his camera crew as they had their attention taken by the sudden sweeping arrival in Downing Street of the ministerial escort car and an awful lot of escorting heavily armed Security Service personnel.

They and the rest of the seemingly permanently encamped press corps on the opposite side of the street watching in amazement as with two ARU officers either side of them, the two men they had recognised together with Sir Richard Crowthorne proceeded from the rear of the car and straight in through the front door of Number 10 Downing Street.

The usual Downing Street political staff and associated flunkey’s had no choice but to move swiftly out of the way as Lord Hainault led the others with their armed officer escorts through the corridors of power with a purposeful stride until they reached the Prime Minister's office where after formally knocking, he entered to find Lord Forsyth over by the window looking out over the rear garden, a large goblet glass of brandy in his hand.

“Lord Terrance Forsyth” Lord Hainault formally called “Under the powers granted me through the articles and statutes of the Parliamentary Procedures Act 1813, I hear-by dissolve your administration and request you remove yourself from Government property immediately.”

“I don't think so...” Lord Forsyth calmly responded, turning around to face his opposition.

“In other words matey, you're fired” Sir Richard decided to explain the situation in more simple language.

“Furthermore” Lord Hainault continued “You are placed under arrest charged with treason and accessory to murder.”

“You had better take me in then” Lord Forsyth responded, putting down the now empty brandy glass on the desk alongside him and stepping forward, his arms outstretched.

“All right lads, take him in” Sir Richard called to the officers who proceeded to take Lord Forsyth into custody.

“Stay tuned gentlemen” Lord Forsyth called as he was led away “This little drama is not over yet!” he declared before laughing manically which echoed along the corridor and throughout the building.

“Shut up...” Sir Richard dismissed his folly as he followed closely behind leaving Lord Hainault and the Home Secretary behind in the cabinet office.

“Well Graham” Lord Hainault indicated the centre seat “There it is, it's all yours.”

“Thanks...” the Home Secretary responded as he went around to the seat with some obvious reluctance.

“Look at this way my friend” Lord Hainault remarked as if in some sort of reassurance “You can't be any worse than the last guy?”

Outside the front door of Number Ten there was a massive clamour from the press trying to get the story and it took a significant number of Security Service officers to keep them behind the barriers on the opposite side of the street, more so when Lord Forsyth appeared in the doorway obviously under arrest whilst Sir Richard following a short distance behind looked on.

Up until now Lord Forsyth had cooperated and come quietly and as a result there had been no need to place him in handcuffs however he was depending on this as he had one last defiant move planned before he was taken in, one that he wanted to perform in the full glare of the public glaze as he had an announcement to make.

Before anyone realised what was happening, Forsyth managed to grab one of the officer's guns and force his way free, running out into the centre of the street.

“Hold it!” he called, spinning around to see that he had everyone's attention with the barrel of the gun pointed against the side of his own head “I want everyone to see this!!”

“Don't shoot!” Sir Richard called to the Security Service officers all around who had reacted by bringing their weapons to bear on the escapee “We need him alive.”

“I serve notice on this country and the world!” Lord Forsyth called out, addressing the ranks of the press a short distance ahead of him, the gun still pressed against the side of his head as above, Lord Hainault and the Home Secretary looked on from the first floor window at the rapidly unfolding drama in the street below “The revolution is coming, the Pyramid Project will rise from the ashes and I will be forever remembered as its first martyr, etched in the pages of history that only now, you begin to realise are about to be rewritten forever!!”

“Oh God, he is really going to do it...” the BBC's Political Correspondent was heard to remark.

“Anarchy rises!!” Lord Forsyth called out loudly in one last triumphant outburst before swiftly moving the gun to place it underneath his chin and pulling the trigger.

Some looked away, others looked on transfixed in horror as the shot was fired and in an instant the back of Lord Forsyth's head exploded sending a spray of blood over the Security Officers and Sir Richard who were rushing in behind him at that moment.

“Strange fellow” one of the Security Service officers remarked as in accordance with standard procedure and despite the fact it was clear Lord Forsyth was well and truly dead, he kicked away the weapon clear of the body.

“You can say that again” Sir Richard agreed as he stood over the dead body and looked down with a puzzled expression “He's managed to ruin my best coat as well” he wryly remarked.

“Well...” Tracy remarked with a slightly sick feeling as she watched the live BBC News feed on one of the screens in Control Room “I guess that will be the top clip on YouTube within the next half hour.”

“Saves us the cost of an expensive and probably pointless trial though” the Commander confirmed as he joined his wife.

