

EPPING

Security Novels Series - Episode X



John M Upton

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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

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Episode XXIII – Priory Park
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Epping

"Oh this one is a right charmer" Divisional Commander Tracy Caverner of the National Security & Police Service commented as she worked her way through a huge pile of case files on her desk.

The time was now approaching four o'clock in the afternoon and it seemed to her that she had been confined in her office, situated on the top floor of New Scotland Yard in central London for the best part of the entire day.

On her unusually cluttered desk, the file that had triggered her remark was a situation report from the Intelligence Service, better known as MI5 about a particularly unpleasant looking suspect who, it had been reported had entered the country by way of Luton Airport approximately twenty four hours earlier.

"With a mug like that my friend" Tracy commented wryly "You are going nowhere."

The clock on the desk beside the photograph of herself and her husband the Regional Administrator General of the service, better known to all and sundry simply as the Commander declared the time as almost four o'clock.

"Stuff this" Tracy declared to herself as she closed the files on her desk and unceremoniously slung them in the in tray before reaching for her remote control and switching on the large flat screen television mounted on the office wall.

The BBC News 24 channel came on just as the usual jingle played into the seconds leading to the top of the hour and the main news headlines.

"Good afternoon, you are watching BBC News 24" the presenter announced as Tracy relaxed back in her chair "These are the main news headlines at four o'clock."

"Please don't interview my husband" Tracy offered her thought upwards more in hope than expectation.

"Representatives of the major law enforcement agencies plus a host of political dignitaries are gathered today at a conference centre in Essex to thrash out the issues of safety, security and the growing threat of global terrorism both within and outside the United Kingdom" the news broadcast continued as it showed various scenes of the delegates arriving including numerous high ranking members of the Security Service, the Prime Minister and the Mayor of London.

Tracy continued to watch as the news broadcast continued to list the current headlines before returning to the main news item in which she was most interested.

"The first day of the conference has already featured extensive policy launches and lectures from some of the world's leading experts on security and anti-terrorism" the reporter outside the conference centre announced in the midst of the pouring rain with just a rather inadequate standard issue BBC umbrella for cover "The opening speeches were delivered by the Prime Minister and the Mayor of London who stressed the need for increased vigilance at all times from everyone."

“I bet you nodded off during that bit” Tracy remarked to the photograph of her husband on the desk, thankful that she had managed to get out of going to the conference, she had plenty of work to do keeping the Security Service running whilst all the top brass were out of town for the next week.

“In the next twenty minutes the conference is expected to hear from the Regional Administrator General for London and the South East which has already been described by one delegate as potentially the highlight of the day” the reporter continued.

“He'll bring the house down” Tracy responded raising her cup of coffee in salute with a wry smile.

“Hello Sis!” Jennifer Caverner, Tracy's identical twin sister and head of the VIP Protection Division announced as she put her head around the door.

“Come in” Tracy beckoned “If we are lucky we may just get to see my husband on the telly being all undiplomatic as usual.”

“I thought he had got a press officer to help him with these public appearances now?” Jennifer asked as she took a seat.

“He *had* a press officer until two days ago” Tracy explained “Then she made the fatal mistake of suggesting that the Commander adopt the 'forward thinking ethos of the current parliamentary thinking methodology' and that was when he sent her on a free one way transfer to the Ports and Airports Division.”

“Oh dear...” Jennifer responded

“At Prestwick!” Tracy added.

“You've got to hand it to him” Jennifer remarked “He knows how to be unsubtle when he wants to.”

“Anyway” Tracy remarked “Aren't you supposed to be in the deep dark depths of the Epping Forest transporting this bunch of political no necks?”

“They won't be finished for at least another three hours yet” Jennifer explained “There is the big buffet dinner at six o'clock with the representatives from the CIA and the US Government plus a couple of big wigs from the United Nations Security Council, a free feed to a politician is like manna from heaven.”

“And they will probably still try to claim it on expenses” Tracy remarked.

“Well they better not run too late” Jennifer remarked “Simon is cooking dinner tonight.”

“Commander Simon Fuller is cooking dinner?” Tracy remarked amazed “I thought he just micro waved everything to death?”

“One of the advantages of being married to me that I think he is coming to terms with” Jennifer explained “Unlike your husband, when it comes to cuisine, he is open to suggestion.”

“Blimey...” Tracy responded.

“Continuing live coverage of the conference can be seen now over on BBC Parliament” the news presenter on the television announced causing Tracy to quickly change channels.

On the television, the picture had changed to a view inside the large conference centre where the Commander could be seen taking to the stage ever so slightly reluctantly with a semi prepared speech in his hand which appeared to consist of a few bullet points scrawled on the back of an old pocket Underground map, a feature that would come as no surprise in the least to anyone who knew him.

“Good evening” the Commander announced as on the screen his name and position appeared across the bottom of the picture just in case anyone was unaware who to who he might be “The last thirty years has seen an ever increasing level of violent crime not only in the city of London itself but nationwide, guns and knives are on every street corner and hardly a night goes by without some poor sod being carted off either dead or dying, often as the result of an unprovoked random attack.”

“This is good” Jennifer remarked as she and Tracy shared a packet of crisps whilst watching the show.

“In many ways this is what I would call domestic terrorism” the Commander continued “Mostly young people, lost in the great system we call society, few if any prospects and forced to turn to crime in order to make ends meet or establish a reputation on the street.”

“What I hope we will be able to do over the next few days is address this issue and through a combination of gentle persuasion and threatening the Home Secretary with a visit from me unless he increases my budget, put in place the tools to do the job” the Commander continued passionately.

“But that is not the only problem” the Commander carried on as nearby the camera picked up on the current Home Secretary looking understandably nervous “There used to be a time when the criminal fraternity had standards, unwritten rules, lines that were never crossed, sadly many of the old hands are long gone and now it's a free for all out there where innocent victims are caught up in major crimes of an increasingly intense, well organized and violent nature where greed becomes the most powerful force and anyone who gets in the way, irrespective of who they may be are swept aside often with fatal results.”

“Then there is the big third problem” the Commander resumed after a brief pause as he looked around with a stern stare ensuring he had everyone's attention which he soon saw he had, no one would dare ignore him with his reputation “Terrorists, I hate these guys!”

A brief chuckle at the Commander's comment was allowed to filter through the room before he continued "Now I know terrorism is nothing new, the IRA blew stuff up in London and the UK mainland for over thirty years to the point where we could almost set our watch by them, plus the occasional passing nutter thrown in for good measure but unlike those days, we now have a new breed of terrorist scumbag, better organized, well funded, trained in military skills, dedicated and run almost like a franchise, a sort of MacDonald's of global terrorism."

"That should have Maccy D's lawyers on the blower any second..." Tracy remarked to herself as she reached across the desk and took her telephone off the hook as a precaution.

"In the old days your average terrorist mixed his explosives from common household chemicals in a basement in Bayswater and taped on an Ever Ready battery and an old fifty pence alarm clock from Woollies, popped out, bunged it somewhere, phoned it in to the BBC and then went home again" the Commander explained "Now we have carefully hidden terrorists who will happily die for their belief and are given the funding, the equipment and the training to do it."

"Two years ago we had a terrorist attack on this city" the Commander continued "and from the point of view of our officers on the street and in the stations, what could we have done about it? They appeared as ordinary guys in the street, a bag on the shoulder, a one day travel card and a few quid in their pocket, in effect all but identical to the millions of people who pass through the public transport system every week. This is my point, the world out there beyond this cosy conference centre doesn't contain movie villains with striped shirts and blindfolds walking into banks with bags marked with the word 'Swag' on it, neither do terrorists go around with a hat that says 'I'm a mad bomber, arrest me', hell even the common or garden sawn off shotgun, once the stock in trade of every east end villain is now the thing of the past."

"That's what we are up against" the Commander reiterated "Ordinary people on the outside but beneath the persona, dedicated well trained people who will do anything to achieve their goals."

"Ever since the Berlin Wall collapsed, the availability of cheap effectively over the counter weapons, explosives, drugs, you name it" the Commander emphasized to his enthralled audience "has gone from the odd weapon in the hand luggage on the cross channel ferry amid the duty free to a wholesale flood, cheaply available."

"Let me make this clear, this is not boatloads of old Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc cast offs although the AK47 is still popular in some parts of Croydon, we are talking about the latest in weapons technology, at least so my wife tells me."

“By the end of this week” the Commander began to draw to a conclusion hoping his point was at last getting through “assuming I don't die of boredom or food poisoning in the meantime that is, I want us to have in place the means, the will and most importantly of all the funding lined up for a whole new set of resources to fight this growing menace. The time of trying to stop crime with dedicated officers with nothing but side handled batons and six shot revolvers is gone, its time to fight fire with fire because I am fed up of having to visit the loved ones of my officers and telling them that they are badly injured or have died in the line of duty.”

There was an impromptu round of applause at which the Commander was slightly surprised at as he looked around the conference hall before he put up his hand to ask to continue.

“You know” the Commander continued in a more relaxed tone “I was talking with an old colleague of mine who is now my opposite number up in Scotland, he asked me why do I do what I do, put myself in the front line and more often than not get shot at from time to time.”

"Well there are benefits" the Commander continued after a short pause "The principle one is about five foot eight and answers to the name of Tracy" he admitted which prompted a gleeful smile from Tracy and a peal of laughter from his audience.

"Primarily I do this job, extract myself from my office and head out into the front line as much as possible because I know that out there is where I can make a difference, not pushing papers around a desk or being stuck in dull Government strategy meetings" the Commander explained "Indeed I can think of a multitude of more interesting and productive things I could be doing than being stuck in this marble lined flea pit for a week."

"There goes the diplomatic angle out of the window again" Tracy remarked.

"The point is I want to make a difference" the Commander continued "When I was twelve years old I experienced the full force of greed fuelled brutality and after I recovered I swore that I would never let anything like that happen to anyone else all the time I could do something about it."

"What I hope you lot do this week is think about what you can do to make that difference" the Commander began to draw to a close "I appreciate that thinking is not exactly high on the list of skills for the politicians amongst us but give it a try, you might generate a taste for it."

The audience duly burst into laughter once again at another of the Commander's legendary wry quips as he consulted his antique pocket watch.

"Well if you good ladies and gentlemen will excuse me" the Commander announced "I don't know about anyone else but I'm hungry, lets eat."

In the depths of the Epping Forest, two dark green Land Rovers pulled into a clearing and stopped in the shadow of the trees.

From the lead vehicle, the obvious leader of the group alighted dressed in military style outdoor outfit and went directly to the rear of the canvas backed vehicle where, lifting the access flap, he was greeted by the sight of a significant number of similarly dressed and heavily armed men.

"Good afternoon gentleman" the well mannered voice of their commanding officer announced "Its show time" he declared "Everyone get your stuff, you know what to do."

Within moments and with military like efficiency, the men exited the back of the Land Rover and proceeded to the other vehicle where they quickly set about the task of unloading and distributing the equipment contained inside.

"Everyone knows what to do" the leader called "I want everyone in position in fifteen minutes."

With that order, the men melted away out of sight in amongst the surrounding woodland to carry out their unknown task.

"Interesting speech" Sir Richard Crowthorne, Deputy Director of the Intelligence Service, better known as MI5 commented as he joined the Commander in the queue for the buffet lunch servery area.

"I thought you would like it" the Commander responded as he looked over the salad selection on offer with disdain "Is their anything worth eating around here?" he asked.

"Desert section is further down" Sir Richard confirmed to the Commander's relief as they moved down.

"Ah, that's more like it" the Commander confirmed as he duly helped himself to the largest slice of the double layered chocolate cake that was on offer.

"Tracy still not having any luck making your diet more healthy then?" Sir Richard asked with a chuckle.

"Only when she is not looking" the Commander admitted.

Once they had both made their selection of predominantly unhealthy food, they went over to a vacant table and sat down.

"Mind if I join you?" the voice of a tall slim well dressed gentleman with a neatly trimmed moustache asked.

"Please feel free" the Commander indicated an empty seat at the table.

"Christopher O'Connell" the man introduced himself in his broad North American accent "Overseas criminal intelligence unit, CIA."

"Ah, Special Agent O'Connell" the Commander shook his hand "A pleasure to put a face to a name at last, we've spoken on the telephone from time to time."

"When the opportunity came up to come to this conference and meet you, I jumped at the chance" O'Connell explained as he sat down whereupon he was also warmly greeted with a handshake by Sir Richard.

"People rarely 'jump' at the chance to meet me" the Commander commented with a hint of surprise "In fact the last one who did that was trying to kill me if I recall."

"Occupational hazard of this business we are in" O'Connell responded "Let me reassure you sir my intentions are strictly professional and honourable."

"Now there speaks the voice of a man with either a problem or at the very least an encroaching dilemma" Sir Richard commented.

"Regrettably I am forced to admit my presence here is more than just personal" O'Connell admitted with some regret.

"I knew the day was going just that bit too smoothly" the Commander remarked as he tucked into his chocolate cake with his usual enthusiasm.

"We have reason to believe that a UK citizen in which we have had an interest for a number of years is about to agree a large arms deal in the next week" O'Connell explained in a hushed tone.

"Anyone we know?" the Commander asked.

"Possibly not" O'Connell responded "As far as I can tell, this guy is clean as far as your side of the pond is concerned."

"So why the cloak and dagger if you don't mind me asking " Sir Richard enquired.

"The gentleman in question has influence in the corridors of power across the United States and other countries as well" O'Connell explained having checked around discreetly to check that they were not being overheard "Any attempt to investigate him gets what an old Admiral friend of mine calls the proverbial Potomac two step."

"That sort of thing happens this side of the pond as well" the Commander confirmed thanks to an extensive wealth of experience.

"The subject in question is a prominent businessman by the name of Harold Devlin" O'Connell explained "If possible would it be possible to arrange a meeting between us at a more suitable time and location to compare notes?"

"By all means" the Commander confirmed "Give my Personal Assistant a call in the morning and we can arrange a time that's convenient" he suggested as he gave O'Connell a card with his contact details.

"Will all delegates please return to the main auditorium" an announcement called.

"Blimey that was quick" the Commander remarked as he quickly scooped the last part of his chocolate cake, "Looks like the Mayor wants to get home early tonight."

"Must be something decent on the telly tonight" Sir Richard commented as the three men got up from their seats and joined the crowd as they filed out.

"If you suffer from insomnia" the Commander mentioned aside to O'Connell "You will find that a speech from our beloved Mayor is the perfect cure."

"Does anyone know where this RTA is supposed to have happened?" Tracy asked from her seat at the main console in the Central London Control room as she surveyed the large screens at the front of the room for the current status with the evening rush hour just starting to get under way.

"Top end of Regent's Street" one of the despatch officers confirmed.

"Oh wonderful" Tracy responded with despair as she called up the appropriate traffic camera on her screen "Well that's the rush hour along the Euston Road shot to hell... again!"

As she checked on the deployment status of officers and support in the area of the problem, Tracy noted one of the despatch officers to her right receive a call that resulted in a sudden outburst of feverish scribbling of notes.

"Something occurring?" Tracy inquired once she had seen that the dispatcher had finished receiving the report.

"Looks like a suspicious package reported in Whitehall" the dispatcher confirmed as he passed a copy of the details to Tracy "Brown parcel in the Portcullis House post room that when opened emitted a suspicious white powder."

"Lima Mike One to all units in the Westminster and Whitehall area" Tracy called over the radio network "Code nineteen at Portcullis House, post room. Seal off the area and evacuate in accordance with the standard haz-mat protocols."

"The chemical boys have been red flashed and are on their way" the dispatcher confirmed.

"Lovely" Tracy responded as she got up and grabbed her uniform tunic from the back of the chair "Show me as on the way" she declared before leaving the control room.

Within a few minutes, Tracy was heading out of the back door of New Scotland Yard into Victoria Street where she flagged down a Security Service patrol car as it was about to pass.

"Evening Maam" the officer driving the patrol car announced as she joined him in the front.

"Evening" Tracy responded "Portcullis House please and don't spare the horses as my old grandmother used to say."

Thanks to the sirens and lights of the patrol car, Tracy was swiftly delivered to Parliament Square where she duly assumed her role as senior officer on site and took charge of operations.

"Have we confirmed the building has been evacuated yet?" Tracy enquired as she looked on up the face of Portcullis House that faced the Houses of Parliament.

"Everyone is out and the Haz-Mat team are doing a final sweep now before entering the post room" the supervising officer confirmed "Then we shall get a look at whatever we have."

"Fiver says its baking powder again" Tracy remarked wryly "Outside bet may be worth laying on washing powder detergent though."

"Lima Hotel Zebra One Five to Gold Control" came the call over the radio from the Hazardous Materials Team who were inside the building.

"Here we go" Tracy declared as she boarded the Mobile Operations Unit parked nearby "Gold Control receiving" she confirmed once she was aboard.

"Everyone is out" the confirmation came from the team leader as, encased in his red chemical protection suit, he surveyed around the eerily quiet and deserted reception area of Portcullis House "No contamination detected on anyone so we are going to head into the post room now."

"Can we get the video feed direct to here?" Tracy asked.

"Yes certainly Maam" the officer monitoring developments confirmed "I'll put it on the main screen over there."

Tracy and a number of other officers gathered around the main screen and watched the live camera feed from the cameras mounted on the chemical protection suits of the Hazardous Materials Team as they began to move through the deserted building before entering the post room.

"Do the words needle and haystack ring any bells?" Tracy remarked as they got their first look at the interior of the post room which was full of grey mail sacks as well as letters and parcels stacked high in and around sorting boxes and an armada of franking machines.

"This looks like it" the leader of the Haz-Mat team responded as he approached a desk where an opened package could be seen with a white powder visible inside the open part.

"What have you got?" Tracy asked.

"Fairly standard looking package" came the response as the video feed showed the suspect parcel being looked over very carefully "Some sort of white substance emitted from the interior, I am going to have a closer look."

"Be careful" Tracy warned as they watched the gloved hands carefully open the package further. The tension increased noticeably as they watched the interior of the package being slowly revealed whereupon an inner wrapper was revealed.

Further pulling back of the outer wrapper revealed a label or marking of some kind which everyone watching the screen found themselves forced to rotate their heads in order to make out.

"Sel..." Tracy read from the beginning of the label before breathing a quiet sigh of relief and stepping back "Ok, who had self raising flour?" she asked.

"Jerry back in the control room" one of the officers confirmed.

"Lima Mike Zero One to control" Tracy called over the radio "Pay Jerry the sweepstake money, he's won again."

"Why on earth would someone send a bag of flour to a bunch of politicians?" one officer asked.

"Flour bombing by mail" Tracy mused "It's a new one on me I will admit but all in all" she surveyed the not inconsiderable manpower and resources gathered around "Someone got their wish of keeping us well and truly occupied for an hour."

"Conspirisists of the world unite" the Haz-Mat officer commented over the radio.

Half a mile away on the top floor of New Scotland Yard, two men in blue overalls appeared from the fire stairs door carrying toolboxes and whistling quietly in the way that made them appear to be normal maintenance engineers of some kind.

After a general look around the deserted corridors of the floor and confirming that there was no one about, the two men nodded to each other and split up, one proceeding to the Commander's office, the other to Tracy's which is immediately adjacent.

It only took a matter of seconds for the men's experienced hands to make light work of the locks before they were inside the respective offices and looking around.

In the Commander's Office, the man in there took a good look around before going over to the filing cabinet and after a moment with the lock, opened it and scanned through the four drawers of files clearly looking for something specific.

Evidently what he was looking for was not there as he moved on to the desk where, after a brief pause to look and wonder why there was a model of a 'King Arthur' class steam locomotive on the front edge, he turned his attention to the drawers of the desk where the stranger was forced to pick the lock to gain access.

The search duly elicited what appeared to be the requisite file that was being sought, tucked down the side of the deep lower drawer behind a packet of biscuits from which the stranger duly helped himself to a couple as he checked through the file to confirm it was the right one.

In Tracy's office next door a similar searching process was being undertaken by the second man where he too found relevant files in the filing cabinet.

"You got them?" his colleague enquired as he joined him.

"All present and correct" the second man confirmed.

"Here have a biscuit and lets get back to the office" the first man responded.

With that they left as discreetly and unobserved as they had arrived.

"Thank goodness for that" the Commander remarked as he and Sir Richard filed out of the main conference room with the rest of the delegates "I thought it was never going to end."

"I think I have been to more exciting funerals" Sir Richard agreed "Oh sorry..." he apologised when he remembered that the Commander had only recently lost his father.

"Don't worry about it" the Commander responded reassuringly "At this very moment I am willing to bet my old dad is up there right now playing poker with God himself and probably winning."

"Want a lift?" Sir Richard asked as they stepped out of the main entrance into the driveway outside where a row of official cars were waiting their myriad of important and high ranking passengers complete with an extensive Security Service escort of patrol cars and motorcycles.

"Yeah, why not" the Commander agreed "It would be nice to actually see my wife again sometime this week.

"Evening Sir" Jennifer Caverner called from her Ministerial Escort car as she pulled up outside the entrance and got out of the drivers seat.

“Wrong one” the Commander remarked wryly “Who are you chauffeuring around tonight then?” he asked.

“I’ve got the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary” Jennifer confirmed.

“Well if you are looking for the Home Secretary, he will be the one cowering behind the potted plants in the hallway waiting for me to go” the Commander remarked with a knowledgeable grin.

“I don’t suppose you two could act as the rear vehicle for our run could you Sir?” Jennifer asked as she saw that the Commander and Sir Richard had their own vehicle available.

“Don’t see why not” Sir Richard confirmed “If that is all right with you?” he turned to the Commander who nodded in agreement.

“That gets me out of a bit of a jam then” Jennifer confirmed “One of my cars overheated in the run in and we are an escort down.”

“Do you want us to just follow along?” Sir Richard asked.

“That’ll be fine thanks” Jennifer confirmed as she opened the rear door of her car to allow the Prime Minister to get in.

“You lead and we will follow” the Commander confirmed as he and Sir Richard moved off to their car parked nearby. Once inside with Sir Richard in the driving seat, they observed the multitude of dignitaries leaving the centre and getting into their waiting vehicles.

“Who’s paying for this publicity stunt?” the Commander wondered as they watched the Home Secretary join the Prime Minister in Jennifer’s car whilst the Mayor of London and two associates got in the car immediately behind.

“Mr and Mrs Taxpayer and their lovely children P.A. and Y.E I suspect” Sir Richard confirmed “If I could have half what they are spending on this in my budget I could solve a lot of resource shortfall issues and maybe catch a few more bad guys.”

“Try arresting someone with a nice Swiss bank account full of untraceable gold bullion” the Commander suggested “Made a very nice dent in the investment backlog did that” he referred to a recent case in which a sizeable sum of funds was seized and which he had ensured was subsequently invested in providing better services for the benefit of all.

“Looks like we are off” Sir Richard remarked as he started the engine.

“Mystery tour of the Epping Forest or shall we just dump the Mayor on the Central Line with an Oyster Card?” the Commander remarked as the convoy of vehicles began to move off, headed by two patrol cars and a motorcycle outrider.

“Looks like the mystery tour” Sir Richard confirmed as once the majority of the vehicles with the dignitaries had passed them, he pulled out and slotted in just in front of the patrol car that was bringing up the rear.

The driveway of the country manor in which the conference was being held was so long that it took a full five minutes at a reasonable pace before they reached the large ornate guarded gates that led out onto the main road deep in the heart of the most rural part of the Epping Forest.

Once on the main road, the lights and sirens of the lead and tail patrol card ensured that any traffic around moved quickly out of the way as the convoy made a quick if somewhat circuitous route through the forest roads.

“Victor Pappa One to all units in Convoy Bravo” Jennifer's voice was heard over the radio “Traffic Division reports that the roads past North Weald are a bit clogged with an RTA so we will be diverting onto route 'C' on your plans.”

“What's route 'C' when it is at home?” the Commander wondered.

“Buggered if I know” Sir Richard admitted “I guess we just keep following the chap in front until we get somewhere.”

“Sounds like a reasonable plan” the Commander agreed “With any luck we should pass a chip shop on the way.”

“Do you always think about food?” Sir Richard asked as they turned off the main road onto a more rural country lane that was poorly lit.

“Only when I am not thinking about Tracy” the Commander admitted.

“Oh” Sir Richard responded.

“Where the hell are we?” the Commander asked generally as they continued down the rather rough rural lane which was getting narrower as they went on.

“Map on the back seat” Sir Richard commented.

“Ok then” the Commander remarked once he had retrieved the map and opened it whereupon he scanned the area in search of some clue as to where they were “Well from what I can make out of this, we appear to be in the back of beyonds back yard.”

“Well I didn't think it was Croydon somehow” Sir Richard confirmed wryly.

“Indeed” the Commander agreed “Not enough nutters around with guns for a starter.”

They continued to drive seemingly into deeper and darker woods for another five minutes when the Commander began to doze off with the boredom of it all.

"What the hell was that?" the Commander suddenly asked when he was awoken with a start from his sleepiness by a loud explosion that erupted a short distance ahead, instantly destroying the lead patrol car and bringing the convoy to a sudden halt.

Sir Richard barely had time to look around for the answer when a second explosion blew the patrol car at the rear of the convoy and right behind them off the road into the trees in a mangled mess of burning metal.

"Evacuate!" Jennifer's voice called with calm urgency over the radio but just as the remaining vehicles were about to disperse as per standard procedure should a secure escort come under attack than military dressed men appeared from the woods and proceeded to open fire.

"Stuff this" the Commander exclaimed as he pulled his gun from his holster and got out of the car.

"All things considered" Sir Richard remarked as he and the Commander scrambled out of the car "East Croydon is looking like a far more pleasant option right now."

The gunmen were concentrating their firepower on the second escort vehicle when the Commander popped up from one side, aimed and fired which struck and disabled one of the men but had the effect of bringing the attention of the others towards the Commanders position.

By this point three other officers and Sir Richard joined the fight and were able to provide covering fire which allowed the Commander to duck down behind the cars and make his way to the front where Jennifer was defending the Prime Minister and Home Secretary as there was no chance of escape at the moment.

"Who the hell are these jokers?" Jennifer asked as the fire fight continued, a volley of shots striking her car and chipping the bullet proof glass windows.

"Whoever they are" the Commander commented between returning fire "They are definitely after someone specific."

"We can't get out of here whilst this lot are turning us into Swiss cheese" Jennifer declared.

"Leave it to me" the Commander declared "As soon as I give the word, get the hell out of here."

"What about you?" Jennifer asked.

"I'll hail a cab" the Commander confirmed as he reloaded his gun and using the cover of the vehicles, headed back to the rear of the convoy.

As the fire fight continued, two of the armed men advanced forward to the third car of the convoy and commenced spraying it with concentrated fire until the car caught fire and exploded as the fuel tank was breached.

"This is getting bloody dangerous!" Sir Richard exclaimed as he and two officers now low on ammunition took cover behind a couple of trees.

"We need a diversion" the Commander explained "Otherwise no one is getting out of here alive."

"On three then?" Sir Richard asked.

"On three" the Commander confirmed "You guys ready?" he asked the other officers.

"Ready as we ever will be" one of them confirmed.

"Ok then" the Commander responded "One, two, three!"

On the count of three the Commander, Sir Richard and the three officers jumped up from behind the cover and opened fire, instantly shooting four of the gunmen but at the cost of one officer who was struck and collapsed.

"Come on" the Commander called to one of the badly injured dignitaries from the targeted car as he and Sir Richard under covering fire managed to pick him up and carry him to Jennifer's damaged but still useable car.

Once there, the Prime Minister got out of the car to Jennifer's annoyance and helped to load the injured man unceremoniously inside the car.

"Get out of here!" the Commander ordered as he shut the door whereupon Jennifer got back in the drivers seat, tossed the Commander her gun and sped away as fast as possible.

"Right there're out" the Commander declared as Jennifer's car sped off at high speed "Who's left?" he asked as he joined Sir Richard behind the remains of one car.

Another explosion destroyed a second car which caused them to duck down as debris was thrown up.

"We are rapidly running out of options" Sir Richard confirmed but as the explosion died down, the two men realised that the gunfire had ceased.

"Where did they go?" the Commander asked as he cautiously looked up over the smouldering bullet ridden bonnet of the car to see amongst the smoke from the wreckage of the vehicles that the gunmen were retreating down a forest track away from them.

"Find some transport" the Commander requested "then scoop up anyone who's still breathing."

"Where are you going?" Sir Richard asked as they both got cautiously to their feet and surveyed the extensive damage.

"I want to know who these jokers are" the Commander confirmed before going over to the other side of the road and looking ahead down the track where in the distance he could see the gunmen retreating.

Meanwhile, Sir Richard quickly checked the condition of those officers and dignitaries still on site, one officer was still alive but very unstable, the others including the Mayor of London were dead.

"Got a live one here" Sir Richard confirmed whereupon the Commander rejoined him and together they carried the badly injured officer to one of the patrol cars which was damaged but appeared at least driveable.

"Oh hell!" the Commander suddenly exclaimed as gun shots once again rang out sending them scrambling to get into the car.

"I thought you said they had gone?" Sir Richard remarked as the Commander got in the drivers seat and managed to start the engine.

"Well maybe they fancied an encore" he remarked as he gunned the engine and without even bothering to close the door, put his foot to the floor, accelerating away hard in the process knocking one of the wrecked cars aside before continuing as fast as the badly damaged car would permit.

As they headed away into the distance, the leader of the gunmen, dressed in neatly turned out military style battle dress calmly stepped out from the bushes into the middle of the road, raised his binoculars to his eyes calmly and watched with a slight hint of disdain.

"I do so hate it when people decide to leave the party early" he calmly remarked as he extracted a mobile telephone from his pocket. With one hand continuing to hold up the binoculars up to his eyes so he could observe the exact position of the fleeing vehicle, he waited until the exact moment before pressing a speed dial number on the telephone.

"Say goodnight gentlemen" he remarked as he pressed the button.

Sir Richard and the Commander were unaware of what was happening a short distance behind them until suddenly what appeared to be a carefully placed road side booby trap bomb exploded just as their car was passing it.

The force of the explosion threw the car off the road causing it to roll several times through the rough woodland scrub until its momentum was stopped by a large oak tree that impacted with the passenger cabin and distorted the already heavily damaged vehicle almost beyond recognition.

The guard of two uniformed officers on patrol outside the main entrance to the conference centre were stood in the doorway porch looking out across the vast grounds that were now beginning to disappear from view as sunset began to encroach and the area beginning to darken.

"Well this may be one of the most dull duties I have ever been assigned" one officer commented to his colleague "but at least it's quiet and you get a decent view thrown in."

"Can't argue with that" the second officer agreed "They've got a golf course around the back of this place as well."

"That explains why the Government chose this place" the first officer commented.

"Hello" the second officer remarked as he observed a vehicle approaching in the distance apparently driving erratically at high speed "What's that about?"

"Probably some Minister forgotten his briefcase again" the first officer commented "Although on second thoughts, isn't that one of the VIP Protection Squad's motors?" he asked as it came closer and they both now saw the battered and shot up condition of the vehicle.

"Wake up the cavalry" the first officer asked his colleague "This doesn't look like any regular drop off."

The car came to a sudden halt right in front of the main entrance, crunching on the gravel surface and sending small stones flying before a bedraggled Jennifer appeared from the driver's seat and caught the officer's attention with a shrill whistle.

"Chuck us a radio mate" Jennifer called "and help me get this lot inside."

"Yes Maam" the officer responded as he opened the back door of the car whereupon the Prime Minister joined the two officers in helping the Home Secretary, clearly in a state of shock and the badly injured officer inside the building.

Once they were all safely inside, Jennifer took the officers radio and made the urgent call.

"Victor Pappa One to Control" Jennifer called over the radio "Code one on convoy, officers and escort down, Pappa Alpha safe at location one but urgent medical and strategic support urgently required, fully armed."

Tracy had decided that as her husband was probably going to be late back that evening, she would take the opportunity to clear some of the ever present backlog of paperwork that was on her desk.

As she entered her office, Tracy hung up her uniform tunic on the coat but then paused and looked around with thought for a moment.

To her something did not seem quite right somehow although she was not sure exactly what. Shaking her head as she dismissed the thought, she went and sat down behind her desk from where she surveyed her office where everything at least seemed normal.

Tracy was about to reach down to her desk drawer and open it when she was interrupted by a sudden rapid knocking before Commander Simon Fuller, head of the Computer Crime Division and Jennifer's husband came in with a flustered look.

"Where's the fire?" Tracy asked.

"Epping Forest" Fuller confirmed "There's been an incident with the dignitary convoy and it doesn't look at all good."

"Do we have any ideas on casualties?" Tracy asked as with a renewed sense of urgency, she got up and headed for the door, grabbing her uniform tunic as she passed.

"All we know is that an armed team of military types ambushed the convoy about thirty minutes ago" Fuller confirmed as he and Tracy headed swiftly for the control room "the first we knew about it was when Jennifer turned up back at the conference centre in a badly shot up car with the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary."

"I want one of our helicopters on the roof of this place in ten minutes" Tracy requested with a calm sense of urgency.

"Already on its way over here now" Fuller confirmed "I'm going with you" he insisted.

"But I..." Tracy began.

"Jennifer is my wife" Fuller insisted "You would do the same if the Commander was involved."

"You're right" Tracy agreed "Go up top and hold onto that chopper, I'll join you in a minute.

Fuller headed off whilst Tracy went directly into the control room.

"What's the S.P.?" Tracy requested as she joined the duty supervisor at the main console.

"Divisional Commander Caverner is on channel three" the Supervisor confirmed passing Tracy a radio head set.

"Jenny?" Tracy called concerned "Are you all right, what the hell happened?"

"Bugged if I know" Jennifer admitted as she spoke over the radio inside the main reception area of the conference centre "One minute we were driving along all fine, the next thing we knew we were ambushed by some well trained and determined military goons."

"Are you all right?" Tracy asked.

"A few bumps and scrapes but otherwise I will be all right" Jennifer confirmed as she looked down at her rather battered and torn uniform "The PM is fine, the Home Secretary has shock, it's the ones we left behind I am worried about though."

"Who's missing?" Tracy asked as she got a pen.

"Half a dozen officers, the Mayor, a couple of his flunkies, Sir Richard Crowthorne and I am afraid to say your husband" Jennifer confirmed with regret "Indeed he bought us enough time for me to get the PM out of there."

Tracy did not respond for a moment, taking in the shock news to her that the Commander, her husband was missing and may very well have been killed.

"Err right" Tracy responded "I'm rolling to you with the full cavalry."

"Be quick Sis" Jennifer advised "That was one hell of a fire fight back there and if anyone is alive they are going to need help pretty quickly."

"Right" Tracy turned to the Supervisor on duty "I want the ARV guys, Tim Norton and his Anti-Terrorist Team guys, every paramedic you can find, dog teams and if you can find any, some military back up from our friends at the Ministry of Defence. Command Centre is the conference venue, Jennifer is on site supervisor until I get there."

"I'll start making some phone calls" the Supervisor confirmed before Tracy quickly departed for the roof access stairway.

The turbulence from the Security Service helicopter as it came into land on the roof was nothing compared to the strong gusty wind that was blowing across the top of New Scotland Yard as Tracy emerged from the stairway door.

"Oh dear" Tracy remarked as she joined Fuller and they approached the helicopter once it had landed "I'd forgotten how much I hated travelling in these things."

"Needs are as needs must is what my Auntie used to say" Fuller commented "Of course she was probably high on gin at the time mind."

"Right" Tracy declared as she got in the front of the helicopter alongside the pilot "Get this thing in the air before I change my mind."

With a swirl of downdraft and the whine of its turbine engines, the helicopter lifted off, banked around to point north east and flew off across the city which was now heading into the murky gloom of dusk.

It was a couple of minutes before the Commander managed to recover some of his senses and look around the shattered wreckage of the car which was almost on its side up against the large oak tree. He was still in the drivers seat, held in place only by the seatbelt, alongside him was the unconscious Sir Richard, clearly injured and slumped awkwardly.

“Richard” the Commander called to him “You still with us?” he asked.

Sir Richard managed a low grumble but that was all he could manage. The Commander meanwhile noticed that in the shattered rear view mirror there appeared to be figures approaching from behind them and he guessed they would not be friendly.

Being the only one in any state to defend himself, the Commander released his seatbelt and clambered through the hole where once the windscreen was and onto the leafy forest floor.

Oblivious to his own injuries and surviving only on adrenalin, he retrieved the gun he had been given by Jennifer and took cover behind the tree as the men approached the car where just short of it they formed a perimeter guard line whilst the leader stepped forward and looked inside the wrecked interior where he saw the injured officer and Sir Richard.

“Job done lads” he declared seeing that they were in no fit state of any description “Ok, lets get this wrapped up and head back to the barn.”

With that, the team of gunmen with military precision departed on foot away into the forest. As they made their way from the scene however, the Commander emerged from his hiding place and despite bleeding badly and with numerous injuries, he discreetly followed.

The light was failing quite quickly now and with no torch or other form of illumination, the Commander had only the distant lights being used by the departing gunmen to guide him through the thick forest where unknown to him, he was leaving a trail of dripping blood in his wake.

He had no idea how long he had been pursuing the gunmen through the forest when he came to a rough clearing, by this point the Commander's mind was somewhat blurred as was his vision. All he could really see was what appeared to be some sort of vehicle lights a short distance ahead and the gunmen loading themselves into them before setting off beyond reach away into the darkness.

Continuing to ignore the excruciating pain he was in, the Commander limped out into the clearing where the now near darkness meant he could not see more than a few inches beyond him, the only light being the dark blue of twilight making silhouettes from the surrounding tall trees.

At that moment however, the Commander's body gave up the struggle to keep going and he collapsed to the ground, quickly passing out.

Jennifer Caverner came out of the main entrance of the Conference Centre just as the helicopter carrying Fuller and Tracy came into land, buffeting the surrounding area with its neatly attended gardens as it touched down on the lawn. Barely had the skids of the helicopter come into contact with the ground than the front door was open and Tracy was alighting from the aircraft.

“Evening Sis” Jennifer weakly called, now extremely exhausted as the frantic activity of earlier events had now overtaken her.

“You look terrible” Tracy remarked “Simon!” she called back to Fuller who was struggling to release his seat belt and get out of the helicopter “This is your job I think” she declared.

“Come here” Fuller responded as he joined the two sisters whereupon he and Jennifer embraced warmly.

“Is the cavalry here yet?” Tracy asked.

“Just coming up the road now” Jennifer motioned towards the lengthy driveway up which could be seen the approaching lights of numerous emergency service vehicles.

“Right” Tracy declared as she took charge “You two get inside and just be there for each other, I'll handle the tricky stuff.”

“What makes you think there will be any tricky stuff?” Jennifer asked.

“Hey this is my husband we are talking about” Tracy responded jokily in a manner that she hoped would in some way disguise her serious concern and fear for the Commander “When have you ever known him to get mixed up in something nice and simple?”

As Fuller helped Jennifer inside, Tracy turned to the various vehicles that were now filling the main driveway area outside the conference centre from which numerous personnel duly appeared.

“Right” Tracy announced as she stood on the top step of the main entrance so she could address them “Gather around everyone. What we have here is a major incident involving the discharge of firearms at a rural location approximately ten miles from here.”

The personnel from various sections of the emergency services listened carefully as Tracy carried on the briefing and detailed the plan of action.

“The last thing we want to do is send in more people into an area that could be crawling with armed unfriendlies” Tracy continued “Therefore we are going to do this in two distinct stages. Team one will consist of myself and the Armed Support Unit guys, we will go into the area first and confirm that the scene is clear, once that happens then the rest of you good ladies and gents go to work. Bob, get your boys tooled up.”

“Yes Maam” the head of the Armed Support Unit confirmed before he and his officers proceeded to their armoured van to ready their weapons and body armour.

“How many paramedic teams do we have here?” Tracy called out.

“Three Maam” one of the paramedics confirmed “Plus we have a doctor on route right now and the air ambulance has been alerted to be on standby if we need it.”

“Lovely” Tracy confirmed “You guys follow us as I have the horrible feeling we are going to need your services.”

“Anything I can do?” Fuller asked as he came out of the conference centre and joined Tracy on the steps now that he had seen that Jennifer was safely resting indoors.

“Summon up a mobile operations unit and while you are about it, find us a tea wagon as well” Tracy requested “This is likely to be a long night and not only will we require all the on site intelligence you can feed us but enough cuppas to keep us all going well into tomorrow morning.”

“Consider it done” Fuller confirmed as he headed back inside to make a call.

“Big Bob, are your guys ready?” Tracy asked the head of the Armed Support Unit.

“Yes Maam” the gentle giant of the Service that is Bob confirmed as he checked his MP7 series automatic weapon.

“Right then” Tracy confirmed as she walked back down the steps and joined them, checking her gun as she did “Wagons roll.”

“In breaking news coming through as we speak” the presenter on BBC News 24 confirmed in that slightly hesitant style that always signalled a major breaking news story although as of yet they were not yet aware of any details yet “There are reports of a major incident involving the Prime Minister and the Mayor of London who were travelling back to the centre of London following the conclusion of today's session at the London Security Conference.”

As the news presenter continued relaying the rather scant details which they had available, at this point merely a retelling of the facts already known such as where they had been and the reason for the conference, the distinguished well turned out figure of Harold Devlin, ostensibly a businessman in his late forties arose from his rather sumptuously appointed leather sofa and turned down the volume on the television set so that he could make a telephone call.

Having first taken a couple of pills which he produced from a small antique engraved silver case, Devlin went over to the telephone on the coffee table and duly speed dialled a number. After a few moments during which he looked around the sumptuously appointed wood panelled interior of his large manor house home, he was connected.

“Good evening” Devlin declared “I see that you managed to make an impression in your efforts, is our mutual friend no longer with us?” he enquired.

“The state our mutual friend is in now, only his dentist will be able to identify him” the leader of the military trained gunmen confirmed as they continued to drive through the dark forest towards an unknown destination.

“Excellent” Devlin confirmed “Any casualties?” he enquired.

“Lost a couple of my men I am afraid” the leader confirmed “A couple of the Security Service officers turned out to be rather handier than we had anticipated.”

“Can't be helped” Devlin remarked with some regret “I am glad you remembered to not shoot the Prime Minister though.”

“Well the intelligence we had on the convoy formation helped a lot” the leader confirmed “Just a pity our mutual friend who supplied it won't be able to enjoy his payment for it.”

“I had better get onto my bank right now” Devlin confirmed “Thank you for your efforts so far, stay low until I give the go ahead for phase two tomorrow.”

“Yes Sir, goodnight.”

With the call disconnected, Devlin then dialled a new number which connected him to his personal banker, a man of great importance with his hand on the controls of some of the most significant yet secure cash flows in the world.

“Mr Thorpe” Devlin declared “Proceed with the payment to the specified accounts, please ensure that our mutual friend received his payment at home in cash. Don't bother to be accurate with it though, he won't be coming home to count it.”

“The junction is about two hundred yards ahead” the leader of the Armed Support Unit confirmed as he paused the van in the middle of the dark road and consulted a map.

“Ok then” Tracy declared from the passenger seat “We walk from here.”

“Everybody out!” Bob declared which saw his team of heavily armed officers alight from the two vans and form up in the roadway where Tracy prepared to brief them.

“I want a thorough but careful search of the entire area, once that is done, we set up a perimeter around the scene and then get the cavalry in here” Tracy announced
“Everyone ready?”

“Yes Maam” the officers responded almost as one.

“Well let’s go then” Tracy declared.

The armed officers duly dispersed into a 'v' shaped formation, weapons trained all around as, with Bob and Tracy leading, they proceeded methodically down the road towards the site of the incident.

All appeared clear as they reached the centre of the incident site where some of the vehicles involved were still burning fiercely from when they were attacked a short time earlier.

"Teams of two" Bob quietly declared "Check each vehicle and watch out for any ordnance or other unpleasant surprises."

With methodical efficiency, the officers dispersed through the wreckage and checked each vehicle carefully whilst Tracy checked the bodies lying around to see if there were any survivors.

"Clear!" Bob declared a few moments later "Spread out and give me a one hundred metre perimeter."

"Any sign of my husband?" Tracy asked with an understandably worried look as Bob rejoined her in the centre of the debris.

"A few of Jennifer's group, five uniformed officers, couple of bodyguards, the burnt out remains of the Mayor and his aides plus a couple of the bad guys" Bob indicated one of attackers lying dead nearby "That is everyone accounted for except Sir Richard, the Commander and one patrol officer."

"Lima Mike One to Gold Command" Tracy called the incident co-ordination centre that was now set up back at the conference centre "Get the paramedics, dog teams, bomb disposal and the scenes of crime boys down here ASAP."

"On the way" Fuller's voice confirmed over the radio as Tracy looked around.

"Is it my imagination or are we a vehicle short here?" she commented as she cast her torch around the scene counting the wrecks."

"Sir, I think you ought to see this" the voice of one of the Armed Support Unit officers called over Bob's radio.

"Where are you?" Bob asked.

"About sixty yards up the road" the officer confirmed waving his torch towards them so they could see where to go.

"Were coming to you" Bob confirmed as he and Tracy broke into a jog and proceeded up the road to the officer's location.

"Whoa" Tracy remarked as they reached the officers location and looked down to see what it was that had been found by the side of the road bathed in the torchlight but still partially concealed by the carefully placed undergrowth.

"Anti personnel mine" Bob confirmed as he kneeled down for a closer look "Very nasty."

"You don't pick these down your local branch of 'Guns 'R' Us' do you?" Tracy remarked.

"Did you see the gun that the dead guy was packing back there?" the officer asked.

"Yeah" Bob confirmed "South African design, nice bit of kit but very expensive and extremely difficult to come by anywhere north of the Mediterranean I would have thought."

"So it looks like we are not dealing with any Friday night terrorists here" Tracy responded "These guys mean business."

"There goes my overtime budget" Bob remarked wryly as he got up and they all wisely stepped back away from the device "I have the nasty feeling we will be seeing more of this lot in the days to come."

"What's that?" Tracy asked as she shone her torch up the road and caught sight of something lying on the surface a short distance ahead.

"Jim, watch our backs while the lady and I go and take a look" Bob called to his officer before he accompanied Tracy as they proceeded cautiously up the road until they reached the object they had seen revealing it to be the remains of the rear bumper assembly of a car.

"This doesn't look good" Bob remarked as he saw the crater in the edge of the road where an explosion had gone off, the surrounding brush and undergrowth still smouldering.

"Oh hell!" Tracy called as she caught site of something in amongst the trees, jagged and broken pieces of metal and glass reflecting the light of her torch.

"Gold Control from Echo One" Bob called into his radio with some urgency as he and Tracy set off quickly through the shrubbery "If that paramedic team is on site, tell them and the Fire Brigade lads to go to a position approximately one hundred yards north east of ground zero and I'll direct them from there."

"Oh my God" Tracy exclaimed as they reached the point where the tumbling car had come to rest, imbedded in a tree some distance from the road.

"Stand back" Bob suggested as he passed Tracy his weapon before taking a firm grip with both hands on the rear passenger door.

A combination of the damage to the vehicle plus Bob's brute force saw the door come away easily and as he tossed the door aside, Tracy shone the torch around the interior.

"Check the front" Bob suggested as he knelt down and lifted up part of the car interior to reveal the blood soaked uniform of a young Security Service officer.

"This guy is still alive" Bob declared once he had checked the officer's pulse "Weak though, found anything up front?" he asked.

"Good evening my dear" Sir Richard weakly greeted Tracy as she pushed her way in through where the windscreen once was.

"If you don't mind me saying so" Tracy remarked as she checked him over "You're a mess."

"Thanks" Sir Richard responded with a weak rasping cough "If you are looking for your husband, he went that way about half an hour ago."

"Hang in there old man" Tracy encouraged him "The cavalry is on its way."

Bob let out a shrill whistle as he saw the blue flashing lights of the Fire Brigade and paramedics approach along the road with an armed Security Service escort just in case "Over here quick" he called, flashing a torch towards the road to help guide them.

"Ok what have we got?" the paramedic enquired as he arrived with the Fire Brigade officers in tow with cutting gear in hand.

"One in the back, weak pulse and shot to hell" Bob confirmed "Another in the front, he's a bit more with us but it looks like his legs are trapped."

"If you would care to step back" the paramedic took over "We'll take care of them."

Tracy stepped back over to a nearby tree and watched as the paramedics proceeded to stabilise the two trapped men's condition before the Fire Brigade could set about releasing them from the wreckage.

As Bob came over to join her, his boot stubbed against something lying in amongst the leaf litter that covered the forest floor.

"Something down here" Bob declared as he bent down to pick up the object before passing it to Tracy.

"Shine a light here" Tracy requested as she took the object from Bob and examined it, a small leather wallet like object that as she opened it revealed a Security Service badge, warrant card, an Oyster travel card and a photograph of herself.

"If he was in there" Bob nodded back towards the car "The chances are he has some serious injuries, we had better find him quickly."

"Agreed" Tracy responded as she grabbed her radio "Gold Control from Lima Mike One" she called "I want dog teams, search and rescue and a helicopter combing this forest in a circular search pattern radiating outwards from the incident site within the next five minutes."

Deep in the forest, lying on the leafy forest floor on the very edge of the clearing, the Commander regained a bit of consciousness as an owl shrieked nearby in the darkness.

Gingerly and in excruciating pain, the Commander managed to just about sit up and prop himself against a tree where he looked around for any sign of life.

Apart from the over enthusiastic owl and the distant sound of a jet aircraft high overhead, there was silence, maybe a bit of a rustle from the breeze through the trees but nothing significant.

As he sat there slumped with his back up against the tree, the Commander was unaware of the amount of blood that he was losing and that had by now soaked through his uniform, all he did know was that he could feel the life draining out of him bit by bit and there was not a damm thing he could do about it.

Instead he reached inside his pocket for his warrant card wallet so that he could at least squint in the darkness at the picture of his beloved Tracy, however the Commander was forced to give up this last idea as he discovered that during the evening's dramatic events, it had been lost.

To make matters worse, a distant rumble of thunder rumbling through the dark clouds above preceded the start of rain, a development that would not only make his condition deteriorate still further but would also hamper any potential search and rescue effort.

"Today is just not my day" the Commander quietly commented to himself as he gave in and passed out back into a state of unconsciousness once more.

"Oh great" Fuller remarked as he looked out of the window of the Mobile Operation Unit as the rain began to pour down incessantly.

"The perfect end to a perfect evening" Tracy agreed sarcastically before they returned to the map table where they surveyed the plan of the densely wooded surrounding countryside.

"The dog teams are heading outwards as we speak" Fuller confirmed "I've got the Fire Brigade sheeting over the scene outside to preserve the evidence until we can get a proper look at it in daylight."

"What about the helicopter?" Tracy asked as she looked out of the window with clear concern as the intensity of the rain increased noticeably.

"Weather is too rough apparently" Fuller confirmed "Besides even with the infra red they would not be able to see much in this mess I would have thought."

Outside in the woods, the drumming sound of the rain on the plants and trees almost drowned out the sound of the dogs barking as the search line with their torches advanced into the depths of the forest in a methodical manner.

By the time the line of search teams had covered just over a mile from the original incident scene, the time had long passed midnight and the weather had worsened considerably.

Progress was not only hampered by the weather but also by the deep thick nature of the undergrowth in places which forced the search teams to slow down. For any part of the line to have forged ahead would have risked gaps appearing and the distinct possibility of missing something.

Suddenly one of the dogs became more attentive as it detected the trace of something.

"What you got then lad?" the dog handler asked as he shone a torch down to the ground in front of the dog.

"Search Team Four to Gold Alpha" the dog handler called as he knelt down and lifted a fern to reveal some blood splashed on ground over a piece of tree branch "We got some blood here."

"Where are you?" Tracy's voice quickly responded.

"Search grid square delta three, about a mile and a half in the midst of this mess" the dog handler confirmed as he consulted his extremely soggy map.

"Mark the spot" Tracy ordered "then concentrate the search radiating from that point and I'll send reinforcements."

"Tony!" the dog handler called to his colleague nearby "Head over this way a bit, let's see if this blood trail leads anywhere."

A couple of minutes of searching around the immediate area soon produced a result as a couple of the dogs now picked up a faint trail heading off into the forest which they then proceeded to follow.

An hour later as the rain stopped and the clouds began to clear with the brighter stars in the sky starting to shine through, the forest echoed with the sounds of dogs barking, a sound that was now approaching the Commander's position, lying unconscious at the base of a huge oak tree.

Suddenly one of the dog handlers noticed as they approached where the Commander was that his dog got noticeably more excited, clearly detecting something in the dark forest ahead.

“Sounds like he's on to something” the dog handler remarked to his colleague “Shine that torch ahead could you?” he asked.

“That looks like something just ahead there” the other dog handler pointed ahead to something on the limit of his torch light beam ahead.

“I think we've found him” the first dog handler declared “Come on” he encouraged his dog as they picked up the pace and moved forward until they reached the Commander, unconscious and helpless on the ground.

“Search Team Four to Gold Alpha” the dog handler called into the radio “We got him.”

Tracy leapt up from her seat and grabbed the radio from Fuller's hands before he had the chance to answer.

“Is he alive?” Tracy asked.

“Just checking now” the dog handler confirmed as he took charge of the two dogs and pulled them back whilst his colleague rolled the Commander over onto his back and checked for any signs of life.

“I've got a pulse” the officer confirmed “It's very weak though, best get the paramedics in here fast.”

The thunder and heavy rain that had beating away against his bedroom window for most of the night had succeeded in keeping Devlin awake, so much so that as the ornate clock in his bedroom struck three, he decided to give up on sleep and return to his study.

Being careful not to wake his young mistress who was asleep alongside him, he put on a dressing gown and made his way downstairs to his study where with the door closed behind him, he used his remote control to switch on his large wall mounted flat screen television which immediately started on BBC News 24.

Devlin sat back on the large leather chair behind his desk and poured himself a drink from the decanter before using the remote control to flick through the television channels. He found himself distinctly unimpressed with the selection of overnight television that was being offered. The all night quiz program on ITV seemed to be an insult to his intelligence as far as he was concerned and the Open University was a bit too high brow especially as he had no interest whatsoever in the theory of plane geometry unless it meant he could make more money that is.

Even the poker on Channel Four was a repeat of the heat that he had seen earlier in the week so he instead returned to BBC News 24 where the half hourly reminder of the headlines was just beginning.

“To confirm our major news story at three thirty” the news presenter announced “The Prime Minister and Home Secretary are reported to be uninjured following an assassination attempt on their convoy as it returned earlier this evening from the London Security Conference. However it is now believed although yet to be confirmed that the Mayor of London and his aides may have been injured or killed whilst at this time according to a Security Service spokesperson, the whereabouts of the London & South East Regional Administrator General of the Security Service who was with the convoy when it was hit is still unknown.”

“Oh shit...” Devlin remarked with a slightly resigned tone. As the television coverage of event he was responsible for setting in motion continued, he used the remote to turn the volume down and then reached across the desk for the telephone.

"Colonel" Devlin responded as soon as he was answered "Do you want the good news or the bad news?"

"I'll take the good news first Sir if I may" the Colonel responded as he stepped outside from around the old barn which he and his team were using as temporary overnight headquarters.

"You and your men have your first payment safely nestling in your nominated accounts" Devlin confirmed.

"Lovely" the Colonel confirmed "What's the bad news then dare I ask?"

"You remember mentioning you had problems during the operation with one officer who seemed particularly handy?" Devlin responded "Well I think I know who it was."

"All right then Sir" the Colonel responded "I'm suitably intrigued, who was it?"

"The Regional Administrator General of the Security Service no less" Devlin informed him.

There was a pause as the Colonel took in this development with some hesitation "Whoops..." he eventually responded "Is he alive?" he asked.

"Listed as missing, they are searching the woods for him now" Devlin confirmed "Also our combined efforts seem to have hospitalised Sir Richard Crowthorne into the bargain as well."

"Well that should put the intelligence and investigating authorities into a bit of a spin" the Colonel remarked "We may have to accelerate our planned timetable a bit."

"Agreed" Devlin responded "At daybreak, move your men to location three, I will meet you there at nine o'clock and brief you on the next stage."

"See you in the morning then Sir" the Colonel responded "Goodnight."

As soon as he had hung up, Devlin picked up the television remote control and turned the volume back up just as a spokesman for the National Police & Security Service came on screen with a live statement to the press from outside the main entrance of New Scotland Yard.

"First I shall read to you the statement in which we shall detail as far as we can the events that have occurred and the current status of those principals involved with this incident" the spokesman announced clearly "After that there will be the opportunity for some questions but please bare in mind that certain details cannot be released at this time as this is an ongoing sensitive investigation."

The spokesman paused as he checked his papers whilst the assembled members of the press waited with baited breath for the statement.

"Late Wednesday evening, a convoy of six vehicles conveying a number of significant dignitaries from the London Security Conference was attacked by a group of professional armed men" the spokesman announced.

"I can confirm at this time that the lead vehicle carrying the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary was one of those that came under fire, however under the protection of the Divisional Commander of the VIP Protection Division, they were safely evacuated from the scene."

"The Prime Minister is reported to be in good health whilst the Home Secretary is described as being uninjured but suffering from shock."

The members of the press continued to film or make notes as the statement continued.

"I can confirm at this time that as a direct result of the intensive military attack, the Mayor of London, his deputy, three of his aides and at this time an unconfirmed number of Security Service officers have been killed, a further three officers are in a serious but stable condition whilst the Regional Administrator General is currently still on scene receiving medical treatment to severe injuries and Sir Richard Crowthorne, Deputy Director General of MI5 is being airlifted to hospital at this moment."

The dark nature of this information meant that bar a few whisperings between themselves, the members of the press were all but silent.

"The scene of the incident will remain sealed off until a full investigation is completed, this expected to commence at first light" the Spokesman continued "Due to the nature and seriousness of this incident, the Service is unable to comment on some aspects of this investigation at this time."

"Is there any indication of who is responsible for this attack?" the BBC correspondent asked.

"Not at this time" the spokesman confirmed "We can however confirm that in the exchange of gunfire, three of the attackers were killed although at this early stage, their identities have yet to be established."

As he spoke, events continued to unfold in the dark depths of the Epping Forest where after having to clamber through thick undergrowth, the paramedic team with an armed escort, finally managed to reach the Commander's location.

"What is his status?" the doctor accompanying the paramedic team enquired as they reached the Commander's position where he remained unconscious.

"To be honest" the dog handler who had originally found him remarked as he stepped back "He's a mess."

"Christ all mighty" the Doctor exclaimed as he knelt down and by the light of a couple of torches, began to assess the Commander's injuries.

"Airlift?" the paramedic asked.

"Yep" the Doctor confirmed as he tried to work out where to start with treatment as there was so many problems "Better get them warmed up and moving."

"Three Zero One Eight to Control" the paramedic called into a radio "Requesting air ambulance for evacuation of one patient ASAP" he requested.

On board the Mobile Operations Unit at the incident site, Tracy heard the call and immediately responded.

"It will be with you in a few minutes" she confirmed by which time she was out of the door and jogging down the road to where the air ambulance helicopter was parked on the carriageway, its turbines just beginning to start up as she arrived and boarded.

"Lets go" Tracy encouraged as she put on the head phones and buckled up.

"OK, here we go" the pilot announced as he carefully lifted off, manoeuvring carefully so as to avoid clipping the trees either side as it was a tight squeeze.

"Where to?" the pilot enquired once he had his craft clear of the trees and hovering.

"Five miles north east" Tracy confirmed as she consulted a map "Then we just have to hope that there is somewhere to set this thing down."

"Should be there in a couple of minutes" the pilot confirmed as he turned the helicopter before proceeding in the direction required.

The powerful searchlight with which the helicopter was fitted provided more than sufficient illumination to see the thick tree tops below as they flew just above them.

"That looks like them over there" the pilot remarked when just ahead they saw a gathering of people with torches, one of which was being waved from side to side to attract their attention.

"Can anyone see anywhere to set down around here?" the pilot called to those on board as he swept the helicopter around.

"What about over there, to your right?" Tracy pointed to a clearing in the trees nearby as it came into the beam of the searchlight.

"That should do" the pilot responded "Lets hope it is not a boggy quagmire."

Carefully the pilot brought the helicopter around and over the clearing before carefully lowering it to the ground.

Barely had the skids touched the ground than Tracy had unbuckled her seatbelt and was jumping out of the helicopter.

Making her way through the undergrowth beneath the trees with the helicopter crew not far behind, Tracy quickly reached the point where the Commander lay, now secured on a stretcher and with portable monitoring equipment wired to him.

"How is he?" Tracy asked, kneeling down and taking her husbands hand.

"Internal bleeding, concussion, probable fractured skull, broken ribs and that is just for starters" the doctor responded.

"Come on love" Tracy encouraged the Commander who remained motionless "Hold on, don't give up now."

"That is as stable as we are ever going to get him" the Doctor confirmed "Lets get him out of here while he still has a chance."

"Ok then" the paramedic declared as he took charge of the next stage of the operation, the transfer of the stretcher with the Commander from his resting place, through the woods to the helicopter some one hundred metres distant "Three each side and lift carefully on my mark."

Tracy joined the paramedic, two members of the helicopter crew and two Security Service officers around the stretcher as on the Paramedic's word they lifted the stretcher up in unison and with the Doctor shining a torch ahead whilst continuing to monitor the Commander's condition, they moved off.

Carefully the Commander was carried through the dense forest undergrowth, into the clearing and up to the helicopter where he was carefully loaded into the back.

"All aboard who is coming aboard" the pilot declared as he started the mighty machine, the turbine engines and rotor blades winding up into life once more.

Once the crew, Doctor and Tracy were aboard, the paramedic outside closed and secured the door before he and the two Security Service officers stepped back, clear of the helicopter as with much turbulence buffeting both themselves and the surrounding trees it took off.

"Now things get interesting" one of the officers remarked as they watched the helicopter gently ascend above the tree tops.

"Oh yes, why's that then?" the paramedic casually asked.

"Well the chances are come first light the Divisional Commander will have the country torn apart looking for whoever is responsible" the officer explained "Believe me the gloves will be well and truly off."

As soon as the helicopter cleared the tops of the trees, the pilot turned towards the distant lights of London and proceeded forward.

"Alpha Lima Nine Nine to Control" the pilot called in over the radio "One patient on board, leaving scene now, estimated time of arrival about fifteen minutes, have a full ITU team on standby please and I have a request for an operating theatre to be readied for our arrival."

"Roger Alpha Lima Nine Nine" the response came "Message received, the usual reception committee will be ready for your arrival."

During the fifteen minute flight above the darkened outer parts of north east Greater London sleeping below, Tracy did not take her eyes off of the Commander even once until they were coming in low over the high rooftops of the main central part of the city itself and the helipad of the hospital appeared ahead.

"Make sure you are all buckled up back there" the pilot called back "We are about land and its getting rough with the cross winds."

Whilst everyone aboard checked they were securely fastened in, the pilot carefully manoeuvred the helicopter in above the helipad, taking care to make constant subtle corrections to counter the crosswind before landing.

Within moments of landing, a full medical team rushed forward and helped unload the Commander before he was transported inside, directly to the Intensive Care Unit.

"Ah, a celebrity in tonight" the duty consultant surgeon remarked as he commenced his examination of the Commander "Lets get a full set of X-Rays done and get him into surgery immediately please."

As soon as he spoke, the Commander was on the move again with an attendant cortège of medical personnel and Tracy in close proximity.

"This is I'm afraid where you will have to leave us to it" the consultant informed Tracy who was understandably reluctant to leave her husband's side.

"But erm..." Tracy tried to protest but she already knew there was no way she could remain with the Commander whilst he was in surgery.

"We'll call you as soon as he is out" the consultant reassured her in that calm way that came as second nature to members of his profession.

"All right" Tracy reluctantly agreed as the Commander disappeared from sight through the double doors "Where might I find Sir Richard Crowthorne?" she asked.

"Just down there, room twelve" the Consultant confirmed "You can't miss it, it's the one with half a dozen armed spooks parked outside it."

"Thanks" Tracy responded as the consultant left and she proceeded down the corridor to where a number of discreetly armed plain clothes officers were gathered outside a single bed ward.

She proffered her identification as she arrived as a matter of course even though they knew perfectly well who she was.

"Morning" Tracy declared "Any chance of a look at the old fella?"

"Go right in Maam" the senior officer in attendance confirmed, opening the door for her before she proceeded inside.

"Oh dear..." Tracy remarked once she was inside the room where she saw Sir Richard wired up to numerous items of monitoring equipment whilst lying motionless on the bed.

"Morning my dear" Sir Richard quietly welcomed Tracy but remained motionless due to the nature of his injuries which meant he was restricted in his movement to prevent causing any further damage.

"What's the damage?" Tracy asked.

"I didn't get the full gist of what they said but apparently quite a few bits of me are not in great condition" Sir Richard confirmed "What about the Commander?" he enquired.

"Just brought him in" Tracy responded as she went over to the window and looked out across the city where the sky was just starting to brighten with the approach of dawn "He's in surgery now, they say he is stable but I'm not convinced" she confirmed as she bravely held back potential tears.

"He's been through worse" Sir Richard tried to reassure her but even he knew deep down that this was about as serious a situation as it was possible to be in.

"Well with you and my husband both out of commission" Tracy remarked as she turned back away from the window "I guess it's all down to me to investigate this mess."

"Could I possibly make a suggestion?" Sir Richard asked.

"Sure" Tracy confirmed.

"Well its more of a two part suggestion really" Sir Richard continued "Firstly introduce yourself to my new Deputy, David Collins, he is the chap that opened the door for you just now and will be filling my shoes whilst I am stuck in here."

"And the second part?" Tracy asked.

"Don't do anything too drastic until you have been spoken to by the Prime Minister" Sir Richard continued slightly evasively "and while you are about it, have a word with a CIA chap by the name of Special Agent Christopher O'Connell, he is in town at the moment and may prove useful."

"How many of your guys can I commandeer if I should need them?" Tracy enquired.

"Feel free to help yourself to as many as we can spare" Sir Richard responded "Just make sure you get the buggers, but whatever you do be careful my dear."

"You rest" Tracy instructed "And keep an eye on my husband, I do believe I have work to do."

"Trust me" Sir Richard confirmed wryly "I'm not going anywhere."

Once outside the room, Tracy looked around the officers present in search of the individual that Sir Richard had mentioned.

"Would you be David Collins by any chance?" Tracy asked the most senior looking man in his late forties who was wearing a well tailored suit that had been obviously put on in a hurry when he had received the call about the night's events.

"Yes Maam" he confirmed, fighting back a stifled yawn as he had been up all night but he was still ready to assist "How may I be of service?" he enquired.

"Come with me" Tracy requested as she headed off down the corridor with some pace "Sir Richard has given me permission to commandeer anything from your Department that I may require, so far that is just you but we all have to start somewhere."

"Right I understand" Collins confirmed as he tried to keep up with Tracy's quick pace "What exactly did you have in mind?"

“I want a fully setup incident investigation centre set up at the Conference Centre by nine o'clock and I want it filled with the best people you have plus as many of mine as I can spare” Tracy explained “Co-ordinate with Commander Fuller, he is our IT expert in the Service, I suspect you may be familiar with his work?”

“Know him well” Collins confirmed “Are you related to his wife by any chance only you do seem rather familiar?”

“Twin sister” Tracy explained as they reached the reception desk of the Intensive Care Unit where she duly caught the attention of the duty receptionist.

“Any word on my husband?” she enquired.

“Consultant telephoned through a couple of minutes ago” the Receptionist confirmed “He is reported to be stable and responding to treatment but it will be well into the morning before he is out of surgery.”

“Thanks” Tracy responded with a little hesitation mixed with some relief “When he is out, have me contacted urgently, I can be reached through New Scotland Yard.”

“Yes Maam” the Receptionist confirmed as Tracy and Collins left.

“Whilst you are rounding up your team” Tracy continued to instruct Collins as they came out of the hospital main entrance “Find me the best military expert we have in weapons and tactics, also apparently there was a cousin from the CIA at the conference by the name of O'Connell, find him too and get him there.”

“You think our brethren from across the water know something?” Collins asked as he showed Tracy to his car parked nearby.

“Possibly” Tracy remarked “Whatever, he is around and asking questions apparently so I'd like him there when I kick off the briefing at nine thirty sharp.”

“Consider it done” Collins confirmed “Can I drive you anywhere?” he asked.

“Back to the Yard I think” Tracy confirmed “I need a fresh uniform and some transport I feel comfortable on.”

As the sky above the incident scene began to lighten to the point that artificial lighting was no longer needed, it revealed fully for the first time the full scale of the devastation and the intensity of the attack.

Wrecked and burnt out vehicles dominated the centre of the scene whilst surrounding the cordon thrown up around it were a plethora of emergency service vehicles including the Fire Brigade who had just finished damping down the scene.

At the approach to the road, a scene entry checkpoint had been set up and it was at this location that an ominous looking black car with military number plates pulled up.

“Good morning Sir” the officer on duty announced politely but firmly.”

“Morning Officer” the well dressed military man in the car declared as he produced his identification which along with his officers uniform merely reinforced his position “Major Ronald Ford, I was requested by your Divisional Commander Caverner?”

“Ah yes Sir” the officer on duty confirmed as he checked his list of expected personnel “You are expected at the Conference Centre though.”

“Your boss asked me to drop by and take an expert look at this mess on the way” the Major explained.

“Very well Sir” the Officer confirmed as he lowered the tape that cut off the road access to allow the Major to drive through “You can park your car just on the side there and walk on up.”

“Thank you” the Major confirmed as he duly drove through and parked up before getting out of the car. He put on his gold braided uniform cap before proceeding up the road on foot the couple of hundred yards to the perimeter of the scene itself where a tape barrier prevented anyone from entering the scene itself for the time being.

“My, my, my” the Major commented as he took his first cursory glance around the scene “What a mess....”

The sound of an approaching motorbike caused the Major to break off his preliminary survey and look around as a fully marked Security Service Honda Pan-European patrol motorbike pulled up to a halt alongside him. The Major looked on as the rider removed her helmet to reveal it to be Tracy.

“Morning” Tracy declared “You must be the military guy I asked for?”

“Indeed Maam” the Major confirmed as he stepped forward and shook hands “Major Ronald Ford at your Service.”

“Call me Tracy” she responded as she got off the motorbike and placed her jacket and helmet on the seat.

“So who had the surprise party last night then?” the Major enquired as he returned to looking at the wreckage before them.

“Well we know everyone on our side that were in the vehicles” Tracy confirmed “The question is who the party crashers with attitude were.”

“Mind if I take a closer look?” the Major asked.

“Sure” Tracy confirmed “Just be careful what you touch, the scenes of crime lads haven't started yet though.”

The Major held up the tape to allow Tracy to pass under before ducking below it himself whereupon they were free to examine the scene, now much more visible in the increasingly brighter morning light.

“From what I can gather they took out the front vehicle and then the back one” Tracy indicated the remains of the rear vehicle of the convoy, a badly wrecked but still just about recognisable marked patrol car of the Service.

“One swift move and you have cut them off” the Major confirmed “No means of escape front or back and trapped in a narrow road with trees and dense foliage cover either side plus you are in an isolated rural radio and mobile telephone black spot. Nice place for an ambush” he concluded.

“Do you think this was a general attack?” Tracy asked.

“No” the Major confirmed as he walked forward to the barely recognisable remains of the car that had contained the Mayor of London and his entourage “Look at the proportional damage to the different vehicles in the convoy, this one was specifically the target or to be more precise whoever was inside it.”

“I see what you mean” Tracy agreed.

“Plus whoever they were” the Major continued “They were far too professional and thorough to let the car containing the Prime Minister go, unless they specifically wanted it to.”

“This is one of the attacking gunmen” Tracy indicated the body in the road nearby as they went over to it “Seems that before he got blown off the road, my husband managed to knock a few of the bad guys out of the equation.”

“Well done Commander” the Major commented “Mind if I take a closer look at this chap?” he asked.

“Use these” Tracy passed the Major some medical type rubber gloves.

“Thanks” the Major proceeded to put on the gloves and then started to examine the dead gunman's body “How is the Commander by the way?” he asked.

“Still in Intensive Care but they say he will pull through” Tracy confirmed.

“Well at least there is hope” the Major confirmed “Which is more than I can say for this guy.”

“Anything interesting?” Tracy asked as the Major got up having completed his cursory examination.

“Well there is no way these are local boys” the Major confirmed “No identification on him which is not that surprising really but judging by the old scars I'd say chummy here has had an extensive military career of some kind which explains the expertise shown in the attack.”

“Freelance hit team, mercenaries?” Tracy asked.

“Given the fact he has best part of five grand in fresh fifties in his wallet” the Major confirmed indicating the back pocket of the body “I’d say the latter and a well paid one at that, this would just have been expenses and beer money, the real payment would have been electronic probably into a numbered Swiss bank account.”

“Then there is the hardware” Tracy remarked as she gestured to one of the guarding officers on the perimeter “Bring those guns we found over would you?” she asked.

“People get very personal about weaponry” the Major commented “Each has their own preferred make, model and setup like an artist’s signature so this could shed a bit of light.”

“These are the guns we found on him” Tracy handed over two clear plastic bags containing weapons “You can take them out if you want, the print boys confirmed they are clean and clear.”

“Nine millimetre Glock semi automatic handgun” the Major confirmed as he examined the first weapon “Nice bit of kit, not the sort of thing your average terrorist carries around though.”

“They tend to favour AK47's don't they?” Tracy remarked.

“Indeed they do” the Major confirmed as he turned his attention to the second weapon “And certainly nothing of this quality either, this is top of the range South African equipment, you don't find this kind of stuff on EBay.”

“Meaning?” Tracy asked.

“Whoever was paying our deceased friend here to do the job probably supplied the weapons and we are talking well connected with large bank books and no questions asked kind of level here” the Major confirmed.

“I think you had better take a look at this other little nicety they left behind as well” Tracy gestured up the road towards the spot where last night she had located the Commander and Sir Richard's car “Just be careful where you step.”

Together Tracy and the Major walked up the road towards a point where a section of the hedgerow had been taped off for safety reasons.

“We think they used these booby traps to blow the cars off the road” she indicated the carefully laid mine and explosives nestled in the undergrowth on the edge of the road.

“Nasty...” the Major confirmed “Well I can confirm your attackers had military experience all right, this little beauty is straight out of the 'How to recognise a Terrorist Booby Trap' handbook. The insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan use a similar setup to blow off the road anyone passing they don't like so I would say someone has been doing their homework.”

“Wonderful” Tracy responded with a depressed sigh that summed up how she felt easily.

“Maam!!” an officer called from the trees nearby where the provisional search of the surrounding area had now begun “Something has been dropped here” the officer pointed towards something at his feet in amongst the tangled roots of an old tree stump.

“Best make it quick” Tracy remarked to the Major as she checked her watch “We ought to be getting back to the Conference Centre fairly soon.”

“After you” the Major indicated as Tracy went on ahead into the trees with him following.

“What have you got?” Tracy asked as she reached the spot where the officer had found the object.

“I though it was a branch or an old log at first” the officer explained “Then I noticed the writing on the side and decided against kicking it out of the way.”

“Glad you did lad” the Major responded “This thing is loaded” he declared as he bent down to carefully pick up the object with his expert hands.

“That looks particularly unpleasant” Tracy remarked.

“Single use portable rocket launcher, primed and ready to go but they never got around to using it” the Major explained “State of the art bang bang, fire it and then run like buggery.”

“Looks like we'll be running through the Yellow Pages under A for Arms Dealers I guess” Tracy commented wryly “Come on, let's get out of here.”

The chauffeur driven Mercedes saloon with blacked out windows turned smartly off the main road down a dusty track for some distance until it reached a seemingly abandoned complex of old farm buildings complete with a compliment of rusty disused machinery parked outside amidst a sea of nettles and weeds.

As the car pulled to a stop in the weed and cobble covered yard between two old barns, Devlin got out of the back where he momentarily paused to reposition his expensive well polished shoes so as to avoid a puddle before carefully buttoning up the expensive well tailored suit which he always wore whenever he was on business, although these were somewhat different surrounding to the usual plush offices and discreet rendezvous which he usually went about his business in.

Devlin was fully aware that his every move was being carefully observed by four camouflaged rifle snipers with scopes trained from overlooking positions all around upon him as he made his way across the yard to the old farmhouse attached to one of the barns where he went straight inside.

“Good morning Mr Devlin” the Colonel announced from the old kitchen table on which was a field radio unit and a pot of fresh coffee “Would you care for a coffee or perhaps something a bit stronger.”

“What have you got Colonel?” Devlin asked as he looked around the dusty and neglected kitchen.

”A couple of bottles of decent Scotch for a starter” the Colonel confirmed with a wry smile as he produced them from beneath the table “My men liberated them from the Administrator General's personal office supply last night.”

“Good thing he won't miss them for a while” Devlin remarked as he dusted off a chair opposite the Colonel and sat down while the drinks were poured into plastic cups.

“I apologise for the quality of the hospitality” the Colonel remarked “but needs must as they say” he passed across Devlin's drink to him.

“Of course you do realise that the presence of and subsequent hospitalisation of the Commander could present certain problems?” Devlin asked.

“It's occurred to me” the Colonel agreed “However if your contacts are as good as you claim them to be, surely even you could throw the authorities off track sufficiently long enough for us to complete the contract.”

“Shouldn't be a problem” Devlin confirmed with a knowing smile “Besides after phases two and three of this project, they are likely to be running all over the place whilst the political establishment will be screaming for round the clock protection.”

“And all attributed to some crazy radical terrorist group or whoever the Home Office doesn't like the look of this week” the Colonel concluded.

“Exactly” Devlin agreed “Where are your men by the way?”

“I've got one group on perimeter duty, another patrolling the grounds of our luxurious accommodation here and the rest are back there in the barn getting some breakfast down them” the Colonel confirmed.

“I never saw them when I came in” Devlin remarked.

“That's the point” the Colonel confirmed “My men are experts at covert undercover work, they can make themselves very invisible even in plain sight. You asked for the best and I got them for you.”

“Well so far” Devlin remarked as the Colonel refilled his cup “They have been worth every penny.”

“Which reminds me” the Colonel added as he reached into a khaki bag and extracted a large bunch of files “I believe these were the papers you wanted liberated from the Security Service?” he asked as he handed them across to Devlin who took them and had a brief look through.

“Well done Colonel” Devlin confirmed “Looks like our friends from MI5 were on the ball and had their dossiers up to date for the Commander.”

“What happens when they find out those files are missing?” the Colonel asked.

“At a guess I would say the Security Service will be at a loss” the Colonel confirmed “We need to take care of the MI5 angle though which we will deal with in phase three, although with Sir Richard Crowthorne unexpectedly hospitalised earlier than I had planned there is not so much of a hurry on that now.”

“In the meantime, how about phase two?” the Colonel asked.

“Ah yes” Devlin confirmed “How are your suburban combat skills?”

“Nothing half an hour on a target range won't sharpen up” the Colonel confirmed “What exactly did you have in mind?”

“A very big bang in a very public place” Devlin confirmed as he handed over a briefing document to the Colonel who opened it and read the initial introductory notes.

“Nobody has tried anything like this since the dear old IRA went all warm and fuzzy” the Colonel remarked “But I think it's eminently doable.”

“Is that a word?” Devlin asked.

“What, doable?” the Colonel responded.

“Yes” Devlin confirmed.

“Well my grandmother always used to say it so I suppose it is” the Colonel replied “and she never let anything get in her way.”

“In that case at midday today I want to hear from my hotel room the sound of something going from doable to well and truly done” Devlin responded.

“Bloody hell” Tracy exclaimed as she entered the large ballroom that had been requisitioned for use as the Incident Investigation Room “Now this is what I call progress.”

As she and the Major entered the room, they were greeted by the sight of the best part of two hundred officers of various different sections of the Service plus MI5 putting together equipment, desks and a variety of wall charts and maps in readiness for the task ahead.

“Morning Maam” Fuller greeted Tracy as he passed by carrying a large pile of telephones which then promptly slipped and fell to the floor with a crash.

“I suppose that is what is meant by dropping a line then” Tracy joked, a rare moment of light relief in an otherwise tense situation.

“Very good” Fuller responded “Anyway, you wanted the works and you've got it” he confirmed as he led the way through the frenetic activity “I've got lines and computers tied into to pretty much everyone you can think of including the CIA and Interpol as well as Mr Collins and his friends from MI5 who are lurking over there by the large tray of doughnuts.”

“Lovely” Tracy confirmed “How's Jennifer by the way.”

“She's OK, still guarding the Prime Minister at the moment” Fuller confirmed “She has been pacing up and down armed to the teeth outside his bedroom door all night.”

“Where?” Tracy asked.

“West wing, fourth floor” Fuller confirmed “Shall we say briefing in twenty minutes.”

“Sounds good to me” Tracy confirmed “Just make sure the Major and I get decent desks that don't wobble.”

“I'll see what I can do” Fuller responded “You look like you could use some breakfast Sir” he addressed the Major.

“I like the sound of that” the Major confirmed as he followed Fuller “Until later Maam” he bid his farewell for the moment to Tracy.

Outside of the ballroom, Tracy looked around as the dignitaries from the conference, obviously minus some key members now were filing through the main hallway into the dining room for breakfast.

“Don't tell me they are going to keep going are they?” Tracy asked one of Jennifer's VIP Protection Division officers on duty in the hallway.

“Apparently so” the officer confirmed “Minus the Prime Minister though, he's confined to quarters on the boss's insistence.”

“What about the Home Secretary?” Tracy asked.

“Buggered off under full military escort in a helicopter back to the welcoming arms of his mistress in Islington about half an hour ago” the officer confirmed wryly “We won't be seeing him again until he comes back to fill in his expenses claim form.”

“I'm heading on up” Tracy confirmed “Make sure your lads get some breakfast at some point won't you?”

“Yes Maam” the officer confirmed as Tracy headed up the grand staircase. It took some five minutes to make her way through the complex former manor house to the hotel section where in the fourth floor she smiled with wry amusement when she saw her sister Jennifer on guard outside the Presidential Suite with the biggest automatic weapon she could find, taking no chances over the safety of her charge the Prime Minister.

“Expecting trouble Sis?” Tracy asked wryly as she met up with her sister and nodded at the large weapon in Jennifer's hand.

“You can never have enough firepower” Jennifer admitted “Not when there are some really pissed off terrorists floating around the woods.”

“Can I have a word with him?” Tracy asked.

“Yeah sure” Jennifer confirmed “Just knock and go in, he's having breakfast.”

With some trepidation Tracy knocked on the door and waited until a distant 'Come in' was heard from inside.

“Prime Minister” Tracy announced her presence as she came in.

“Out here” he called whereupon Tracy crossed the room to find the Prime Minister on the balcony looking out across the well manicured gardens whilst munching on a triangle of toast.

“Nice view” Tracy admitted as she joined him on the balcony “Of course if my sister knew you were out here she would go nuts right about now.”

“Is she still doing her Mad Max impression outside the door?” the Prime Minister asked.

“I'm afraid so” Tracy confirmed.

“How's the boss?” the Prime Minister enquired.

“Stable, intensive care” Tracy reluctantly responded “We won't know anything more for a couple of hours yet” she confirmed.

“He saved my life out there you know” the Prime Minister replied.

“Well the theory at the moment is that you were not the target if that makes you feel any better Sir” Tracy informed him.

“Given how many lives have been lost” the Prime Minister responded with remorse “That's not much comfort at all.”

“I know the feeling” Tracy agreed.

“I don't suppose there is any chance I can persuade you to back away from this investigation by any chance?” the Prime Minister asked.

“Are you kidding?” Tracy responded.

“You know, emotional involvement and all that” the Prime Minister suggested.

“The Security Service is like a big family” Tracy explained “We all watch each others backs, all of us are emotionally involved on this one.”

“Just a thought” the Prime Minister evasively commented.

“You know something don't you?” Tracy asked directly.

“There is not much that gets past you is there?” the Prime Minister responded.

“Well I get paid for this sort of thing” Tracy confirmed with a wry smile “Come on, spill or I get a court order!” she joked.

“Well it is not what I know” the Prime Minister explained as they headed back inside “More what I suspect.”

“Sounds nice and ominous” Tracy remarked.

“Let me assure you that your official investigation will, if what I believe is correct run into all sorts of obstructions, road blocks, red herrings, etc both official and unofficial” the Prime Minister explained “I suspect that their are some big names involved and they have well filled contact books.”

“Would I be right in saying that a two tier investigation is called for then Sir?” Tracy asked.

“Indeed” the Prime Minister confirmed “A nice big public one headed by Sir Richard's deputy which will run into the aforementioned quagmire of obstructions whilst in the background you and a few select others you trust runs a more unofficial investigation, away from the glare of publicity and the attentions of the well heeled establishment.”

“Putting the wind up the establishment is a talent I have developed over the years” Tracy responded “I learnt it from my husband mostly.”

“I've got to make a phone call first but do you mind if I then join your briefing?” the Prime Minister asked as Tracy turned to leave.

“Join the party” Tracy confirmed with a smile.

In Whitehall, the centre of Government, the morning rush hour was just starting to die down and the flood of tourists was now beginning to take over the centre of the City.

From his office in the Ministry of Defence building, Sir Brian Fenshaw, Secretary of State and Chairman of the Overseas Defence Committee looked down at the street some six storeys below where the tourist buses were starting to pass through with their eager passengers photographing everything familiar all around.

“Prime Minister for you on Line Three Sir” the intercom from his secretary announced whereupon Sir Brian broke off from observing the traffic outside and went over to the telephone on his desk which he put on speakerphone.

“Prime Minister” Sir Brian called “Scrambler Line Three” he suggested.

After a brief pause and a bleep on the line, the Prime Minister's voice came through.

“Morning Brian” the Prime Minister called “I take it you have heard the news?”

“Can't exactly miss it” Sir Brian confirmed as he picked up his copy of the first edition of the Standard newspaper “The press are having a right old time although the Commander's plight is getting a lot more popular sympathy than yours it has to be said.”

“Hardly surprising” the Prime Minister agreed “Listen, I want to pencil a provisional emergency meeting of the COBRA Committee for this afternoon at Downing Street” he announced.

“Good idea” Sir Brian agreed “I was going to suggest it myself as a matter of fact.”

“Great minds think alike” the Prime Minister responded “Could you pass on my apologies to the Overseas Defence Committee when you get there, although I doubt I shall miss much.”

“They'll understand” Sir Brian confirmed “Speaking of which, I had better get moving, meeting starts in the Commons in half an hour and I want to make sure I get my usual favourite seat.”

“No dozing off in the middle of the briefings” the Prime Minister suggested “I know you.”

“See you later Sir” Sir Brian confirmed with a wry smile before hanging up, grabbing his briefcase and leaving the office.

Outside the Ballroom as Tracy crossed the hallway, she noticed a rather worried looking man enter from the opposite side and look around nervously.

"You look lost" Tracy remarked as they met by the main door to the Ballroom.

"I'm looking for Divisional Commander Tracy Caverner" the man explained.

"You've found her" Tracy confirmed "And you would be?" she enquired.

"Special Agent Christopher O'Connell" he announced "CIA Overseas Criminal Intelligence Unit, one of the minions from the Grosvenor Square lunatic asylum" he explained as they shook hands.