“I guess that leaves one last bit of housekeeping to take care of them” Tracy then declared as she picked up the radio head set “Lima Alpha One to Heathrow Team” she then called “Amber, you may proceed when ready.”

“Okay guys” Amber called into her hidden radio as she looked around the interior of the Terminal Five building at Heathrow Airport “We have a green light, let's go and pick them up.”

“You know what Ms McWilliam” Glasgow remarked as he and Amber got up from their seats in the coffee shop near the main check in desks and proceeded out onto the concourse “I have been waiting for this day for almost fifteen years.”

“Well I have only been after Cruschov for the last four so you win that one” Amber admitted as they made their way across the concourse to where a group of ARU Unit officers were waiting in the corner.

“Team Three” came a call over their radios at that point “Targets One, Two and Three have just arrived at the west entrance in a Mercedes saloon car” the confirmation came from a lookout positioned on a rooftop overlooking the entrances to the building.

“Looks like we are about to get all three cards in our Top Trumps scumbag of the month set” Amber declared, barely managing to contain her look of delight at the news “Let's go and get them.”

“All right everyone” the leader of the ARU team confirmed to his people who in addition to the Unit of six officers standing with him, were spread discreetly throughout the complex “Show time is upon on us. No one moves until the word is given, when that happens I want every ISA man in the place nailed to the floor and every entrance and exit covered and locked down.”

“And there they are...” Amber declared as in the distance she saw the three smug looking men heading across the concourse in their general direction although the sheer size of the Terminal Five building meant that they were still some distance away.

Amber quickly took off her coat and reversed it to reveal a full Security Service uniform tunic before she led the way with Glasgow and four ARU officers in close formation behind her across the concourse heading straight for the three men.

“Hold it right there gentlemen” Amber declared as they met in the middle whereupon both parties came to a halt, a divide of just a couple of feet separating them.

“Now!” the ARU Unit leader called into his radio whereupon almost instantaneously there were shouts and screams as his men deployed all throughout the airport, immediately sealing off the entrances and exits as well as quickly forcing to the ground and taking into custody any and all ISA officers that were still around including some plain clothes ones that they had identified.

“We are legitimate businessmen with every right to travel” McCallister declared “If you would care to step aside Miss then I will be prepared to forget this unfortunate misunderstanding.”

“You three are not going anywhere” Amber reiterated as she took a step forward “Especially you” she put most of her attention on the Russian, Cruschov who merely looked back with a distinct expression of revulsion.

“One simple telephone call should sort this misunderstanding out” Cruschov confirmed as he reached for his mobile but the action of putting his hand into his pocket soon had the armed officers immediately moving in.

“Keep your hands out of your pockets, take them out, slowly, do it now” one of the officers warned, his gun pointed directly at Cruschov's head.

“If you were thinking of calling your buddies” Amber confirmed with a knowledgeable smile “You had better know that Sir John Haliford has been arrested, the high and mighty ISA now lies in tatters and Lord Forsyth blew his brains out in the middle of Downing Street live on the BBC just a few minutes ago.”

“The authorities in this country cannot hold me” McCallister confirmed confidently “I'm protected up to the kazoo both here and in the United States.”

“Same here” Cruschov confirmed.

“And any detention you have planned for me my dear Amber” Altman warned “I will be out within twenty four hours and when that happens let me reassure you that I will track you down and kill you stone dead where you stand.”

“Now that is not a very polite thing to say to a lady” the leader of the ARU team remarked.

“You know what gentlemen” Amber declared “You are all absolutely right, at least you think you are” she then stepped aside for a moment “Mr Glasgow, would you care to join us?” she requested whereupon the elder Russian man stepped forward to stand immediately in front of his former KGB colleague and now adversary.

“Hello Alexander” Glasgow remarked “It's been a long time.”

“I am amazed you have the guts to confront me in person” Cruschov dismissed the threat.

“Alexander Dimitriev Cruschov” Amber formally declared “Under Article Three of the United Nations National Security Service Charter 1981, I am placing you under arrest for immediate deportation to your home country where you will face charges.”

“You can't do this!” Cruschov protested as he began to see his freedom slip away in front of his eyes as Glasgow indicated to two of his men to step forward whereupon they proceeded to take position either side of him and take him into custody.

“Don't worry my old friend” Glasgow mockingly confirmed “You will be travelling first class back to Moscow” he then nodded to his two men who administered a knock out drug that quickly saw Cruschov collapse unconscious “of course you will be travelling as carry on luggage mind” he then added with an amused smirk as the prisoner was then unceremoniously dragged away.