"Welcome to the party" Tracy responded "You are just in time to see me start the show, shall we?"

"After you" O'Connell confirmed whereupon he duly followed Tracy into the Ballroom where they were greeted by the sight of even more frenetic activity than was to have been found earlier.

"Are you up to speed on developments?" Tracy enquired.

"I think so" O'Connell confirmed "I was in the bar here late last night with my opposite number from MI6 when your sister and the Prime Minister pulled up outside and declared the emergency."

"Take a seat" Tracy suggested "I have to go and make a speech."

"Break a leg" O'Connell remarked.

"Mine or someone else's?" Tracy wryly remarked "Only usually in these sort of cases I tend to specialise only in kneecaps."

"Right..." O'Connell remarked with a slightly stunned look as he took a seat along with a hundred or more officers who were now gathered and coming to attention as Tracy took to the stage at the front of the Ballroom and tapped the microphone to get everyone's attention.

"Good morning" Tracy announced with more than a hint of grim determination before pausing and looking around carefully to ensure she had everyone's attention.

"I'll assume that at this point you are all at least familiar with the basic facts surrounding last night's events so I will cut directly to the details" Tracy began.

"As you are no doubt aware from the popular press, not to mention the usual Service grapevine, last night the convoy carrying the Prime Minister, the Mayor of London, his deputy and approximately ten other assorted dignitaries from here back to central London was ambushed by a team of heavily armed and professional men.

"At this time the count is seven dead dignitaries including the whole of the Mayor's party" Tracy continued "With seven dead and eight badly injured officers, this includes our very own Administrator General and also Sir Richard Crowthorne of MI5."

The Ballroom was respectfully silent at this point as Tracy paused before continuing.

"At this point" she carried on "Initial examination of the scene shows that there is a high probability that this was an attack that had a specific target, this being demonstrated by the proportionally increased damage and ferocity of the attack to the Mayor's car than anyone else's."

Tracy's point was demonstrated on adjacent large projection screens with the initial scene photographs before she carried on.

"The weaponry used was expensive state of the art imported equipment" she continued "That points to a well funded benefactor behind all this, a point further emphasised by the fact that whoever was responsible knew the exact route of the convoy and the best place to strike it."

Tracy paused for a few moments to check her hastily scribbled notes before carrying on.

"These are the main target areas I want us to concentrate on" she announced "First of all we have two dead bad guys on the plot, I want to know all about them from their names to who is paying their bills."

"Secondly, someone gave the organiser of this little shindig chapter and verse on the details of the convoy so I want a second team interviewing everyone who knew about it, as somewhere in the system we have a leak" Tracy continued.

"Item three" she announced "I want to identify who the intended target was, that means a large proportion of you will be working on checking the background of each and every one of the people travelling in that convoy."

Tracy's audience continued to pay close attention, some scribbling notes as she continued.

"I want to see a wall chart with everyone's name on it and then I want to investigate every single one of them" she declared "Background, relatives, known associates, anyone they might have crossed swords with. If anyone comes up with so much as an auntie with an unpaid parking ticket then I want their entire life, finances and premises gone through with a fine tooth comb, take the gloves off, kick doors in, rip up the floorboards, if anything smells finance wise feel free to get the Inland Revenue in while you are at it."

The Prime Minister watching from the sidelines with Jennifer on guard alongside had to admit to himself at that point that Tracy was certainly not short of determination.

"The section heads as well as our on site representatives of other agencies involved in this investigation will report regularly to either myself or David Collins over there twice a day and if you find anything significant then I want to know about it immediately" Tracy declared. "Any questions?" she asked.

Seeing the determined mood that Tracy was in, none of the audience dared to respond.

"Right" Tracy declared "Lets get on with it shall we? Heads briefing in five minutes in the side room over there."

With her briefing concluded, Tracy stepped down from the stage as the officers in the room set about their various tasks.

Down on the Ballroom floor as she made her way through the hubbub, Tracy caught up with Collins and the Major.

"Shall we gentlemen?" Tracy asked as she opened the door of the side room to allow them to enter before she caught the attention of Fuller nearby with a shrill whistle.

"Simon!" Tracy called "Grab your wife, your box of tricks and a pot of fresh coffee and join the party."

As if the traffic in Whitehall was not bad enough even at the best of times, the arrival of a large telecommunications company road works lorry pulling into the side of the road outside the Ministry of Defence building signalled that worse disruption was imminent.

With the lorry at a halt, a team of six men in hard hats and overalls duly disembarked and from the rear of the lorry proceeded to unload the tools of the trade including cones, drills, shovels and signs.

Having consulted a plan of the complex utilities networks that were to found beneath the road surface, the foreman duly directed the men to the traffic island in the middle of the street where they promptly set up their cones and barriers along with a portable tent that they positioned over the man hole access.

The traffic passing either side merely continued on, another incidence of road works merely adding a further inconvenience to the daily journey.

With their equipment set up, two men unloaded a number of equipment cases from their lorry across the road and into the tent.

Once inside, the cases were opened and the contents, a number of weapons, some explosives and other equipment were passed down through the manhole to two of their colleagues who were commencing work below ground in the cable conduits.

"Ok gentlemen" the foreman declared as he entered the tent, removing his hard hat to reveal in fact he was the Colonel as he knelt down and called into the man hole "You have ninety minutes to get set up, make it impressive."

"So, Agent O'Connell" Tracy began the meeting where they were gathered around a hastily commandeered pasting table with laptop computers and files liberally piled thereupon "You had concerns I believe about a UK national we should be aware of."

"This guy" O'Connell began as he produced a sealed file from his briefcase which was marked heavily with the word 'CONFIDENTIAL' below the familiar logo of the United States Central Intelligence Agency.

"And this gentleman would be?" Tracy asked as she took the file and opened it where she was confronted by a photograph of the individual in question.

"The charming gent with whom you are currently getting acquainted is Mr Harold Devlin" O'Connell explained "Ostensibly a normal above board international business man with a lot of connections."

"Ostensibly..." Tracy picked up on the emphasised word from O'Connell.

"In actual fact" O'Connell continued "Over the last twenty five years he has built up a business empire and amassed millions from extensive overseas arms sales."

"We've had our eye on this chap for some time" Collins added "Only on an unofficial basis mind, he only operates overseas, does no business whatsoever in either the UK or US and by the time his earnings reach our shores they have been well and truly laundered."

"So if I sidled up to this chap with an open wallet and a shopping list?" Tracy asked.

"You wouldn't get anything" O'Connell confirmed "He only deals through trusted intermediaries and only to overseas clients."

"His catalogue makes for interesting reading as does his client list" Collins commented.

"Indeed" O'Connell agreed "His organisation sells a lot of very nasty stuff to some of the world's most unpleasant individuals and regimes."

"You have to give him his dues though" Collins added "Nothing ever sticks and he doesn't discriminate, give him a nice civil war and he will happily supply the latest state of the art equipment from a bag of hand grenades to an aircraft carrier full of fighter planes to both sides in equal measure."

"Remind me to recommend him for a Nobel Prize" Tracy remarked with some sarcasm.

"And he would probably get it too" Collins responded "He is landed gentry now, albeit a bought title and he is very well connected."

"So if our new found friend Mr Devlin takes great care not to tout his wares on UK soil" Tracy asked "What does he have to do with this situation?"

"Two points" O'Connell confirmed "Major?" he turned to the uniformed military man to his right.

"Point one is this little beauty" the Major explained as he nodded to Fuller who put on the wall screen a evidence photograph of the weapons left at the ambush scene by the gunmen "This is a state of the art piece of kit not available in the US or Europe, produced in South Africa and our gun running gentlemen friend is one of the major distributors."

"The second point comes from some whispers we have picked up on the back channels" Collins continued "The general gist being that someone within Mr Devlin's little circle of well connected friends has apparently been caught with their hands in the till."

"I take it that Devlin would not be too happy about that then?" Tracy asked.

"To put it mildly" O'Connell confirmed as he passed across a photograph "This is how they found part of the last guy in his little corporate empire who decided to take a personal percentage."

"Ouch!" Tracy exclaimed as she looked at the photograph of the dismembered body "What happened to the rest of him?"

"The Royal Mail managed to loose one of the parcels" Collins remarked "The theory is that his right leg is still floating around a lost corner of the Mount Pleasant sorting office."

"I'd like to meet this Mr Devlin" Tracy confirmed "Even if he is not connected with this mess, I reckon he is someone worth keeping a close eye on."

At that moment they were interrupted by Tracy's radio bursting into life.

"Control calling Lima Mike Zero One, urgent message" came the call with a distinct sense of urgency.

"Go ahead" Tracy quickly responded.

"Message from the hospital" came the response "The Commander is reported to coming around."

"I'm on my way" Tracy confirmed as she jumped out of her seat. Not being able to squeeze past those sat at the table, she stepped up onto the chair and skipped over the desk before jumping back down and heading out at speed.

"Anyone taking bets on how quick she can get to central London on that bike of hers?" Fuller remarked.

"Next item" Sir Brian in his official role as Chairman of the Overseas Defence Committee declared "Funding proposal for counter terrorism operation in Africa and Asia."

"The Foreign Secretary is very keen that this goes through" the representative of the Foreign Office remarked "He made a clear commitment to this last week and he wants it stuck to."

"Well I know MI6 need the funding" Sir Brian confirmed "The number of terrorist organisations setting up shop down that part of the world has escalated alarmingly."

"Shall we do the usual rubber stamp job and authorise it then?" the Foreign Office representative asked.

"Might as well" Sir Brian confirmed as he made a note of the decision before looking around the meeting room with a quizzical expression as he noted the unusually large number of empty chairs around the table.

"This is ridiculous" he remarked "There is hardly anyone here."

"The Prime Minister is on high alert" the Foreign Office man remarked "the Security & Police Service as well as most of MI5 are either running around the Epping Forest, in hospital or dead and MI6 are up to their eyeballs as well apparently."

"In which case I may as well declare this meeting closed" Sir Brian declared "There is little more we can do today with so many away."

"Same time next week?" the Foreign Secretary asked wryly.

"Indeed Geoff" Sir Brian confirmed "If wet in phone box" he joked.

As they left the committee room, exiting out into the bustling corridor, Sir Brian checked his watch and was surprised to find that despite the seemingly foreshortened meeting due to its distinct lack of participants, it was still later than he expected.

"You have the appearance of a man with a problem?" the Foreign Secretary commented as the two distinguished members of the Government walked down the corridor heading for the House of Commons Bar.

"When you are head of the MoD and there are armed nutters running around Epping Forest randomly gunning down the Mayor, high ranking members of MI5 and worst of all the Commander himself" Sir Brian remarked with a resigned sigh "Committee meetings are the least of my problems."

"Anyone taking bets on who was behind it?" the Foreign Secretary asked as they entered the bar.

"Could be anyone to be honest" Sir Brian responded "Mercenaries, rouge agents, someone who forgot to pay their congestion charge."

"Doesn't exactly narrow it down" the Foreign Secretary confirmed "I assume Divisional Commander Caverner is heading up the enquiry?"

"So I gather" Sir Brian confirmed as he took his drink from the barman "No door is safe I reckon."

The heart monitor alongside the Commander's bed began to bleep faster as his eyes flickered and slowly opened for the first time since he had arrived at the hospital.

"Steady now Sir" the Doctor supervising cautioned as the Commander began to gain his senses and looked around.

"What the hell happened?" the Commander murmured.

"Do you want the long version or the short version?" Sir Richard asked from his own hospital bed alongside as he observed the medical staff monitoring the Commander's vital signs as he came back to the land of the living.

"Just tell me that all is well and Tracy is on her way" the Commander responded as he just lay there looking straight up at the ceiling.

"Well one out of two isn't bad I suppose" Sir Richard remarked as Tracy came through the door.

"Morning love" the Commander weakly responded with a smile as Tracy sat by his bed side and hugged and kissed him carefully.

"I really thought I had lost you this time" Tracy responded, bravely holding back a tear.

"You don't get rid of me that easily my dear" the Commander confirmed "So, how many doors have you kicked in yet?"

"None so far" Tracy confirmed "but the day is still young."

"Ok then" the Commander declared as Tracy and the Doctor helped him sit up "What's the damage and where have we got to?"

"Well the Mayor and his entire party, seven of my officers, at least three of Jennifer's, and a couple of politicians of various insignificance are in the morgue" Tracy recalled "Half a dozen hospitalised including you two jokers and a lot of very nervous politicians and civil servants demanding protection as usual."

"Any word on our unfriendly lunatics with the guns?" the Commander asked.

"We know whoever they were, they were well equipped, financed and paid" Tracy confirmed "Possibility that a well connected businessman with more than a passing interest in overseas arms deals by the name of Devlin may be connected in some way."

"That's the name of the guy I sent that file to you about" Sir Richard remarked "He also seems to be attracting the attention of our American friends judging by our conversation with one of their guys last night."

"Special Agent O'Connell?" Tracy asked.

"That would be the fella" the Commander confirmed "Find him."

"Way ahead of you darling" Tracy responded "I've got him working with ours and Sir Richard's boys back at the incident room now."

"In which case I had better join you" the Commander declared as he attempted to get up.

"You are not going anywhere" Tracy insisted as the Commander grimaced with pain having not appreciated the seriousness of his injuries before falling back.

"Arrgh!" the Commander exclaimed as nearby the Doctor glowered at him "Looks like you may be right."

"Security Department rule number twenty three" Tracy smiled in wry response "Tracy is always right."

"Oh drat!" Sir Brian exclaimed as he checked his watch and realised he was going to be late for an important briefing at the Ministry of Defence. Quickly he downed his glass of Scotch before getting up from his seat at the bar.

"See you later Des" he called to the Foreign Secretary as he grabbed his briefcase and departed quickly.

Walking briskly through the corridors of the Houses of Parliament, Sir Brian was met at the entrance by his driver, as usual one of the VIP Protection Division of the service.

"Morning Dave" Sir Brian remarked to the driver as he got in the front of the car, he not being one for the formality of sitting in the back.

"Morning Sir" the driver responded as he closed the passenger door once Sir Brian was inside before going around and getting in himself.

"Any word from the front?" Sir Brian asked.

"My boss is refusing to let the Prime Minister out of her sight apparently" the driver confirmed "They may have a lead on the gunmen so it is expected that the Divisional Commander will be interviewing people in her usual imitable way before the day is out."

It only took a few minutes for them to exit from the main gate of the Houses of Parliament, around Parliament Square and into Whitehall.

"Traffic is hell as some berk has decided to dig up the road" the driver explained as they came to a grinding halt when they reached the back of the queue waiting to be let past the temporary traffic lights that had been set up around the apparent road works.

Sir Brian noted as they advanced slowly forwards that there appeared to be no one actually on site at the road works although to be fair it was approaching lunch time so it was not that unexpected. The traffic lights duly switched to red again as they reached them leaving the car at the head of the queue with a regular route 11 service bus immediately behind.

"Well I am not going to make that meeting on time now" Sir Brian remarked as he checked his watch.

"Oh I don't know Sir" the driver responded as unexpectedly the traffic light signal suddenly changed to green again much quicker than had been expected.

Nearby on the pavement, the Colonel observed Sir Brian's car advance forward from the traffic light, pulling away from the bus which suddenly stopped again when the signal was switched quickly back to red again through the remote control unit in his hand.

Now isolated in the road works controlled section of the road, Sir Brian's car reached the point where it was alongside the tent that had been erected earlier over the man hole cover by the Colonel's men.

"Say goodnight" the Colonel remarked casually as he pressed a second button on the remote control.

In an instant a huge explosion erupted from just beneath the surface of the road, enveloping and instantly destroying the car in a large violent fireball that sent burning debris flying in all directions.

A couple of miles away, the sound of the explosion caused Tracy to look up and out of the window of the hospital ward.

"What the hell was that?" the Commander asked as Tracy went over to the window and looked out across the River Thames to the north side where a plume of thick black smoke could be seen going up over Whitehall.

"Good question love" Tracy agreed as she reached for her radio set "Lima Tango Zero One to Control" she called "What the hell was that?"

“Control” the response quickly came along with the background sound of much confusion from the Control Room at New Scotland Yard “Apparently there was some sort of explosion just now in Whitehall, no details yet though.”

“I’m on my way” Tracy confirmed as she turned back to the Commander “Sorry love” she responded as they kissed briefly “Duty calls.”

“Enjoy yourself” the Commander replied as Tracy smiled and then rapidly left.

Running through the corridors of the hospital, Tracy quickly found herself outside and getting onto her motorbike. Starting up the powerful engine as well as the sirens and lights, she pulled out of the Hospital grounds and quickly into the traffic before weaving through to access the south end of Westminster Bridge past the old County Hall building.

Already the traffic was starting to back up as a direct result of the explosion which meant Tracy had to resort to veering off and using the bus lane across Westminster Bridge, narrowly squeezing down the side of a couple of buses in the process.

Passing Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament, the traffic did the best it could to get out of her way and allow her through which meant Tracy was quickly into Parliament Square where she resorted to mounting the pavement and crossing the grass surface of the central reservation to be able to turn right into Parliament Street and Whitehall.

With the appliances from Westminster Fire Station joining Tracy as she sped along the wrong carriageway of Whitehall, she was quickly on the scene which was one of panic, confusion and by now a familiar looking pattern of devastation.

“What the hell happened?” Tracy asked one of her officers who himself had only just arrived on the scene having run all the way from Downing Street when he had heard the explosion.

“Big bang basically Maam” the officer responded, as much in the dark as she was “I’ve got everyone I can find sealing off Whitehall at both ends and evacuating now.”

“Ok boys” Tracy called to the Fire Brigade officers as they pulled up in their appliances “It’s all yours.”

No sooner had they stopped than the Fire Officers were alighting from their appliances and with a well practised professionalism, slipped into their standard routine with fire fighting equipment quickly produced and used to tackle the burning wreckage as well as the minor secondary fires caused by flying debris from the explosion.

“Get me the Bomb Squad, Scenes of Crime and the usual circus down here” Tracy requested of a couple of officers now on the scene “If you find any witnesses, park them out of the way, give them a cup of tea and we will take statements as soon as the hub bub has died down.”

The air was filled with the sounds of sirens as further emergency service vehicles arrived on the scene and Tracy walked around the perimeter of the smouldering wreckage, trying to make out what the vehicle was before its untimely end.

“Do we have any idea who or what this was yet?” Tracy called out.

“Black saloon car according to a bus driver” one officer confirmed “He doesn't remember the registration number though.”

“Can you spray a bit of water on that there” Tracy asked one of the fire officers nearby as she pointed to a smouldering object in the gutter.

“Yeah sure” the fire officer confirmed as he turned and trained a hose on the area she had indicated until the smoke coming from it had dissipated.

“Here we go” Tracy declared as she bent down and picked up the object, revealing itself to be a partially melted and smoke blackened number plate from the car that had been destroyed “What do you reckon?” she asked the fire officer as they both looked at it, trying to make out the registration number.

“Lima Golf Five Four Oscar November Golf?” the fire officer asked.

“I reckon so” Tracy agreed “Control from Lima Mike Zero One” she called into her radio “Can you do a check on a vehicle, registration number Lima Golf Five Four Oscar November Golf?” she asked.

“Looks like we have two dead in the vehicle” the Fire Chief confirmed as he joined Tracy just as his officers finished the final damping down of the remains of the vehicle “Not much left of them though, some sort of high explosive judging by the state of the place.”

“Thanks” Tracy responded “Better seal it off until the Bomb Squad get here” she advised.

“Lima Mike Zero One from Control” came the call from Tracy's radio.

“Go ahead” Tracy responded slightly worried as she picked up on the tone of the dispatcher's voice which expressed clear concern and more than a little shock.

“The car you asked about” the dispatcher confirmed “Lima Golf Five Four Oscar November Golf is registered to the Service, specifically the VIP Protection Division, it's one of ours.”

“Err understood” Tracy replied after taking a few moments to take in this news as she looked over the mangled wreckage “Patch me through to Victor Papa Control.”

“Victor Papa Control” came a response after a few moments.

“Morning” Tracy replied “Can you tell me who was being escorted in one of your motors up until about fifteen minutes ago from Parliament to somewhere in Whitehall?” she asked.

“Oh that's easy” the officer on duty at the VIP Protection Division head office confirmed “Most of our lot are out at that conference so the only one scheduled to go through Whitehall this morning is Sir Brian Fenshaw, a big wig in the Ministry of Defence.”

“Not any more he isn't” Tracy confirmed “What's left of him, the officer escorting him and the car are now spread liberally all across Whitehall.”

“Oh my God” the VIP Protection Division officer responded in shock “The explosion in Whitehall just now?”

“The same” Tracy confirmed grimly “Can you tell me where Jennifer is right now?”

“She is due to escort the Prime Minister back from the Conference Centre in about an hour once they have had lunch” came the confirmation.

“Get her on the phone right now and tell her to stay put until I get there” Tracy instructed “Lima Mike One out.”

As Tracy looked around, the armour plated van of the Bomb Squad arrived on the scene.

“Get your box of tricks out gentlemen” Tracy instructed the Bomb Squad team as they got out of their van and grabbed their equipment “I want to know type, source and method before the sun goes down and I want it reported directly to me all right?”

“You got it boss” the head of the Bomb Squad team confirmed as they set about their work.

“It's all yours” Tracy indicated the mess “In the meantime I have to go and tell my Sister she has lost another of her officers.”

“Pray tell what the heck do you call this?” the Commander asked as he looked down at the tray in front of him.

“It is a carefully designed meal” the nurse tried to explain “Specifically cooked from specially chosen ingredients to provide a healthy balanced nutritional diet, very important for those who are recovering from severe trauma such as yourself Sir.”

“Three cracked ribs and internal injuries?” the Commander retorted “You call that serious? I've been shot a fair few times you know, now that is what I call serious. Anyway, got any chips around this joint?”

“That would not be very nutritious now would it Sir?” the nurse responded even though she knew full well she was fighting a losing battle here against the Commander's normal diet that seemed to consist almost entirely of everything that he should not be eating.

“Thanks...” the Commander replied with a slightly depressed sigh as the nurse left whereupon he picked up one of the rather soggy and pathetic looking salad leaves with his fork.

“Good God” the Commander remarked “Even the Food Standards Agency would baulk at this mess.”

“Could be worse” Sir Richard remarked from the adjacent bed “Apparently my Deputy's wife is on some sort of cabbage soup diet.”

“Bleugh...” the Commander responded as he pushed the tray away and proceeded to try and get out of bed.

“Where the hell are you going?” Sir Richard asked as he saw the Commander struggle to his feet.

“I am going to find some decent food” he responded with determination only to promptly fall over as his weakened condition saw to it his legs could not take the sudden weight.

“Nurse!!” Sir Richard called out in an attempt to summon assistance.

One of the nurses out in the corridor who had been chatting to the two armed officers guarding the door to the ward rushed inside and helped the Commander back onto the bed.

“Now that wasn't very sensible was it Sir?” she asked.

“It has to be said that I have had better ideas” the Commander was forced to admit as he sat up on the edge of the bed.

“Well rest then” the Nurse advised “And no more unscheduled excursions all right?” she insisted as she left the room.

“You know what” Sir Richard remarked as he gave up on his attempts at eating lunch “You may have a point about the catering around here, I haven't tasted hospital food this bad since 1973.”

The Commander looked around the rather dull interior of the two bed ward and was about to try standing up again when the fire exit door over on the far side of the room opened and a young boy approximately twelve years of age walked in, dressed in a hospital gown and pyjamas.

“Oh sorry” the young lad apologised “wrong floor.”

“Where did you pop from?” the Commander asked the young lad as he was about to leave again.

“Oh I’m supposed to be up in the children’s ward two floors up” the lad explained “or is it three, I can never quite remember.”

“Three I think” the Commander confirmed “So what are you doing sneaking around the secure area then?”

“This place is an utter rabbit warren” the young lad replied “I’ve been doing a bit of exploring whilst trying to rustle up some supplies.”

“Supplies?” Sir Richard asked.

“Some bright spark decided we were not allowed any chocolate or indeed anything else remotely decent up in the children’s ward” the lad explained “So a couple of weeks ago I decided to go into business whilst I am here and do a little black market trading” he duly produced some of a number of chocolate bars and other items he had in his pockets “Making quite a nice little profit out of it too” he was forced to admit.

“You have a name then?” the Commander asked.

“Jack Thornton” the lad stepped forward to the Commander and shook his hand “And you must be the Commander?”

“How did you know that?” the Commander asked out of curiosity.

“I read the papers I get for the lads up in the Geriatrics Ward” Jack explained “Nasty business you got yourself into last night from what I read.”

“You can say that again” the Commander admitted ruefully.

“Got to go” Jack declared “Sorry for the intrusion gentlemen, I’ve got a poker game organised in ward nine in half an hour and I don’t want to be late.”

“Hang on a second” the Commander responded “Come here a minute.”

“Something I can do for you?” Jack asked.

“How would you like to make some money?” the Commander asked.

“Now you are talking my language” Jack responded with a smile.

“If you can rustle up some decent chocolate, a copy of Railway Modeller and a deck of cards then I would be eternally grateful” the Commander asked.

“As you are the Commander” Jack replied “I’ll make it cash on delivery, can I get you something Sir?” he turned to Sir Richard.

“A bottle of best Scotch?” he answered very much out of hope rather than expectation.

“I’ll see what I can do” Jack confirmed “If you’ll excuse me, I will see you both later.”

With that the small lad departed by the same fire exit through which he had entered leaving the two men in the ward looking on with expressions of amazement.

“That lad has potential” Sir Richard remarked “I wonder if he would like a job in MIS?”

“He reminds me of someone I knew when I was his age” the Commander confirmed.

“Oh” Sir Richard responded “Who’s that then?” he asked.

“Me” the Commander confirmed with a smile.

The Colonel casually shuffled the deck of cards before dealing out a Solitaire game onto the old table that he had managed to put back into use in the dark interior of an old factory on the outskirts of east London where he and his men had settled down for the afternoon to await their next instructions.

As he was about to pick up an ace of diamonds from the table, the Colonel was interrupted by the sound of a car horn outside in the courtyard of the old factory. Getting up from the table and taking his gun with him as a precaution, he wiped off years of cobwebs and dust from the cracked window glass and looked down to see Devlin’s car parked outside.

Quickly the Colonel made his way out of the old office and down the metal steps to what was once a factory floor, its manufacturing equipment now long gone and the vast empty space now only occupied by his vehicles and a couple of sea containers where their equipment was being stored.

“Good afternoon Mr Devlin” the Colonel greeted him as they met on the factory floor “We seem to have gone up in the world” he gestured around the old building’s interior “That is to say sir that the roof doesn’t leak here unlike that little rural retreat you put us in last night.”

“This old place has memories” Devlin admitted “It used to be where my father worked just after the war, I acquired the business some years ago and moved it to new premises but I just could not let go of this place.”

“Bet it’s worth a small fortune now with all that Olympic Games redevelopment around here” the Colonel observed.

“Oh yes” Devlin agreed with a smirk “There is that little factor as well I will admit.”

“Come up to the office” the Colonel gestured up the stairs “We can talk in private up there.”

“Anyone would think you did not trust your men” Devlin remarked as he followed the Colonel up the stairs.

“Oh I trust my men” the Colonel confirmed as he showed Devlin into the old office “All of them are one hundred percent loyal, it's just that their loyalty is dependant on who is holding the largest purse strings if you get my drift.”

“I do indeed” Devlin confirmed “In which case I think we should move onto the job in hand.”

“I'm all ears” the Colonel confirmed.

“Nice work on the Whitehall job by the way” Devlin commented as he reached inside his briefcase and extracted a file which he placed on the table and opened.

“Well if you can't enjoy making a big bang” the Colonel confirmed smiling “What is the world coming to?”

“Indeed” Devlin agreed “However this next job will require something rather more subtle, stealth like shall we say.”

“A hospital?” the Colonel enquired as he looked at the contents of the file that Devlin had brought “Who is the bunny this time then?”

“This man” Devlin passed across a photograph of Sir Richard Crowthorne “He is number two in the hierarchy at MI5 and has a fair bit of knowledge about myself, my organisation and my err business style” he confirmed “All of which could hamper my business transaction tomorrow so I need him put away.”

“He is likely to be heavily guarded” the Colonel commented “This won't be easy.”

“It may be easier than you think” Devlin continued to explain “In about an hour, the Prime Minister is being moved under the tightest security possible from the Conference Centre back to Downing Street for a COBRA Committee meeting. He was due to leave earlier but your little job in Whitehall has conveniently forced the authorities to put back their schedule a bit.”

“You want us to hit the PM's convoy?” the Colonel asked.

“No” Devlin responded “The PM's convoy will safely divert the attentions of most of the Security & Police Service along with our friends from MI5 for over an hour, during this time I have it on very good authority that the minimal guard on Sir Richard will be reduced as they will have far bigger fish to proverbially fry.”

“I've got to hand it to you Sir” the Colonel complimented Devlin “You really do have a talent for these opportunities and little operations don't you?”

“Well I did spend ten years with various military groups in Africa and South America as a military advisor and supplier” Devlin admitted “You tend to pick up a few tips here and there when you travel with such esteemed company.”

“Two men in medical uniform of some kind plus discreet weaponry should be all I need for this” the Colonel confirmed “Shall we say one hour from now?” he asked.

“That will do nicely” Devlin agreed with an evil smile.

“There you are” Jennifer called as Tracy arrived at the main entrance of the Conference Centre on her motorbike “I was beginning to think you would never get here.”

“You got my message then” Tracy confirmed as she got off her motorbike and removed her helmet.

“No one is going anywhere until you give the green light” Jennifer confirmed “So what happened back in town then?”

“Sir Brian Fenshaw” Tracy explained as together the two sisters headed up the steps and inside the building “His car got blown to pieces in the middle of Whitehall along with your officer.”

“That's another call on a bereaved family I have to do” Jennifer responded with deep regret.

“I've got half the Armed Response Units of the Service on their way here now” Tracy explained “When the Prime Minister is on the move, he will be fully protected.”

“You know what he will say” Jennifer commented as they headed into the Ballroom.

“He can say what he likes” Tracy confirmed with grim determination “Until such a point is reached where his word is higher than my rank, he does exactly what I tell him.”

“I'd better go and get him ready” Jennifer confirmed “He is going to grumble about it all the way there though.”

“I'll see you later” Tracy responded before Jennifer departed whereupon she turned her attentions to the investigation in hand and immediately sought out the Major, Fuller, Collins and O'Connell.

“Good afternoon gentlemen” she declared as she entered the side room where Fuller was busy on a row of three interconnected laptop computers with Collins and O'Connell helping him feed information into the system.

“Well don't all shout at once...” Tracy added as none of the men responded initially to her arrival.

“Oh sorry Maam” Fuller looked up briefly “We were busy joining the dots on this lot.”

“Anything interesting come up?” Tracy asked as she joined them in front of the computer screens.

“Well if this Devlin guy is our man” Collins confirmed “He doesn't do any of his business through any of the regular banks either here or overseas.”

“Fits in with what we know about him” O'Connell agreed “From our admittedly limited knowledge about him, he has always undertaken most transactions in either bonds or good old fashioned cash, very difficult to trace.”

“Well you can add Sir Brian Fenshaw to the list for checking out” Tracy remarked “Someone very rudely interrupted his day by blowing his car to bits in the middle of Whitehall an hour ago.”

“So we heard” Fuller confirmed “Did you know that ten years ago he chaired a Commons inquiry into illegal arms sales to Middle East?”

“Really?” Tracy responded “Please tell me that our friend Mr Devlin was involved somehow?”

“His name came up as one of the suspected financiers in these deals but as usual nothing was ever proved” Collins confirmed “The usual story, friends in high places blocked the inquiry with enough law suites to drown an elephant plus the death of a key witness didn't help.”

“Key witness?” Tracy asked.

“There was an accountancy expert from a Swiss Bank who was going to testify that he handled significant amounts of cash in specified transactions, he had the paperwork to prove it too” Collins explained “Unfortunately just before he was about to take the stand, he and his papers disappeared forever when his private yacht vanished in the English Channel.”

“How convenient” O'Connell commented.

“Where is the Major?” Tracy asked looking around and not seeing him anywhere.

“He is out in the woods looking for clues” Fuller confirmed.

“Ok then” Tracy responded “You guys keep working on this paperwork marathon, I'll see you gentlemen later.”

As she headed out of the Ballroom into the main reception foyer area, Tracy met Jennifer and the Prime Minister coming down the stairs.

“Really Divisional Commander” the Prime Minister protested as he saw the numerous vehicles outside containing armed officers waiting to escort him back to central London “I don't like all this armed guard nonsense.”

“Do you like being dead?” Tracy asked directly.

“Well no actually” the Prime Minister was forced to admit.

“Good” Tracy responded “Now stop arguing and get going will you?” she demanded.

“Yes Maam” the Prime Minister confirmed with a mock salute whereupon Jennifer and two other officers of her Division escorted him across the foyer to the main doors.

“Hey Jenny” Tracy called after her twin sister “Be careful” she warned.

“You too” Jennifer responded before picking up her radio “Victor Papa One to all Units, Eagle One is coming out of the door now.”

With that the Prime Minister was escorted out of the doors and down the steps before being quickly shown into the back of a waiting armoured ministerial escort car. Once safely inside, Jennifer went around to the drivers door and got in herself.

Tracy watched from the steps as the large and well protected caravan of vehicles departed amid the noise of sirens with a helicopter joining them overhead to provide additional observational protection.

As the caravan disappeared out of sight amid a cloud of dust in the distance down the long driveway, Tracy returned to her motorbike and started the engine. After consulting a map, she headed off at speed across the adjacent golf course in the direction of the woods.

It took only five minutes of travelling along rather rough country tracks before Tracy came across the search teams still at work combing every inch of the woodland for miles in each direction radiating from the original incident site.

“The Major around anywhere?” she called to a couple of officers where she met them on the track.

“He's checking out the clearing where we found the Chief Maam” one of the officers confirmed “Turn left about a mile further down the track and then right, you can't miss them.”

“Thanks” Tracy responded as she restarted the engine and set off.

“Whoa there” the Major called to a couple of his men just as one of them was about to put his well polished military boot in a patch of mud “Something here which may be important.”

“Sorry Sir” the Army Private responded as he carefully stepped back as instructed whilst the Major knelt down and looked at what it was that had caught his attention.

As he was examining the ground, the sound of a motorbike approaching caused him to look up and see Tracy arrive.

“Good afternoon Maam” the Major called as Tracy got off her bike and joined the Major “Something interesting here” he indicated the ground.

“Tyre tracks?” Tracy asked.

“Indeed” the Major confirmed “These were made by a vehicle, probably a Land Rover sometime in the last twenty hours I would say.”

“One of ours?” Tracy asked.

“No” the Major responded as he stood up “The tracks are from a vehicle fitted with the heavier duty military grade type tyres so it was not one of your lot, neither was it the Forestry Commission either, you both use the more civilian type.”

“Could be our friends with the guns then” Tracy commented.

“That would be my educated guess yes” the Major agreed before calling to his men “Everybody spread out and tread carefully, see if you can find where these tyre tracks go to.”

After a few minutes of careful searching, one of the Major's men called from further down the barely visible woodland track that snaked its way through the densely wooded forest.

“Major!” the Private called loudly with a wave of the arms “Something here Sir” he indicated the ground in front of him.

Within moments the Private was joined by Tracy and the Major and together they looked down carefully at another muddy patch through the middle of which was a vehicle track very similar to the first.

“Looks like they were heading east if this is anything to go by” Tracy commented “Who has a map around here?” she asked generally.

“Here” the Major passed her a folded map of the area which Tracy proceeded to study carefully.

“Ok then” Tracy declared “The Conference Centre is over there and the point where the attack took place is here where this country track veers off from the paved road.”

“According to your husband” the Major commented “The men he followed through the woods headed west towards a clearing about two miles away, they must have had vehicles waiting I would have thought.”

“Now that clearing is here” Tracy indicated on the map “At least I think it is, all this thing seems to show is mile upon mile of trees.”

“Not far off” the Major confirmed “Just about here actually, the Air Ambulance was able to land nearby to pick up the Commander without too much trouble.”

“So if they had vehicles, there were two different ways they could have gone from that clearing” Tracy continued.

“East is out of the question” the Major remarked “That would have taken them back to the paved roads where they would almost certainly have run straight into your lot attending the incident, game over.”

“West then” Tracy agreed “which takes them through here where we are now and out towards the plantation and forestry area over here” she pointed to a part of the map.

“In which case that is where we must go then” the Major agreed “I’ll see if I can rustle up some suitable transport, your motorbike won’t be able to handle this mud I would have thought.”

“I was three times county under sixteen girls motor cross champion” Tracy remarked with a wry smile “This should prove no problem.”

“If you say so” the Major agreed.

“There you go Sir” Jack declared as he placed a bag onto the Commander's bedside table and proceeded to produce the contents from within it “One copy of Railway Modeller, two bars of chocolate and a deck of cards.”

“Very nicely done, thank you” the Commander responded with a smile.

“And for you Sir” Jack turned to Sir Richard “One bottle of finest single malt, sorry I couldn't come up with any glasses though.”

“Wow!” Sir Richard remarked in astonishment as he read the label of the bottle “And it's the good stuff as well, here it's not nicked is it?”

“Got a friend with a cash and carry business who owed me a favour” Jack explained.

“Do your parents know about your little business empire?” the Commander asked.

“Highly unlikely” Jack admitted with a slightly hesitant response “They died a couple of years ago in a car crash on the Marylebone Road, I've been sort of fending for myself ever since.”

“So where are you living?” Sir Richard asked.

“At the moment on the Children's Ward upstairs” Jack explained “It was because of my more usual accommodation that I got an injury and a chest infection which is how I wound up in this place. Anyway if you will excuse me gents, I have a poker game to get to.”

“Extraordinary” the Commander remarked with a shake of the head as Jack departed out through the fire exit door.

Making his way from the fire escape brought Jack into the older part of the hospital, much of which was now closed and decommissioned prior to a long planned but never started rebuilding. It was a rabbit warren of old wards and corridors with abandoned and stored medical equipment, beds, etc just lying around all over the place.

Jack liked this place, it was where he felt most comfortable in the hospital as he had been effectively living off his own wits and talents all alone for the best part of two years now and in the preceding couple of weeks that he had been in the hospital, had come to know the more forgotten parts of the complex well.

As he was heading down a corridor with the intention of taking a short cut through to the west wing of the Hospital, Jack stopped suddenly when he heard the sound of footsteps coming in his general direction. The empty nature of the building meant that the clear sound of hard soled boots coming down a distant adjoining corridor was clear to hear and getting louder as the owner of the boots approached closer to his position.

“Time for a swift exit” Jack commented to himself as he sidled off into a disused office immediately adjacent and quietly closed the door behind him.

Looking through a gap in the dusty old Venetian blinds that covered the office window, Jack observed as two men in paramedic uniforms turned into the corridor. One of them was consulting a plan he had in his hand whilst the other was carrying a medical kit bag.

“Room 2142” the man with the bag confirmed to his colleague as he continued to examine the plan.

“Down to the far end, turn left and then up the fire escape according to this” the other man said “Best get ready” he suggested.

At this suggestion, the first man put his bag onto an adjacent old bed that was lying in the corridor and opened it. From inside it he produced a small semi automatic weapon for himself and a second one for his colleague which he passed out along with a couple of clips of ammunition.

“Do we want the silencers or shall we enjoy ourselves and make some noise?” the first man was heard to say.

“Well there are only two guards on duty in the corridor according to our contact” the second man confirmed as he checked his weapon before discreetly putting it inside his paramedic uniform jacket “Hospital security is a joke, this shouldn't be a problem.”

“Let’s go have some fun then” the first man responded as they departed up the corridor.

“Oh hell...” Jack commented quietly to himself as he watched the men disappear out of sight up the corridor. Quickly he jumped up and left the old office before looking up and down the corridor trying to think of some way that he could get ahead of the gunmen and cut them off.

Realising there was a chance that he could get around them using his vastly superior knowledge of the layout of the place, Jack quickly ran off in a different direction.

“Looks like I am going to have to put in an advanced order for that new Standard Class 5” the Commander remarked as he read the Railway Modeller magazine “If these pre-production views are anything to go by it will sell like hot cakes.”

“I take it then they operated on the Southern Region then?” Sir Richard asked more out of something to distract his boredom than any interest in the intricacies of railway modelling.

“They did indeed” the Commander confirmed as he looked over at Sir Richard over the top of his small square framed reading glasses “I even rode the footplate of one from Waterloo to Wimbledon in 1967.”

“Should have guessed really” Sir Richard responded.

“Hi!” Jack suddenly announced as he came in the fire escape door and ran across the ward to the main door where he looked out into the corridor in both directions.

“Something wrong?” the Commander asked sensing Jack's urgency.

“What would you guys say if I said there were two fake Paramedics coming down the corridor carrying machine guns?” Jack asked.

“Duck?” the Commander retorted wryly.

“Good idea” Jack suggested as he took another look down the corridor to see the two men he had seen minutes earlier appear in the corridor and walk briskly in his direction with clear and intended purpose.

“Wardrobe over there” the Commander got out of bed and pointed Jack towards the other side of the room.

“Right” Jack agreed as he ran over to the wardrobe and opened it “You'll be needing this I take it?” he asked as he pulled back the wardrobe door to reveal the Commander's uniform and gun belt hanging there.

“Pass that to me” the Commander called whereupon Jack took the gun belt off the hook and tossed it to the Commander who was struggling a bit to stay steady on his feet “Thanks, now get in there and close the door” the Commander instructed.

“What the hell am I supposed to do?” Sir Richard asked, unable to move due to the severe nature of his injuries.

“Play dead for the moment” the Commander confirmed as he pulled his gun and made for the wall behind the main door into the ward.

“That may be easier in a minute” Sir Richard remarked with not much confidence as he lay back and closed his eyes, pretending to be unconscious.

Outside the ward, the two men were not surprised to find that the assigned two officers who were supposed to be guarding the ward were not on duty, this operation having also been timed to coincide with shift change time and the relief not having come on yet.

“This is a bit easy isn't it?” the first man remarked to his colleague.

“Stop right there please” a voice called from behind them when one of the duty officers appeared in the corridor and saw the two paramedics about to enter the secure ward.

“Is there a problem Officer?” the second man asked, turning around as the officer approached.

“Any reason why you need access to the ward?” the officer inquired.

“We were asked to retrieve a patient for transfer” the first man responded.

“No one has notified me” the Officer replied “Could I see some identification please?” he asked politely but firmly.

“Sure” the first man confirmed, quickly drawing his gun and shooting the officer before he could respond.

“Lets go” the second man confirmed as they entered the ward where they found Sir Richard Crowthorne in the far bed apparently either asleep or unconscious.

“All yours” the second man confirmed to his colleague “Make it clean and quick” he instructed.

“If you insist” the Commander responded from behind the door as he shot the first man which sent him to the ground and caused the second man to turn sharply to see where the shot had come from.

Before he could respond however, the second man was shot by the Commander and joined his colleague on the floor whilst Sir Richard opened one eye to see if the coast was clear.

“Now” the Commander declared as he went over to the two men lying in pain on the floor where he quickly kicked their guns away “What are we going to do with you two clowns?”

“This is as far as the track goes” the Major declared as he consulted his map which he had laid out on the bonnet of his Land Rover “So the question is where do we go from here.”

“What's around here?” Tracy asked as she got off of her motorbike and joined the Major in surveying the map carefully.

“Couple of old farms, abandoned airfield, nothing exactly exciting it has to be said” the Major confirmed.

At that point their deliberations were cut short as a farmer's tractor came up the lane and was forced to stop as it was unable to pass the Major's vehicle where it was protruding from the track exit.

“How many more of your lot are there around here?” the tractor driver asked.

“I'm sorry?” Tracy responded.

“Well you are the second bunch of Army guys I have had to get by today” the tractor driver confirmed.

Tracy could tell from the look of suspicion on the Major's face that they were both having the same thought at that point.

“Err excuse me Sir” Tracy called back to the tractor driver “I was wondering, where did you see these other Army personnel?” she asked.

“Few hours back” the tractor driver confirmed “They have been on night manoeuvres apparently, based out of old Hoskins Farm just up the road there. I'm surprised you guys don't know about it.”

“Hoskins Farm” Tracy asked “Is that the one about a mile up the road from here?”

“Aye, that would be the one” the tractor driver confirmed “Been abandoned for years now ever since old Trevor Hoskins sold up and moved out to New Zealand.”

“You didn't happen to get a good look at these Army guys did you?” the Major asked.

“Ordinary blokes in khaki camouflage travelling in a couple of green Land Rovers” the tractor driver responded “Nowt particularly special about them I thought.”

“Thanks” Tracy replied “You've been a great help.”

“Have I?” the tractor driver responded slightly surprised “Ah well then, shift you truck back so I can get past and we will call it even lassie.”

“Deal” Tracy agreed whereupon one of the Major's men put the Land Rover into reverse and moved it back so that the tractor driver, amid much revving of his engine could pass and continue on his journey.

“Worth checking this place out do you think?” Tracy asked the Major.

“I reckon so” he confirmed in agreement.

“All right then” Tracy responded as she got back on her now rather muddy motorbike “Follow me and keep your eyes peeled.”

With that, Tracy started the engine of her motorbike and pulled out into the lane with the Major and his men in their Land Rover following close behind. After a couple of minutes, they pulled up at the old disintegrating gateway to the farm, its name sign now badly rotted and faded at an angle in the adjacent hedge.

“Lets see if anyone is home” the Major declared as he scanned the distant farm buildings through his binoculars.

“Anything?” Tracy asked.

“Nothing obvious” the Major confirmed “Although I would say someone has been there fairly recently, the weeds and undergrowth in the yard have been trampled down by vehicles and feet.”

“Right then” Tracy declared as she drew her gun and checked it “Let’s go and take a look.”

“Are you sure?” the Major asked “Only I am guessing that these guys don't take too kindly to unexpected guests just dropping by unannounced.”

“I have always been one for going where angels fear to tread” Tracy admitted as she pushed open the old gate “It's a bad habit I picked up from my husband.”

“All right” the Major agreed as at his signal, one of his men passed him his SA80 Assault Rifle and some spare ammunition “but I'm coming with you. The rest of you form a perimeter around the site, report anything you find.”

With the Major's men dispersing around the perimeter of the farm buildings, he joined Tracy in advancing up the old track with caution. It must have looked a little odd though as the Major's six foot eight height towered over the diminutive Tracy who barely measured five foot six even in her best uniform.

“You know” Tracy commented quietly to the Major as they approached the farm yard in front of the buildings “This may go down in history as one of my less well advised ideas.”

“I’ve got your back Maam” the Major reassured her as they cautiously entered the farm yard where only a couple of crows nesting in an overhead tree seemed to be watching them.

Crossing the farm yard, they made quickly for the near wall of the main barn adjacent to the old farmhouse before using the cover of it to move along to the main doors which through a combination of age and neglect were barely clinging to their frames and hanging off at a drunken angle.

“Go” Tracy motioned to the Major as they went inside the main barn and trained their guns inside, the flashlight mounted on the Major's rifle illuminating the dark interior and revealing the place to be deserted.

“Nobody home” the Major confirmed “The house?” he asked.

“The house” Tracy agreed as they backed carefully out of the barn and moved along the wall to the door of the old farmhouse.

“On three” Tracy quietly indicated to the Major “One, two, THREE!”

On her word the Major kicked in the farm house door and they proceeded quickly inside.

“Freeze!” Tracy called out as they swept their weapons around inside the old kitchen only to find this too was deserted although the empty bottles and abandoned newspapers and magazines indicated that someone had been here until very recently.

“Hang on” the Major whispered as he heard the sound of movement upstairs, a momentary scabbling sound on the floorboards of the room directly above. The Major pointed upwards to indicate to Tracy where he had heard the sound coming from.

Tracy nodded in understanding and they proceeded to the old staircase where they ascended as quietly as the rickety old wooden steps would allow. At the top of the stairs, they both heard the sound of something moving in the former front bedroom whereupon Tracy took the lead.

“Hold it!” Tracy called as she and the Major flung open the bedroom door and entered the room only to be confronted by cat that in fright scuttled away.

More empty beer and whiskey bottles were to be found here in this room indicating that here too someone had been very recently.

“Looks like there was a party here and we missed it” the Major remarked as he surveyed the abandoned debris.

“Best check the rest of the place to be sure” Tracy suggested.

“Right behind you Maam” the Major confirmed as they left the room to check the rest of the old farm house. As with the rest of the place, a check from room to room showed signs of recent unauthorised occupancy but clearly whoever had been there were now long gone leaving very little behind of any worth to indicate exactly who they were.

“If these guys are as professional as I think they are” Tracy remarked as they returned to the former kitchen and sat down at the old table “I am willing to guess they didn't leave any prints on the bottles or indeed anywhere else.”

“Probably” the Major agreed as he examined one of the newspapers that had been abandoned “Oh dear” he remarked.

“What's wrong?” Tracy looked up worried.

“West Ham lost three two at Fulham last night” the Major confirmed from the newspaper “That's us out of the premiership I reckon.”

“My dad always supported Watford” Tracy remarked casually “God knows why, they were playing like a bunch of muppets last time I looked.”

“I can sympathise” the Major confirmed as he got on the radio “Ok boys” he declared to his men “You can close in now, looks like whatever happened we missed it.”

“Hello” Tracy remarked as she looked down into the old fireplace “This looks like something here” she bent down off the chair she was sitting on to rake through the ashes of a recently set fire to extract a number of partially burnt pieces of paper.

“Lay it out on the table” the Major suggested “I always was good with jigsaws.”

“Looks like what's left of a receipt of some kind” Tracy commented as she tried to rearrange the charred pieces into some sort of sense.

Outside the farm building, the Major's men were heading in towards the farm yard, sweeping their weapons around to ensure that the area was fully clear. It was as one of the men was approaching the back door of the farmhouse that he noticed something seemed out of place and bent down to take a closer look.

“Major!” the Private called into his radio with some urgency as he recognised a carefully hidden explosive charge in the base of the wall of the farm house “This place is booby trapped!”

“Don't move” the Major cautioned Tracy “What ever it is we haven't set it off yet otherwise we would have been blown to bits by now.”

“If you say so” Tracy agreed “You are the expert on big bangs.”

With understandable caution the Major looked around the room carefully until his eyes alighted on something beneath the leg of the chair Tracy was sitting on.

“Oh dear...” the Major remarked.

“Oh dear what?” Tracy asked slightly nervously upon seeing the Major's expression of concern.

“There is a trigger mechanism of some kind beneath the legs of the chair you are sitting on” the Major confirmed “When you sat down, it was armed.”

“And if I get up?” Tracy asked even though she could guess the rest of the answer.

“I reckon you will have about five to ten seconds and then bang” the Major confirmed as he got back on the radio “Listen carefully everyone, back away from the buildings slowly, watch out for hidden trip wires, traps and other unpleasantries, this whole place is wired.”

“Do you have a plan?” Tracy asked as she carefully remained very still on the chair.

“Maybe” the Major responded “First, lets get these pieces of paper safely out of the way” he carefully gathered up the charred fragments of paper they had found and placed them in a clear plastic evidence bag that Tracy produced from her tunic pocket.

“Ok” the Major got up and checked the table carefully “This isn't wired so I am going to move it out of the way so that you have a clear line of sight from where you are now to the door all right?”

“All right” Tracy confirmed as the Major gingerly moved the table out of the way, being careful to look out for any other potential traps or triggers he may be disturbing.

“Right” the Major continued now that the table was clear out of the way “Listen carefully, when I say go, we are going to run very fast out of the door and straight away from the buildings.”

“Shouldn't you go first?” Tracy asked “After all I am the one with my err bum on the trigger, not you.”

“We will do this together” the Major confirmed “When we run, we will have at most ten seconds before this lot goes off, the moment you start to hear the explosion, hit the ground and cover yourself as best as you can, got it?”

“I think so” Tracy responded “On three?” she asked.

“On three” the Major agreed “One, two, THREE!” At that signal, Tracy lifted herself straight off the chair and together she and the Major ran out of the farmhouse door and across the yard as fast as they could. As they reached the gate leading to the driveway, the house and barn behind them erupted in a huge explosion that blew the windows and doors out and shattered the roof into a thousand pieces.

The moment the explosion started, Tracy and the Major threw themselves to the ground where they were showered with raining debris and dust for the best part of a minute.

As soon as the cloud of dust that enveloped the entire farm site had started to dissipate, the Major's men moved in to extract them from the mess.

“Well that was fun” Tracy remarked as she coughed from the dust that had coated her all over “Are you all right Major?” she asked.

“Never been better” the Major confirmed with a wry smile as he got up before helping Tracy to her feet whereupon they looked back at the shattered and wrecked farm buildings.

“Looks like they didn't want anyone finding any evidence I would say” Tracy remarked as they left the scene and headed down the driveway back to the lane.

“Pity for them then we found this first before their firework display wasn't it?” the Major remarked as he extracted the evidence bag containing the charred paper fragments.

“It is indeed” Tracy agreed with a smirk of satisfaction.

“Simon” Tracy called as she entered the Ballroom still heavily covered in cement dust and debris to looks of astonishment from those in the room “Get these checked out and tell me what you find” she passed him the evidence bag containing the charred paper fragments.

“Yes Maam” Fuller confirmed “Erm if you don't mind me asking, what happened to you and the Major only you both seem to be covered in plaster and cement?”

“Just been doing a little rural redecorating” Tracy confirmed “Have we got anything on our friend Mr Devlin yet that is vaguely approaching concrete yet?” she asked.

“He has a very well appointed not to mention very well secured mansion and grounds near Chigwell” Fuller confirmed “However at this very moment according to my friend from MI5, he is currently languishing at his luxurious apartment in Chelsea where tonight he is hosting a dinner party for a number of foreign diplomats and their staff.”

“I just fancy a nice evening out” Tracy remarked wryly “I'll pass by the yard, pick up a fresh uniform and drop by for a drink.”

“Oh there was one other thing but the Commander didn't really want to mention it in case you got worried” Fuller added with some hesitation.

“Simon, in the last two hours I have navigated my way through more boggy woodland than I ever want to see again and had an entire farm yard explode and disintegrate itself all over me” Tracy remarked “Believe me I am all out on my worrying quota for today.”

“Someone tried to assassinate Sir Richard Crowthorne in his hospital ward a couple of hours ago” Fuller confirmed.

“What!” Tracy exclaimed with such ferocity it shook some of the plaster dust loose from her uniform and formed a momentary cloud around her.

“It's all right” Fuller reassured her “Apparently the Commander was warned that they were coming and managed to stop them.”

“Well that is a relief I suppose” Tracy remarked “What happened to the attackers?” she asked.

“The hospital staff patched them up before they were transferred to the secure unit” Fuller explained “May well be worth giving them a going over perhaps?”

“I think I might just do that” Tracy confirmed “See you all later.”

“How can you have a straight better than mine?” the Commander asked as Jack duly collected the winnings of the poker hand he had just won against him and Sir Richard, albeit only consisting of biscuits but the principal was still there,

“Years of practice” Jack confirmed with a smile “How long have you been playing?”

“Since I was about nine” the Commander admitted as he dealt the next hand “My grandfather once played poker in the old Sands Casino in Las Vegas with Frank Sinatra, or at least so he claimed.”

“Next thing you will be telling me your dad played with the Kray Twins” Jack remarked.

“Well actually now you come to mention it...” the Commander wryly admitted.

"Hello love" Tracy called as she entered the ward, interrupting the miniature poker circle.

"Now there is a sight for sore eyes" the Commander responded with delight as they kissed.

"Why is it whenever I am in hospital, I never get a visit like that?" Sir Richard remarked to Jack.

"Are you married?" Jack asked.

"Divorced twice" Sir Richard admitted ruefully.

"Well there you go then" Jack confirmed.

"Do you know you are covered in plaster?" the Commander asked Tracy as he noticed the state she was in.

"Oh erm" Tracy was about to explain but figured that it was best not to complicate matters any more than they already were "It's a long story" she eventually dismissed the enquiry "Anyway I hear you two reprobates had visitors."

"A couple of chaps did drop by for a chat yes" the Commander confirmed.

"They must have meant for it to be rather short judging by the hardware they were carrying" Jack remarked.

"Who's the little sidekick?" Tracy asked.

"Tracy my love" the Commander did the introductions "Meet Jack Thornton, the Arthur Daley and poker king of the children's ward oh and our saviour as it turned out, Jack this is the good wife Tracy, love of my life."

"An honour" Jack greeted Tracy as they shook hands.

"You were the patient who warned my husband about the imminent unexpected guests?" Tracy enquired.

"Just doing my civic duty" Jack confirmed with a smile.

"Be careful around these two" Tracy warned "They play a very sharp game of poker."

"Then I can only assume recent events have put them on tilt" Jack confirmed as he double checked his biscuit winnings with a confident grin.

"I hear your two visitors are holed up somewhere around here?" Tracy asked.

"Three doors down the corridor my dear" the Commander confirmed "Perhaps you would be so kind as to drop in on them and see how they are doing?" he suggested.

"I'll do that" Tracy confirmed "Although I had better be quick" Tracy responded "I have to change my uniform and drop in uninvited on a Mr Devlin and his evening soiree."

"Are you sure that is wise?" the Commander asked cautiously "We don't want to tip him off too early do we?"

"From what I can work out, I would be surprised if he wasn't expecting some sort of visit from us" Sir Richard remarked.

"I am sure that name rings a bell somewhere" Jack commented.

"Give him my regards" the Commander requested.

"I will" Tracy confirmed "Don't worry love" she kissed him in reassurance "I'll be subtle and diplomatic" she smiled knowingly as she left.

"He is going to be in trouble now" Sir Richard remarked in a wry response.

Outside in the corridor, Tracy looked to her right where as expected three doors down there were half a dozen heavily armed officers guarding the secure ward containing the two gunmen.

"Afternoon" Tracy greeted the officers as she arrived "Just popping in for a little chat."

"I don't think they are exactly the chatty type Maam" one of the officers remarked as Tracy entered the room.

"Oh I shouldn't worry" Tracy confirmed determinedly "Just if you hear screaming, don't panic."

"Right..." the officer responded with some concern as Tracy disappeared inside, closing the door firmly behind her.

"Good afternoon gentlemen" Tracy declared with implied menace as she entered the room, her arrival being greeted by ignorant silence from the two restrained gunmen who were handcuffed to their hospital beds.

"I'm overwhelmed by your enthusiasm to co-operate" Tracy responded to the determined silence.

"Ok then" Tracy declared as she moved forwards to the middle of the room with one bed either side "Eenie meenie minie mo...." she went until her finger came to rest pointing to the man on her left.

"You first" Tracy declared stepping forward to the first man and roughly grabbing him by the hair and pulling him upwards.

"Now" she informed directly "Unless you wish to seek additional treatment for lead poisoning" she brandished her gun to back up her point "I suggest you tell me everything you know, how about we start with who is paying your bills?"

"Get the hell off me!" the man demanded.

"I tell you what" Tracy dropped the man back down with little regard for his condition "You have two choices, tell me everything you know or I send in my husband and a couple of my more muscular colleagues and you two can relax and watch as you're kneecaps are used for target practice."

"You wouldn't dare" the second man called from his bed opposite.

"Ah! He speaks as well" Tracy declared "I wonder if you can do any other tricks?" she asked out loud as she went over to him.

"Look if I agree to talk" the second man stated clearly but with obvious concern "We will need to be protected."

"Well I can probably arrange that" Tracy agreed "That is if the information is decent."

"Are you mad?" the first man called seeing his colleague was on the verge of surrendering "We'll be killed!"

"And if you don't talk" Tracy responded "I will make sure that your next twenty years at least are spent in a very dark and miserable place full of some very unpleasant people, and I don't mean East Croydon."

"Basically I work worldwide as a paid mercenary" the second man began with some hesitation "I don't know who is actually running the whole show, only that my old C.O. from my Army days put us together."

"I'm all ears" Tracy prompted "Does this chap have a name?" she asked.

"Colonel Issac Wilberforce" the man finally admitted after Tracy had given him a hard insistent stare.

"What an odd name" Tracy remarked "Well if your conscious decides to remember anything else, feel free to inform my colleagues just outside the door, good day gentlemen."

Outside the ward, Tracy was quickly on to her radio as she walked briskly down the corridor.

"Control from Lima Mike Zero One" Tracy called "Have Commander Fuller hack into the Ministry of Defence and find out about a former Army Colonel by the name of Issac Wilberforce. I want to know all about him by sunset."

"They are late" the Colonel remarked as he consulted his watch, pacing up and down before turning to his radio officer who was sat at a table in the old factory office with his field radio set.

"Call them again" the Colonel prompted.

"Angel team from nest" the radio officer called "Angel team from Nest, report please."

Just as per the last few times over the preceding hour that they had tried raising the men who had been sent to the hospital, there was no response whatsoever.

"Pass me the telephone" the Colonel requested.

"Here you go Sir" the radio officer passed the field telephone across to his superior officer.

After dialling a number, the Colonel waited patiently to be answered. When he was answered, he was surprised to hear the background sound of some sort of social gathering in progress.

"Hello?" Devlin's voice answered over the background noise.

"Good evening Sir" the Colonel called "I regret to inform sir we have a deviation from plan."

"So I gather" Devlin responded "Disappointing I will admit but at least it will keep the authorities busy."

"Should we continue?" the Colonel enquired "There is a potential risk of information leakage here."

"What did these two men know?" Devlin asked.

"Little more than the name of their Commanding Officer" the Colonel confirmed.

"Well then the damage is minimal at worst" Devlin agreed "Meanwhile I suggest you squeeze yourself into your best dress uniform and join us for drinks, we have some business to discuss."

"Save me a vol-a-vent" the Colonel confirmed "I'm on my way."

"Oh this is ridiculous" the Commander declared as he got out of the bed and hobbled over to the wardrobe from where he proceeded to extract his uniform.

"You can't just walk out of here you know" Sir Richard responded.

"I know" the Commander confirmed as he dressed in his rather battered uniform before putting on his gun belt "I am going to need to find some assistance."

"Well I am not much use to you" Sir Richard responded "I am strictly confined to barracks here."

"Don't panic old friend" the Commander confirmed with a knowing grin "I have a cunning plan."

"Oh dear..." Sir Richard remarked with a well experienced worried tone.

"Front desk please" the Commander called on the internal telephone.

"Front desk" came the response a few moments later.

"Ah good evening" the Commander announced whilst semi disguising his voice with a hint of an Irish accent "This is Doctor O'Sullivan up in the Secure Unit, there are a couple of officers who need to speak to a patient who witnessed that incident up here earlier. Can you have Mr Thornton paged to room 2132 please?"

"Yes Doctor" the front desk confirmed "Right away."

Three floors up, Jack was sitting on his hospital bed in the Children's Ward reading when he did a double take at hearing his name being called over the hospital PA system.

"Would Mr Jack Thornton please report to room twenty one thirty two please, Mr Jack Thornton to room twenty one thirty two please" the announcement called.

"That's odd" Jack remarked as he jumped off the bed and quickly dressed.

Using his customary skills, he managed to leave the Children's Ward without being noticed and a few minutes later Jack was confidently walking down the secure corridor where he greeted the officers on guard whom he was now on first name terms with by now as he passed them.

"It's all right" Jack informed the officer outside the ward door "I'm expected."

"All right" the officer responded, opening the door and allowing Jack inside.

"You called?" Jack announced as he arrived in the room.

"I know this will probably be a daft question" the Commander asked as he tried to make the best he could of his uniform "Would you be in the mood to make a little money?"

"How can I be of service?" Jack asked.

"I need a discrete back door route out of this place and I would say you are the best qualified guide in the place" the Commander explained.

"All right..." Jack replied with a slight reluctance "Best way is out of the fire exit, through the old wing and then exit through the service deliveries area out the back."

"You'll have to show me the way" the Commander admitted as he checked his gun and equipment, ensuring he had not left anything he may need behind.

"This way then" Jack announced as he went over to the fire exit door and opened it.

"Don't go away" the Commander called to Sir Richard.

"Very funny..." Sir Richard retorted sarcastically as they left.

“Now apart from a brief meeting earlier today, I only know your wife by reputation but I would have thought it would be fair to say she hasn't exactly approved this little excursion of yours Sir?” Jack asked as they led the Commander down the fire escape stairs and entered the practically abandoned disused wing of the hospital.

“Whatever gave you that idea?” the Commander remarked with a chuckle.

“She reminds me of my mother that's all” Jack explained “She was always very protective of dad and me.”

“You don't like talking about your parents much do you” the Commander commented as they headed down a darkened dusty corridor.

“They were the only family I had” Jack explained with some reluctance “Then one day some drunken toff in a Rolls Royce runs them off the road and legs it and next thing I know I am an orphan with the dubious muppets from Social Services trying to run my life, I decided to tell them to get stuffed and went out on my own bat.”

“Well if you are ever in need of a meal and a cuppa” the Commander responded “You will always be welcome to drop by New Scotland Yard and say hello.”

“Wow...” Jack responded “When was the last time an eleven year old got an invite to Scotland Yard?”

“March 1969” the Commander confirmed with a wry smile “Oh no hang on, I was twelve actually.”

“Oh yes” Jack recalled the story he had read in the Evening Standard a few weeks earlier “So I remember.”

“Are we there yet?” the Commander asked as they turned left into yet another of the seemingly endless identical abandoned corridors.

“Just down the end here” Jack confirmed as they reached the end and a set of double doors “Through here and you are in the deliveries bay and then you can just walk up the path to Westminster Bridge.”

“Thanks” the Commander confirmed “Do me a favour will you lad?”

“Sure” Jack responded.

“Keep an eye on old Sir Richard will you?” he requested.

“No problem” Jack confirmed “Although I am supposed to be coming out of here in a couple of days.”

“Here” the Commander pressed a twenty pound note into Jack's hand “Don't spend it all at once.”

“Pleasure doing business with you Commander” Jack duly tucked the note into his pocket.

“And if you ever get into any bother” the Commander gave Jack his official Security Service business card “Give me a call OK?”

“I might just do that” Jack responded “Be careful Sir, I get the impression these unfriendly gunmen chaps don't respect loyalty and rank like we do.”

“Be seeing you” the Commander duly bid his farewell as he exited out through the double doors. Sure enough on the other side he found himself in the loading bay where the deliveries to the hospital were received. At that time of the evening though it was quiet, only the background noise of air conditioning units and the patter of rainfall disturbing the near silence.

“Nice evening for a walk” the Commander remarked sarcastically to himself as he pulled his tunic closer in around himself and headed up the access ramp to the roadway outside.

The rain was hammering quite loudly on the window of Tracy's office at New Scotland Yard as she entered where she switched on the desk lamp to provide some illumination in the otherwise darkened office.

Quickly she proceeded into the side room where she extracted the only spare uniform left in the wardrobe, that being her best dress one which she placed flat on the desk before using the sink in the side room to wash up.

“I appear to be a trifle plastered” Tracy joked to herself as she looked at her own reflection in the mirror directly above the wash basin. She didn't have time for a full shower so made the best she could to make herself presentable, tossing the battered uniform tunic over onto the side before returning to her desk and sitting behind it.

As she sat back in the seat for a few moments, her mind wandered back to something that had been mentioned about files sent over by MI5 and that she had been looking over them the previous evening when this whole affair had started.

They should have still been on her desk where she left them so Tracy removed the dress uniform, still in its hanging bag off the desk and looked. To her surprise however nearly all the files that had been in the pile she was looking through the previous night had gone, only a small scattering of biscuit crumbs lying on the desk where they had been.

“That's odd” Tracy remarked to herself as she proceeded to look in the desk drawers in case the files had been erroneously put away but again they were not in any of the drawers, indeed the contents that were there seemed to have been disturbed, they were certainly not in the usual organised state that she usually left them in.

Failing to find the files in or on the desk, Tracy got up and went over to the filing cabinets where she duly went methodically through the drawers, once again to no avail.

“Am I going mad?” Tracy asked the photograph of her and the Commander that resided on the desk “Quite probably” she concluded as she left the office and went next door into the Commander's office.

“You wouldn't have taken them would you?” Tracy asked herself for there was no one else there to hear her as she looked around the Commander's office “Of course not, you've been in hospital since last night.”

Sitting behind her husband's desk, she duly looked through the typically disorganised pile of papers and found nothing bar a few memos, and certainly no files of the type she was looking for.

Reaching down to the drawers underneath the left hand side of the desk, she looked inside and apart from the usual clutter that normally resided there, drew another blank.

Looking to the drawers under the right hand side of the desk however, Tracy was going to pass them by as they were usually locked, more to keep the Commander's secret chocolate and biscuit supply secure than to protect any state secrets however it was then she suddenly noticed that there was some distinct damage to the edge of the lower drawer and pulling at the handle revealed it not only to be unlocked but also showing signs that at some point fairly recently, the lock had been forced open.

“Biscuit crumbs...” Tracy pondered as she noticed the badly torn packet of biscuits inside the rummaged through drawer, this being noticeable especially to her as she was well aware that the Commander always took great care of his biscuits, he would never have left them like this.

Taking the packet of biscuits with her, Tracy returned to her own office and tipped some crumbs from it onto her desk alongside the crumbs that were already there where after looking closely she realised that they were one and the same.

“What the hell is going on here?” Tracy wondered out loud until she remembered the hoax chemical alert call at Portcullis House the previous evening. Could it have been a diversion was the thought that occurred to her as she reached across to the telephone and dialled a number.

“Simon?” Tracy called as she was connected through to Fuller who was still working on hacking into bank details and Ministry of Defence records back at the Conference Centre “Do we have CCTV recording on the top floor at the Yard?” she asked.

“Err yes” Fuller confirmed, rather taken by surprise at this request that did not seem to fit with current events.

“Could you possibly pull up the footage from about the time we were all out at that Portcullis House job last night?” Tracy asked “Only I have the distinct impression it was a diversion and we had uninvited guests up here.”

“Anything missing?” Fuller asked as he went over to another computer terminal and accessed the secure CCTV system remotely meaning he was now trying to work on five computers simultaneously which for him was nothing unusual.

“A bunch of files MI5 sent over and half a packet of the Commander's biscuits” Tracy responded.

“Oh the Chief won't like that one bit” Fuller commented “I don't suppose he will be overly delighted about losing those files either.”

“Anything on the tapes?” Tracy asked after chuckling at Fuller's probably all too accurate comment.

“Just winding back to the right bit now” Fuller commented as he ran the footage from four different angles on a split screen display “After you left, the Commander's PA was right behind you” he continued as he hit fast forward and the footage sped quickly forward to the point where he saw someone again “Ten minutes later we have two what look like lift engineers appear, oddly though they appear to be using the stairs.”

“Go on” Tracy prompted.

“Hello...” Fuller remarked as he continued to watch the footage “One each in yours and the Chief's office, looks like they know how to pick locks by the looks of it as well.”

“How long are they in there for?” Tracy asked.

“Tall guy is in the Commander's office for about four minutes, then he exits with what looks like half a dozen files and what do you know, he his munching biscuits the cheeky beggar.”

“Straight into my office to see his chum by any chance?” Tracy wondered.

“Got it in one” Fuller confirmed “They leave back down the stairs three minutes later carrying a holdall of some kind which looks more full than when they arrived.”

“If you get a chance” Tracy requested “Have a go at putting some names to the faces can you and inform Mr Collins that those files his lads sent over to us have gone walkies.”

“Will do Maam” Fuller confirmed.

“I meanwhile have a party to gate crash” Tracy responded as she looked across at her dress uniform “Goodnight.”

Tracy got up and grabbed her dress uniform tunic, putting it on and checking it was straight and properly presented in the full length mirror in the corner of the room before checking her weapon was fully loaded and she had a full compliment of spare ammunition clips before turning out the light and leaving the office.

Passing briefly by the Control Room to say hello, Tracy made her way down by way of the lift to the ground floor and crossed the main reception area to the doors where she looked outside at the continuing miserable wet weather outside.

“Better make a run for it I suppose” Tracy remarked as she pulled in her uniform tunic around herself before making a swift exit out of the building then turning right and heading along Broadway to the nearest entrance to St James Park Underground Station.

She paused in the entrance way for a few moments to purchase a copy of the final edition of the Evening Standard, unaware that she was being observed from the shadows of a shop doorway on the other side of the road.

The Commander observed Tracy with a slightly heavy heart as she disappeared from view, he had wanted to be with her but for now he needed her to continue to think he was safely tucked up in hospital rather than sneaking around with the intent of doing a little investigating of his own.

With Tracy out of sight and heading down into the lower platform levels of the station, the Commander walked with a partial limp and some discomfort up the road and into a side entrance of New Scotland Yard.

As was common for that time of night, the relative quietness of the building meant that he was able to take the lift to the top floor and make it to his office unobserved.

Indeed as he carefully closed the office door once he was inside, the Commander began to wonder if there was anyone on duty around at all.

As Tracy had done just minutes earlier, the Commander noticed the damage to his desk drawer where it had been forced and quickly realised that the files that should have been in there, not to mention one packet of biscuits were missing.

"What the..." the Commander nearly jumped off his chair with surprise when the telephone on his desk started ringing.

The Commander was forced to ponder for a few moments whether he ought to answer it, the logical theory being that the call could only be from someone who knew for certain he was there.

"Hello?" the Commander answered the telephone with a slightly quizzical tone.

"Evening Sir" Fuller called "Popped out for a walk did we?"

"How the hell did you know?" the Commander asked.

"Your Oyster Card popped up on the grid from Westminster to St James Park about ten minutes ago" Fuller explained "And the CCTV picked you up as well, I noticed it whilst checking on something for your wife."

"That something wouldn't by any chance happen to involve one broken into desk drawer, some absent files and my missing biscuits?" the Commander enquired as he peered into the open drawer.

"Yes it would" Fuller confirmed "It turns out that yesterday evening whilst half of the Yard was sent on that wild goose chase to Portcullis House, yours and your wife's office had uninvited guests."

"A break in at New Scotland Yard" the Commander mused "I can see the comical headline in The Sun now."

"What would you say Sir if I told you that it would appear that the two gentlemen who stole your biscuits match the description not only of two of the men seen setting up the phoney road works were Sir Brian got blown up this morning but also that of Hewey and Dewey the deaf and dumb muppets that tried to blow you and Sir Richard Crowthorne away earlier?" Fuller asked.

"Then I would say that we have a potential problem" the Commander remarked "Has anyone from MI5 confirmed what was in those files by any chance?" he asked.

"According to Collins" Fuller looked up at the MI5 man seated alongside him "It was a series of briefing intelligence files on a number of subjects including our new friend Mr Devlin no less."

"Which means he knows we may be on to him in some way" the Commander concluded.

"Apparently the other files covered such diverse subjects as a suspected money laundering operation and something about a suspicious consignment of freight that Interpol have had their eye on" Fuller explained.

"Sounds like riveting reading" the Commander remarked "Hang on, does my wife know about my unauthorised excursion?" he asked.

"I kept schtum on that" Fuller confirmed much to the Commander's relief.

"Thanks" the Commander responded with relief "Do you know where she is going?" he asked.

"I believe she is going over to Devlin's place in Kensington for a chat" Fuller explained "Apparently he is entertaining the great and the good of the City's foreign diplomats, he does a lot of overseas business, legitimate too from what we gather."

"That's a bit dangerous isn't it?" the Commander expressed clear concern that Tracy could be walking into a trap.

"The general consensus of opinion amongst the great and the good here" Fuller looked around the office hopefully "Is that he is not daft enough to try anything on home turf."

"I'll hold you to that" the Commander advised.

"Oh by the way" Fuller quickly added "We have a name on the Colonel who may be running the little freelance military unit that is causing all the havoc."

"Who is he?" the Commander asked.

"Retired Colonel Issac Wilberforce" Fuller read from his screen "I am sending his dossier from the MoD to your fax machine now."

"I have a fax machine?" the Commander demonstrated his usual lack of knowledge about almost any forms of modern technology as he got up and went over to the fax machine in the corner of the office as it started up.

"Not a huge amount on him I admit" Fuller confirmed "But at least we now know what he looks like."

"Hi there..." the Commander responded as he saw the Colonel's picture appear out of the fax machine "This guy was running the shooting party in the Epping Forest last night."

"Well if you should run into him" Fuller advised "be careful, apparently this guy is a walking encyclopaedia of weapons, explosives and tactics."

"Charming fellow" the Commander remarked "If you find out any more, I would appreciate a call, I'll be on the mobile if I can remember how to switch it on."

"Will do Sir" Fuller confirmed "Good night."

The Commander hung up the telephone and returned to his desk where he changed into his fresh uniform before going over to the safe where he extracted a fresh supply of ammunition as he had used much of what he had last night.

A quick look at the picture of Tracy on the desk raised a momentary smile for the Commander before he stuffed the fax he had received into his pocket and left the office.

The rain was still falling incessantly when he came out of the side entrance, however on the way down from the top floor he had picked up an umbrella from lost property which at least protected him from the worse of the fowl weather as he crossed the sodden road and entered the nearest entrance of St James Park Station.

Even inside below ground as he headed to the platform level, the Commander could feel the damp and the cold, not helped by the fact that he had to wait a full five minutes for the next westbound District Line service in the near deserted station where the lateness of the hour combined with the atrocious weather meant that the number of people around was minimal.

As the six car train of refurbished 'D' type stock rumbled into the platform, the Commander stepped forward towards the platform edge and boarded as soon as the doors opened.

Inside the empty carriage, he took a seat and as the train doors closed and it moved off, serious thoughts went through the Commander's mind, many of which gave him a dark sense of foreboding.

The Colonel alighted from the back of a black cab resplendent in full military dress uniform in an exclusive street of Edwardian town houses in the opulent borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

Immediately it was obvious that an event was being hosted here as the sound of classical music from a string quartet could be discerned in the street which was full of parked chauffeur driven luxury cars, many of them displaying diplomatic registration number plates.

Walking quickly across the road and up the short flight of steps to one of the ornate town house doors, the Colonel was met by one of Devlin's domestic staff who duly showed him inside.

"Ah Colonel" Devlin called as he saw his latest guest arrive "Glad you could make it."

"Thank you for the invite" the Colonel responded as he joined Devlin and the small group of distinguished guests with whom he had been in conversation with.

"I believe you know the Ambassador from Val Verde?" Devlin began the introductions.

"Good to see you again Sir" the Colonel shook the ambassador's hand "It's been a while."

"Indeed it has" the Ambassador agreed.

"And this is General Moranda" Devlin introduced the other distinguished looking man in the small group "United Nations advisor to some of our smaller countries in the more lucrative parts of the world south of the equator."

"Always nice to put a face to a name" the Colonel agreed as another warm handshake was exchanged.

"I think it is time that we got down to business" Devlin declared "If you would care to grab a drink and a nibble and join us in the study Colonel."

"I would be delighted" the Colonel confirmed "If you will excuse me?"

With the Colonel leaving them briefly to get some refreshment, Devlin escorted the two guests through the crowd into his well appointed study.

"Feel free to sample the Scotch gentlemen whilst we wait for our friend" Devlin suggested.

A few moments later the Colonel joined them in the study with a small plate of nibbles through which he was making swift progress.

"All that work making you hungry then?" Devlin commented.

"Well its better than the field ration packs I normally have to suffer on the overseas jobs I am more accustomed to" the Colonel remarked.

"Right, to business then" Devlin declared as he took his seat behind his desk and invited the others to take their own seats.

"This is quite an event for me" Devlin announced "The first business deal in the new bolder more trading friendly European Union. It's amazing how useful completely scrapping border checks can be" he laughed.

"As requested" Moranda confirmed as he produced a document from his pocket and passed it across "The first half of our payment for the goods has been deposited in your account in cash, the second and final half will be wired across to you upon delivery of our portion of your shipment."

"Excellent" Devlin confirmed "I have three buyers for this lot of hardware, it is one of the biggest deals I have ever done."

"The same arrangement applies to us also" the Ambassador added as he too passed across a document to Devlin "My associates fighting the military rebels will be most grateful for your products."

"This is the latest generation of military hardware we are talking about here" Devlin explained "Ten years ago it was all surplus Eastern Bloc rubbish, now the business of war uses nothing less than the best state of the art equipment."

"Oh I can vouch for that" the Colonel remarked "My men only use the latest in guns and ammunition, far more effective in any theatre of conflict than anything I have ever used in my experience."

"All we need to do now is arrange the delivery" Devlin confirmed "I believe you all have the details of where the consignments are coming ashore?" he asked.

“Indeed” the Ambassador confirmed, a sentiment agreed with also by Moranda with a nod of the head.

“Colonel” Devlin turned back to the military man present “You will be bringing the Sheik to the handover as well as providing your usual protection against uninvited guests?”

“Indeed” the Colonel confirmed as he recharged his glass from the decanter “I've done work for the Sheik and his family before across the Middle East, he pays up front in cash and neither asks nor answers any awkward questions.”

“If the cash is there we do not care?” Moranda commented.

“Something like that yes” the Colonel responded with a chuckle.

The door bell was heard to ring at that point which caused Devlin to check his pocket watch.

“Must be a late arrival” he remarked as he got up from the desk and looked through the curtain at the doorstep outside to see the back of a uniformed Security Service officer standing there.

“Well what do you know” Devlin commented “I believe that is a fiver you owe me Colonel.”

“Problem?” the Colonel asked sensing something was not quite right.

“You know I said I was expecting the Security Service to come knocking at some point” Devlin remarked “Well it looks like they are here.”

“Fishing expedition?” the Colonel suggested as he joined Devlin at the window and looked outside for himself as the door was opened by the butler and the officer turned to be greeted, revealing that person to be Tracy in her full dress uniform.

“Ah a lady of considerable note and reputation” Devlin confirmed “And dressed for the occasion too, I'm touched.”

“Divisional Commander Tracy Caverner” Tracy introduced herself politely but formally to the butler when the door was opened “National Security, Police and Civil Defence Service, Metropolitan Division.”

“Good evening madam” the butler responded “Do you have an invitation?”

“Try this” Tracy suggested as she produced her warrant card in identification “Is Mr Devlin in, I was hoping to ask him a few questions.”

“Please come in” Devlin called from the study door as he entered the hallway. The butler duly stood aside and allowed Tracy through “I'm Harold Devlin, please come on through, your reputation precedes you.”

“Thank you” Tracy responded as Devlin escorted her into the main front room where the guests were still socialising, the great and the notable mixing together forming a veritable 'Who's Who' of London's establishment and diplomatic society.

“Can I tempt you to a drink?” Devlin enquired.

“Err no thanks” Tracy replied “I'm on duty.”

“Ah, always so business like” Devlin remarked “So what can I do for you my dear?”

“No doubt you will have heard about the attack last night on the VIP convoy in the Epping Forest?” Tracy asked.

“Oh yes” Devlin confirmed with false yet convincing concern and sincerity “Nasty business, I do hope your husband is all right?”

“He's mending nicely” Tracy confirmed “The thing is two of the attackers were shot dead at the scene and when we searched the bodies, we discovered they were armed with particularly uncommon types of automatic weapon.”

“Really?” Devlin remarked.

“We did some checking and discovered that they are made in South Africa and distributed by one of your trading companies” Tracy explained “We hoped that maybe you could help us in tracing how they wound up in the hands of these terrorists, maybe by tracing the original purchaser?”

“Well I would be happy to help” Devlin confirmed maintaining the false but convincing sincerity, little did he know that Tracy's long experience meant she could see right through it although she didn't let on.

“Of course I should point out that I am little more than a legitimate businessman” Devlin continued “I merely trade goods, hardware, equipment, medical supplies, etc across the world all in accordance with international laws. What happens to anything that any of my companies or representatives have sold once the purchaser has taken possession is beyond my control.”

“Still” Tracy replied “It may just be that you can help us at least trace the start of the trail. I kid you not these are very dangerous people.”

“That much is obvious from the reports of recent events” Devlin confirmed “I tell you what my dear, have your people send over the details of the items in question and I will have my people check our records.”

“Thank you Mr Devlin” Tracy responded.

“Ah Colonel” Devlin responded as he was joined by the Colonel “May I introduce Divisional Commander Caverner of the Security Service, Madam this is Colonel Frobisher, an old friend of the family.”

“Colonel” Tracy replied in greeting as they shook hands, she being unaware of the real identity of the smartly presented man standing in front of her or of his relevance and involvement in current ongoing events.

“An honour Madam” the Colonel responded.

“Well I hate to break up the party” Tracy confirmed as she grabbed a snack off the tray of a passing waiter “Duty calls and I have to be getting back.”

“A pity you have to leave us so soon” Devlin responded with false regret.

“I’ll have my people contact your office first thing in the morning” Tracy confirmed “Thank you for your co-operation, good night.”

As Tracy left from the front door of Devlin's town house and got into the passenger side door of a local Security Service patrol car that she had arranged to pick her up, the Commander watched from the shadows of a doorway on the opposite side of the street, having to duck back momentarily when Tracy looked up briefly in his direction when she was getting in the car.

With the Patrol Car pulling away the Commander stepped forward from the shadows out onto the pavement which was still very wet under foot despite the fact that the rain had stopped some minutes earlier.

“Well thank you for a pleasant evening” the Colonel's voice was heard to call as he emerged from the front door of the town house causing the Commander to retreat back into the shadows once more. Looking across the road, he recognised the Colonel from the dossier picture that had been faxed through to him earlier and realised that here was a major opportunity to follow a primary suspect.

The Colonel departed the house and went on foot up the road some three hundred or so yards to the junction where he turned left. Following him discretely a short distance behind him, the Commander had to put up with the discomfort still being felt from his earlier injuries as he attempted to keep up with the Colonel.

A few minutes later the Colonel crossed Sloane Square and headed straight into the main entrance of the Underground Station. The Commander reached the same point less than thirty seconds later and was in time to see the Colonel complete his purchase of a ticket from the window in the booking hall before passing through the barriers and disappearing out of sight down the escalators.

“Evening” the Commander announced at the ticket window.

“Err good evening Sir” the booking office clerk responded, slightly surprised to see the Commander there given recent news and events.

“Military chap just passed through here a few moments ago” the Commander explained “I don't suppose he said where he was going do you?” he asked.

“Oh that army chap with the gold braiding and the medal ribbons?” the ticket office clerk replied “Single to Epping, he had better hurry though, their aren't many more trains going up that way tonight if he doesn't get a move on.”

“Thanks” the Commander responded “Oh if you happen to see a certain female Divisional Commander by the name of Tracy, I was never here.”

“Got it” the ticket office clerk confirmed with a knowledgeable smile.

As the Commander passed his Oyster Card over the yellow reader to let him through the barriers however, his plan to evade Tracy failed. Even as he was walking down the steps to the platform, the bleeper in Tracy's tunic pocket went off causing her to extract it and examine the alert code displayed on the small green LCD panel.

“Why am I not surprised” Tracy commented as she reached for her radio whilst the officer driving continued on the journey back to New Scotland Yard.

“Something wrong Maam?” the officer asked.

“Just a hunch paying off” Tracy confirmed with a wry smile “Lima Mike Zero One to Control, come in please.”

“Control receiving” came the speedy reply.

“Can someone have the two officers on duty in the hospital secure unit go into room 2132 and confirm that my husband isn't there please?”

“Will do Maam” the Control Room confirmed.