“I think he could be a tad overweight for a carry on” Amber remarked with an amused grin.

“It is amazing what you can still claim on FSB expenses these days” Glasgow confirmed “Well I must be going, thanks for all your help my dear, it's been fun.”

“Dosvedanya comrade” Amber confirmed whereupon with a warm shake of the hand and a tug of his hat brim the elderly Russian smiled and then duly departed.

“What about these two?” the ARU Unit leader asked nodding at the clearly fuming McCallister and Altman.

“Mr McCallister has an appointment with the FBI in Washington D.C.” Amber confirmed “You see they have been on to you and your cronies for a very long time now and they are just itching to get down to business.”

“This is nonsense” the former and now considerably disgraced US Senator defiantly replied.

“You can discuss that with your case officer when you reach the States as you will be spending a lot of quality time together” Amber informed him before turning back to the officers behind her “There is a FBI jet waiting at the private departure terminal for our friend here, see he gets on it.”

“I’ll see you in hell!” McCallister protested as he was duly handcuffed and all but dragged away.

“Yeah, yeah...” Amber remarked to herself before turning smartly on her heels to confront the last man standing, Altman even though he towered above her, she did not let this dominate her at all.”

“And as for you, you piece of utter filth” Amber called, staring the Welsh man directly in the eyes “There is something I have wanted to say to you for over four years.”

“What’s that?” Altman defiantly responded.

“You’re under arrest” Amber confirmed with a satisfied smile “Take him away” she then commanded.

“When this is over, you are dead you bitch!!” Altman was heard protesting as he was led away, struggling despite being held by six armed Security Service officers.

“I have been dead more times than I can count” Amber remarked in response to herself “Once more isn’t going to matter.”

As early evening drew in over London and the rush hour got under way across the city, many people were only now starting to get the full picture on the days momentous events through the evening papers which were being read on trains and buses homeward bound everywhere.

In various locations there was still the evidence of what had happened to be seen. Parliament Square was still closed off as the clean up of the damage and mess continued. Similarly in Trafalgar Square the council highways men were hosing down the last traces of blood from the fountain wall where Harcourt had met his end by the Commander’s sword.

Across London, the familiar and friendly faces of the Security Service were back on patrol on the streets as many of the officers who had managed to evade the Haliford ISA days returned to work doing what they did best, protecting the people and upholding law and order.

Meanwhile in Downing Street, former Home Secretary and now Prime Minister Graham Turner was getting to work, putting the Government back on track, assembling his cabinet of ministers and starting what would prove to be a new era for the country and the way it is governed.

Outside the window of the Cabinet Room in the street itself a large inflatable tent stood over the spot where the previous short term incumbent of that position had ended his life so dramatically a few hours earlier, his remains now being placed into a black body bag to be taken away, leaving only the memory of what had happened, witnessed by so many people who now all they had left to wonder was what was the meaning of Forsyth's peculiar warning when he died.

Was it a warning of something to come in the distant or maybe not so distant future? Then again maybe it was the mere ramblings of a power crazed mad man knowing that his final moments had come and that this was his end.

For now however in offices and conference rooms across the city, the priority as the evening drew in was to right the damage that had been wrought and it was on the top floor of New Scotland Yard that some of the most important changes were being made.

“You know I have been looking at this admittedly tatty piece of paper you gave me” Lord Hainault indicated the old envelope on the desk in front of him as Tracy and the Commander looked on from the other side “I have to say Commander, this could work.”

“The irony of being locked up in Haliford's basement the other night meant I had plenty of time to think” the Commander admitted “This Service has remained largely the same in terms of operations and format since it was founded back in the early 1980's but since then the world around it has changed.”

“We have tried to adapt wherever possible” Tracy added “a little reorganisation here, some redeployment of personnel and resources there but like my husband says, times have changed and so must we.”

“And one of the most important things we must do if this is to work is to make sure we look to the future” Lord Hainault agreed “The past must remain in the past, not in some state of potential resurrection to cause havoc in the future.”

“Hence the inquiry I propose” the Commander confirmed “We need a wide ranging review of every level of what we and associated agencies do.”

“You are proposing to launch a public inquiry into the very root and branch of the Civil Service, Government, the very instruments of command and control” Lord Hainault summarised “A system that has not changed or even been challenged in over three hundred years. Could be fun...”