“There is no way he can fold” Jack commented as he sat up on what should have been the Commander's bed watching the late night poker programme on the television with Sir Richard “He's pot committed now.”

“Then its all in I would have thought” Sir Richard agreed however their debate was to be interrupted as the two guarding officers from the VIP Protection Unit entered the room.

“Control from Victor Papa Eight Three” one of the officers called on the radio as he surveyed the room “Inform the Divisional Commander she was right unless the Commander has shrunk to the size of a twelve year old.”

“Do you mind” Jack retorted sarcastically “I'm eleven actually.”

The eastbound District Line service for Barking continued its uneventful journey until it reached Mile End where the Commander in the fourth car from the front observed the Colonel alight from the next car up.

“Well I'll give this to you” the Commander commented to himself “You know your tube connections.”

As the doors of the District Line train were about to close, the Commander quickly alighted, crossing the platform to the opposite side where services on the eastbound Central Line ran from. Using one of the vertical green and white tiled pillars as cover, the Commander ducked his head around the corner for a moment to check that the Colonel was indeed waiting as he expected for one of the last eastbound Central Line services of the night, running all the way to the furthest point of the line, the terminus at Epping itself.

At that time of night the gaps between services is greater so it was some six or seven minutes before the Central Line service, a eight car train of 1992 type tube stock came into the platform and stopped, opening all of the large red painted doors simultaneously so that passengers could board and alight.

“This train is all stops to Epping via Woodford” the driver announced over the train tannoy, change here for District Line eastbound services to Barking and Upminster as well as westbound to Tower Hill, Embankment, Westminster, Victoria and Earl's Court.”

By the time the announcement had finished, the Colonel had boarded the fifth car from the front and the Commander duly followed boarding the next one down.

Sitting down inside the fairly empty tube carriage, the Commander picked up a discarded newspaper to pass the time as the train moved off. The next two stops at Stratford and Leyton passed without incident or the Colonel showing any signs of leaving his seat, however at Leytonstone, the Commander became aware as the train doors opened that he now had company as a familiar face joined him, taking a seat directly opposite.

“Good evening Sir” Commander Cassini, the head of the specialist undercover surveillance unit of the Service announced “Your wife is not a happy bunny.”

“Fancy meeting you here” the Commander responded “Oyster Card trace?” he asked.

“She had you tagged through the system” Cassini confirmed “She figured you might get bored, slip out and do a little bit of freelance investigation when she wasn't looking.”

“I thought you were working on that big Hatton Cross drugs ring surveillance job?” the Commander asked as the train moved off and continued its journey heading north clattering over the point work beyond Leytonstone station.

“I was on my way home for a cup of cocoa” Cassini admitted “Your wife asked me if I wouldn't mind running into you on the way, make sure you were all right.”

“All things considered” the Commander commented “I've had better weeks.”

“So I heard” Cassini confirmed “Nasty business all round, so I take it you are following someone connected with this mess?”

“The Colonel who seems to be Devlin's bag man is one car up” the Commander motioned with his head to his right, in the direction of the next carriage.

“Full dress uniform, you can't exactly miss him can you?” Cassini commented as he looked through the connecting door window briefly “So he is the man with the weapons and the armed nutters then?”

“Some very well trained and motivated armed nutters” the Commander confirmed “Well financed too.”

“I'm off at Woodford” Cassini explained “Any message for the wife?” he asked.

“Mine or yours?” the Commander joked “Well give yours my regards and tell mine that I love her and that the Colonel chap she met at Devlin's place is our man and he is heading back to the Epping area.”

“Do you want some transport made available at Epping?” Cassini asked.

“An unmarked motor and an officer would be useful” the Commander confirmed.

“I'll see what I can do” Cassini replied.

“Morning Jim” Fuller called as he entered the side room of the Conference Centre where the forensics and Scenes of Crime experts had set up a temporary laboratory for the examination of any forensic evidence connected with the case.

“Morning?” James Fenton, the head of the Forensic Services Division remarked as he looked up from the microscope to which he seemed to have been attached for hours “Oh yes I see what you mean” he confirmed as he checked his watch to see the time was now one minute past midnight.

“I was just about to turn in” Fuller explained “Thought I would drop in when I saw the light still on and see if you found anything.”

“Well my colleagues in the Bomb Squad have confirmed that the explosive used in the Whitehall bomb comes from a batch manufactured in the far east, China to be precise” Fenton passed across a report folder containing the details “Rarely used this side of the Arabian Gulf as a rule so it was specially imported by someone.”

“Interesting” Fuller commented.

“Should have more details on batch, supplier, buyer, etc by sunrise” Fenton confirmed “The other thing is Commander Caverner's burnt offerings from this afternoon” he went over to an adjacent light table and switched on the built in illumination to light up the pieces of charred paper that had been found and recovered from the farm house by Tracy.

“I see you managed to do something with it then” Fuller remarked.

“Well we managed to put the pieces back to where they were originally” Fenton replied “As you can see with a little treatment from our box of tricks we have managed to recover some of the writing on them. What they mean however is down to you seeing as you are the document and computer expert around here.”

“Definitely some form of dispatch note of some kind” Fuller commented as he looked at the fragments.

“Try this” Fenton passed him a printed scan of the fragments “Far more user friendly, plus you won't get soot on your computer.”

“Thanks” Fuller confirmed “Now I just have to find the paper trail this belongs to and follow the rest of it.”

“Might I suggest a good night's sleep first?” Fenton remarked “You look like hell if you don't mind me saying so.”

“You're probably right” Fuller agreed “I doubt anything else will happen tonight, even crooks need their beauty sleep.”

The mandatory speed limit for a station with a terminating platform meant the train ran slowly into the platform at Epping, coming to a halt before the doors were opened and the last train of the night terminated.

Only one passenger initially alighted, the Colonel who proceeded directly to the station exit. Outside the small station building, a dark green Land Rover with one of his men was waiting to collect him. As he got in and the Land Rover departed, the Commander emerged from the station exit and looked to his right to see the vehicle heading up the sloping approach road to the main turn off.

“Ahem!” Tracy called as she stepped forward from the shadows behind the Commander who turned around and greeted her appearance with mixed emotions, delight at seeing her but dread at what she was about to say about his little escapades.

“Fancy meeting you here love” the Commander responded slightly hesitantly.

“Don't worry” Tracy responded as she stepped forward and they embraced warmly “I should have known you wouldn't let this lie.”

“Much as I hate to tear myself away from you love” the Commander remarked “But aren't we losing sight of our Colonel friend?”

“Let me introduce you to a little friend of mine” Tracy showed the Commander to the unmarked car parked nearby. As they got in, Tracy switched on a little screen set in the lower dashboard between the driver and passenger seats.

“Oh very clever” the Commander commented as even his less than sharp mind for technology recognised that this was a tracking device system.

“Little present from our friends at MI5” Tracy confirmed “We can follow that Land Rover wherever it goes.”

“Well I doubt that anything is going to happen tonight” the Commander commented “As long as we have this on them I think we can safely call it a night.”

“Great minds think alike” Tracy confirmed as she started the engine and drove off “Are you all right love?” she enquired.

“Tired, battered and bruised but I'll live” the Commander responded “More so now that I am back with you.”

“Oh you old romantic” Tracy giggled “Don't worry, the Prime Minister has insisted we have use of the Presidential Suite at the Conference Centre Hotel so we can snuggle down and I'll kiss you better.”

“Now that I like the sound of” the Commander responded “I don't suppose you have any injuries I could kiss better do you?” he asked.

“I'll make some up!” Tracy laughed.

For the Colonel, the warehouse that Devlin had found for him and his men near Epping was the third base in as many days, the theory being that to keep moving would keep them one step ahead of the authorities sufficiently long enough for them to complete their goals.

“I think I preferred the old factory” the Colonel remarked as he looked around the rather uninspiring industrial building.

“We are set up upstairs Sir” the Colonel's officer who had driven him here from the station at Epping indicated upwards.

“Well let's go then Sergeant” the Colonel duly responded as he followed his officer up the stairs. As he headed upwards, the Colonel looked down at the warehouse floor where in the dark he could just make out the large rectangular outlines of a number of sea containers stacked up like silent rusting metal statues.

“The goods are here then” the Colonel commented as he was led into the offices where he found his men relaxing.

“Arrived about two hours ago” the Sergeant confirmed “The usual perimeter security is in place, no one is getting within at least two miles of here without us knowing about it.”

“Excellent” the Colonel responded “Do us a favour will you, stick the kettle on while I make a telephone call?”

For Fuller, the original intention to retire for the night was long forgotten ever since he had been handed the reconstructed document earlier. Checking the readable details carefully through the computer and tracing its origins was just the sort of puzzle he enjoyed solving which meant he was still at his computer in the now near deserted Ballroom whilst everyone else had either retired to their beds or gone home for the night.

“North Korea?” Fuller remarked to himself as he checked a manifest of a cargo ship that had sailed some eight weeks earlier, where on its journey across the Far East it had made calls at several ports of interest.

As Fuller continued to work in the Ballroom, out the front of the Conference Centre Tracy and the Commander arrived through the main entrance to find the place almost deserted bar a few patrol officers on roving guard duty and the night porter.

“Bustling little metropolis isn't it?” the Commander remarked wryly as arm in arm they walked across the ornate marble floored reception area towards the large double doors of the Ballroom.

“Take a look at this then love” Tracy showed her husband the extensive operations and investigation room that she had had set up in the Ballroom.

“Is there anyone left at Scotland Yard at all?” the Commander asked as he looked around the darkened Ballroom and did a quick estimate of how many desks there were in there.

“Not many” Tracy admitted “and I managed to drag along half of the Army and MI5 to this little party as well.”

“OK my dear” the Commander admitted “I'm impressed.”

“Thank you” Tracy responded with a kiss on the cheek.

“Remind me to compliment you more often” the Commander responded with a grin, it was then that he noticed the glow from a computer coming through the crack in the door which led to one of the side rooms “Looks like someone is still hard at it” he commented.

“Fiver says it’s Simon” Tracy responded.

“No bet” the Commander replied “Too much of a dead cert” he explained as they walked across the Ballroom floor, snaking their way through the maze of furniture and equipment towards the door.

At the door, Tracy opened it very slowly and they both peered around the corner where sure enough they saw Fuller concentrating intently on one of his bank of four computer screens.

“Boo!” the Commander called making Fuller almost jump out of his seat in shock.

“What the?” he called out.

“Don't panic” Tracy declared as they entered the room and joined him “It's just the ghost of Christmas past” she giggled.

“Oh that's all right then” Fuller sat back relieved “If you don't mind me saying so Sir, aren't you supposed to be in hospital or something?”

“I'll shall be having words with him about that later” Tracy responded with a mock scowl.

“So anyone want to bring me up to speed on world events?” the Commander asked as he took a seat.

“So far we have a name for our military friend as you know” Fuller confirmed as he passed across the full dossier on the Colonel “Conveniently he has worked as a freelance military advisor in several of the far flung parts of the world that our new buddy Devlin or one of his affiliates has sold so called 'Technology and Operational Hardware' to.

“Well that fits” the Commander agreed “The Colonel was over at Devlin's place tonight.”

“Except that Devlin introduced him to me with a false name” Tracy added “I got the impression though that he and a few others weren't there just to comment on which is their favourite variety of party snacks.”

“A deal of some kind?” the Commander remarked.

“Except according to our friends from MI5 and MI6, Devlin doesn't do any business in the UK or Western Europe” Tracy responded “He has always kept his dealings in the Middle East, Africa and the far east, usually with the sorts of countries run by two bit tin pot dictators.”

“Maybe he has plans to expand” Fuller remarked “If he had he would need some form of influential connection in Government and our circles as well which given how well informed they have been so far suggests he has.”

“Did you get anywhere tracing the history of the people in the convoy?” Tracy asked.

“The Deputy Mayor before he achieved the high ranks of town hall power was an advisor to the United Nations” Fuller passed across a piece of paper “Amongst the various things he did was provide advice to certain countries on how to apply for United Nations funding to help them out of desperate economic disaster.”

“Let me guess” the Commander put his best cynical mode on “These same countries being the ones that then used the UN aid to buy weapons and start civil wars with their neighbours?”

“Got it in one” Fuller agreed “And you can probably guess who was touting around his gun and ammo shop.”

“This Devlin character is very clever” Tracy remarked “I only met him briefly but I have seen enough slimy operators in my time to know that he can have his tracks covered with a click of the fingers.”

“Of course according to the MI5 intelligence” Fuller continued “All of the more suspect deals that they have tried to connect Devlin with have always been through fairly anonymous intermediaries and usually in cash washed through numerous levels of banks and off shore money pits.”

“The more levels you put between the merchandise and the cash in your pocket, the harder it is to prove” the Commander remarked.

“And if he has influential friends and contacts in the right places...” Fuller added.

“...which he probably has as money talks and more money talks louder...” Tracy cut in.

“...then I think it would be safe to say he is going to get away with it every time” Fuller concluded.

“Not always” Tracy added “Didn't you say there was some investigation or something a few years back that almost implicated him. Something about a key witness disappearing on a yacht?”

“The Hendon Inquiry” Fuller confirmed “Some Government junior minister got wind of a potential scandal involving UK citizens selling arms and other equipment to some of the less popular countries in the world from where they were finding them in the hands of certain extremist groups.”

“So no doubt this minister thought he would make a name for himself and blow a whistle or two” the Commander commented.

“It was bogged down by imposed press black outs, missing witnesses and legal arguments for the best part of two years” Fuller explained “Then there was a change of Government, at the same time the key witness did his disappearing act in the English Channel along with all of his evidence and the whole enquiry was quietly scrapped but not before the British taxpayer had forked out fifteen million quid in costs.”

“Ouch” Tracy responded.

“Of course the really interesting bit is what happened to a couple of the key players” Fuller continued “The enquiry was chaired by Sir Brian Fenshaw, he of the big explosion in Whitehall yesterday whilst the junior Minister who kicked the whole thing off later went on to become the political and security advisor to the Mayor.”

“And as if by coincidence he just happened to be in the convoy when boom” Tracy concluded.

“We still have someone on the inside feeding this guy information though” the Commander added “We need to find out who that is.”

“What's that?” the Commander motioned towards the screen on which was the scan that Fuller had been working on.

“This is what I would describe as a key piece of the puzzle” Fuller explained “Forensics managed to put it back together from the remains brought to them this afternoon.”

“It's the charred document that I found in the fireplace at the old farm cottage they had been using” Tracy explained “The Major and I managed to rescue it before the place blew up.”

“Blew up?” the Commander responded with surprise.

“It was booby trapped” Tracy confirmed “I sort of set it off” she sheepishly admitted “Boom....”

“And I thought I was the unsubtle one” the Commander commented.

“It's a cargo document” Fuller explained “Admittedly not all of it is here or legible but so far I have managed to trace it to a container that left on a ship from China about eight weeks ago, I'm still working on tracing who, what, where, why and when though.”

“That reminds me” Tracy interrupted “Where did the Colonel and my tracking device go after we lost them at Epping Station.”

“Good question” Fuller responded as he went over to another computer screen and called up the tracking system “Looks like he is on his way back towards South London if this is right.”

“All right” the Commander looked at his old pocket watch “Time for bed” he declared “That includes you” he insisted to Fuller.

“Can't sleep without Jennifer around” Fuller admitted “She is on guard in Downing Street at the moment.”

“Well in that case” the Commander replied “Keep an eye on that flashing dot, when it stops, have the location checked out and then first thing we are going to knock on their door.”

“Thanks for the tip off mate” the Colonel called over the telephone as he relaxed back in a chair in the warehouse office “That should keep them occupied in the morning.”

“Anytime” the contact on the other end of the telephone responded before hanging up.

“Well that was sneaky” the Sergeant commented “Following you and tagging the vehicle like that.”

“I have to admit that was a rather clever move on the part of Divisional Commander Caverner” the Colonel agreed as he poured himself a drink “And it would appear we have the Administrator General himself back in the game.”

“We could eliminate them” the Sergeant tentatively suggested.

“Not enough time” the Colonel confirmed “By this time tomorrow the whole job will be wrapped up and we will be sitting on a beach somewhere counting the takings, besides thanks to that tracking device, the authorities will have plenty of blind alleys to distract them whilst we are busy.”

“If the Commander is worth one tenth of his reputation” the Sergeant remarked “Then it is highly likely he won't be happy.”

“If all goes according to plan and our sources keep up their end of the deal then we shall never have to find out” the Colonel confirmed as he poured another drink for himself and one for his Sergeant “Now tell me about the handover tomorrow.”

“I've got an advance team on site now” the Sergeant confirmed as he placed a large scale map on the table between them “Nice rural location, no nearby residences, high security fence and observation points with views in each direction for some considerable distance.”

“Looks good” the Colonel agreed.

“Thanks to the flat terrain we have full three hundred and sixty degree coverage for at least three miles in every direction” the Sergeant continued “A camouflage wearing mouse couldn't get past us.”

“Local law enforcement?” the Colonel asked.

“Two local patrol officers based in this village” the Sergeant indicated on the map “Twenty minutes away at least and even then they only have handguns and a Ford Fiesta, no match for our hardware.”

“Of course that is even assuming they know this place exists” the Colonel added “It's ex MoD and not on any of the regular maps.”

“Well if we do get any uninvited guests” the Sergeant confirmed “They won't be staying long.”

“Hmmm” the Colonel seemed unsure or uneasy.

“Something wrong Sir?” the Sergeant asked sensing his superior officer's discomfort.

“It's just that I don't like killing Security & Police Service officers if I can help it” the Colonel confirmed “After all they are doing a job the same as us.”

“Only I suspect we get paid more” the Sergeant added.

“Indeed” the Colonel responded “So let's hope tomorrow goes nice and smooth.”

“I'll drink to that Sir” the Sergeant agreed.

"When they said presidential, they were not joking" the Commander remarked as he entered the huge well appointed apartment rather than a room as such.

"Apparently this room has played host to the best part of forty different heads of state over the years" Tracy confirmed, "That probably means there is only about a dozen dormant listening devices lurking in here."

"Hellloooo!" the Commander called out with a mock wave.

"Come here" Tracy instructed the Commander "Let's have a look at the state of you."

"Careful" the Commander urged as, sat on the edge of the bed, Tracy helped him off with his uniform tunic and shirt to reveal quite a few heavily bandaged injuries.

"Good grief" Tracy exclaimed upon seeing the extent of just the visible injuries "Don't take this the wrong way love but you're a mess."

"I've had worse" the Commander was forced to admit "Not for a while mind, besides I suspect my warranty expired long ago."

"You made it null and void the moment you signed up for this line of work" Tracy remarked "Why do we do this?" she asked.

"Well it certainly isn't the money" the Commander confirmed as he flopped back to lie on the bed where Tracy joined him alongside, grimacing a little as he aggravated another injury.

"It's not like we don't have a good life together" Tracy added "We can't live without each other."

"Absolutely" the Commander agreed as he gingerly rolled over onto his side facing Tracy and kissed her.

"A shower and then bed?" Tracy suggested.

"Sounds like a good idea to me" the Commander agreed.

Ten minutes later, the couple were both showered and refreshed with Tracy applying fresh bandages to her husband's wounds.

"Where did you learn to do that?" the Commander asked.

"My grandmother was a hospital matron all her life" Tracy explained "I picked up a few things from her."

"Looks a pretty good job to me" the Commander commented upon seeing her handy work "So why did you not become a nurse then yourself?" he asked.

"I discovered there was no opportunity for my three favourite pastimes" Tracy explained with a giggle "Riding motorbikes, shooting guns and putting the wind up politicians."

"I can agree with that" the Commander freely admitted.

"Speaking of hospitals" Tracy added as she finished bandaging "What's the story with your new best friend?"

"Who?" the Commander responded as he lay back on the bed.

"The little fella with the mobile goods and information shop" Tracy replied "Not to mention a sideline in eliciting poker games."

"Oh Jack" the Commander realised "He really is a bit of a jack the lad isn't he?"

"He saved yours and Sir Richard's bacon earlier" Tracy remarked "Sounds like someone who knows his stuff."

"Well all I have managed to get out of him is that he lost his parents in a hit and run accident a couple of years back on the Marylebone Road" the Commander responded.

"I vaguely remember that one" Tracy recalled the incident.

"Apparently he has spent the time since then on his own living off his wits and skills" the Commander confirmed as he let out a poorly stifled yawn.

"Haven't Social Services found a foster home or something for him?" Tracy asked.

"I got the distinct impression he is none too impressed by them, he seems to have chosen to do it himself" the Commander remarked as he settled down and put an arm around Tracy.

"It doesn't seem right somehow" Tracy mused.

"Well I told him if he gets into any bother to give me a call" the Commander explained "I think I might run his name through the system if I ever get back to the office though, someone ought to be looking out for him."

"Another lost sheep in the system" Tracy remarked.

"What time is it?" the Commander asked looking around.

"Quarter to two" Tracy confirmed "We have to up again in a little over four hours."

There was no response from her husband as Tracy returned her watch to the bedside table. When she rolled over to face him she was forced to smile sweetly as she observed that the Commander had slipped away into sleep.

"Sleep tight love" Tracy called quietly as she turned out the light.

"Mr Fuller, good morning" the Major called "Do you ever sleep?" he asked out of idle curiosity as he passed across a much welcome cup of fresh coffee that he had brought for him.

"Oh thanks" Fuller responded, taking the coffee with much appreciation "I've been up all night working on this little puzzle."

"I see you managed to put the document back together" the Major remarked seeing the reconstruction on one of Fuller's screen "Did you find anything out about it?"

"You remember that rather tasty selection of hardware we found on our dead shooters back in the forest?" Fuller asked.

The Major nodded in agreement.

"Well after a lot of paperwork trail following" Fuller continued to explain "It transpires those guns were part of a consignment of twelve containers that left a general trading and export company in China eight weeks ago."

"This is part of the paperwork for that shipment?" the Major asked.

"Two points" Fuller confirmed "Now then, these containers of what is euphemistically called 'machine parts' on the manifest left on the container ship 'Omra Star' and headed generally speaking west across the Indian Ocean dropping off a single container from the shipment at each of North Korea, Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates and Morocco before docking at Felixstowe just over a week ago."

"Some particularly hostile destinations there" the Major commented "So where did the containers go from there?"

"I don't know" Fuller was forced to admit "I do know they were unloaded at Felixstowe upon arrival and left the port a few hours later but beyond that..." Fuller shrugged his shoulders.

"Given the nature of the small amount of contents we do know about" the Major remarked "It doesn't bear thinking about what else was being carted about."

"That reminds me" Fuller reached over to the other side of his desk and retrieved a file "This guy ring any bells perchance?"

"Well there is a blast from the past" the Major remarked as he opened the file to be confronted with photograph of the Colonel at the front of his official Ministry of Defence file.

"Friend of yours?" Fuller asked as he observed the Major read through the file with obvious interest.

"The Colonel here was my instructor at Sandhurst more years ago than I care to remember" the Major explained "When he left the Army, oh about fifteen years ago now he went private freelance. He's good, very good."

"And he is the guy in charge of our local friendly military nutters" Fuller confirmed.

"In which case we have a problem" the Major responded "I don't suppose we happen to know where he is now do we?" he asked.

"Right there" Fuller pointed to a screen on which a steadily flashing green dot on a map showed the current stationary location of the tracking device "Well in theory that is where he is at least."

"Looks like I had better give my boys a wake up call" the Major declared "It would appear that there is some heavy duty door kicking to be done."

"Wakey wakey..." Tracy called gently as she attempted to wake the Commander by waving a fresh steaming cup of tea beneath his nose.

"Oh dear..." the Commander wearily responded as he gradually woke up and looked around only to smile as he alighted on the much welcome sight of Tracy smiling sweetly and holding a cup of tea.

"Welcome back dear" Tracy announced "I thought I was going to have get a brass band in to wake you up for a moment there."

"I was having this lovely dream" the Commander remarked "I was kicking in the door of Ten Downing Street to rescue you in full medieval knights armour, riding in on a white charger."

"Full damsel in distress mode" Tracy commented as she passed the Commander his tea "I like that, did you get the girl though?"

"Didn't get that far" the Commander confirmed with regret "I was too busy running through an army of black armour clad ministers when I woke up."

"Always happens when you get to the interesting bit" Tracy remarked "Come on White Knight, off your horse and eat your breakfast."

"Why is it they make croissants curly?" the Commander asked as he joined Tracy at the small breakfast table out on the balcony as the sky turned dark red with the approach of sunrise.

"Well that must rank as odd query of the week" Tracy remarked with a giggle.

"Curiosity my love" the Commander explained "It's kind of in the job description."

"I had some fresh uniforms brought over overnight" Tracy nodded to the two suit bags hanging up nearby on the inside of the balcony doors "and apparently Simon has got the Major and his boys warmed up and ready to go as soon as I give the word."

"Am I allowed to come along?" the Commander asked.

"If I said no, you are too badly injured still, you would only sneak along anyway" Tracy responded with a knowing grin.

"You know me too well" the Commander was forced to admit.

"I'm your wife" Tracy responded "It's in the job description love."

A polite sounding knock at the hotel room door interrupted the couples amusing conversation.

"I'll go love" the Commander confirmed as he got up, giving Tracy a kiss before walking back inside and across the room, pausing on the way to collect his gun from beneath the pillow.

"Morning" the Major announced as the Commander opened the door "I hope I am not disturbing you?"

"You must be Major Ford" the Commander greeted him as he opened the door wider "Come in please."

"I won't trouble you" the Major insisted "I just want to let you know your Commander Fuller has identified the likely location of our friend the Colonel and I have a helicopter full of my lads ready to go as soon as you give the word."

"Sounds like we are going to have an interesting morning" the Commander agreed "We'll be down in ten minutes."

"See you there" the Major confirmed before departing whereupon the Commander joined Tracy and helped her on with her uniform tunic.

"More helicopters" the Commander remarked "Oh joy..."

"Relax darling" Tracy responded as she passed her husband his fresh uniform "It's like falling off a bicycle."

"But I can't ride a bicycle" the Commander retorted with concern.

"Here, make sure you wear this" Tracy insisted passing him a bullet proof vest.

"I hate these things" the Commander remarked regretfully.

"Listen love" Tracy stared into her husband's eyes directly, seeing him melt into submission as a result "I've nearly lost you once already this week, please don't argue with me on this."

"Throw in a kiss and it is a deal" the Commander relented.

"Fair enough" Tracy agreed before they kissed "Come on, lets go catch some bad guys."

"Yes dear" the Commander confirmed as he put his uniform tunic on over the vest and returned his gun to the holster.

"Ok ladies and gentlemen" Fuller announced to the officers gathered "Eyes down for a full house."

As he got the full attention of the various personnel present in the Ballroom for his briefing, he was joined by Tracy, and to some surprise from those present, the Commander.

"Shall I?" Fuller gestured ahead.

"Be my guest" Tracy confirmed.

"The likely location for our strike team would appear to be this factory near Deptford" Fuller announced as on the large projection screen behind him, a map with the location marked with a dot gave way to a zoomed in aerial photograph of the site which he had managed to source off of the Internet earlier.

"Although disused" he continued, "this former factory is complete and highly complex with numerous sub buildings, cellars and basements, a nice place for an ambush if they suspect we are coming which I almost certainly expect they do."

"Who owns this undesirable little piece of real estate?" the Commander asked.

"An investment company who list as one of their principal shareholders a certain Mr Devlin no less" Fuller confirmed.

"Small world isn't it?" Tracy remarked.

"Major?" Fuller turned to the uniformed military man to his left.

"Thank you" the Major responded as he rose from his seat "Following the various previous encounters with these gentlemen over the last few days, understandably extreme caution is to be used when we enter these premises."

The Major put a local map up on the screen with a plan of the building "At the last location we ran into them, the place was very cleverly booby trapped."

"Don't remind me..." Tracy remarked quietly to her husband.

"Ah yes" the Commander whispered back in response "The plaster incident..."

"Therefore what I propose is that the Security & Police Service forms a watertight perimeter around the premises whilst my boys go into the site and check for any unpleasant surprises" the Major continued "Then when we give the all clear, we shall flood the place and hopefully take them unawares."

"Let me emphasise" the Commander announced at that point "We are dealing with highly trained, professional, equipped and motivated individuals here" he confirmed "Believe me I speak from experience here that these guys have no scruples whatsoever about killing."

"Right" Tracy declared as she took over the briefing "I shall be running things from the Mobile Operation Unit Gold Control which will be located here" she indicated a park on the map about a half mile distant from the target location.

"Bob from Armed Response will be Gold One and will be leading on the ground with the Major as Gold Two" she continued "and no doubt my husband will be in there no matter how much I badger him."

The audience laughed whilst the Commander pretended to look upwards all innocently.

"Helicopter and vehicles leave from the side entrance in ten minutes" the Major declared "Let's saddle up shall we?"

With that declaration, the officers in the room like a wave moved out with the senior officers leading the way through the Conference Centre complex to the side exit where the Commander duly looked on with apprehension as the large Army Chinook type helicopter with its distinctive double rotors came in low overhead and landed on the tennis courts.

"All aboard" the Major declared as he and his men led the way and boarded the helicopter with Tracy and the Commander following.

"Don't let go of my hand no matter what" the Commander pleaded quietly to Tracy.

"I knew you were going to say that" Tracy replied as she reaffirmed her grip on his hand in reassurance before they boarded the helicopter.

"Right everyone better belt up" the Major declared as the Commander was the last to take a seat on board.

"I can imagine myself saying that in a meeting at the Home Office" the Commander remarked wryly as the helicopter took off and his apprehension grew markedly.

"Relax Sir" the Major reassured him "I've been up in these things a thousand times."

"It's not the up bit I am worried about" the Commander admitted "It's the coming down again!"

A fifteen minute flight across the centre of London during which the Commander almost crushed Tracy's hand as he was holding on to it so tightly soon saw them land at the planned location, a public park a short distance away from the target location and closed off to the public by local officers so that the helicopter could land safely.

"Thank God for that" the Commander responded with gratitude as he alighted from the aircraft a lot faster than he had boarded it. Once off, the Major assembled his troops together whilst Tracy and the Commander went over to the Mobile Operations Unit which was set up and waiting in the side street nearby.

"Morning Maam, Sir" Bob, the tall and heavily built Chief of the Armed Response Unit called as he met them and they boarded the vehicle "I've got as many of the boys and girls as I could round up ready to roll at your command."

"Lovely" Tracy responded as she went to the map table and surveyed a plan of the site "Have you been briefed on what is occurring?"

"Only that we are kicking in some doors and the Army boys are leading the way" Bob confirmed.

“All right” Tracy declared “Here is the plot” she indicated on the plan “This old factory complex is we believe being used as a base by the bunch of gun packing loonies who we have had a spot of bother with over the last few days.”

“Interesting” Bob responded “I believe we have a few scores to settle with them.”

“You can say that again mate” the Commander agreed as he felt his injuries that were still giving him severe discomfort.

“The Major and his lads are going to go in first and check the area for booby traps and any other nasty surprises” Tracy continued “Meanwhile your guys are going to form a perimeter around the outside of the site, catch any runners we may have and then move in when we get the all clear.”

“Nice simple gig” Bob agreed “I think we can handle that with no bother.”

“One other thing” Tracy added “My husband here is insisting that he goes in with them” she gave the Commander a knowing look “I want you to stick to his side like glue and make sure no one puts any extra holes in him.”

“Cost you breakfast Sir” Bob remarked aside to the Commander.

“Deal” the Commander agreed, knowing well that Bob shared his fondness of a good fry up.

“Right, lets make this happen” Tracy declared

“Tracy” the Commander called just before he was about to leave “I love you.”

“Come here” she responded whereupon they kissed “Right, now get going you sentimental lump and don't get yourself shot please?”

“I'll try love” the Commander admitted as he and Bob left.

“Right then” Tracy picked up the radio headset “Gold Control to Gold Two, Major are you ready to roll?”

Outside the Mobile Operations Unit, the Commander and Bob went over to the Armed Response Unit support vehicle, a large armour plated van where the rest of Bob's team were waiting already armed and in full body armour.

“You got a vest on Sir?” Bob asked the Commander.

“Way ahead of you” the Commander confirmed “The wife insisted earlier this morning.”

“Sensible lass” Bob agreed “Wish my missus was so understanding. Here you are not going to use that old thing are you?” he asked seeing the Commander pull out and check his trusty old six shot revolver.

“It's never let me down before” the Commander remarked.

“Terry!” Bob called to one of his officers “Give the Chief here something a bit more 21st century.”

“Right boss” the officer responded as he headed into the van and extracted a weapon from the gun cage inside, passing it to Bob.

“Let me introduce you to Mr Heckler and Mr Koch's trusty MP7 assault rifle” Bob handed the Commander the gun “Fires a mere 850 rounds a minute although you have to reload after forty as that is all it holds.”

“Maybe Tracy has a point about this old antique” the Commander remarked as he holstered his own gun and put the MP7 over his shoulder “Right, I gather you are my shadow for this little shindig?”

“Indeed Sir” Bob confirmed.

“Bloody big shadow though” the Commander commented as he looked up at the towering six foot nine frame of Bob which dwarfed him by some considerable margin “Shall we?”

“After you Sir” Bob responded as they went over to the Major who had finished briefing his troops and was ready to go.

“Gold Control from Gold Two” the Major called into his radio “We are ready to roll, Gold One and the Commander are coming with us.”

Even though it was only half six in the morning, many of the locals had appeared on the streets to witness what was going on from windows and front doors as a couple of hundred armed Security & Police Service officers and Army personnel led by the Major, Bob and the Commander came down the street on foot before turning left into the side street where the old factory complex loomed large over the local area.

“Gold Two to teams Two, Three and Four” the Major called into his headset radio, “Proceed to perimeter entrances to the site and prepare to go in on my word.”

The military personnel duly split up into their assigned teams and went off in different directions to secure the various gate entrances into the site whilst the Major with the Commander led his group to the main front gate.

“Gold One to all ARU units” Bob called in “Deploy around the perimeter and keep the visitors out and the bad guys in” he called.

“Gold Control to all units” Tracy's voice came over the radio system a few moments later “Report current status.”

There came a procession of responses from the various teams around the site confirmed that they were all in position and ready to go.

“Ok then” Tracy declared “Let's get this party started. Major, give the word.”

“All units from Gold Two” the Major called “Attempt entry now, now, now.”

One of the Major's men quickly went from the side wall to the centre of the main gate where he proceeded to examine the latch and lock securing the two leaves of the old gate together whilst two other men checked the hinges.

“Clear” they declared a few moments later once they were happy that no booby traps of any kind were present.

“Open them up” the Major called whereupon the old looking padlock was quickly dismissed with bolt croppers and the gate opened.

“Here we go” the Commander remarked to Bob as they followed the Major and his men into the main loading area of the old factory where they carefully swept around with their SA80 rifles pointed ahead.

“You two left hand side outbuildings, you two the right” the Major called quietly to his men whilst he and the others pressed on ahead, pausing only to check the interior of an old burnt out van in the yard that judging by the undergrowth growing through it had been abandoned for some considerable time.

When they reached the main entrance into the factory building, the Major stopped for a few moments to obtain an update from the other teams.

“All units report your status” he called.

“Unit two” the first response came “East gate breached, searching east end wing of building, no traps or persons found so far.”

“Unit three” the next response came through “North gate jammed solid with disuse, had to climb over, currently sweeping through what appears to be the old works canteen. No body home.”

“Unit four” the final team reported in “West gate breached signs of recent vehicle activity here but no vehicles present, no devices found as yet.”

“Right” the Major declared “Lets have a look shall we?” he suggested as with understandable caution he opened the main door before they proceeded inside.

“Well someone has been here recently” the Commander remarked seeing the debris of old bottles and newspapers strewn about in amongst recently disturbed dust.

“Spread out gentlemen” the Major declared “and watch out for anything unpleasant.”

With caution they split up and went through the vast old factory floor looking around carefully including inside side offices and dilapidated cupboards. At one point the Commander spotted some movement out of the corner of his eye and swung his gun around onto it joined by Bob who did the same, only to see a surprised mouse scuttle away.

“Phew...” Bob gave out a sigh of relief that was reflected by the Commander.

“Well there is no way I could kill a mouse” the Commander remarked.

“You can say that again” Bob confirmed with a wry look as he reached across and flicked a setting on the Commander's MP7, you left the safety catch on.

“Whoops” the Commander admitted.

They carried on their careful search of the ground floor and found nothing but recently deposited debris. Soon they met up again at the back wall by the stairs to the upper level.

“After you” the Commander indicated upwards.

“Thank you” the Major responded “I think...” he added as he began to ascend the metal steps up to the old office level.

“Unit three to Gold Two” the radio called “We've completed our search of the north section, nothing happening.”

“Proceed to check the cellar” the Major requested “Unit Two join unit three down there when you have completed you section.”

“Yes Sir” the response quickly came.

“Tracy” the Commander called over the radio as they proceeded down the office corridor, carefully checking each of the old abandoned offices as they went and finding nothing “Can you pinpoint exactly where the tracking signal is coming from?”

“I think so” Tracy confirmed as she went over to a screen and checked the display “According to this it should be about fifty feet in front of you.”

“Manager's office ahead according to this” the Major confirmed as he consulted his copy of the old building plans.

“Step into my lair said the spider to the fly” Bob remarked with concern and caution.

“Exactly what I was thinking” the Commander admitted.

“Let's hold here for a moment” the Major suggested “All units report” he called over the radio.

“Unit Three with Unit Two in the cellar” came the initial response “Apart from half the rodent population of Deptford there is nothing here. Whatever happened, it looks like we missed it.”

“Roger that” the Major agreed “Unit four, report please.”

“Just checking the warehouse bit now” the leader of Team Four confirmed “There are some empty packing crates that look suspiciously like weapons boxes, recently abandoned by the looks of them, one has a dispatch date on it from two months ago.”

“Fits in with the cargo ship lead” the Commander remarked.

“There are also a couple of sea containers here as well” the Team Four leader added as they rounded a corner and found the open metal containers “More packing materials abandoned but nothing else.”

“ARU Units from Gold One” Bob called “Secure the warehouse area and make sure it is clear for the forensic boys to move in when we give the word.

“So” the Commander looked ahead down the corridor towards the old Managers Office from where it was believed the tracking device signal was coming from “What do you think gentlemen?”

“Sounds like a trap, smells like a trap, looks like a trap” the Major responded.

“In which case it almost certainly is a trap” the Commander agreed “Ah well” he announced as he stepped forward down the corridor “Where angels fear to tread and all that...”

“Oh no you don't” Bob insisted as he stopped the Commander from putting his hand on the door handle and opening it “If anything happened to you, your wife would never let me hear the end of it.”

“Allow me gentlemen” the Major declared as he stepped forward and examined the old door carefully “Ah there is the little blighter.”

“Oooh nasty” Bob remarked as he too saw the very thin wire that if had the door had been opened wide at that point, would have snapped and triggered some form of unpleasant surprise.

“Stand back” the Major advised as he very carefully opened the door a tiny fraction, just enough to look inside but not enough to break the wire “Hi there...”

“What is it?” the Commander asked.

“A nice little anti-personnel mine” the Major announced as he reached inside through the crack in the door with a pair of pliers and disarmed it before opening the door fully whereupon they could all see the device “If you had opened the door like this without checking first we would have been scraping bits of you off the wall right now.”

“What's wrong with this picture?” the Commander asked rhetorically as they looked at the old manager's desk on which was neatly sat the tracking device still bleeping away and a small personally addressed envelope underneath it.

“You mean how the hell did they know about the tracking device for a starter?” Bob asked.

“We definitely have a leak in the system” the Commander remarked as he picked up the device and the envelope which he opened to extract a note inside.

“Dear Administrator General” the Commander read the note out loud “Better luck next time. P.S. No hard feelings but now would be a good time to start running!”

“Can I make a suggestion?” Bob suggested.

“Yeah” the Commander agreed as he chucked the tracking device away “Run like buggery”

Quickly they ran out of the office and down the corridor, only throwing themselves to the floor when the Managers Office exploded showering them in debris.

“Well that was different” the Major remarked as the smoke and noise died down.

“What the hell was that?” Tracy demanded over the radio upon hearing the explosion.

“Just a little present from our friend Mr Devlin” the Commander confirmed “I think I have aggravated my ribs again but apart from that we are all right, bit dusty though.”

“I'll be there in two minutes” Tracy declared as she left the Mobile Operations Unit and ran down the road towards the factory site.

“Another uniform ruined” the Commander remarked wryly as Bob and the Major helped him to his feet and he did his best to dust himself down “Quartermaster's office will be putting me back on their black list again.”

“Are you all right love?” Tracy asked as she came running onto the factory floor only to find the dust and plaster covered Major, the Commander and Bob look down at her from the balcony above seemingly all right if a bit grubby.

“Oh we are having a blast” the Commander joked attempting to hide the agony he was in having aggravated his earlier injuries still further “Get Simon on the blower and tell him to draw up a list of everyone in the Service who knew about your tracking device, then cross reference it with the list of those who knew the convoy route.”

“Right” Tracy confirmed.

“Somebody in the service has been feeding info to these buggers and I want a backside on a silver platter before lunchtime” the Commander stated with clear determination.

“Lima Mike Control from Lima Mike Zero One” Tracy called over the radio as the Commander made his way gingerly down the stairs to join her on the factory floor “Patch me through on a secure frequency to Commander Fuller please.”

“In the meantime my love” the Commander gave Tracy a peck on the cheek causing her to smile with delight whilst she waited for the radio response “Let’s have a look in the warehouse.”

The Major joined the Commander as they made their way through to the warehouse which was now secured by the ARU officers.

“What's the betting these two containers came in on that ship from China?” the Commander wondered as he looked over the discarded packing materials both inside and outside the two containers.

“All containers have a unique international registration number on them” the Major pointed out the information panel on one of them “Should be easy to trace where this has been.”

“Fuller's on the case” Tracy confirmed as she joined them taking the Commander's arm in hers for support.

“Look familiar?” the Commander observed a transit document on the discarded lid of one of the crates.

“Matches the burnt one we found at the farmhouse I would say” Tracy agreed “Plastic moulding components, Swiss made” she read from the document.

“Plastic explosive would be my bet” the Major commented as he knelt down and sniffed inside the container “Semtex is made in Switzerland of all places and this smells like it.”

“And there was me thinking they only produced cheese, chocolate, dodgy bank accounts and cuckoo clocks” the Commander remarked.

"Are the forensic guys on the way?" the Major asked as they looked over the place.

"Call is in to them" Tracy confirmed "They should be here in a half hour."

"Quarter past seven" the Commander consulted his old pocket watch "Anyone not doing anything is hereby invited back to the Yard for breakfast."

"Sounds good to me Tracy confirmed.

"Now then" Fuller declared as he sat down in front of his computer and called up a number of lists of names "Which one of you is not getting a Christmas card from the management this year."

"Having fun love?" Jennifer asked having crept up behind him and taken him by surprise.

"Oh boy are you a sight for sore eyes" Fuller responded with delighted relief as they kissed.

"And sore eyes is not far from the truth" Jennifer commented "You look terrible."

"Thanks very much" Fuller replied.

"Have you been awake all night?" Jennifer demanded to know.

"Maybe..." Fuller responded slightly evasively.

"Well that means yes then" Jennifer confirmed as she sat down alongside him and they put their arms around each other.

"Well I was going to get some breakfast but then something came up" Fuller explained.

"Something always does with you" Jennifer confirmed "All right then, if I give you a hand then maybe we can speed things up a bit."

"Join the party love" Fuller confirmed.

"So, what are we looking for then?" Jennifer asked.

"A name" Fuller explained "Somebody in the Service appears on all of these lists and I am willing to bet breakfast that there is only one."

"Well you can eliminate anyone dead" Jennifer remarked "Pretty much anyone in hospital can come off as well."

"Remove automatically anyone who fails to appear on at least one of these lists" Fuller continued as he worked quickly on the keyboard "and behold, we narrow down the list to three."

"Well I have an alibi" Jennifer confirmed prompting Fuller to delete her name from the list.

"And so do I as well" Fuller confirmed "which leaves us with Lieutenant Commander Edwin Newton. Who he?"

"He is that new chap in my Department" Jennifer confirmed with concern and surprise "and he has been the duty night shift supervisor recently."

"Personnel record" Fuller declared "Let's have a root through this chap's life."

"Meantime I had better tell the Chief that we may have found his man" Jennifer confirmed as she reached for the telephone.

"Bacon, eggs, toast and more bacon please" the Commander requested of the canteen staff as he arrived at the servery area.

"Guess the healthy option is off then?" the Major remarked, unaware of the Commander's strong preference for fried food, eschewing anything remotely healthy.

"We have a healthy option?" the Commander asked rhetorically.

"Not that you would know dear" Tracy remarked quietly under her breath as she selected the healthy option.

"Did I miss anything?" Collins asked as he joined the back of the queue behind Tracy.

"Two empty containers inside one empty factory and a booby trap or two" Tracy confirmed "Apart from that, all in all a pretty quiet morning."

"In which case let me add something interesting into your breakfast time thoughts" Collins remarked "Did you know that of the investigation panel of five that headed the original weapons supply inquiry, only one is still alive?"

"Interesting" Tracy responded with clear interest as the canteen supervisor finished serving her breakfast "For that I'll throw in a free breakfast, grab something and join the party."

As Tracy went over to the table by the window where the Commander was already tucking into his breakfast with great gusto, the Major looked on with some concern.

"Isn't there supposed to be some Government guidance on how much salt you are allowed to eat in a day or something?" he commented seeing the amount the Commander had liberally poured on his breakfast.

"Since when have I ever taken any notice of what the Government have said?" the Commander responded wryly.

"Well you did once enthusiastically embrace a request from the Prime Minister once" Tracy confirmed as she sat down alongside him.

"Yes" the Commander agreed "But that was probably because it gave me carte blanche to kick in the doors of the aristocracy for a couple of days which ironically I would probably just have gone ahead and done anyway."

"Ah Mr Collins, good morning" the Major greeted the MI5 man as he joined them with his free breakfast, almost as unhealthy in appearance as the Commander's to his thorough approval.

“Our friend from MI5 here was mentioning something interesting a few moments earlier” Tracy explained “Between mouthfuls, let’s hear it then.”

“Right” Collins confirmed as he swallowed his breakfast “On that original inquiry a few years ago headed by Sir Brian Fenshaw into suspected illegal arms trading, there was a panel of five senior people, some of them from the Government, judiciary etc.”

“All sounds reasonable so far” the Commander agreed “Go on...”

“Well in the intervening three years, one died in a car crash on the M25” Collins explained “Another died of a heart attack about a year later at about the same time that the third committed suicide off a tower block roof whilst Sir Brian Fenshaw himself of course went out with a bang just yesterday.”

“Presumably leaving just one left?” Tracy asked.

“Exactly” Collins confirmed as he passed across a file to the two Security Service officers “Sir Frank Newton” he announced “The minister responsible for the overseeing of all imports and overseas trading at the Department of Trade and Industry.”

“The Department of Total Idiots?” Tracy responded as the Commander had his mouth full of bacon at that point although her public declaration for what the Security Service usually referred to the DTI as nearly made him choke on it.

“Can't be a coincidence” the Major commented to which the Commander nodded in agreement.

“The problem is it would seem that until we find out who our mole is” Tracy added “we cannot put a tail on this chap otherwise something nasty might happen.”

“Something nasty will happen when I find that mole I can assure you” the Commander responded with determination as he finished his breakfast “Of that you can be assured.”

“I'll get the thumbscrews out of storage then shall I dear?” Tracy asked.

“Will the Administrator General please call reception” the P.A. system declared throughout the building causing the Commander to look up with some disgruntlement.

“Just as things were getting interesting” he remarked wryly as he reached for his radio “Lima Alpha One to Control, what is all the excitement?”

“Divisional Commander Caverner and Commander Fuller were wishing to ascertain your current location Sir” came the explanation from the Control Room a few storeys above him.

“Main canteen” the Commander confirmed “And tell them this had better be good” he added.

“What was all that about?” the Major asked as he too finished off his breakfast.

“Looks like we are about to find out” Tracy motioned towards the main entrance into the canteen through which Jennifer came running through dragging Fuller her husband by the hand behind her and knocking chairs flying as she made her way across towards them.

“Where's the fire?” the Commander asked as Jennifer arrived almost out of breath and barely able to speak.

“We've got him” Fuller managed to struggle to say.

“Got who?” Tracy responded as equally mystified as everyone else sat around the table at that point.

“Our mole, insider, call him what you will” Jennifer finally managed to explain once her breath had returned to something approaching normal.

“Pull up a pew” the Commander prompted.

“There is only one person who knew about the convoy route, Sir Brian Fenshaw's schedule and Tracy's tracking device” Fuller explained “The duty officer at the times in question in the office of the VIP Protection Division.”

“Edwin Newton” Jennifer confirmed “He transferred over from Customs and Excise Division about ten days ago.”

“He wouldn't happen to be related to a Sir Frank Newton of the DTI by any chance would he?” Collins commented when he picked up on the identical surname to the subject they had been discussing a few moments earlier.

“According to this” Fuller checked his slightly battered notes “That's his dad, why?”

“I'll tell you later” the Commander confirmed “Any other evidence against this guy?”

“Nice healthy bank account” Fuller showed the Commander a copy of a bank statement “Very healthy indeed, take a look at the times and dates those cash deposits went in over the last seventy two hours.”

“Right, I want him nicked” the Commander declared “Where is he now?”

“On duty back at the office” Jennifer confirmed “Should have clocked on half an hour ago by my watch.”

“We had better do this discreetly” Tracy suggested “You can see for miles around from Cardinal Place, if he sees us turning up mob handed, he will know we are on to him.”

“Agreed” the Commander confirmed “All right, we do this just between this little group. Major, Mr Collins, would you care to join the party?” he asked.

“Lead on” the Major confirmed as they all rose from their seats.

“Simon” the Commander called to Fuller “Find a Mobile Operations Unit, man it with a couple of people you trust implicitly and park it in Terminus Place, if anyone from Transport for London gives you any grief, send them to me.”

“Yes Sir” Fuller confirmed as he went on ahead.

“The rest of you, my office” the Commander confirmed.

At the disused Ministry of Defence establishment situated deep in the heart of the Essex countryside, the usual solemnity of bird call and insects was suddenly disturbed by a convoy of vehicles coming up a long and dusty track sending up a cloud that almost totally enveloped the five heavy trucks and four military style lorries.

It was not until they stopped at the old main gate to the site that the dust began to dissipate a bit, revealing the trucks to each be carrying large sea shipping containers and escorted in the military style vehicles by the Colonel's men, their leader himself travelling in his usual Land Rover that overtook the convoy and came to the gate upon arrival.

“Good morning Sergeant” the Colonel declared as he got out of his vehicle and approached the gate where his officer was on guard duty “All quiet I trust.”

“Not a living thing for five miles in each direction Sir” the Sergeant confirmed indicating the overlooking roof top snipers who had a clear view in all directions from the site “Well unless you count the local wildlife that is.”

“Excellent” the Colonel confirmed “Ok, lets get the gate open and this little lot inside” he declared.

At his signal, the convoy of trucks restarted their engines and advanced forward through the gate, across the large concrete apron area and into the main building on the site, a former aircraft hangar of vast size that was so big, the large trucks seemed almost toy like in comparison once they were inside.

“Right gentlemen” the Colonel checked his watch as his men alighted from their vehicles “I want an air tight security seal around this site, mines, mortars, snipers, the whole shooting match. If a mouse farts within three miles of here, I want to know about it before it happens, let’s go to work.”

The Colonel looked on with pride as his team of highly trained and motivated men dispersed out into the grounds of the site and went about their task without question.

After wandering outside for a few moments to look around and check that everything was going according to plan, the Major went over to a battlefield communication vehicle, a specially converted truck parked to one side of the site and went inside.

“Is this thing live Corporal?” he asked his radio operator with his large bank of communications and monitoring equipment.

“Just dial a number Sir” the Corporal confirmed “Scrambled in both directions and untraceable.”

“Thank you” the Colonel confirmed as he picked up the telephone handset and quickly dialled a number.

After a few moments the Colonel was connected and he simply re-laid a message before hanging up.

“The presents are under the tree and awaiting Santa” he declared “Next call in one hour.”

“Thank you” the Commander responded before hanging up the telephone “Right, Simon just hacked into the Cardinal Place CCTV and confirmed our man is in the office, right where he is supposed to be.”

“So how do we go about this then?” Tracy asked “We can't just pull up outside with a dozen vehicles all sirens and lights blazing, Cardinal Place has windows out of which you can see for some distance all around.”

“Indeed my dear” the Commander agreed “If he knows we are coming, he'll be out the back sharpish.”

“I can have a few discreet members of my lot out the back of the place in a Land Rover in ten minutes” the Major confirmed “If that will help that is.”

“Much appreciated” the Commander confirmed “Only stay off the radio net, use mobile telephones only and keep this a strictly by invitation only party.”

“Certainly” the Major confirmed politely “Gentlemen, ladies if you will excuse me” he declared as he left.

“The only thing we do have in our favour at least is that I can go in there without raising any major suspicion” Jennifer confirmed, still seething somewhat at the thought of a traitor in her own Department.

“What kind of weapons training does this guy have?” Tracy asked.

“Full Diplomatic Protection course, special weapons and tactics, the works” Jennifer confirmed “I insist on it for all my staff.”

“This could get icky” Collins commented “If you like I can rustle up half a dozen of my chaps and lasses and filter them into the street outside if that will help.”

“Do it” the Commander agreed “But don't tell them anything of what is going on.”

“I'll call it a training exercise or something” Collins confirmed as he got on his mobile telephone and retreated to a corner to make the call.

“I have just had an idea” Tracy commented realising there was one little advantage they possessed that had been overlooked “Jenny, you wouldn't happen to have a spare uniform floating around by any chance?”

“I think I can arrange that” Jennifer confirmed with a knowing smile “The old Caverner twin two step I take it?”

“Well it worked the last time we tried it” Tracy admitted “It may just create enough confusion and distraction for our target to knock him off his guard.”

“All right you two” the Commander declared “Get a uniform sorted out and I will meet you on the westbound platform at St James Park Station in ten minutes.

As the sisters left the office, Collins finished his call and returned to the desk where the Commander was checking his weapon with a determined business like look.

"All arranged" Collins confirmed "I've got a team filtering into the surrounding streets as we speak."

"Lovely" the Commander responded as he put his uniform tunic back on "Lets get going shall we?"

Collins looked worried as he and the Commander descended in the lift.

"Don't worry" the Commander reassured him "Sir Richard and I get into all sorts of scrapes all the time, when you eventually take over from him full time you will find the same."

"I don't recall that bit in the recruitment interview" Collins remarked wryly.

"How long have you been in the service?" the Commander asked as the lift doors opened in the main reception and they exited.

"Twelve years in the intelligence co-ordination section" Collins confirmed "Then I was appointed number two to the old man last year. It's been quite an eye opener I'll say."

"Well I think you will find that I certainly do not do things by the conventional book" the Commander confirmed as they left the main entrance of New Scotland Yard and crossed the street to the nearby St James Park station.

"Believe me your reputation precedes you Sir" Collins confirmed with a knowing grin.

"I hope you brought your Oyster Card" the Commander cautioned as they reached the ticket barriers where he placed his card on the round yellow magnetic reader to pass through.

"Some guy in the Security Service suggested to Sir Richard that we all get one" Collins confirmed as he too passed through the ticket barriers.

"Good grief" the Commander remarked as they headed down the steps to platform level "He actually took notice of one of my ideas."

Down on the westbound platform they were met with the extraordinary sight of what appeared to be two Jennifer Caverner's.

"Erm, which one is which?" Collins asked, unable to see any difference in the identical twin sisters.

"Blue eyes is my girl" the Commander confirmed as he took Tracy's hand and kissed her.

"Green for danger, that's me" Jennifer confirmed referencing her different colour eyes.

The approaching rumble of a District Line service made all four of them look up in the direction of the running tunnel where the bright headlights piercing the gloom heralded the arrival of the next westbound service.

"All aboard" the Commander prompted as soon as the six car train of 'D' type stock came to a halt at the platform and the doors opened.

It was a short two minute journey the one stop along the Circle & District Line to their destination of Victoria where once the doors opened, the usual rush forward of waiting passengers meant they nearly didn't make it off the train.

"Do you know where we are going?" Collins asked as they all waited at the back wall of the platform for a few moments for the crowds to dissipate a bit.

"Just keep following me" the Commander confirmed as they moved off along the platform, up the exit steps and into the Terminus Place north ticket hall.

"Up there" the Commander indicated the exit steps to street level. Reaching the exit in Terminus Place, they found the Mobile Operations Unit parked at an awkward angle in the lay-by of the Bus Station area.

"I give you a simple task and you wind up stopping traffic" the Commander called wryly as they crossed the road and boarded the vehicle.

"Well we hit a bit of a problem" Fuller admitted "The space left by the duty tow truck going out turned out to be somewhat smaller than this thing."

"In which case" Jennifer suggested "Perhaps we should get this over and done with quickly before we get the angry phone call from London Transport."

"The Major confirmed a couple of minutes ago that he has his men on standby around the back" Fuller confirmed "Also there appear to be an awful lot of MI5 bodies milling about from what I can see" he observed from the front doorway, looking around the surrounding area.

"I'm impressed" Collins remarked as he too looked outside "I'm their boss and I can't see them."

"Years of experience and practice my friend" Fuller confirmed with a knowing grin.

"Time we were off" Jennifer declared as she and Tracy prepared to leave "Wish us luck."

"Stay in touch" the Commander urged "First sign of trouble, send for the cavalry."

"Ready Sis?" Jennifer asked as they stepped down from the vehicle together.

"As ready as I will ever be" Tracy confirmed "Let's go."

With that declaration they set off together across the road and around the corner. Crossing the bottom end of Victoria Street past the Little Ben clock, they quickly reached the distinctive curved glass nose like entrance of the Cardinal Place building where a number of the Service divisions were housed.

"You go up the front way" Jennifer suggested, "I'll go up the back stairs and we will cut him off in a pincer movement."

"Sounds like a plan" Tracy agreed "See you up there."

The sisters duly split up, Jennifer heading around the side to the rear of the building whilst Tracy walked in the main doors and went directly to the lifts.

"Bienvenue" the automated voice in the lift announced as Tracy entered, the infamous system now spouting fluent French after several months during which the engineers had struggled to get it to stop talking in Spanish.

Tracy put up with the friendly but annoying announcements as the lift ascended to the fifth floor where the doors opened and she exited out into the offices of the VIP Protection Division which were relatively quiet.

Not far behind was Jennifer who was making her way as fast as she could up the back fire escape stairs.

"Morning" Tracy declared as she passed through the duty office "Anything happening today?" she enquired, hoping that she was acting just like her sister.

"The usual goings and comings in the halls of power" one of the officers at his desk confirmed, clearly convinced it was Jennifer he was addressing.

"Is Newton about?" Tracy asked looking around.

"Fast Eddie?" the officer responded "I think he has gone to the coffee machine, he'll be back in a minute."

"Right" Tracy confirmed as she went through into Jennifer's office before calling back "When he comes back, send him in to see me?"

"Will do Maam" the officer confirmed.

Inside Jennifer's office, Tracy sat down behind the desk and looked around, however no sooner had she sat down and was getting accustomed to the surroundings than there was a polite, almost timid knock at the door.

"Come in!" Tracy called.

"You wanted to see me boss?" an officer asked as he appeared around the door.

"Ah yes" Tracy responded, recognising the gentlemen from the file photograph as Edward Newton "Come in, take a seat."

"Something I can do for you Maam?" Newton asked.

"Hopefully, you'll come quietly and not make any fuss" Tracy declared "Then you can tell me all about your special relationship with a Mr Devlin."

"I don't know what you are talking about" Newton responded hesitantly and starting to look nervous.

"Do you want to know something, just between you and me?" Tracy asked leaning forward a little "It's lucky for your I'm not your boss as if she was here right now, I expect my sister would probably be tearing your legs off by now."

"Right..." Newton let out a nervous laugh as he thought about a swift exit "So you are not Jennifer Caverner then?"

"No" Tracy admitted with a knowing smile "But she is" she pointed to immediately behind Newton when he suddenly felt a pointed and firm tap on the shoulder and looked back to see an intensely staring Jennifer standing there.

"There must be some mistake" Newton responded as he slowly turned around to face his superior officer.

"That's what we want to talk about" Jennifer confirmed "Assuming you survive the particularly unpleasant things I have in mind for you that is of course" she smiled knowingly and with clearly implied menace at the man who was responsible for information leaks that in the last few days had led to a significant number of her Department to be seriously injured or killed in the line of duty.

“I...” Newton began but he realised now he was running out of options and so instinctively shoved the chair in front of him into Jennifer and made a bolt for it.

“Oh damn it!” both sisters exclaimed simultaneously as Newton ran out of the door and across the main office. Tracy stood up and hurdled over the desk and took up the pursuit with a slightly winded Jennifer following closely behind.

“Out of the bloody way!!” Tracy called as the pursuit through the fifth floor continued with Newton just ahead of the two pursuing officers and shoving people and objects out of his way in all directions as he ran.

“Victor Pappa One to Mobile One” Jennifer called over the radio “The bugger is running and we could do with some help up here.”

“North staircase!” Tracy called as she saw Newton disappear through one of the fire exit doors where he then headed down the metal staircase as fast as he could.

In less than a minute Newton burst out of the fire escape door at ground level and turned left only to see the Major and his men heading straight towards him. A quick change of direction was duly executed as he turned back again and headed the other way, knocking one of the MI5 officers who had gone to intercept him to the pavement in the process.

“Which way?” Tracy asked of the Major as she and Jennifer came out of the doors and met him and his men.

“Towards the station” the Major confirmed as he bent down to help the MI5 officer back to his feet.

“Mobile One” Tracy called into her radio as she and Jennifer ran off in the direction of the nearby station where they could just make out Newton in the distance having reached Victoria Street where he was dodging across the road only narrowly avoiding getting run down by a bus in the process.

“Go ahead” Fuller responded from the Mobile Operations Unit parked around the corner.

“He's heading towards you” Tracy confirmed as she and Jennifer negotiated crossing the busy street as well “Cut him off.”

“I'll cut something off when I catch up with him” Jennifer added with determination.

“Showtime” the Commander declared as he and Collins left the vehicle and headed up Terminus Place on foot, having to dodge around buses calling at the stop there.

No sooner had they reached the end of the bus station where Wilton Road, Victoria Street and the station traffic all met up than Newton appeared right in front of them.

“Oi!” the Commander called causing Newton to change direction again and head directly into the vehicle exit lane of the busy Victoria Bus Station.

“Watch out” Tracy called as she and Jennifer overtook the Commander and Collins who then followed.

“Where the hell did he go?” Jennifer asked as they stopped in the middle of the bus stop lane that served the route 73 buses and looked around the rows of clear plastic bus shelters in search of Newton.

“There he is” Tracy pointed three stop bays over towards the railway station entrance where she could see Newton ducking between two stationary route 507 Red Arrow articulated buses.

Newton began to think he had escaped his pursuers as he slinked down the offside of the buses. As he reached the rear of the second bus in the stop a third one pulled in directly behind it offering the chance of cover all the way to the back of the bus station.

However as he peered around the offside rear corner of the last bus in the row, Jennifer suddenly appeared from nowhere and punched him in the face sending him reeling backwards into the bus stop shelter behind him.

“A word in your shell like matey” Jennifer suggested as she grabbed Newton by the scruff of the neck and brought him back to his feet “Don't ever mess me about” she warned before throwing him unceremoniously through the glass of the bus shelter, shattering it and landing him in a crumpled heap on the pavement of the next lane over.

“What the...” Newton wearily wondered to himself as he managed to get back to his feet while Jennifer stepped through the large hole his body had just made in the wall of the bus shelter.

“Still feel like running?” an angry Jennifer asked seeing Newton as he tried to get away again only to have his escape brought to an abrupt halt again as she kicked him in the ribs.

“Watch out!” Tracy called from the other side as she could see that Newton was reaching for a gun which Jennifer saw just in time and kicked it out of his hand, sending it scuttling across the concrete until it was crushed under the wheels of a route 52 double deck bus.

Her effort at disarming him however only gave Newton the distraction he needed to run again as he quickly scrambled to his feet.

“Still a little life left in you yet then” Jennifer remarked seeing Newton make a run for the Buckingham Palace Road entrance to the bus station where he narrowly avoided once again being run down by another bus coming in.

Jennifer drew her gun with grim determination and took up the pursuit with Tracy, the Commander and Collins not far behind her.

“All right you traitorous bastard” Jennifer declared as she took aim “Try running now” she called as she took aim and fired, the bullet impacting in Newton's right knee and sending him crashing to the ground.

“You bitch!” Newton called out in agony as he lay on the ground clasping his knee.

“In that case you won't miss the other one will you?” Jennifer remarked as she coldly fired her gun at Newton's other knee “It's the least you deserve.”

“Have you quite finished?” the Commander asked as he arrived on the scene where Jennifer was standing over Newton with a determined look of much wanted revenge on her face.

“For now” Jennifer conceded as she stepped back.

“Just thought I had better check” the Commander confirmed.

“Someone call me a God damm doctor!” Newton demanded.

“Try a lawyer instead” the Commander responded coldly “And while you are about it I suggest you dial up a conscious, a miracle and a few prayers as well as by the time I've finished with you, you are going to wish you were spending the afternoon in a dark sound proof room with my sister in law.”

The man on the roof looking out to the east from the old MoD site panned his binoculars around the distant horizon as he had been doing since taking over that guard position some three hours earlier.

Suddenly his panning around stopped as he noted something approaching, still some three miles distant yet but on the dusty track that led to the site.

"Look out twelve to the Colonel" the guard called into his radio "One vehicle approaching."

"Can you make it out?" the Colonel asked as he came out into the open from one of the buildings and trained his own binoculars into the distance.

"Black Lexus saloon" the guard confirmed as he looked through his powerful rifle sight to check the vehicle "Looks like one driver plus one passenger."

"All units stand down" the Colonel called "This one is expected."

Some minutes later in a cloud of dust, the car arrived at the heavily guarded main gate. After being thoroughly checked by the Colonel's men the car was allowed through and came into the main hangar where it was met by the Colonel.

"Good afternoon" the Colonel called as he opened the rear door of the car and out got Devlin with whom he shook hands.

"Colonel" Devlin responded in kind "Apologies for this intrusion into your lunchtime."

"I thought you were a bit early" the Colonel remarked.

"Any chance you can spare a couple of sniper lads for a last minute bit of housekeeping?" Devlin inquired.

"A problem?" the Colonel asked as they walked across the cold cracked concrete surface of the old hangar.

"A potential inconvenience" Devlin confirmed "It would appear that someone in authority might have put two and two together so a little pruning is in order just in case."

"Let me introduce you to Graham" the Colonel confirmed as they exited through a side door into a grassy open area outside.

"And he would be?" Devlin asked.

"Probably the best sniper I have ever worked with" the Colonel confirmed as he picked up his radio "Graham, if you would be so kind as to demonstrate your talent on the old can to my left please."

There was no response until suddenly a silent gunshot struck the old can on the ground, sending it ricocheting off into the distance.

"What the...?" Devlin responded in shock.

"Say hello to him" the Colonel remarked as he pointed into the far distance "He is about a mile in that direction" he confirmed.

"Remarkable talent" Devlin commented "I think he will do rather nicely."

"I take it our friend with the connections is giving us cause for concern then?" the Colonel remarked.

"We always knew that we might have to eliminate him" Devlin confirmed as they headed back inside "It's just that he and his son have been very useful."

"I'll get Graham right on it" the Colonel confirmed "In the meantime perhaps you would care to inspect the delivery?"

"By all means" Devlin confirmed as the Colonel showed him to the five large lorries which were under heavy armed guard by his men.

"Ok Corporal" the Colonel called "Open one up and let's have a look."

"Yes Sir" the Corporal confirmed as he went over to the rear doors of the nearest lorry and released the locks and catches before opening the doors to reveal its extensive contents.

"Now isn't that a beautiful sight" Devlin commented as he looked on with admiration at the large stacks of crates in the back of the lorry.

"It most certainly is" the Colonel agreed "and hopefully highly profitable as well."

"Take a seat" Jennifer insisted as she threw Newton into the chair where he had no choice but to remain as his kneecaps were badly injured and unable to support his weight.

"I'm denying everything!" Newton declared defiantly as Jennifer left the interview room.

"Oh good" the Commander responded wryly as he entered the room and took the seat facing Newton "That'll make the next half an hour far more fun."

"How about some legal representation?" Newton suggested.

"How about I throw you to the wolves and several heavily built and extremely angry colleagues who, thanks largely to your exploits, would like to go to work on you with a chainsaw for the deaths of several officers and others" the Commander quickly but calmly retorted.

"When I last looked we used to produce such a thing as evidence" Newton responded.

"Do you know I am glad you asked me that" the Commander opened the file on the desk in front of him "In the last four days, you have received a number of intriguingly timed cash deposits in you account amounting to some two hundred thousand pounds."

Newton said nothing, merely shrugging his shoulders in disinterest.

"Now either you have been lucky on the football pools" the Commander continued "which given West Ham's form of late seems somewhat unlikely or alternatively you have had your mits in someone's petty cash till."

"Nothing wrong with having money" Newton defended himself.

"Each cash payment took place in the space of an hour or two prior to several key violent incidents in the last few days" the Commander continued "committed by people who were well informed by someone on the inside. For twenty points, see if you can guess who is the only person who knew all the crucial information?"

"This is insane" Newton retorted.

"You've got into bed with some really nasty people" the Commander directly informed Newton "They sell nasty gear to some really nasty people and don't give a toss who gets blown away on the journey."

"I've got protection" Newton responded.

"Unless your protection involves a large reinforced concrete bunker and half the Bolivian army" the Commander responded "I'd seriously suggest re-evaluating your situation as the ruthless bastards who are financing your little cash fuelled retirement fund will have no second thoughts at blowing you away."

A stony silence followed in the room with only the background buzz of the lights to accompany Newton's thoughts as he gave serious consideration to his dilemma.

"All right" Newton relented, the previously defiant tone now gone and a distinct if slightly reluctant sense of co-operation now coming to the fore "I'll give you the story but I need guaranteed protection."

"Lets hear the old old story then" the Commander gestured "and try not to leave anything out."

"The whole show is being run by some prominent international businessman who I only know because my Father is his contact at the DTI who sorts out trading paperwork apparently" Newton explained, still with some obvious pensive reluctance.

"For which read well connected ruthless arms peddler" the Commander replied.

"My Father arranged for me to get a transfer to the VIP Protection Division which at the time seemed fine until I found out why" Newton continued.

"Then why the hell if you suspected something did you not go and tell someone about it?" the Commander demanded to know.

"I did" Newton responded "I confided in one of my colleagues four days ago but then he went and got himself killed in the Epping Forest job didn't he? After that I figured I was going to live a lot longer if I just shut my mouth, took the cash and kept passing what I knew to my Father."

"So where does he fit into all this?" the Commander asked, sensing a new line of inquiry emerging here.

"All I know is that there is some big deal going down and that my dad has been handling the import and export paperwork" Newton confirmed "Beyond that you'll just have to go and ask him."

"Thank you" the Commander responded as he got up from his seat "I'll do that."

"What about me?" Newton asked as the Commander was about to leave.

"I wouldn't make any firm plans for the next few years" the Commander advised before leaving the room, closing the door firmly behind him.

With a skip in his step, despite continuing discomfort from his rib injuries, the Commander headed via the lift back up to the top floor and his office where he found Tracy, Jennifer, Fuller and Collins waiting for him.

"How soon can I get a search warrant?" the Commander asked as he entered the office and proceeded directly to his desk.

"An hour, maybe two" Tracy confirmed.

"In which case we will do it the old fashioned way then" the Commander confirmed.

"Who is getting the bad news?" Collins asked.

"Newton's father" the Commander responded as he brushed down his uniform tunic before putting it on "He is some sort of big import and export guy at the Department of Trade and Industry."

"Hang on a minute" Collins called "You just can't waltz into a Government Department and start upsetting the locals."

"Why not?" the Commander "They are only just across the road, its called being neighbourly."

"Oh dear, here we go again" Fuller remarked quietly to himself.

"Mr Collins" the Commander took charge of the next stage of operations "Prepare to smooth the incoming ruffles that I am about to set in motion."

"I'll see what I can do" Collins confirmed as he turned to leave "Just try to be diplomatic please?"

"Diplo...what?" the Commander responded with a knowing smile.

"It's going to be a long afternoon I can tell" Collins remarked with a wry grin as he left.

"Jennifer" the Commander resumed his instructions "Have one of your cars and a couple of your lads on standby outside the side exit of the DTI building in about fifteen minutes."

"Will do" Jennifer confirmed "See you later love" she kissed Fuller before leaving.

"Simon, I will be requiring your usual talents in the well practiced dark arts of file extraction so make sure you bring along your box of tricks" the Commander instructed "Right if everyone is ready, let's go knock on a door."

With that, the Commander and Tracy took each others arm in theirs before heading off.

"Now promise me dear" Tracy suggested as they headed down in the lift "You will be subtle and diplomatic."

"Rest assured love I will use my usual careful tact and diplomacy" the Commander assured her with a knowing smile.

"We're in trouble now" Fuller remarked to himself.

It was only a short walk for the three officers from the back door of New Scotland Yard across the busy thoroughfare of Victoria Street to the rather insipid modern building that was home to the Government's Department of Trade and Industry.

"Afternoon" the Commander called to the receptionist as he entered the vast foyer and proffered his identification "I am here to have a word with one of your resident idiots" he explained, continuing to show no respect whatsoever for the minions of the Civil Service.

"We have quite a few" the receptionist responded "Did you have a particular one in mind Sir?" she enquired.

"Guy by the name of Newton" the Commander confirmed.

"Top floor" the receptionist confirmed.

"Thank you" the Commander responded before with Tracy by his side, he headed for the lifts.

"There may be trouble ahead..." Tracy hummed quietly to herself causing the Commander to look across at her where he was greeted by a giggling face.

"I hope you are not expecting me to dance love" the Commander remarked before the lift doors opened at the top floor.

"It's all right dear" Tracy reassured him "My feet are still recovering from the last time."

"Floor directory" Fuller indicated the alphabetical list of names and their corresponding office numbers displayed on the adjacent wall "Newton is in office eight one two."

"Down here I think" Tracy led the way down a corridor following the logical progression of the office numbers until they reached number 812.

"Is he in?" the Commander asked as he walked into the outer office where a secretary looked up, understandably surprised at the arrival of such highly important if unexpected guests.

"He is expected back in a couple of minutes" the secretary confirmed.

"Pity" the Commander responded as he tried the door to the office itself and found it to be locked "I tell you what, we will wait in here" he declared as with no subtlety whatsoever he kicked the door in that being standard issue cheap Government issue, near disintegrated with ease.

"So much for subtlety and diplomacy" Tracy remarked although she wasn't expecting anything less really given her husband's past performances.

"Have you a warrant?" the secretary demanded to know.

"Tracy my dear, did you bring the warrant?" the Commander asked rhetorically.

"I thought you had it dear?" Tracy responded with understated sarcasm.

"Such is life" the Commander informed the secretary with a shrug of the shoulders "I think you had better go and find your boss and get him here quickly before we do any more damage."

"Err yes, right away" the secretary agreed and left to go and find him.

"What a lovely view" the Commander remarked as he looked out of the window towards Westminster.

"Where do you want me to start Sir?" Fuller enquired.

"Over there should do for openers" the Commander indicated the filing cabinets.

A minute later, Frank Newton arrived back in his office just in time to see the combined efforts of Fuller and the Commander force open his filing cabinet, wrecking the lock mechanism in the process.

"What the hell is going on?" he demanded to know.

"This is called a raid Mr Newton" the Commander explained "A shifty, a rifle through your drawers, acting on information received to use the trade parlance."

"You can't just walk in here and wreck the place" Newton demanded "This is a department of Her Majesty's Government."

"I can when I discover one of the servants of the crown, err that would be you by the way" the Commander explained "is providing a pipeline of information and services to some very unpleasant people."

"You can't prove anything" Newton protested as Fuller produced some paperwork he had found in the desk drawer and drew the Commander's attention to it.

“Interesting” the Commander remarked “I wonder what the press would make of it if they knew you have been giving clearance to import grants on cargo being handled by one of this country's most prominent arms dealers?”

“I just waive a few forms through, pass on some information from time to time, nothing sinister” Newton defended himself.

“Information that so far has resulted in the deaths of several Security & Police Service officers, the Mayor and Deputy Mayor and several dignitaries not to mention countless injuries” Tracy informed him.

“This is harassment!” Newton declared.

“You want to see harassment?” Tracy asked “then perhaps we should let you spend an hour in a sound proof room with my sister, your son has already lost the ability to walk today since we discovered he was a traitor, I am willing to bet your health would not exactly be too good after she has had a 'word' or two either.”

“Computer Sir?” Fuller asked the Commander.

“By all means” the Commander agreed whereupon Fuller sat down in Newton's seat and began to work on the computer terminal having easily cracked his password.

“Something here about that cargo ship we traced” Fuller confirmed as he worked on the computer “Authorisation for those seven containers to be cleared through Felixstowe four days ago on behalf of one of Devlin's holding companies.”

“Can you confirm that you authorised these?” the Commander asked Newton who was duly escorted around the desk by Tracy to see for himself.

“Yes...” he relented “I thought...” He got no further though as suddenly the office window behind them shattered and Newton let out a brief gasp before collapsing onto the desk, revealing a clean bullet wound to the back of the head.

“Down!” Tracy called as she grabbed the Commander and pushed him to the floor and laid on top of him whilst Fuller just dived beneath the desk.

No sooner had they dived for cover than the rest of the windows were shattered by a number of rapidly fired rounds that impacted into the office smashing furniture, fittings and the computer.

“I hate it when that happens” Fuller remarked wryly after a few moments of silence when he tentatively looked up above the window ledge to see if the coast was clear.

“I think we are all right now” Tracy agreed as she got up off of her husband and then helped him to his feet.

“Where the hell did that come from?” the Commander asked as he looked out of the window across the skyline.

“Don't know” Tracy responded as she too cautiously took a look outside “But whoever it was is a ruddy good shot.”

“You got off lightly my friend” the Commander remarked to the dead Newton as he double checked he was indeed deceased.

“Computer is wrecked” Fuller confirmed as he examined the smashed screen “I can still get the data off though but I'll need to take the unit back to my place.”

“Gather whatever seems relevant and then get the ballistics team and the coroner in here” the Commander requested as he looked around the bullet ridden room whose damage was being further increased by the buffeting wind coming in through the broken windows.

“Doubt we will get much from the bullets I would have thought” Tracy remarked as she and the Commander left the office where outside they found Newton's secretary and what seemed like half of the building's staff wondering what was going on.

“I don't think he will be needing you for the rest of the day” the Commander confirmed to the secretary as he left.

Jennifer Caverner was waiting patiently with a car by the side entrance of the DTI building wondering why their appeared to be a long wait.

"Where are they?" she asked herself as she got out of the car and looked around, unaware of the dramatic developments that had occurred just minutes earlier several storeys above her.

"Sorry Sis" Tracy declared as she emerged from the side entrance and joined Jennifer at the car "The gig is off."

"Why, did something happen?" Jennifer asked.

"Only a long range sniper rifle and someone who knows how to use it" Tracy grimly confirmed.

"What?" Jennifer responded.

"One shot, back of the head through the window" Tracy confirmed "Right there in front of us."

"Is everyone all right?" Jennifer asked with obvious concern.

"Oh we are all OK" Tracy confirmed "Unfortunately we just lost our potential key witness but we do have his files, our respective husbands are taking them back over the road to the office now."

"One door closes" Jennifer mused philosophically "Another slams in your face."

"Fancy a cuppa courtesy of my humble little division while our boys are playing hunt the file?" Jennifer asked.

"Sounds like a plan" Tracy agreed as they both got in the car before Jennifer started the engine.

"So where does this investigation go from here then?" Jennifer asked as she pulled out into the busy traffic flow of Victoria Street.

"I have no idea" Tracy admitted "We can only hope those files turn up something as so far our friend Mr Devlin has covered his tracks extremely well."

"There goes the Home Secretary" Jennifer remarked as she acknowledged a similar dark saloon car to her own that passed them travelling in the opposite direction.

"This may sound like an odd question" Tracy commented as they reached the end of Victoria Street where Jennifer pulled off left into a side street "I don't suppose I could take a look at Newton's duty schedule could I?"

"I should have that in my office" Jennifer confirmed as she locked the car before they headed across the street.

"It is just that when I was at Devlin's place, he was having a soiree featuring a lot of diplomatic types from the sort of countries that have a taste for buying weaponry from dubious sources" Tracy explained "I just wondered if there was a possibility that he was scheduled to drive any of these characters around."

"Well I do run the country's most expensive taxi service to the great and the not so great" Jennifer confirmed as they crossed the Cardinal Place foyer and entered a waiting lift car.

The lift duly made a garbled automated announcement in an unidentifiable language as the doors closed and they began their ascent to the fifth floor.

"Haven't they fixed this thing yet?" Tracy asked.

"They keep trying" Jennifer admitted "At least it no longer makes rude remarks in Polish anymore."

As the lift doors opened accompanied by a further unintelligible message, Jennifer recognised one of her officers passing in the corridor in her usual inimitable way.

"Oi, Greg!" she called after a shrill whistle to attract his attention "Put the kettle on, and then bring me the duty logs for the last few days to my office."

"Right away" the officer confirmed.

"I'm wondering is it worth giving Newton's desk a good rifling through?" Tracy suggested.

"Sounds like a plan" Jennifer agreed "Over here" she led the way to the desk whose former occupant was now safely locked away in a cell in New Scotland Yard.

"Organised chap wasn't he?" Tracy remarked as she sat at the desk and noted the neatly laid out nature of the items on the desk, positioned with almost mathematical accuracy.

"Where's that coffee?" Jennifer called across the office.

"Here we go" the office responded as he brought the refreshments over along with the duty log as requested.

"Thanks" Jennifer replied as she put the log book across the end of the desk and opened it, flicking through the large pages until reaching that days date.

"Nothing much here" Tracy declared once she finished a search of the desk surface and drawers "Not that surprising really."

"According to this roster" Jennifer confirmed reading from its detailed pages "Our friend Newton was due this afternoon to escort a trade delegation from Val Verde to an unspecified destination."

"There was a guy at Devlin's party from there" Tracy recalled "I got the impression that he, Devlin and the Colonel were old pals."

"If I recall Val Verde is one of those charming little countries in South America run by a tin pot dictator" Jennifer remarked "He publicly embraced democracy a few years back, cleverly a few days after one of his Generals accidentally ran over the opposition leader in a tank two days before the election."

"Just the sort of chap that the likes of Devlin and his international guns and ammo shop would have as a customer" Tracy responded "I don't suppose there is a picture of any of these guys on file anywhere?" she asked.

"We keep profiles on all our esteemed clients" Jennifer informed her sister as they went through into her office, "We're not supposed to mind so don't tell anyone."

"I shall remain respectfully silent" Tracy confirmed whilst she observed Jennifer unlock and open one of her filing cabinets.

"Here we go" Jennifer pulled out a file "All the notables from Val Verde on the books."

"That's him" Tracy declared after briefly looking through the file and finding a photograph of a dignitary "And this guy was there too" she added indicating a second photograph.

"Well they are due to be collected from their embassy in just over an hour" Jennifer confirmed.

"Well it's a lead" Tracy remarked "thin admittedly but it's probably all we got."

"How the hell do you understand all this technobabble?" the Commander asked as Fuller worked through a myriad of files in his office which as always seemed to resemble the aftermath of an explosion in a computer shop with bits of machines all over the place.

"Actually computers are very logical things" Fuller explained, not even taking his eyes off his work "It's the rubbish people put in them that causes the problems and confusion."

"So in the midst of all this logical confusion, have you found anything that might just give us a lead by any chance?" the Commander asked.

"Well it would appear that the now late Mr Newton senior authorised twenty seven imports from the Far East in the last fortnight" Fuller explained whilst indicating a number of items on his screen.

"Please tell me some of them were on that ship you traced" the Commander asked.

"Seven of them were containers that arrived in this country on the M V Omra Star" Fuller confirmed "Two of them we found empty at that factory in Deptford."

"Probably the supplies and equipment for the Colonel and his merry men to do this job" the Commander remarked.

"Well that fits" Fuller agreed "The destination codes on the other five containers make for interesting reading though."

"Keep talking" the Commander urged.

"Two have destination codes for Val Verde, two others are destined for somewhere in the darkest parts of Africa though nothing specific" Fuller confirmed "There's no destination on the fifth one though."

"Which means either it is for an individual or its destination is here in the UK?" the Commander asked.

"Exactly" Fuller agreed "Now while I cannot tell you where they are right now, putting the container numbers through the international container shipping registry system does tell me that the two Val Verde ones are booked on a Freightliner train out of Ipswich at nine o'clock tonight bound for Southampton Container Port."

"From there they will be on a ship and then will probably mysteriously vanish never to be seen again" the Commander commented.

"That would be my guess yes" Fuller confirmed "The other containers evidently must be being moved by road I would guess as there is nothing booked on the system anywhere."

"I thought I might find you two conspiring in a corner somewhere" Tracy declared as she came in the office.

"We were just playing a game of hunt the container" the Commander nodded at the computer screen "We think we have worked out where they might end up eventually but as to where they are now" he held his hands up in surrender.

"Our friendly local traitor Newton was scheduled to take a trade delegation from Val Verde to an unspecified destination this afternoon" Tracy handed over her notes she had made earlier "Could that have anything to do with it?" she asked.

"Tracy I love you" the Commander declared openly as he leaned forward and kissed her "Lets go and ask Newton what his plans for this afternoon where shall we?"

"Right behind you love" Tracy confirmed as she followed her husband out of the office and down the corridor.

"If I am right" the Commander commented as they entered the lift and began to head down to the detention floor "Someone has to go and hand over their money for Devlin's goods."

"It could be done electronically?" Tracy suggested.

"However remember what the intelligence from our friends at the CIA and MI5 said about our friend Mr Devlin" the Commander responded as the lift reached the detention floor and the doors opened "All of his dealings have always been in cash, plenty of layers of transactions making it virtually untraceable through the banks."

"And you don't stick a suitcase of bank notes in the post" Tracy agreed "Well not unless you are extremely mad that is."

"Lieutenant Newton" the Commander declared as he entered the detention room "For ten points, guess what we would like to talk to you about?" he asked.

"The weather?" Newton responded not really caring as the Commander sat down on the opposite side of the table that separated them "The chances of West Ham getting promoted? What a noisy place Kakrafroon has suddenly become?"

"Val Verde" the Commander responded "A charming little holiday spot in South America or somewhere with a tin pot dictator who likes to stay in power by shooting dead anyone daft enough to vote for the opposition and who just happens to get his guns and toys from your friend Mr Devlin."

"Never heard of the place" Newton retorted.

"Strange..." The Commander responded as he produced a piece of paper that summarized Newton's duties for the last two weeks "Because according to this you have been escorting not only their ambassador but also a trade delegation from that charming little country no less than eight times in the last fortnight with another trip scheduled for this very afternoon."