“People like Sir John Haliford are a product of that system” the Commander explained “Power hungry greasy pole climbers who without the checks and balances in place, move themselves into positions to wreak havoc in the name of their ego and their wallets. We have seen too many of these lunatics over the years, too many people have got hurt or killed in the process of their rising and subsequent removal and you heard Forsyth's farewell speech when he went.”

“There is a sleeping dragon in the system waiting to awaken” Tracy remarked.

“So you propose we find that dragon and kill it in its sleep before it has a chance to awaken and burn us down” Lord Hainault remarked “We could wind up stepping on a lot of important toes along the way” he warned.

“Like that has ever bothered me before” the Commander wryly reminded him to which Tracy and the elder statesman responded with knowing smiles.

“Two Home Secretary's, one Justice Minister, one Deputy Prime Minister, a Justice Minister and now an Acting Prime Minister's head on you wall” Lord Hainault summarised with much amusement.

“Don't think I would want Forsyth's head in my trophy cabinet” Tracy mused amusingly “Not after what he just did with it!”

“You will head the main enquiry in your usual inimitable style” the Commander confirmed to Lord Hainault “Tracy here will be in charge of any criminal inquiry aspects that arise from your joint investigations and believe me there will be plenty to dig up.”

“Meantime, what about the Security Service?” Lord Hainault asked “I had trouble making out the squiggles on your diagram” he admitted indicating the drawing on the old envelope.

“Well I stay where I am, much as I yearn to be an ordinary front line patrol officer” the Commander admitted “Tracy here will be in charge of the criminal investigation operation as and when required, meantime Jennifer will take over as acting Divisional Commander of the Metropolitan Division just until she is better and able to drive again, then she returns to her normal post at VIP & Diplomatic Protection.”

“And the rest of these changes you propose” Lord Hainault continued “You have the agreement of the parties involved?”

“Sir Richard has confirmed his intentions and that has been worked into what you see before you” the Commander explained “There are a couple of blanks to fill in but I think these are now taken care of, hence our meeting.”

“They should all be ready for us downstairs now” Tracy confirmed “Amber McWilliam got back from the airport about thirty minutes ago and the rest have now arrived as well.”

“In which case I think we had better go and unveil the plan” the Commander confirmed “Should give them a laugh if nothing else!”

“So I said to him” Sir Richard remarked as he helped pour the coffee in the conference room “either my office gets redecorated or we send the boys around.”

“He's a right old lag isn't he?” Martin remarked to Amber as they watched from their seats around the conference room.

“You should see the cobbles he utters when he is *really* drunk” Amber confirmed with a wry smile “God help us if he ever writes his memoirs, a lot of people will be running for cover, or their lawyer the day that happens.”

“Ah, looks like everyone is here” the Commander remarked as he and Tracy entered the room whereupon the majority rose from their seats in respect.

“You'll have to excuse me not getting up” Jennifer Caverner admitted.

“If everyone would care to be seated, this won't take long” the Commander confirmed before he took the main seat at the head of the table with Tracy alongside him.

“I'm going to need a stiff drink for this one I think” Sir Richard wryly remarked as he produced his hip flask and took a quick swig before offering it around.

“To bring everyone up to speed” the Commander began “The last week or so has seen some extraordinary events occur and the time has come to make a few changes. We have a lot of good people amongst us and it is time we put them to the best use, recognise some untapped talent and prepare ourselves for the future that awaits us.”

“Very poetic...” Collins remarked.

“Sir Richard” the Commander addressed him directly “Yesterday you informed me of your intention to retire from the field, is that still your intention?” he asked.

“Well much as I have enjoyed being in the thick of the action in the last couple of days” Sir Richard openly admitted “I am not getting any younger, I have given thirty years, two marriages and one heart attack to the service of my country and quite frankly I am getting too old for this.”

“Time to move out to that little cottage you have bought in the Cotswold's and write your memoirs whilst that little research assistant from MI5 Central Ops you have been seeing for the last six months makes the tea for you” Tracy mused.

“How did you know about her?” Sir Richard asked in amazement “No one knows about her!”

“I knew!” Collins remarked cheekily, putting his hand up “So does pretty much everyone else for that matter.”

“So much for keeping secrets...” Sir Richard mused.

“With that thought in mind, part one of this little reorganisation I am proposing” the Commander duly continued “I'd like to bring Section Fourteen under the Security Service umbrellas as a semi-independent Division. It's proved useful and under the right leadership I think will continue to be a very useful weapon in our arsenal in the future.”

“Who gets the centre seat?” Collins asked.