"I am just a glorified taxi driver with a gun" Newton responded "I know nothing, unless that is you are looking to cut a deal?"

"Personally" the Commander began "I am not interested in you, you're just small fry in the grand scheme of things, however I want to know where the trade delegation are going this afternoon and as far as I can tell you are the only one who knows."

"I hate to disappoint you Commander" Newton replied "All I know is that I am scheduled to pick them up from the embassy at three o'clock and drive them to an unspecified destination. En route I am to be relieved and they then take the car on alone."

"Then what happens to you?" the Commander asked.

"I return to normal life whilst the car and its passengers disappear presumably never to be seen again" Newton confirmed.

"You won't be able to have much of a normal life from six feet under" the Commander commented.

"What?" Newton replied.

"Just over an hour ago a sniper using a long range weapon of some kind shot dead your father in his office" the Commander informed him "Your 'friend' Mr Devlin is covering his tracks and I am willing to bet he won't think twice about ordering your worthless backside eliminated as soon as you have ceased being useful."

Newton was silent for a few moments as he took in the shock news of his father's death and considered his position all whilst the Commander maintained a careful watchful eye on him.

"All right damm you" Newton surrendered "I'll help but you just can't roll up outside the embassy with any old person, they are expecting me and one other in the car."

"Tracy" the Commander called back to his wife who was standing in the doorway of the room "Find the Major and ask him to meet me in the canteen in ten minutes."

"Yes dear" Tracy confirmed before leaving.

"All right here is the deal" the Commander announced "You help us catch these guys and I'll make sure you vanish from the world with a new name and identity in some far flung corner of the world."

"Ok" Newton relented.

"You are going to be in that car" the Commander continued "You will have someone with you as driver seeing as you are a bit incapacitated at the moment and then you are going to make the pick up as scheduled and take them where they want to go."

"And when it comes to the point where I 'cease to be useful' as you put it?" Newton asked "Then what?"

"Let us take care of that" the Commander reassured him "Not only do I want you alive but I want the car and its passengers to continue on their journey unmolested and under the impression that all is well. We will have a tracking device fitted to it so we can follow them remotely right to where whatever is happening will happen."

"The Major is in your office dear" Tracy called through the door of the detention room.

"Thanks love" the Commander responded "Can you see to our friend here, make sure he is cleaned and patched up, oh and get some coffee in him, he has a long journey ahead."

"Oh come on" Fuller shouted at his computer "Be nice, tell you old friend where you are going" he tried saying nice things to it in an attempt to get it to come up with the information he sought but to no avail.

In the corridor outside Fuller's office, Collins and O'Connell were just passing by when they heard him crank up the threats against the computer for failing to cooperate.

"Are you having problems?" Collins asked as he looked around the door to see what was going on, just in time to see Fuller about to threaten the computer with a large mallet.

"I seem to be having trouble with a container" Fuller explained.

"Perhaps we can help?" O'Connell suggested as they came in.

"Join the party" Fuller confirmed as O'Connell and Collins took up a seat at the rather cluttered desk.

"Ok then, what are we dealing with?" Collins asked.

"I am trying to trace the last of seven containers that Devlin's organisation seems to be handling" Fuller explained "They came in from the Far East on the container vessel the MV Omra Star last week and were taken out of the Port of Felixstowe by lorry about two hours later after a very quick pass through Customs."

"Let me have a try" O'Connell suggested.

"Be my guest" Fuller confirmed as he moved aside to allow O'Connell access to the computer terminal.

"This is the manifest I take it?" O'Connell asked to which Fuller nodded in confirmation "So I take it this one is the container causing the problems?"

"Yes" Fuller confirmed "We know about the other six already. Two are destined for Val Verde via Southampton, two more for some deep dark part of central Africa and the other two are the empty ones we found at the old factory in Deptford this morning."

"That I expect would be the Colonel's payment for doing Devlin's dirty work I expect" Collins remarked "Some nice shiny new toys for him and his boys to play with out in the big wide world."

"It's this last one that is causing the headaches" Fuller confirmed indicating one entry in the manifest displayed on the screen.

"Well there is more than one way to make an omelette" O'Connell confirmed as he entered a few commands into the computer.

"No their isn't" Collins commented as he tried to think of what alternative way to making an omelette their were besides the obvious one.

"It's called a rhetorical remark my friend" O'Connell explained "When you have the muppets on Capitol Hill sending us at the CIA daily bandwagon loads of daft directives and initiatives, sometimes its all we have left to remain sane."

"I know the feeling" Collins agreed with a polite chuckle.

"Tell me Mr Fuller" O'Connell asked "Can I get into the CIA Langley central system from here?"

"Of course I can" Fuller confirmed "I can even get you into the CIA Intranet if you want."

"Right..." O'Connell responded slightly shocked and unaware of exactly how far Fuller's skills at accessing computer systems worldwide could stretch.

"Of course the fact I designed much of it does help" Fuller explained as he entered some key stokes and called up the CIA system interface on the screen.

"So the only client codes we have on this container are the one from Devlin's shipping company and this strange XSDJI" O'Connell read from the manifest "So lets see if anyone in my office has heard of it" he declared as he entered the search string.

"One instance found" Fuller read from the screen after the search had finished "Interesting."

"Lets see what it connected with" O'Connell declared as he called up the file which the search had highlighted.

"Jesus Christ!" Collins responded as he saw the details of the file when they appeared on the screen.

"Not quite" O'Connell confirmed "Someone find the Commander right now, we have a new problem."

"Good afternoon Commander" the Major called as the Commander entered his office and made straight for the seat behind the desk.

"Glad you could make it" the Commander confirmed "Help yourself to a drink."

"Thank you" the Major confirmed "We found the weapon that killed your Mr Newton by the way."

"Really, where?" the Commander asked.

"On a rooftop about two miles away from the DTI building" the Major confirmed as having filled his glass from the decanter on the side table, he returned to his seat at the desk "Here is the little beauty" he added producing an evidence photograph of the weapon where it had been found in situ.

"Nice looking bit of hardware" the Commander commented as he looked at the photograph "Have you ever seen one of these before?" he asked.

"Not recently" the Major confirmed "They are very expensive, not to mention illegal in this country with one exemption for one of your officers."

"Commander Elizabeth Baker" the Commander confirmed "Wouldn't be hers though I would have thought."

"Indeed" the Major responded "Already checked, her one is a slightly earlier model with custom sights and she had a cast iron alibi, besides this one is fresh out of the packet, just come in off the boat."

"Literally I suspect" the Commander added.

"So what's the job?" the Major asked "I assume you didn't invite me here to discuss weapons."

"We have a potential lead on where the containers are" the Commander confirmed "If our joint suspicions are right then there are five containers of very dangerous weaponry and explosives somewhere out there plus guarding them a platoon of goons with the training to use them."

"If the Colonel is worth one tenth of his reputation" the Major remarked "I am willing to bet that they are safely stored in a location from which they would see us coming for miles around."

"That would suggest somewhere nice and quiet, probably rural" the Commander agreed.

"Sir!" Fuller called as he burst into the office with Collins and O'Connell in close pursuit, in a hurry waving a file like a flag of battle.

"Calm down lad" the Commander urged "Didn't your mother ever teach you to knock?"

"It can't wait Sir" Collins confirmed "We have a very serious new problem."

"Who is this guy?" the Commander asked as Fuller tossed the file onto the desk in front of him and he opened it to see a photograph of the suspect.

"That is our problem" O'Connell confirmed "He is the lucky recipient of missing sixth container in the shipment."

"Deposed Crown Prince Sheik Abdul Diablo" the Commander read from the file "Do I know the gentleman?"

"The name is a phoney" O'Connell confirmed "However the man behind the name is very real, he is a rather wealthy Arab chap who was kicked out of his own family circle about ten years ago for organising the assassination of his own brother when he borrowed his Ferrari without asking first."

"Charming" the Commander remarked "Sounds just like the sort of guy Devlin would have no difficulty doing business with."

"Unfortunately that isn't the end of the story" O'Connell continued "Four years ago he set up a world wide Jihad cult and decided to get into the lucrative business of supplying tools and supplies as he puts it on his website to terrorists worldwide."

"And with no destination specified on a container of high quality weapons and explosives linked to him" Collins remarked "That suggests he could be about to equip a major terrorist cell somewhere in the UK."

"We at the CIA have had our eyes on him for sometime" O'Connell confirmed "He's been keeping his head down since we blew up his Land Rover in Abu Dubai a couple of years back but we have long suspected he was planning something new and would reappear at some point."

"No wonder Devlin's been unusually keen to do business on home soil" Collins commented "I am willing to bet the size of this Sheik's chequebook made him see the light easily."

"Terrorists" the Commander remarked wryly "I hate these guys."

"Well I strongly suggest that unless you want nutters roaming the streets of London making pseudo political statements with guns and explosives" O'Connell suggested "if you see him then don't hesitate even for a second, kill him on sight."

"All right then" the Commander declared "From here on in not only are we going to have to keep this strictly within this little circle, also we concentrate our primary effort on the sixth container and its purchasers."

"So how are we going to find out where the exchange is taking place?" the Major asked.

"A little good old fashioned double bluff and subterfuge" the Commander confirmed "With some good old fashioned legwork thrown in for good measure."

"Well I can have a team of men on standby at any time" the Major responded "All we need is a destination and someone to say the magic word."

"What's the magic word?" O'Connell asked out of curiosity.

"Now..." the Major confirmed.

"Is there any chance I can have this car back in one piece?" Jennifer asked as she got out of one of her ministerial escort saloon cars which she had brought into the basement garage of New Scotland Yard "Only what with recent events, I seem to be running out of serviceable motors."

"The way things have been going lately I doubt it" Tracy admitted as he met her sister by the car.

"I knew you were going to say that" Jennifer remarked "Which is one of two reasons I brought this one."

"What's the other?" Tracy asked as they were joined by a technical officer who proceeded beneath the vehicle to install a sophisticated tracking device.

"It's borderline on the MOT, the speedo has packed up, there is at least one hundred and fifty grand on the clock and I strongly suspect the engine is held together with duct tape and bailer twine" Jennifer confirmed "Apart from that, it's sweet as a nut."

"As long as it makes it as far as wherever the hell we are going then I'll be happy" Tracy responded.

"We are ready to roll" the technician reported as he emerged from the underside of the car "Nasty oil leak you got there though."

"Like I said" Jennifer admitted "Borderline MOT!"

"Lima Mike One to Lima Alpha One" Tracy called into her radio "Darling, your carriage awaits."

"We will be right down" the Commander confirmed as he got up from the seat behind his desk "Messer's Collins and O'Connell, if you would be so kind as to enter a judgely huddle somewhere and get me as much intelligence on this Sheik chap as you can find I would appreciate it."

"I'll see what we can come up with" O'Connell confirmed as he and Collins left the office.

"In the meantime" the Commander declared as he buttoned up his tunic only to wince a little as he once again aggravated his rib injuries "Would you care to join me Major in a little game of hunt the bad guy?"

"Sounds like fun" the Major agreed as he and the Commander departed "Of course there is the risk this could wind up becoming a seriously dull wild goose chase you know" he warned.

"Yeah I know" the Commander was forced to admit as they headed down the stairs "But it is all we got and I want to seriously nail these buggers."

"There are a lot of scores waiting to be settled on this job" the Major agreed "Lets just not lose sight of the target, I cannot over emphasise what a devastating effect those weapons and hardware will have on innocent lives if they get out into general circulation."

"You don't have to remind me" the Commander confirmed as they reached the basement parking level "I speak from the experience of having been on the receiving end of some of Mr Devlin's product line in the last couple of days."

In the basement car park they found Newton being escorted carefully across the cold concrete surface and into the front passenger seat of the car, all the time under the watchful eye of Jennifer whose stare would cut Newton to pieces if it was any harder.

"Are you sure this is such a good idea?" Tracy asked as they all met at the car.

"Ask me again in the morning love" the Commander responded evasively.

"I knew you were going to say that" Tracy remarked wryly.

"Who's doing the driving?" the Commander asked looking around and seeing no other officers around.

"I am" Jennifer confirmed as she got in the drivers seat.

"Are you insane?" Tracy demanded to know as she went up to the drivers door of the car.

"Of course I am" Jennifer confirmed "but if you can show me a better qualified driver from the VIP Protection Division anywhere around here, please feel free to point him or her out."

"I don't think you are going to win this one" the Commander advised Tracy who was forced to agree.

"All right" Tracy relented "Just be bloody careful Sis."

"I will" Jennifer confirmed.

"We have got a microphone installed underneath the dashboard so we will be able to hear everything you say" the Commander informed Jennifer as she started the engine "As soon as you are told where you are going, repeat it nice and clear then we can leap frog ahead with the backup."

"Don't be late" Jennifer warned "I drive pretty fast you know."

"I'll try not to be" the Commander confirmed "Ok away you go" he instructed.

With that, Jennifer wound up the window and gave a friendly wave that disguised her understandable nervousness as she moved off up the exit ramp and outside.

A couple of minutes later, the Major, Tracy and the Commander joined Fuller in his office where the tracking device location was being shown on the screen, clearly heading as expected towards the Kensington area of London where many of the embassies of overseas nations could be found.

"Looks like we are right on course" Fuller declared "Should be arriving outside the embassy of Val Verde about now."

"Now we find out who our passengers are for the afternoon" Tracy remarked.

"If anyone can hear me" Jennifer's voice came over the speakers "It looks like three individuals, suits and briefcases emerging from the embassy" she confirmed into a hidden radio set within her uniform.

"Good afternoon gentlemen" Jennifer greeted them as she opened the rear door of the car for them.

"We were expecting Mr Newton" one of the tall men from the trade delegation remarked.

"I'm here" Newton confirmed from the front passenger seat "Nothing to worry about" he reassured them.

The body language of the men seemed to become noticeably more relaxed when they saw Newton sitting in the front seat of the car and they duly got in the back without further hesitation.

"Where to gentlemen?" Jennifer asked as she got back in the drivers seat once she had seen that the men were safely inside the car.

"First stop Pentonville Road, Islington" the leader of the delegation confirmed "We will be collecting a colleague there and then it is on to our final destination."

"Which would be?" Jennifer inquired as she pulled the car back out into the traffic.

"I have no idea" the man was forced to admit "That's why we need our colleague, he knows where we are going."

"All very cloak and dagger" Jennifer remarked "Never mind, I like a good mystery" she responded.

"What the hell is in Pentonville Road?" the Commander asked generally around Fuller's office.

"Craft's Council, Angel Tube Station..." Tracy recalled off the top of her head before quickly running out of suggestions.

"Pentonville nick is down there as well ironically" Fuller added.

"I think we had better get some people out to that spot pretty quick" the Major suggested.

"Agreed" the Commander confirmed.

"I'll go" Tracy confirmed "You are in no fit state to be running around love" she informed the Commander directly.

"All right" the Commander reluctantly agreed "I'll stay here and monitor developments" he confirmed.

"The Major and I will go and sort out Pentonville Road" Tracy confirmed "Then once we have a final destination on these guys, you can jump ahead and get things organised on the ground and we will join you there."

"Sounds like a plan" the Commander agreed before reaching for the telephone with some reluctance "Control" he called once he was connected "Have a company helicopter on stand by on the roof within twenty minutes."

"Lets go" the Major suggested "Ladies first."

"Is the traffic always this bad?" one of the men in the back of Jennifer's car asked casually as they crawled at barely walking pace along the Euston Road past St Pancras Station heading east.

"It's been utter chaos along here ever since the works on the new Eurostar terminal started" Jennifer confirmed "The sooner they get it finished the better."

"Trouble is" Newton remarked "That is when the King's Cross redevelopment is due to kick off and then the traffic will be even worse."

"How the hell we are supposed to do our job of driving important people around the City in this mess I will never know" Jennifer commented as she hit the horn loudly when a car tried to cut her up at the junction, nothing unusual along this stretch of highway "It's getting to the point where we might as well take the Prime Minister around on the tube all day."

"Well that explains why he took the tube then" one of the other men in the back of the car remarked, a point quickly picked up on by Jennifer as well as the others who were listening in "He should be meeting us there in about fifteen minutes."

"Tracy?" the Commander called over the radio "The meet up is at Angel station" he confirmed "Fifteen minutes from now which makes it three o'clock by my workings out."

"Got it" Tracy confirmed as she travelled through the streets of the city in the front passenger seat of the Major's Land Rover "Have the nearest available Transport Division officers meet me on the northbound platform at Angel in five minutes, I'm bailing out at Old Street."

"Busy area around the Angel there" the Major confirmed "But I think we can cover it as soon as we can get up City Road."

"Go on ahead and do your usual stuff" Tracy confirmed "Drop me off here and I'll take the tube up one stop and see if we can get a tail on our mystery guest."

"Be careful" the Major advised as Tracy got out of the Land Rover as soon as it had stopped in the middle of the busy roundabout alongside one of the subway entrances to Old Street Station.

"I'll try" Tracy confirmed before closing the door and disappearing into the crowds.

As the Major continued on up City Road towards the Angel at Islington, Tracy passed through the sub surface ticket hall and down the escalators to the northbound platform of the Northern Line where due to what was advertised as 'signalling problems at Morden' there were some delays being experienced with the service and heavy crowds on the platform as a result.

"Oh great..." Tracy remarked to herself as she made her way through the crowd to the far end of the platform where it was quieter. Fortunately a Northern Line service arrived at that moment and no sooner had it stopped than the crowds on the platform surged forward.

Tracy decided to remain against the platform wall until the crowd had sorted itself out. It was as she was waiting however that she noticed someone step onto the platform that to her seemed somehow not right in some way.

The man who Tracy had noticed evidently felt the same way about the overcrowded tube train as she did judging by the fact that he checked his watch, looked up at the next train indicator board on the platform and then stepped back, clearly deciding to take the next train due in a couple of minutes and undoubtedly likely to be quieter than this one.

As the train finally managed to close its doors on the third attempt, it pulled away leaving Tracy, the mysterious man and a few other intending passengers on the platform as it disappeared into the darkness of the north end running tunnel portal.

"I wonder if you are who I think you are?" Tracy wondered to herself as she stepped back out of sight into a cross passageway that ran between the north and south bound platforms.

"Lima Mike One to Control" Tracy called discreetly into her radio as she continued to observe the man on the platform by way of his reflection in the mirror mounted on the cross passageway wall that allowed her to see around the corner without actually sticking her head out into the open "Patch me through to Commander Fuller please" she requested.

"Fuller here Maam" came the fairly swift response.

"Simon, do me a favour" Tracy requested "Get into the CCTV at Old Street and take a look at the Arabian like gentleman who is standing approximately thirty feet from the south end of the northbound Northern Line platform."

"Just a second" Fuller responded as he moved over to a different computer console and called up the live CCTV feeds "Northbound Northern at Old Street you say?" he confirmed.

"Yes" Tracy responded "There is something about this chap that seems not quite right."

"Ok chummy" Fuller declared as he found the right camera "Let's have a look at you."

"Is Collins or O'Connell around by any chance?" Tracy asked quietly.

"They are drinking copious amounts of coffee and working through files next door" Fuller confirmed as he hammered on the dividing wall and through the window gestured them to come over "They are just coming."

"What's all the excitement?" Collins enquired as he and O'Connell quickly came into Fuller's office.

"Does this guy ring any bells?" Fuller indicated the man on the screen.

"Lets have a look" Collins commented as he put on a pair of reading glasses and looked carefully at the screen "Do you know, I reckon that could be our dodgy Sheik" he remarked.

"Good call" O'Connell agreed as he too took a look at the screen "Are these pictures live?" he asked.

"Old Street station, Northern Line right now" Fuller confirmed "Divisional Commander Caverner is in a cross passageway nearby.

"Commander Caverner, this is O'Connell" the CIA man called over the radio headset "Good spot, that's our man."

"Well it looks like he is going in the same direction as me" Tracy confirmed as the distant rumble of an approaching train began to be heard from the south end tunnel portal "I think I'll tag along and keep an eye on him."

"Do we want to intercept this guy at Angel?" Fuller asked as they continued to watch the live CCTV feed that was now showing the arrival of the Northern Line service at the platform.

"We need him to go about his normal business" Tracy replied as she observed the Sheik step forward to the platform edge ready to board the train at the second car from the rear "Our only involvement should be ensuring that the intercept at Angel goes without any unpleasant incident."

"Roger that" Fuller confirmed "I'll advise the Major and his boys."

"While you are at it" Tracy added as she quickly darted from the cross passage across the width of the platform and jumped onto the rear car of the train "Shoehorn my husband into that helicopter and tell him to get moving, things are about to get interesting I suspect."

Up on the roof of New Scotland Yard, the Commander was watching from the roof access the Security Service helicopter coming into land with some understandable nervousness. He hated flying, he was not overly keen on heights either but usually his sense of duty ensured he reluctantly overcame his personal fears.

"How do I keep getting into these scrapes?" he asked himself as the helicopter touched down and after a deep breath he came out onto the roof and went over to it.

"Sir!" Fuller's voice was barely audible over the noise of the helicopter's engines as he emerged from the roof access door and called out, it was however just about enough to make the Commander turn around just as he had opened the door and was about to get in.

"Please tell me I can take the train instead" the Commander joked more in hope than any realistic expectation.

"Your wife says to take off as soon as possible" Fuller confirmed "She has sighted our unfriendly Sheik at Old Street Station heading northbound to the rendezvous at Angel so it would appear he is the mystery guest for today."

"Which means in about five minutes we should find out where I am supposed to be going in this contraption" the Commander confirmed "Right, where is Tracy now?" he asked.

"The train is just passing the old City Road station fan shaft now" Fuller confirmed as he checked his palmtop computer which was providing him with live real time updates of the situation.

"Two minutes then" the Commander confirmed "Tell her to be careful, I'll see you later" he added as he secured his seatbelt and the helicopter pilot prepared to take off.

Fuller stepped back and watched as the helicopter with the Commander in the front took off from the rooftop and once clear turned towards the North West before heading off at some speed into the distance.

"Is this thing safe?" the Commander asked the pilot out of curiosity.

"Safe as riding a bicycle" the pilot confirmed.

"That's the problem" the Commander responded "The last time I rode a bicycle I was about seven and I fell off it and broke my leg."

Whilst the Commander was travelling above the city, his wife Tracy was very much below it as the Northern Line service continued on its journey between Old Street and Angel stations, the only point of interest in the otherwise continuous long dark tunnel being a moment when a rush of air and slight change in the sound of the trains wheels on the track signalled the point where it passed through the long closed City Road station, now little more than a forgotten ventilation shaft.

"We are now approaching Angel" the on board automated announcement declared as the train noticeably started to slow down and Tracy observed through the connecting door window into the next car that the Sheik was rising from his seat ready to disembark.

"This is Angel" the announcement came as soon as the train emerged into the light at the station platform and slowed to a halt.

The Sheik quickly alighted as soon as the train had come to a halt and the doors opened, however unlike the rest of the disembarking passengers, he carefully looked around which caused Tracy to temporarily duck back inside the train doorway to avoid being seen.

A few moments later the Sheik proceeded across the platform to a cross passageway and went to the opposite platform as Tracy managed to jump clear of the train's doors just as they were closing.

"Oh this guy is good" Tracy remarked to herself as she went through a different cross passageway to the much wider and more open southbound platform and observed the Sheik heading for the exit, using the larger open area of the larger formerly two track island platform tunnel to check to see if he was being followed more easily.

As soon as the Sheik was out of sight in the crowds at the far end of the platform and heading for the escalators, Tracy skipped back to the northbound platform and headed along it to the exit quickly.

The Sheik seemed comfortable now that he was not being followed, there had not been anything obvious at platform level and so he relaxed as he joined the crowds boarding the first short escalator up before proceeding directly to next larger and newer escalator that led all the way to the surface.

It took over a minute to reach the top on this, the longest escalator on the entire Underground network and thankfully for Tracy who was not that far below him, his relaxed nature meant he did not bother to check below and behind him even as he reached the street level ticket hall and passed his ticket into the barriers to allow him to exit.

As the Sheik headed for the exit to the busy street outside, Tracy passed her warrant card over the yellow card reader and passed through the ticket barriers herself before turning right and heading to the station control room where she was met by two uniformed officers from the Transport Division of the Service.

"Afternoon gentlemen" Tracy declared as she entered the Station Control Room "Have you two been brought up to speed on what's occurring?" she asked.

"Not so far Maam" the first officer confirmed "We were at King's Cross when we got a call to leg it over to Angel and await your arrival."

"Well gentlemen" Tracy declared "This is where the fun begins. You see the Arabic looking gentleman at the entrance there?" she pointed out the Sheik through the two way mirror window of the Control Room.

"Six foot two, grey sports jacket?" the second officer asked.

"That's the fella" Tracy confirmed "Whatever you do, don't arrest him or even let him think we are onto him. We want him to go about his business as normally as possible."

"Right Maam" the first officer confirmed as they noted that the Sheik was moving off from the street entrance outside.

"Ok then, lets go" Tracy responded as they left the Station Control Room and proceeded across the ticket hall in discrete pursuit of the suspect.

"Come on get a shift on" Jennifer remarked as she looked ahead at the seemingly never ending stream of traffic that could be seen formed nose to tail off into the distance on the approaches to the Angel at Islington.

"I hope this chap we are picking up is patient" Newton remarked "We are ten minutes late now as it is."

"I gather he is not exactly the tolerant type" the leader of the trade delegation confirmed.

"Oh here we go" Jennifer announced as after what seemed like an eternity the traffic lights changed and they were able to cross the busy junction where she pulled in to the side of the road opposite the entrance to the station.

"There he is" one of the men pointed to the Sheik who was standing on the pavement at the roadside looking across at the car whilst casually leaning forward on the pedestrian barriers.

"Does this chap have a name?" Jennifer asked as she released her seat belt and prepared to get out of the car.

"Sheik Abdul" the leader of the trade delegation confirmed "He is a very important businessman" he explained.

"All right, sit tight everyone and I'll go and fetch him" Jennifer confirmed as she got out of the car. Being carefully to cross the road amid the heavy traffic, and under the watchful eye of Tracy and the two Transport Division officers in the station entrance as well as the Major's men who were discreetly secreted all around, Jennifer went over to the Sheik and greeted him by the roadside.

"Sheik Abdul?" Jennifer asked.

"Yes" the Sheik confirmed in a rich Arabian voice that was full of confidence.

"Your transport awaits Sir" Jennifer confirmed, indicating her car parked on the opposite side of the street "If you would care to follow me?"

"By all means" the Sheik confirmed as he duly followed Jennifer as they crossed the road and went over to the car, however as she went to open the door, Jennifer suddenly collapsed unconscious to the ground as she was struck on the back of the head.

Before anyone realised exactly what was happening, the Sheik had got into the drivers seat of the car, started the engine and driven off at high speed leaving Jennifer lying unconscious on the road and Newton dead on the pavement where he had been shot dead with a silenced weapon by one of the Trade Delegation and then thrown out of the vehicle.

Tracy reacted immediately by running from the station entrance, straight out into the street causing traffic to swerve and brake sharply until she reached Jennifer and turned her over.

"Check him" Tracy called to the Major who joined her at that point and immediately checked over Newton only to discover he was dead.

"He's gone" the Major confirmed whilst around them some of his men plus the Transport Division officers were cordoning off the area.

"Come on Sis, give me a sign here" Tracy urged, leading to a sigh of relief as Jennifer began somewhat groggily to regain consciousness.

"What happened?" she asked as with some caution Tracy helped her to her feet so she could at least get out of the road.

"Newton's dead" Tracy confirmed "the car has been nicked and now the fun begins."

High above the capital, the Commander had settled down a bit in the front of the helicopter as the pilot continued to fly approximately north east towards the Islington area.

"Where are the parachutes on this thing?" the Commander asked casually as they flew over Moorfield's Eye Hospital.

"If we get into trouble" the pilot advised with that typical humour all of the Service flight crew seemed to have as standard "Flap your arms and then just before the ground comes up, close your eyes."

"That's not very reassuring...." The Commander remarked wryly.

"Lima Alpha One from Lima Mike One" came Tracy's voice over the radio headset.

"Go ahead love" the Commander responded.

"Just as we predicted, its happened" Tracy confirmed as she sat on the back door ledge of an ambulance parked outside Angel station as alongside her, Jennifer received treatment from a paramedic "Newton's dead and Jennifer has a bit of a bump to the head."

"Is she all right?" Fuller cut in having heard of his wife's injury.

"Looks like she will be fine" Tracy confirmed much to Fuller's understandable relief.

"I take it the Sheik is in the car with the Trade Delegation?" the Commander enquired.

"Indeed" Tracy confirmed "They headed off at a hell of a lick about five minutes ago, they are probably half way to Stratford by now."

"Simon" the Commander called "Anything from the on board audio?" he asked.

"Not much so far" Fuller responded as he rejoined Collins and O'Connell who were wearing headphones, listening to the live feed from the microphone hidden in the car "Looking at the direction it is heading in" he consulted the live map data on another screen "I would say we are Essex bound."

"Well they are not exactly a chatty bunch" Collins added as he temporarily removed his headphones "So far they have discussed the weather, how crap the Northern Line is and I do believe the Sheik isn't overly impressed with the quality of the car."

"My heart bleeds" Jennifer cut in sarcastically having heard that last comment.

"Hold the phone sports fans" O'Connell suddenly interrupted as it was clear he had picked up on a key piece of information "Can you play that last bit back?" he asked Collins who rewound the recording back a few moments.

"Did you pick up on something?" the Commander asked as the pilot of the helicopter alongside him hovered over the Angel area below.

"Sounded like a destination being mentioned" O'Connell explained as he listened with Collins intently to the play back "Westhood Field?" he asked around the office.

"That's what I thought" Collins agreed.

"Where?" the Commander asked.

"No" the Major cut in "West Wood Field" he confirmed "It's an old Ministry of Defence base in the middle of nowhere about twenty miles west of Fairlop."

"You got a map on this thing?" the Commander asked the pilot.

"Under the seat" the pilot confirmed causing the Commander to scabble about underneath his seat and extract a map book.

"Right" the Commander looked over the map carefully having found the right page "Major, I want you with me, is there anywhere we can land near here?" he asked.

"Not in the immediate vicinity" the Major confirmed as he looked up at the helicopter hovering overhead "Do you have a climbing ladder on board?" he asked.

"Do we?" the Commander asked the pilot.

"Yes" the pilot confirmed "Get in the back and I'll go lower."

"Apparently yes" the Commander confirmed as he slightly hesitantly released his seat belt and climbed into the rear cabin of the helicopter.

"Lift that panel in the floor in front of you" the pilot instructed "Inside you will find a ladder, open the door and throw it outside."

Down below on the street, the Major looked around to assess the potential of what he was proposing before turning to Tracy "I need some space, can we clear the traffic from the centre section for a few minutes."

"That sort of chaos I can easily arrange" Tracy confirmed as she gathered some officers together and they went out into the road to stop and clear the traffic.

In a few moments they had managed to clear a space in the middle of the wide road so that the Major could stand clear and receive the ladder. Up above him as the pilot brought the helicopter in closer, the Commander tentatively opened the side door and with a deep breath, threw out the ladder, causing it to unravel as it made its way to the ground below.

"This guy is either very brave or seriously nuts" the Commander remarked as the Major began to climb the ladder speedily. A minute or so later, the Major was climbing into the cabin of the helicopter safely much to the Commanders relief before they reeled in the ladder and closed the door.

"Well that was fun" the Commander remarked as he returned to the front seat and put the seatbelt back on "Tracy, are you there?" he asked over the radio.

"I'm here love" Tracy confirmed as she returned to the pavement having allowed the traffic to resume flowing through once more.

"Find some transport and get whatever you can find by way of armed bodies plus the guys from the Bomb Squad and the Major's boys and start heading towards the village of East Wood" the Commander confirmed as he checked the map again, East Wood being the nearest apparent settlement of any kind in the vicinity of the old MoD site but even this was some distance away.

"I'll see what I can rustle up" Tracy confirmed as she looked around.

"According to the map there is a Service Office there adjacent to a public house" the Commander explained "The Major and I are going to go on ahead in this contraption and find out what is occurring, you get there as fast as you can and we will meet at the public house."

"Be careful love" Tracy strongly advised.

"I will" the Commander reassured her as best as he could before turning to the pilot "Right let's get this thing moving shall we?"

On the ground below, Tracy watched as the helicopter gained altitude and moved off into the distance, the sound of its rotors reverberating off the surrounding buildings.

"Lima Mike One to Control" Tracy called into her radio as soon as the noise from the helicopter had subsided "Are the Bomb Squad and the Armed Response teams still at Epping?" she enquired.

"Most of them yes" came the confirmation from the Control Room.

"Tell them to get moving" Tracy urged "I'll meet them in Fairlop in thirty minutes and then I'll brief them on the way."

"So what is on your shopping list then Abdul?" the leader of the Trade Delegation asked as they continued to travel in the car having now passed through Stratford and heading north by way of the heavy traffic in and around Leytonstone.

"Nice things that make big bangs my old friend" the Sheik confirmed with a smile "Of the highly profitable variety of course, I am merely a middle man with beliefs."

"I always thought your lot put your devotion to God over the accumulation of money?" one of the men in the back of the car commented.

"But of course" the Sheik confirmed "However there is no harm in making a nice little earner on the side whilst you are about it is there?"

This frank and coy admission caused the four men in the car to laugh menacingly in mutual agreement.

"So what plans do you have for your consignment then?" the Sheik asked the leader of the Trade Delegation.

"Oh we are just going to use the hardware for a little target practice" he admitted "A bit of sport, just don't mention to any of the opposition supporters that they are providing the targets" he remarked with laughter.

"And there was me thinking I was a violent bastard" the Sheik remarked wryly "Now it would appear I have competition!"

"How long until we get there?" the Trade Delegation leader asked.

"Should be about thirty minutes" the Sheik confirmed "And then we can get down to business."

"That's it just up ahead" the pilot called to the Commander, indicating a small village nestled in amongst the trees in the near distance and seemingly the only signs of civilisation for some considerable distance in every direction.

"When you said it was a small rural place, you weren't kidding were you?" the Major remarked

"See if you can find a place to put this thing firmly back on the ground" the Commander requested.

"There is a village green on the west side of the village" the pilot confirmed.

"The place is so small I am amazed it has any sides big enough to be designated west and east" the Commander remarked as the pilot brought the helicopter in over the village green and gently lowered it to the ground.

"Thanks for the lift" the Commander responded as he got out of the helicopter a lot quicker than he had got into it and with some relief put his feet firmly back on solid ground once again.

"Quiet little backwater isn't it?" the Major commented as he joined the Commander standing on the village green and surveyed the surrounding area where to his surprise their landing had elicited no reaction whatsoever from anyone in the village bar a couple of passing ducks on their way to the nearby mill pond.

"I am willing to bet this place doesn't feature highly on any of my regional crime reports that is for certain" the Commander admitted before consulting his map "Let's go and find the Service Office" he suggested "It should be down here I think."

Walking through the village did not take long thanks to its very small size, more of a hamlet than a village really. Once the Commander and the Major had passed by the Post Office, they soon found the Dog & Duck public house and next door the small cottage whose former front room seemed to be home to the local National Security & Police Service office judging by the faded sign on the garden wall and the old 'Police' lamp above the door that no one had ever got around to changing.

"Hello?" the Commander asked as he entered through the front door where he found no one. Only the steam from a mug of coffee on the enquiry desk next to the crime prevention leaflet rack showed any sign that there had been someone there recently.

"I'll be with you in a minute!" came the distant call from somewhere inside the building followed by the reason for the lack of response as the sound of a toilet being flushed was heard.

"I hope he remembers to wash his hands" the Major remarked aside as he stooped down to try and avoid banging his head on the low former cottage front room ceiling.

A few moments later a uniformed officer in his late forties appeared at the reception desk, "How can I..." his voice tailed off when he saw that to his great surprise he was facing the Administrator General "Good God!"

"Two steps down from him actually" the Commander admitted "Got a name Lieutenant?"

"Lieutenant Commander Dave Atkins Sir" the officer responded "Sorry for my reaction Sir only we don't usually get anything more exciting than the occasional cat stuck up a tree around here."

"I can believe it" the Commander admitted "Does anything every happen around here, only we just landed a helicopter on the village green and apart from a couple of disinterested ducks, no one batted an eyelid."

"It does tend to be a bit quiet around here" Atkins confirmed "You see being a rural community, everyone has shotguns and the willingness to use them so no one in their right mind ever dares to burgle anyone."

"How many officers do you have based here?" the Commander asked.

"Just me and Albert Bartlett" Atkins confirmed "Only Albert is off today, his wife is having a baby you see."

"Fair enough" the Commander agreed "What do you know about the old MoD site in Westwood?" he asked.

"That old place?" Atkins responded "Yes I know it Sir. It's about ten miles from here in the middle of nowhere, closed down about fifteen years ago but still maintained like a fortress by whoever bought it off them."

"Have you had any large trucks come through here in the last day or two?" the Major asked.

"Actually now I come to think of it yes" Atkins confirmed after a brief moment for thought "There was a call earlier, its in the log here somewhere" he proceeded to root through a old leather bound log book until he found the right page "Here we go, Mr Giles the farmer reported that he had to swerve to avoid five large container lorries that came through the village earlier this morning."

"I take it that is unusual for here then?" the Commander asked.

"Definitely" Atkins responded "Since they built the new bypass ten years ago, nothing larger than the postman's van comes through here these days."

"Do you have a map of the area?" the Commander asked.

"Yes Sir" Atkins replied as he lifted the access part of the counter "Come through to the back and I'll see what I can find."

"Good grief" the Commander remarked as they went through into the back office, indeed the only office in the entire building which had the appearance of having been caught in a time warp. With the exception of a few minor details here and there it seemed to have survived unchanged as a small rural police station from the 1960's.

"I do admit Sir we are a bit behind in the latest developments" Atkins was forced to admit as he searched through a map drawer trying to find the correct one "We don't even have a computer."

"No great loss there as far as I am concerned" the Commander admitted, not being a fan of technology himself "I might retire to here you know" he remarked.

"Here we go" Atkins declared as he brought over a map to the main desk and unrolled it in front of the Major and the Commander "Have a look at that and I'll go and put the kettle on."

"Just what I feared" the Major confirmed as he examined the map of West Wood and its surrounding area "The whole site is on a rise in the landscape" he pointed out the circle of contour lines "and the ground around it for some miles in each direction is clear of trees and anything else for that matter."

"In other words any unexpected visitors will be seen coming a mile away" the Commander asked.

"Or five more than likely" the Major confirmed "Nice place for an ambush."

"In which case we have a problem" the Commander admitted before turning to Atkins as he came in with a couple of mugs of tea and a bowl of sugar as even he was well aware of the Commander's reputation in all matters of unhealthy eating.

"Here you go" Atkins confirmed as he handed the drinks across.

"Thanks" the Commander responded as he duly spooned in three sugars into the tea and stirred it "Tell me, if I wanted to drive a truck from the old West Wood base out to the main road, how many ways are there I could go?"

"You would have to come through the village" Atkins indicated the only major road from the old base and traced it with his finger on the map through the country side and then through the centre of the village "If you had small vehicles, four wheel drive etc you could try the forest tracks to the east but its pretty treacherous, not to mention slow going especially with the rain we have had lately."

"When do we reckon that our friends in the car are going to get here?" the Major asked.

"About another fifteen minutes I would have thought" the Commander confirmed as he checked his old pocket watch.

"I don't suppose I could possibly ask what is going on could I Sir?" Atkins enquired.

"Bad people about to do bad things" the Commander responded "Specifically here" he pointed to the site of the old base on the map.

"We are not exactly over resourced for this sort of thing you know Sir" Atkins advised the Commander with a little apprehension.

“Don't panic” the Commander assured him “The cavalry is on its way, I hope.”

“I want to take a look at this place” the Major declared having finished his study of the maps “Got any transport we can borrow?” he asked.

“Erm well if you can call it that yes” Atkins confirmed “Come with me” he lead the way through out the back of the premises to the back yard.

“Not exactly what you would call sporty is it?” the Commander remarked as he saw the small battered old Ford Fiesta patrol car which had certainly seen better days.

“She may not look much but she goes” Atkins confirmed “Shall I drive?” he asked.

“By all means” the Commander agreed as he went around to the front passenger door and got in whilst the tall figure of the Major clambered into the back.

“Colonel, this is position three” came the call over the field radio in the communications truck “One car approaching up the access road, now three miles distant.”

“Description?” the Colonel requested as he got up from his seat and picked up the call.

“Dark coloured Vauxhall saloon, four occupants” came the confirmation.

“Let them through” the Colonel responded “Keep a good look out for anyone else through, if the authorities were to try anything, now would be the time.”

“Yes Sir” came the confirmation as the Colonel left the truck and stepped down the access steps into the large yard area in front of the main former hangar buildings. He crossed the open ground and entered the largest of the buildings where inside Devlin and a couple of his associates were checking over the contents of the five containers in readiness for the deal to be struck.

“Sir” the Colonel called causing Devlin to turn around “The car is approaching.”

“Excellent” Devlin responded, rubbing his hands with gleeful expectation “It's time to make a lot of money.”

Some four miles away in the edge of the woodland, the former Ministry of Defence site and the car now approaching it was being observed by the Major through powerful binoculars as the Commander and Atkins looked on.

“Well there is the car all right” the Major confirmed as he passed the binoculars to the Commander “Whatever deal is going down is about to commence.”

“And we can't get anywhere near the place to stop it” the Commander admitted with regret.

“If the Colonel is worth one tenth of his reputation then I would wager he has the whole of the open ground between here and there covered with the best equipment and men in the business” the Major confirmed “Just take a look at the hardware the goons on the gate are carrying, that is just the stuff we can see.”

“That is some serious hardware they are carrying” the Commander agreed as he trained the binoculars on the main gate to the site where the car had now arrived and was being checked by the men on guard before being allowed to enter.

“Let's work this out” the Major commented as he took back the binoculars and passed them on to Atkins so he too could have a look for himself “We reckon that the five containers form three batches of merchandise?”

“That is what it looks like yes” the Commander admitted “Two for the Val Verde guys, two for some African rebel lot and the last one for the fake Sheik.”

“That means three lots of mobile targets to cover with the priority on the Sheik's container” the Major confirmed “Plus one more on Devlin and his boys as once he has his money, he will be wanting to make a discreet exit and put as much distance between himself and his merchandise as possible.”

“The one thing on our side is that all of the container trucks have to pass through the one place so we can pick them up as they come through the village” Atkins remarked “Should bring a bit of excitement to the place I would have thought.”

“We need reinforcements” the Commander admitted “How long do you think we have before they make a move?” he asked.

“Assuming that Devlin lives up to his reputation and does the deal in cash, and then counts it all I would estimate at least an hour, possibly two” the Major confirmed.

“The two Val Verde containers are due on a train out of Ipswich at ten o'clock” the Commander checked his watch “At least we know where those two will be going.”

“We best get back” the Major suggested “Once my men are on site, I'll get a proper observation post up and running here.”

“One thing” the Commander insisted as they went back to the tatty patrol car in readiness to return to the village “I'm going after Devlin myself, there are a few polite words I want with him.”

“The scumbag is all yours Sir” the Major confirmed with a knowing grin.

“Welcome” Devlin declared as the four men got out of the car outside the main hangar on the site “Come inside and let's do some business” he suggested with glee.

Leading the way, Devlin duly escorted his customers to the five containers, still mounted on their lorry trailers and with their backs pointed towards them in a fan shaped formation.

"There you have it gentlemen" Devlin declared like an over enthusiastic general showing off his war trophies "Those two containers are for you Mr Rodriguez" he guided the representative from Val Verde to the two yellow containers on the left.