“Amber, you have proved yourself to be one of the most resourceful and brave officers I have had the pleasure of working with” the Commander turned to the young Irish woman on the left hand of the table “Sir Richard and others here cannot praise you highly enough and the Queen upon my recommendation is awarding you and Alan with the Queens Security Service Medal for outstanding achievement and going above and beyond the call of duty. The top seat is yours if you want it.”

“Err thank you Sir” Amber responded, somewhat taken aback with surprise.

“Mr Hoskins” the Commander then turned to the American who was seated on the opposite side of the table “I said to you earlier I may have a job for you, are you interested?”

“I’m open to offers Sir” Hoskins confirmed.

“The events of the last week or two have shown that more and more we are dealing with influences and individuals that cross international boundaries” the Commander explained “This service has had to rely on grace and favour, old friends in the right places and second hand intelligence where overseas criminal activity is concerned, that is something I want to changed.”

“There has been no permanent Interpol office in the UK for almost two years now” Tracy took over as this part of the plan was largely her idea “We need someone who can run a dedicated division of this service that can span those international boundaries, liaise with all the various overseas agencies, highlight and act on any areas of threat that we would not otherwise have seen.”

“You come very highly recommended” the Commander returned to the conversation with an extensive personnel dossier on the table in front of him “You know the right people to ask the right questions across several continents and after seeing how you managed to so successfully penetrate Haliford's organisation, I'd like to offer you the job.”

“Well...” Hoskins remarked, a look of great surprise readily apparent “It would be a great honour Sir” he confirmed.

“So will you join us?” the Commander asked again, stretching his hand towards the American.

“Where do I sign?” Hoskins agreed with a broad smile as the two men shook hands and sealed the deal.

“Right then” the Commander then moved onto the next item of business “Bob...”

“What...?” the ARU man responded, looking up in mid biscuit and clearly surprised to suddenly find himself being involved in this history making discussion.

“I’ve had your wife on the phone giving me earache” the Commander informed him.

“Ah...” Bob responded almost apologetically.

“She reckons you work too hard” the Commander continued.

“Well, I wouldn't say that...” Bob began to defend himself but the Commander continued.

“She's right” the Commander confirmed.

“I should point out” Tracy remarked with a wry smile “You are being called a workaholic by the second busiest workaholic I have ever met.”

“Err right...” the Commander responded “Anyway the point is I want to reorganise the Armed Response side of the Service, use all those toys and resources that Haliford and his boys left lying around and have a ready to call on force to deal with the upsurge in violent crime that we are seeing.”

“Sounds like a nice idea Sir” Bob had to admit as he considered the idea.

“The fact remains that despite our best efforts over the years, the number of unregistered weapons that has flooded the country from Eastern Europe and beyond has grown alarmingly” the Commander admitted with strong regret “There are kids running around with knives and guns for Christ’s sake so I want to put together the toughest response force, ready for the call to duty at a moments notice.”

“The fact is” Tracy carried on “We want to strike a message of fear into the hearts of everyone on the street who is stupid enough to carry a gun, knife or any other form of inflicting death and misery on the innocent plus have a quick response squad that can counter violent robberies and anything else the world chooses to throw at us.”

“So, you up for the post of Divisional Commander Bob?” the Commander asked.

“Me?” Bob responded, still somewhat taken aback by the offer “Management?”

“Comes with a decent pay rise, complete autonomous control of your own Division, a new uniform and an almost unlimited budget” Tracy confirmed “Plus more time with the wife and kids, what do you say?”

“How can I refuse?” Bob responded with a smile.

“All right ladies and gentlemen” the Commander declared “That is the major alterations I wanted to announce. There is likely to be some more tweaking and moving around to be done over the coming days but I think you will hopefully all agree with me that what has begun here today is a base for a new future.”

“Time to clear my desk, cash in my pension and fire up my DB9 I think” Sir Richard declared, rubbing his hands with glee as he stood up before something then occurred to him “Err where is my Aston Martin now I come to think of it?” he asked.

“Last I saw Lieutenant Barrett was running every through red light in Essex in it” the Commander admitted as the meeting drew to a close.

“I better give Essex Traffic Division a call then” Sir Richard remarked as he left the room on his mobile “Barrett, where the hell is my car?” he was heard to call over the phone as he departed much to the amusement of everyone else there.

“Never a dull moment around here is there?” Tracy remarked with an amused chuckle as she and the Commander left the conference room arm in arm.

“I have to admit the place won't be *quite* the same without old Sir Richard around” the Commander admitted as they walked together down the corridor “I've known him since I was a wee small fellow but don't worry, we have not seen the last of him I think.”

“Oh dear” Tracy called out as she stifled a huge yawn “It just occurred to me I have not slept properly in nigh on three days and it's the weekend. Can we go home now?” she asked.

“Two little things to do before we are done here” the Commander admitted “First I want to look in on someone.”

In the detention cells in the basement, Haliford was pacing up and down with a furious look on his face. In accordance with procedures, the Commander had allowed him his one telephone call and even legal counsel, far more than Haliford's ISA would have allowed anyone they had detained if the roles were reversed.

Whilst the Commander had insisted that the correct prisoner procedure was to be observed for Haliford and the other detainees, he had also taken an additional precaution of having two armed sentry guards on duty outside the cell door around the clock.

For four hours Haliford had been held there, the only occupant of the cell block as all other detainees from that day had been moved elsewhere in order to make sure he was kept isolated therefore he quickly reacted and went to his cell door when he heard footsteps approaching.

“Get me the hell out of here!” Haliford demanded.

“Sorry” the Commander responded as he appeared at the viewing flap in the cell door as it was opened “I am afraid all your friends are in no position to help you, especially Lord Forsyth. He blew his brains out, assuming he had any in the first place that is shortly after you were arrested so he is in no fit state to help you any more.”

“Come to gloat Commander?” Haliford asked.

“No...” the Commander frankly responded “I don't do gloating, as my old friend Sir Richard Crowthorne would say, it's ungentlemanly.”

“No matter if it takes me ten years I will be free” Haliford ominously warned “and when that day comes Commander, you had better watch out because before the sun sets I will have my hands around your throat and you will die.”

“In which case Mr Haliford” the Commander remained calm and unimpressed by his threats “I'll be seeing you. Good night” he then confirmed before shutting the viewing flap and departing the cell block where he found Tracy and Jack waiting for him outside.

“How is our guest?” Jack asked.

“Vengeful I think would be a good description” the Commander admitted “Whilst I am certain we can lock him up for the foreseeable future, one day he will be released one way or another and then I fear we are just going to have more problems.”

“Nothing new there” Tracy admitted “Come on” she suggested “One last task to be done then we can go home.”

A couple of minutes later, Tracy, Jack and the Commander emerged from the main entrance of New Scotland Yard to a reception committee of the world's press who were encamped on the doorstep.

“Do you think Megan will grant me extra brownie points for appearing on the front page of the papers? Jack asked.

“Got to be worth a try” the Commander admitted “Speech time” he then declared as he stepped forward to face the press with Tracy and Jack standing a short distance behind him in the background offering moral support.

There was a barrage of questions fired at him as he approached the barrier behind which the press had been corralled whereupon the Commander held his hands up for silence which with the respect he always received he immediately got.

“Today marks the end of an extraordinary chapter in this city and indeed this country's history” the Commander declared “I'd like to thank everyone for their support, determination and resilience during these difficult last few days.”

The press watched intently as the Commander continued after looking back at Tracy and Jack for a moment for a smile of support.

“I pledge to the people of this city here tonight” the Commander then continued “that we are here, we are back and we will do our duty. Protect and serve the public trust and defend justice wherever and whenever required.”

“Tonight is a time to reflect on what has happened, remember those that were injured and killed because of the actions of a small minority who sought to seize power and

use the legitimate instruments of government for their own ends” the Commander then continued, clearly speaking from the heart “I have this evening already set in motion changes to the structure of the Security Service and its associated agencies which I hope will go some way to ensure that what occurred never happens again.”

“Sunrise tomorrow will mark a new dawn for this country and its law enforcement services and I pledge to you here and now that I will fight tooth and nail for justice and place those who seek to commit criminal acts on notice that your time is up” the Commander then passionately promised “Now it is time for all of us to go home, spend some time with our families and get some sleep so if you will excuse me ladies and gentlemen, good night.”

As the Commander returned to Jack and Tracy and they prepared to depart, the press corps along with onlookers and passers by who had stopped to listen to his passionate speech began to spontaneously break into rapturous applause.

“Should I take a bow?” Jack cheekily asked as the Commander rejoined them and together the three of them made their way to a waiting patrol car parked by the side of the street whereupon they got in the back.

“Where to Sir?” the driver called once they were inside.

“Home sounds like a good idea” Tracy responded as they relaxed in the back.

“You know what I might even have a lie in tomorrow” the Commander admitted with a wry smile as the car set off “Somehow I think we've earned it.”

To Be Continued.....

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