"Mr Molutu" Devlin addressed the man in the Trade Delegation and his associate who were representing the African interests "These two are yours whilst Mr Abdul, I believe this last one is what you have been looking forward to receiving."

"Might the customers be permitted to inspect the goods before payment?" the Sheik inquired.

"By all means" Devlin agreed "Please feel free to check that everything is there, once you are happy gentlemen we shall get down to my favourite part, the money."

With that, the gentlemen moved forward and went over to their respective containers and proceeded to examine their extensive contents carefully.

"Here comes the cavalry" the Commander declared as from the front gateway of the Security Service office in the village he, the Major and Lieutenant Atkins observed numerous Security Service vehicles arriving.

"Good grief!" Atkins remarked.

"Well you did say you were under resourced didn't you?" the Commander remarked wryly.

"We had better sort out some parking" Atkins confirmed, still slightly stunned as the leading vehicle, an Army Land Rover with the Major's men and Tracy stopped in front of them.

"Hello love" Tracy declared from the front passenger seat as the extensive convoy came to a halt behind them bringing the entire village to a gridlocked standstill "Where do you want this lot?" she enquired.

"Best park up around the back of the Church Hall" Atkins suggested "Anywhere else risks the potential of being seen, not to mention the potential of complaints from the natives about the chaos."

"Right you are" Tracy confirmed as the convoy moved off at little more than walking pace.

"Are you expecting trouble Sir by any chance?" Atkins asked as he and the Commander walked around to the rear of the Church Hall as the various Army and Security Service vehicles gathered within the rather rough rural car park.

"Given recent events" the Commander remarked as he felt his ribs that were continuing to be a source of some considerable discomfort "Anything is possible."

"Do we have a plan then?" Tracy asked as she joined her husband.

"Well there is no way we can get anywhere near the place without tipping them off" the Commander admitted "The Major is sorting out an observation team to keep an eye on them and when he gives the word, we shall have to get crafty."

"Sounds like we are going to miss the party" Tracy remarked.

"Don't worry my dear" the Commander confirmed with determination "I fully intend to be there for the desert, I want a quiet chat with our friend Mr Devlin."

"This is eyeball" one of the Major's men called over the radio from his position in the edge of the forest with a clear view ahead to the old MoD site "We are in position, no one is stirring at target location yet."

"Anyone running a book on how long we are going to be here?" the Corporal asked his Sergeant.

"The Major reckons at least an hour" the Sergeant confirmed "Apparently this guy likes to count his money carefully and there is likely to be a lot of it."

A few miles away in the large former hangar, the customers had finished inspecting their purchases to their obvious satisfaction and as the container doors were closed, they returned to Devlin and sat around a table.

"I take it from the smiles you are all happy with the goods?" Devlin asked seeing their expressions, a fact they were quick to confirm with pleasure.

"In which case gentlemen" Devlin duly declared "Once I receive the agreed sum of ten million pounds sterling from each of you, you can take your purchases home."

The three men carrying briefcases proceeded to place them on the desk and push them towards Devlin.

"Ah money..." Devlin remarked as he opened each case in turn to reveal substantial amounts of cash in each one, all neatly bundled "...nothing smells quite like it."

"I assume you are going to count it?" the Sheik asked knowingly.

"Indeed" Devlin confirmed as he wet his thumb and proceeded to count the money in the first case expertly "That's the nicest bit next to actually spending it."

Over the next half hour, as the others talked generally amongst themselves as well as with the Colonel and his men who remained on constant watch, Devlin speedily counted his way through the packs of cash in the cases to his obvious satisfaction and delight.

"Well gentlemen" Devlin declared with pleasure as he closed and locked the cases "All is present and correct, therefore congratulations, the merchandise is all yours."

"A pleasure as always" the Sheik remarked as he and Devlin shook hands.

"Each consignment will have an escort of the Colonel's men until it reaches the port of exit or other destination of your choosing" Devlin announced "A precaution against any possible unpleasantness along the way."

"If you would care to join your appropriate vehicles" the Colonel declared as he joined them "We will get under way."

As the engines of the lorries were started, the Major's men at the observation post picked up on this sudden increase in activity.

"Looks like things are happening" the Sergeant remarked as he returned to the binoculars and rescanned around the distant site.

"Ninety minutes on the nose Sir" the Corporal confirmed "I win ten quid I believe."

"Control, this is eyeball" the Sergeant called over the field radio "The natives a stirring, advise all participants to be on alert."

Back in the village, Tracy and the Commander were busy organising the officers and resources available when the Major emerged from his field operations truck and joined them bearing the news.

"Word from the front" the Major announced "Looks like we may have roll out within the next few minutes."

"Lets get this party started then" the Commander declared.

"We have five teams organised, one for each lorry and any accompaniment that may be travelling with them" Tracy confirmed "We follow them until they are clear of the area and then close in nab the buggers."

"Is that a technical description my dear?" the Commander "Only I would have thought the term is apprehend the suspects and seize the vehicles."

"I've been around you too long" Tracy confirmed "I appear to have picked up some of your bad habits."

"I guess we get the job of clearing West Wood then" the Major concluded.

"If you don't have anything else to do that is" the Commander confirmed.

"Shouldn't be too much trouble" the Major confirmed "Once the trucks and the Colonel's wagon train are clear, we can move in and seize the place. What do you want us to do with anyone we come across?" he asked.

"Ruin their afternoon, permanently" the Commander insisted "I'll be coming along if that's all right with you?"

"The more the merrier" the Major confirmed.

"Just try not to get yourself killed love" Tracy responded as they prepared to depart.

"I'll try my best" the Commander confirmed as they parted with a reassuring kiss.

"Control, this is eyeball" came the call over the field radio in the Major's hands "The gates are opening and it looks like this party is about to begin."

"Roger that" the Major confirmed "Alpha troop" he called to his men "and Administrator General's, time to saddle up!"

"Everyone ready to go?" the Colonel asked over a radio as the convoy of lorries manoeuvred into a line with their escort of Land Rover's containing the Colonel's men, sandwiched in between.

In turn, the driver of each truck plus the leader of each escort confirmed their readiness to depart.

"Very well" the Colonel confirmed "Everyone have a pleasant trip, wagons roll!"

Upon that declaration, the first lorry released its brakes with a hiss of air and moved off towards the main gate where a couple of the Colonel's men were waiting to check the vehicles out off of the site.

"Ok, you're clear mate!" the Sergeant on the gate duty confirmed to the first truck driver whereupon he pulled away onto the long dusty track with an accompanying Land Rover in close formation.

A few moments later as the Colonel, Devlin and a couple of his associates looked on, the second truck departed following closely the path of the first one.

"All in all a very successful afternoon's work I would say" the Colonel declared as the trucks continued to depart, throwing up quite a dust cloud as they proceeded down the track away from the site.

"And profitable as well" Devlin agreed with a satisfied smile.

Travelling slowly over the rather rough track, the vehicles of the convoy took some ten minutes to reach the end of it near the woodland in which the Major with his men and the Commander were hiding out of sight.

"Well there they go" the Major declared as they watched the trucks and Land Rover's go by.

"Lima Mike Zero One" the Commander called over the radio "They are rolling to you now."

"What have we got?" Tracy asked.

"Two yellow trucks leading" the Commander confirmed "two blue ones behind that and a green one bringing up the rear. Be aware though it looks like each truck has an accompanying Land Rover of armed loons so please be careful love."

"I will" Tracy confirmed "If you should bump into our old friend Mr Devlin, give him my regards, preferably right between the eyes."

"With pleasure dear" the Commander confirmed.

"Ok Alpha Troop" the Major declared once the convoy was out of sight "Let's go!"

With that command, the tree line came alive as camouflage clad soldiers emerged from their hiding place and quickly began to deploy across the ground, using the sparse shrub and vegetation to provide some cover.

"I guess we are walking then" the Commander remarked as he and the Major emerged from the woodland.

"Do you want to sneak across the field or walk boldly up the road the old fashioned way?" the Major asked.

"Lets walk right up to the front door" the Commander confirmed as they set off.

Ten miles away in the village, Tracy was watching down the long road that leads into and through the village from an overlooking window in the Public House.

"Here they come" she called back to some of her officers who were waiting with her in the bar area, her announcement causing a flurry of activity as they began to make a move.

In the distance but approaching rapidly now was the leading lorry of the convoy. As it came into the tight confines of the village, the progress slowed significantly, passing the Public House at a sufficiently slow enough pace that Tracy was able to see the number of people travelling in each vehicle.

"Looks like three in each truck cab plus six or eight rent a goons in each Land Rover" Tracy confirmed over the radio as the last lorry approached when Tracy did a double take as she recognised one of the passengers.

"Primary target is the green truck at the rear" Tracy added "It's the one with our fake Sheik aboard."

The vast majority of the Security Service support Tracy had managed to muster were already spread across the area on all roads radiating from the village ready to intercept and discreetly follow the first four trucks wherever necessary.

For Tracy, her priority was the truck with the Sheik aboard, this being the one that had the most potential of presenting a clear and present danger to the nation's security.

"Right let's roll" Tracy called to her colleagues as the target truck headed out of the north end of the village.

Quickly she left the Public House and with an Armed Response Unit team, they got into two powerful unmarked patrol cars, Tracy driving the lead car with Bob from Armed Response alongside her in the front passenger seat.

"Right then ladies and gentlemen" Tracy called over the radio "We need to keep this one and its passenger on our radar at all times" she declared.

"Under no circumstances must we let it get away all right?" she emphasised as they drove out of the Public House's car park and out onto the road.

"That shouldn't be a problem Maam" Bob confirmed "You lead and we will follow until you want us to shoot something."

Maintaining a discreet but manageable distance from the target lorry and its escorting Land Rover, Tracy intently concentrated on following whilst not drawing any unwanted attention to their presence.

"This could turn into a lengthy mystery tour" one of the officers sat in the back seat commented.

"I am beginning to think it would have been more interesting if I had swapped places with my husband" Tracy admitted wryly.

"Next time I'm taking the bus" the Commander remarked as after some fifteen minutes of swift walking, they were reaching the approaches to the gate into the site, so far without any response.

"Looks like nobody is home" the Major commented as he surveyed the gate area, noting that it was closed but now unguarded.

"I don't like it" the Commander declared with a concerned look.

"Neither do I" the Major admitted "Best get this over with quickly I think" he suggested.

"Good idea" the Commander agreed "If you would like to give the word?"

"Alpha Troop" the Major called over his field radio, move in on all sides and secure the perimeter."

On his order, the Major's men emerged from the dense surrounding undergrowth through which they had been moving silently whilst the Major and the Commander had walked up the track.

Moving in all around the site, the men quickly had the perimeter fence secured and confirmed clear of any enemy whilst the Major and the Commander walked up to the main gate.

"Perhaps we should knock" the Commander jokily suggested as they looked around.

"Before we proceed, I think I had better check the gate for any unpleasant surprises" the Major suggested.

"By all means" the Commander confirmed, stepping back to allow the Major to perform a careful check of the gate and adjoining fence for any potential booby trap devices.

"Looks clear" the Major confirmed a few moments later as he got up off of his knees and dusted himself down "Here we go" he declared as he opened the gate cautiously.

"Let's see if anyone is in" the Commander remarked as he drew his gun and with the Major, they entered the apparently empty site cautiously.

Looking all around the apparently empty yard in front of the main buildings, they crossed over to the nearest building, a cursory look inside through the cracked and cobwebbed covered windows revealing it to be empty and looking like it had been abandoned for some time.

"Well that's a blank" the Commander remarked to which the Major nodded in agreement before they moved on.

The next building over was the main and largest on the site, an old aircraft hangar with attached former workshop accommodation down one side.

As they approached the main door, the Commander suddenly caught the sound of relaxed voices coming from inside the vast building and silently signalled back to the Major behind him to stop.

"Somebody's home" the Commander whispered.

"Anyone we know?" the Major asked quietly.

Cautiously, the Commander edged up to the doorway and briefly looked around the post inside the building where he saw Devlin, the Colonel and a number of Devlin's associates gathered by a car, loading cases and other items into the back of it.

"Looks like five" the Commander confirmed quietly "Devlin, that Colonel bloke and three suited lackeys."

"I think we can handle these" the Major remarked after quickly taking a look for himself before ducking back again "Lets get some of the lads to join us first."

Inside the building, Devlin and the Colonel were in a self congratulatory mood having successfully sealed the deal.

"I have to admit Mr Devlin that I had my doubts that we would be able to successfully complete this operation at one point" the Colonel admitted.

"Well there are thirty million reasons why it was worth it" Devlin declared as he looked at the cases containing the money lying in the back of the car with a sense of pride and admiration "Plus your new toys of course" he added.

"Aye" the Colonel confirmed in agreement "I can safely say that I and my lads will be thoroughly enjoying our new toys when we get back to the darker more profitable parts of the world, not that the last few days back here haven't been entertaining mind."

"Lets get moving" Devlin suggested "I have an appointment with the interior of my safe."

As Devlin went around the car, they were all surprised when suddenly the main doors were thrown open and the Major's men entered guns drawn.

"Party's over gentlemen" the Commander declared as he entered the building and proceeded to the front of the line to confront Devlin and his cohorts.

"Commander" Devlin responded with calm but polite irritation "This is an unexpected pleasure."

"I want a word with you" the Commander confirmed "and you as well" he looked across at the Colonel with a stern insistent stare.

"Well I am a very busy man" Devlin responded "Perhaps you and your colleagues would care to make an appointment?"

"How about I just arrest you and we continue this little chat back at the Yard?" the Commander suggested.

"I don't think so" Devlin responded before turning to the Colonel "What do you think?" he asked.

"Simple really" the Colonel remarked "Just two words needed I would have thought."

"I surrender?" the Commander asked who like the Major alongside him, was sensing now that something was about to go horribly wrong.

"No" the Colonel responded calmly before taking a deep breath and then announcing upwards towards the rooftop loudly "Covering fire!!"

The Major grabbed the Commander and pushed him to the ground as a hail of gunfire from the roof space commenced, providing a curtain between the two sides.

"Move!" the Major called as he then dragged the Commander up and together ran over to the side of the building and the cover of some packing crates discarded nearby.

"Bloody hell, these guys are serious" the Commander exclaimed as the two sides exchanged fierce gunfire whilst amid the chaos, Devlin and the Colonel could be seen making good their escape.

"Agreed" the Major responded as he attempted to survey the situation "There are only three shooters up there in the roof space but their elevated position over us gives them the advantage."

"And whilst we are buggering about down here" the Commander concluded "Devlin and his chum are about to bugger off into the sunset."

"My boys can handle this" the Major informed the Commander "They are trained for just this sort of situation."

A loud explosion rocked the building as a grenade launched by one of the Major's men duly took care of one of the roof space shooters who descended to the floor some distance below with a loud crunch.

"That's gotta hurt" the Commander remarked wryly only for his expression to change as he saw through the smoke and chaos that Devlin was in his car now and reversing the vehicle out of the building.

"Is there a back door to this place?" the Commander asked, indicating the changing situation with Devlin's vehicle now heading towards the rear wall.

"Not big enough to get a car through" the Major confirmed "Look, you let me and my lads take care of this lot, you get after him."

"See you later" the Commander declared as, keeping his head down, he headed away from the scene towards a small side door and headed outside.

Once outside, the Commander headed down the side of the building towards the rear as the sound of gunfire echoing within the building began to die down.

Reaching the back of the building and with his gun drawn, the Commander looked around the corner cautiously to see if Devlin was there.

He wasn't but he soon appeared as suddenly the car came crashing through the thin corrugated metal back wall and came to a shuddering halt after colliding against the rusting remains of an old lorry chassis.

The Commander, who had ducked for cover behind an old oil barrel when the car had come crashing through, looked up in time to see Devlin get out of the car and joined by the Colonel and two of his men, set off on foot at a swift pace towards the woods.

"Oh drat!" the Commander remarked as he clambered back to his feet, grimacing in pain as he had once again aggravated his old injuries.

"Are you all right Sir?" the Major asked as he emerged from the building and helped the Commander to his feet.

"I'll feel better when we catch that bugger" the Commander admitted "He's headed that way with that dodgy Colonel and a couple of others."

"Right" the Major declared "Let's get after them then."

"Looks like they are splitting up" Tracy remarked as she received a response from the Control Room who were coordinating the following of the five trucks.

"At least we know where four of them are going" Bob commented "It's chummy here who is the mystery parcel."

"If I was a betting woman" Tracy remarked as she consulted a map "I'd bet on our new friend here turning north west once we hit the motorway."

"Not exactly offering us up much opportunity to stop this thing safely is there" Bob confirmed as he too consulted the map.

"The driver has to rest somewhere along the way" Tracy remarked "Let's hope he picks a nice quiet spot."

"Have we heard anything from the Major and the boss yet?" Bob asked as the road they were driving along began to change from twisty rural lane to the approaches to a busy dual carriageway and the consequent increase in speed.

"Nothing since we left the village" Tracy confirmed as she approached the roundabout that led onto the main road, the truck and Land Rover that they were following just ahead and so far unaware of them following at a discreet but maintainable distance.

"There goes the lot for Ipswich and it looks like the other two are going with them" Bob observed as ahead four of the trucks could be seen in the distance going over a bridge at the junction, taking the road away to the north east.

"In the meantime" Tracy confirmed "It would appear we are heading west. What's on this road?" she asked.

"Yet more forests, a couple of industrial estates and then we are into the upper reaches of Greater London" Bob confirmed "Not to mention being off the map."

"Somebody back there put a call in to our friends at MI5" Tracy called to the two officers sat in the back "I suggest they start to head towards us up the same road and we can co-ordinate our efforts."

"What about the boss?" Bob asked.

"Well if I know my husband" Tracy admitted "By now he either has the situation completely under control and all wrapped up or its all gone pear shaped and he has now resorted to plan 'B'."

"I take it this is plan 'B'" the Major asked the Commander as they reached the perimeter fence where they found a large hole had been recently breached in it.

"Where the hell are these guys going?" the Commander asked as he looked around once they had climbed through the hole in the fence.

"Wherever they are going" the Major remarked as he knelt down and examined the ground "They had transport waiting, these tyre tracks are fresh."

"Looks like they headed off down into the woods" the Commander indicated ahead along a rough old track that headed off into the dense forest ahead "Here we go again" he remarked.

"We are going to lose them at this rate" the Major commented.

"Not if I have anything to say about it" the Commander responded with clear determination "I'm going to follow this track, you go and find some suitable wheels and catch me up."

"Are you sure about this?" the Major cautioned "Only if your wife finds out I let you head off on your own, she'll probably kill me!"

"Best not tell her then" the Commander wryly suggested before setting off up the rutted rough track whilst the Major left in the opposite direction.

Heading deep into the thick forest, the Commander struggled to maintain his footing as he negotiated the rutted and muddy track, slipping in some places and quickly getting caked in mud on the lower half of his trouser legs.

The poor conditions underfoot were also hampering the progress of Devlin and the vehicle he was travelling in despite its four wheel drive configuration.

This meant that despite the Commander being on foot, he could still see the rear lights of Devlin's vehicle making its way through the woods slowly some two or three hundred yards ahead.

"Oh stuff this!" the Commander exclaimed as he nearly twisted his ankle as he slipped in a particularly nasty mud and water filled pothole "Lima Alpha One to Control" he called into his radio.

"Control" came the quick but rather crackly response which indicated a poor signal, not what the Commander wanted right now.

"If you can hear me" the Commander responded "Have someone, possibly Commander Fuller check with the Land Registry and see who owns anything south west of the old Westwood MoD base."

"I'll pass..." the response came before the signal broke up.

"Terrific..." the Commander remarked as he looked down at his radio set that was now broadcasting and receiving nothing but static.

In the relative silence of the forest, the Commander stood still and listened intently. In the distance he could just make out Devlin's vehicle continuing to make slow yet methodical progress some distance ahead but there was also now approaching the sound of a second vehicle coming from behind him.

Deciding that caution was the best option, the Commander climbed out of the muddy rut of the track way and went into the adjacent trees and shrub so that he could observe the approaching vehicle in relative safety in case it turned out to be unfriendly.

A few moments later, the bright headlights of a small vehicle became visible in the distance that as it came closer revealed itself to be a quad bike making good progress through the rough mud.

"Good grief" the Commander exclaimed as he recognised the Major riding the quad Bike and in response stepped out of the bushes to meet him.

"Did you call a cab?" the Major asked as he came to a stop alongside the Commander.

"Oddly enough yes" the Commander confirmed with an uncertain look.

"Hop on the back then" the Major indicated.

"Right..." the Commander responded with continuing uncertainty as he got on the back "Well at least it's not the wife driving I suppose."

"Oh by the way" the Major informed him as he restarted the engine "A call just came through from your Mr Fuller, they got the gist of your garbled message, our boy is most likely heading for his stately mansion about ten miles from here."

"Lets go door knocking then" the Commander suggested as they moved off.

"I spy with my little eye something beginning with 'B'" Bob announced wryly as the boredom of continually following the truck up the main road towards London became readily apparent.

"Bridge" Tracy guessed as they continued down the dual carriageway.

"No" Bob responded only to then notice something relevant ahead "Try bloody great truck next to burger van" he pointed to the lay-by just up ahead.

"Well spotted" Tracy confirmed as she too noticed the truck which had stopped in a lay-by just ahead "Unit two from one" she quickly called to the car behind "Target has stopped, pass it by and then meet up at the next turn off."

Seated in the front passenger seat, Bob made good use of his viewpoint to make a discrete observation of the truck and surrounding area as they passed, continuing on to the next turn off where Tracy pulled into the side of the road.

"Looked reasonably safe from what I could see" Bob commented as he got out of the car.

"Do you think this is going to be our best chance?" Tracy asked as she too got out of the car whereupon they joined the other officers.

"Any further down this route and we are into areas of dense population" Bob remarked "I reckon it's now or never."

"Right, game time ladies and gentlemen" Tracy declared as she gathered them all together "For those of you who haven't been paying full attention lately, our target vehicle is parked right over there and its time to terminate their journey before we get any nearer to the City."

"Any back up available?" one of the Armed Response Unit officers asked.

"Of course not" Tracy admitted wryly "Unless anyone has heard from our friends at MI5 that is."

"I guess we are doing this the old fashioned way then" Bob remarked "Right guys, give me a tight surrounding perimeter, once our targets have finished their burgers, we move in and grab them."

"And if we encounter any resistance?" one of the officers asked.

"Disable and disarm" Tracy confirmed "No heroics though please, we've had enough casualties this week already."

"Ok then" Bob declared "Dave and Terri, you are on traffic control duty, the rest of you with me."

With that declaration, the officers checked their weapons and moved off with Tracy and Bob leading the way back up the road towards the lay-by.

"Are you wearing any armour?" Bob asked Tracy.

"Err no as a matter of fact" Tracy admitted, realising the hypocrisy of her situation given that she had been constantly insisting that her husband was fully protected as far as possible.

"In which case" Bob advised "My standing order from the boss takes precedence."

"What can I say" Tracy admitted wryly "He loves me!"

"If it all kicks off, for Gods sake get behind me" Bob advised.

"Lets hope it doesn't then" Tracy remarked as they approached the lay-by and using the cover of the surrounding bushes, the officers spread out, encircling the area where they could see the truck still parked up with its accompanying Land Rover of soldiers just behind it.

"Well I count one in the truck and four in the Landy" Bob confirmed as he examined the scene through the bushes with assistance of binoculars.

"With what looks like the truck driver returning to his vehicle now" Tracy confirmed "We had better hurry up or they are going to leave without us."

"Is everyone ready?" Bob called over his radio to which came a series of affirmative responses from each of his heavily armed officers now surrounding the location.

"Now?" Bob asked Tracy.

"Now" she confirmed as she observed that the truck driver had returned to his vehicle and that all of the targets were now in the one place.

"Go, go, go!" Bob called over the radio. Immediately there was confusion amongst the men in the Land Rover and the truck when suddenly the dozen or so heavily armed Security Service officers emerged seemingly from nowhere and with guns drawn, surrounded the vehicle.

"You in the truck" Tracy called directly and with firmly implied insistence, aiming her semi-automatic hand gun through the windscreen "Put your weapons down and exit the vehicle slowly."

The truck driver did what he was asked quickly and no sooner was he out of the vehicle than he found himself face down on the ground where he was thoroughly searched and handcuffed before being led away.

"You too, come on, don't make me ask you twice" Tracy called to the passenger in the truck, the man she could clearly recognise as the Sheik who thus far had refused to move.

As Bob and the rest of his team were disarming the men who had been in the Land Rover, Tracy stared intently at the Sheik through the windscreen as if trying to get him to move through some sort of telekinesis.

"I haven't got time for games mate" Tracy declared, inserting a more menacing tone into her voice to emphasise her point "Move!"

Seeing his opponent's grim determination, the Sheik decided that maybe this was one of those rare occasions in his life when it would be better to surrender, at least for now that is.

With some reluctance the Sheik slowly got out of the truck, climbing down the access steps where no sooner had his feet touched the ground than he was quickly restrained and frisked, all the time while he and Tracy maintained eyesight on each other.

"You see, that didn't hurt did it?" Tracy mockingly responded once the Sheik had been checked for concealed weapons and firmly handcuffed.

"This is an infringement of my rights, you will be hearing from my solicitor" the Sheik calmly assured Tracy.

"Oh believe me pal, I am the least of your worries" Tracy responded "It's those guys over there who are going to be your new best friends you should be worrying about" she pointed ahead to a car that was now pulling into the lay-by.

"Did I miss the good bit?" Collins asked as he got out of the car and crossed over to Tracy.

"Well we got him" Tracy confirmed with a satisfied smile "He's all yours."

"Thank you" Collins responded whereupon he turned to two of his MI5 colleagues who had arrived with him "Take our new friend here to Croydon."

"You know what they say don't you?" Tracy remarked aside to the Sheik as the two MI5 officers took custody of him "In Croydon, no one hears you scream."

"Come on chum" one of the MI5 officers responded "There is a veritable who's who of the world's intelligence services waiting to have a nice long chat with you mate."

"This is a major coup for us" Collins remarked as he and Tracy watched as the Sheik was led away "Should earn us a few brownie points with Sir Richard, not to mention the most important thing."

"Which is?" Tracy enquired.

"Watching the look on the CIA's faces when they realise we have nabbed him before them" he confirmed with a smile.

"Lets see what's in this thing" Tracy suggested as the MI5 car carrying the Sheik departed.

"Absolutely" Collins agreed as they proceeded around to the back of the truck where Bob was examining the lock with some concern.

"This isn't shifting in a hurry" he remarked.

"Stand aside" Tracy declared as she approached the lock, "This is my department" she declared as she extracted her lock picking set from her inside tunic pocket and immediately proceeded to work on the lock.

"Ok, I am officially impressed" Collins remarked as after a few moments work, Tracy managed to release the lock and casually chuck it over her shoulder "How the hell did you manage that?"

"Comes of being the daughter of a locksmith" Tracy explained "You should see me crack a safe."

"All right" Bob declared, "You take that side" he instructed Collins "I'll open this side."

Once the catch was released, the two men opened the doors of the container, allowing Tracy to look inside as the light came in and illuminated a large number of crates and metal cases, many of them with military markings and 'Explosives' warning signs.

"Strike a light..." Collins exclaimed as he saw the contents of the container for the first time as Bob and Tracy climbed up inside for a closer look.

"I wouldn't if I were you" Bob responded to Collins comment "There is enough firepower and plastic explosive in here to blow us to Mars."

"Just imagine the damage that could have been done if this lot had got in the wrong hands" Collins commented as he joined the others in the back of the truck.

"Would you mind telling me whose are the right hands for this sort of stuff?" Tracy asked.

"You have a point" Collins admitted.

As they continued to look through the deadly cargo, an officer came running over to them with an urgent message.

"Where's the fire?" Tracy asked sensing the urgency.

“Control picked up a call from the Chief” the officer quickly explained “Well bits of it anyway, the general gist of which was he was heading across country westwards towards a large manor house and estate owned by a Mr Devlin.”

“Bob, find me some wheels” Tracy requested “and a couple of your guys as well if you can spare them.”

“I’m on it” Bob confirmed as he jumped down from the back of the truck and headed off.

“Get back onto the guys at Control and Commander Fuller” Tracy ordered as she too jumped down from the truck with the assistance of Collins “Tell them to get me an exact fix on the location of that mad husband of mine and then get that to me, I’ll be on the general channel.”

“Yes Maam” the officer confirmed as he left quickly.

“I got some transport” Bob announced as he came running back up to Tracy “Can only spare one of my men though, and that’s me.”

“Mind if I tag along?” Collins asked as they walked to the car.

“You armed?” Tracy asked.

“Err no” Collins admitted.

“Here you go” Bob passed out a couple of MP5’s and spare ammunition to both Tracy and Collins as they passed his support van “I do hope you know how to use them.”

“What have I let myself in for dare I ask?” Collins asked as they got in the car, Tracy getting into the drivers seat.

“Considering you have never been on one of these little blind missions with either I or my husband before” Tracy explained as she started the engine of the marked patrol car “I don’t want to ruin the surprise.”

“Right...” Collins responded with some reserved concern as they set off down the road with sirens and lights in full cry.

“Looks like this is about as far as we go” the Major remarked as they stopped in the shadow of some tall trees where ahead they could see a large gated bridge arch with two armed guards on duty. Beyond the heavily guarded gate with its CCTV cameras and razor wire could be seen the tail lights of Devlin’s Land Rover disappearing into the distance.

“I guess we walk from here then” the Commander remarked as they both got off the quad bike and in the failing early evening light, made their way to a point in the tall embankment some distance away from the guarded gate.

“Up and over I guess” the Major declared as they began to climb the tall embankment, struggling a bit as they fought through undergrowth and muddy conditions underfoot to reach the top.

“I wonder why he doesn't have any fencing or anything up on the top of this thing?” the Commander wondered as they reached the top and cautiously stood up.

“Watch out!” the Major called pushing the Commander back away from a railway line just as an eight car tube train of 1992 type stock rushed past them with a sound of its whistle to warn them.

“Ah, Central Line” the Commander remarked as they both watched the tail lights of the train disappear off into the distance “Who needs embankment security when you have six hundred and fifty volts of live electricity and speeding tube trains guarding it?”

“I reckon we must be somewhere about here” the Major indicated on a map using a torch to provide some better illumination.

“The Hainault loop, about three or four miles west of Chigwell Station by the looks of it” the Commander agreed “Which must mean all this to the south of the line is Devlin's gaff.”

“Impressive” the Major remarked as he surveyed the expanse of grounds marked on the map with the manor house right in the middle of it “That's still about four miles from here, we had better get a move on.”

“After you” the Commander indicated as they checked up and down the twin track railway line for any approaching trains before carefully crossing it, taking great care not to touch any of the rails, especially the live electric current ones.

The other side saw the line side cable racks and then a fence which needed to be negotiated and it was a couple of minutes before the Commander and the Major were scrambling down the other side of the embankment and finding themselves on the ground of Devlin's estate which despite the failing light, could be seen to stretch away ahead of them for some distance.

“Great, more walking” the Commander remarked as he looked around.

“Maybe not” the Major informed him as he surveyed the surrounding area through his binoculars “That looks promising” he indicated a barn nearby.

“I hope you are right” the Commander admitted as they walked cautiously over to the slight ramshackle looking old farm building, from the main door of which the bonnet of a tractor could be seen protruding.

“Ever driven one of these things?” the Major asked as after checking the barn was clear, he made his way inside and looked over the tractor carefully.

“Can't say I have” the Commander admitted “Pretty much everything else mind.”

“In which case I'll drive” the Major declared as he opened the cab door and got in the drivers seat whilst the Commander climbed up the back and positioned himself behind the him, perched slightly precariously on the back window ledge.

“This should do my ribs no end of good” the Commander joked as the Major started up the loud engine of the tractor, released the brake and moved out of the barn.

“Are we heading the right way?” Tracy asked Bob who consulted his map on his lap.

“I think so” Bob confirmed “Keep heading towards Hainault and then hope we get lucky trying to find out where this Devlin hangs out.”

“Lima Mike One from Control” Fuller's voice was heard to call over the radio.

“Go ahead” Tracy responded, not taking her eyes off the road as she continued to drive at high speed, the sirens and blue flashing lights helping to get any traffic out of her way quickly.

“This may be nothing but I though you might be interested” Fuller explained from his desk back at the Conference Centre “Transport Division out of Stratford got a call about three minutes ago, apparently a Central Line driver heading south reported that he nearly ran over two guys on the track about three miles north of Chigwell.”

“Could be the usual graffiti morons” Tracy remarked.

“Well maybe” Fuller admitted “Although I would say from the description that these probably aren't.”

“What did the driver say they looked like then?” Tracy asked.

“One was a tall military style chap, the other a shorter guy who seemed to be a Security Service Officer” Fuller explained “It could be a coincidence but then again we seem to have a policy around here of not believing in them.”

“Where is that driver now?” Tracy asked.

“He was due to clock off at Hainault apparently” Fuller confirmed.

“Get on the telephone to Hainault depot and tell him to stay put until I get there” Tracy confirmed.

“Will do” Fuller confirmed “Control out.”

“Take the next left” Bob confirmed as he checked the map for the fastest route to Hainault “Should take about five minutes at the rate you are going.”

Traffic swerved out of the way as Tracy nearly missed the turn off, forcing her to execute a double handbrake turn to get around the corner, sideswiping a traffic island bollard in the process and disintegrating it.

“I guess my driving skills haven't improved after all” Tracy admitted wryly as with the accelerator all but buried in the floor, she continued onwards into the town of Hainault itself.

A matter of minutes later, the patrol car was pulling up outside the rather dour exterior of Hainault Underground Station, located on the east half of the Central Line loop. No sooner had they come to a halt than Tracy, Bob and Collins were out of the car and entering the station where they were quickly allowed through the ticket barrier gate by the duty Station Supervisor.

“Now where?” Bob asked as in the subway, they looked around wondering which of the two possible directions they were supposed to go in.

“Up here officer” came the call from a member of station staff who was standing up on the island platforms 1 and 2.

“You the driver that phoned in the report?” Tracy asked as they arrived on the platform having run up the ramp.

“Yes Maam” the driver confirmed as he stood by the cab door of a northbound terminating service train with a couple of other members of Underground train and station staff.

“Where was this?” Tracy asked, still partially out of breath.

“About three miles from Chigwell Station” the driver confirmed, “I was heading south at the time.”

“Can you take us there?” Tracy enquired “It’s vital we find the exact location and quickly.”

“I think so” the driver confirmed “I’d need to get clearance from control to take this train out first.”

“Leave that to me” Tracy responded as she followed the driver into the cab of the train whilst Collins and Bob boarded the front car and took a seat in the forward section of the passenger saloon.

“Line Control” Tracy called over the radio in the drivers cab as the driver took his seat and prepared the train for departure “Security Service Priority Request” she declared.

“Line Control receiving” came the response “Authorisation and identification code please.”

“Identification Lima Mike Zero One, Divisional Commander Tracy Caverner, authorisation code Echo Alpha Two One Two” Tracy responded.

“Go ahead” the Line Controller confirmed, not bothering to check the authentication of Tracy's call as he knew it had to be genuine as soon as he heard her name.

“I am on an empty stock train in platform two at Hainault” Tracy confirmed “Lead car number...” she quickly looked around for the number, ducking briefly into the passenger saloon through the open connecting doorway to look up at the blue five digit number on the bulkhead wall above the door “... car number 91326, request clearance to proceed up the main line to a point approximately three or four miles past Chigwell and then detrain with two others onto the line side.”

“Do you require the line to be closed?” the Line Controller enquired.

“No, shouldn't do” Tracy confirmed “We just need to jump off where we are told to by your driver here.”

“Ok then” the Line Controller confirmed “I am setting the route now, you are clear to proceed as soon as the signal aspect is cleared.”

“Thank you” Tracy responded before hanging up the radio and taking the seat in the cab on the opposite side to the driver.

Ahead of them the signal aspect changed to green with the routing indicator confirming they were clear to proceed ahead up the main line.

“Here we go” the driver confirmed as he checked his CCTV monitors to ensure there was no one near the doors of the train “Mind the doors” he declared as he pressed the button and the doors all along the platform side of the train closed before he released the brake and the train moved off under its own power.

The flash of arcing from the electrical pickups shone brightly in the failing evening light as the train crossed the point work to the north of the station, passing the large maintenance depot to the left before proceeding out onto the main northbound running line.

A little over five minutes later the driver slowed down as he approached the rural spot where he had earlier witnessed the Major and the Commander by the line side.

“This is it coming up” he called across to Tracy who had been intently looking out through the front cab window at the track ahead looking for any sign of a lead.

“Stop about here” Tracy urged whereupon the driver quickly brought the train to a stand atop the high embankment before she opened the cab door and jumped down onto the ballast of the trackside a few feet below “Come on you two” she called up inside the train to Bob and Collins who with a little trepidation, quickly followed.

“Do you want me to remain here?” the driver asked from the open cab door.

“Better not” Tracy advised “The bad guys might catch wind that something is up if they see a train standing right on their doorstep for some time for no apparent reason. Get to the next station, put a call in to the Transport Division and ask them to send out everything they can spare out here.”

“Right” the driver confirmed “Good luck” he called before closing the cab door and moving off.

As the train disappeared off into the distance, Tracy led the three of them down the embankment and onto what appeared to be some sort of perimeter track that ran around the outside of the estate. A short distance from where they were, they quickly noticed the small number of heavily armed guards by the gate set into the bridge under the railway line.

“They have transport” Bob pointed out the men's vehicle parked near to the gate “If we can grab that, we can get to the manor house a damn sight faster than on foot.”

“Sounds like a good idea to me” Tracy agreed “However we need to get their attention.”

“Leave that to me” Collins declared as he stepped up and calmly walked off down the track towards the gate and its guards.

“What the hell is he doing?” Bob asked as they followed discreetly close behind.

“Top of the evening to you lads” Collins called in a broad Irish accent as he approached the gate, causing the guards to swing around with their weapons drawn in surprise at this unexpected visitor “I was trying to find my way to the pub in the village and I seem to have got a little lost. I was wondering if you could help me?”

“You're a bit out of your way aren't you mate?” one of the guards remarked as he lowered his gun, realising that this was no threat.

“Just a tad laddie” Collins agreed as he saw in the background Tracy and Bob go around the back of the guards unseen “But I think I know where my two friends are going though.”

“Freeze me laddo” Tracy called as she and Bob surrounded the three armed men “Lets see those hands drop the hardware on the ground shall we.”

“All right” the leader of the men agreed as he and his two colleagues surrendered and dropped their weapons on the ground from where Collins duly picked them up.

“Put them on” Tracy passed handcuffs to the men where with Collins supervising whilst she and Bob continued to keep their weapons trained on them, they were restrained and then escorted to the shadow of the bridge gateway where they were put into the corner.

“Have a pleasant evening” Tracy responded sarcastically as she joined Bob and Collins over by the men's vehicle which they had now successfully commandeered.

With Bob in the drivers seat where he started the engine and amid muffled protests from the men who could do nothing about it, they drove off across the estate into the night.

“There we go my beauty” Devlin declared as he carefully secured his vast wall mounted safe having placed within it the cases of cash “Another day, another thirty million in used readies.”

“Nice work if you can get it” the Colonel remarked as he helped himself to a drink from the decanter.

“And I think that concludes our business” Devlin announced as he sat down behind his vast antique desk “Thank you old friend.”

“You're welcome” the Colonel confirmed, raising his glass in salute.

“So where are you heading for next?” Devlin inquired casually as he joined Devlin in enjoying a celebratory drink.

“I have a job coming up in the darkest corners of South America” the Colonel explained “A couple of cabinet ministers the local big wigs want quietly disposed off.”

“Should be a doddle compared with the last few days” Devlin commented.

“Aye” the Colonel agreed “But no less fun though, especially with all those new toys you've given me to play with.”

As the men continued their conversation in the study, outside the sound of a tractor approaching the grounds of the main manor house itself went largely unnoticed. Stopping about a hundred yards from the main driveway into the manor house, the Major looked on ahead to see if they had approach had been noticed.

“Looks like we made it” he called back to the Commander who was grimacing a bit as the rather bumpy ride in the back of the tractor had done his badly injured body no good whatsoever.

“Terrific” the Commander responded as he climbed down and let out a sigh of relief when he was back on firm ground where he was joined by the Major “Ok, now what?” he asked.

“Let’s see whose home” the Major suggested as they went over to the high wall that surrounded the grounds of the manor house and gardens where they looked through a small barred porthole in a seemingly long forgotten side access gate.

“They don't look too friendly” the Commander commented seeing the significant number of armed guards with dogs on patrol both on the ground and around the high roof top balustrades.

“They also look like they can handle themselves as well” the Major agreed “I think we are going to need reinforcements, trouble is where from?” he asked as he looked around more in hope than expectation.

“Get down” the Commander called as he caught sight of a vehicle approaching them along one of the many tracks that criss-crossed the estate.

Hiding in the bushes by the side of the track, they both watched carefully as the vehicle approached, dimming its lights as it approached the manor house grounds and the position where they were hiding.

“Is it me or is something not quite right here?” the Commander quietly asked aside as the vehicle slowed to a stop almost opposite them.

“Its not you” the Major confirmed as the vehicle's engine stopped and the driver's door opened.

“Bob?” the Commander asked with some surprise as he saw the big officer from the Armed Response Division get out of the drivers side of the four wheel drive vehicle.

“What the?” he responded training a torch and his gun around on the bushes as the Commander and the Major emerged from them.

“Thank God” Tracy called as she emerged from the other side of the vehicle and met the Commander where they hugged and kissed.

“Why does that sort of welcome never happen to me?” Collins remarked “Actually now I come to think of it Sir Richard often asks that as well doesn't he?”

“Fancy meeting you here” the Commander remarked.

“Oh we were just passing, saw this nice place in the country and thought we would drop by for a cuppa” Tracy explained wryly.

“Ok, gather around ladies and gentlemen” the Commander called “Here is the situation.”

The five of them gathered by the vehicle as the Major laid out his map on the bonnet and Bob provided some illumination with his torch.

“This is Devlin's gaff” the Commander explained “It has a two metre high perimeter brick wall all around the outside, guards with big guns and even bigger dogs in the grounds and on the roof tops plus I fully expect there to be no end of booby traps, trip wires, motion detectors, etc, etc, ad nauseum all over the shop.”

“So all we have to do is get into the place completely undetected, grab Devlin and we are home free” Tracy concluded “Should be a doddle” she commented sarcastically.

“I hereby open the floor to suggestions” the Commander declared.

“Well” Bob responded thoughtfully “We do have their vehicle here, what if we approached the main gate pretending to be them, create enough of a diversion for a couple of us to make it through the garden gate over there and into the grounds?”

“Its possible” the Major agreed “The only problem is we still have no idea how many unexpected surprises there are waiting for us in the grounds itself.”

“This side gate leads into what looks like old kitchen gardens if this greenhouse on the plans is anything to go by” the Commander pointed out “There must surely be less protection there than anywhere else I would have thought.”

“How far away are any reinforcements?” Collins enquired even though he knew he was not going to like the answer one bit.

“At least half an hour I would have thought” Tracy confirmed “We've got most of our specialist armed guys spread all over Essex and north London trying to keep tabs on container loads of weapons.”

“Speaking of weapons” the Commander remarked “What hardware do we have to hand?”

“I've got my Beretta and three spare clips” Tracy confirmed “Plus an MP5.”

“Same here” Bob confirmed.

“I've got this thing” Collins produced the MP5 he had been given earlier “Not sure what it does though.”

“Point this bit at the bad guy and then press here” Bob advised him, pointing out the important parts of the weapon “Just don't forget the safety catch though otherwise no bang bang.”

“Right...” Collins confirmed with some understandable nervousness.

“I've got my trusty Mark II SA80” the Major confirmed, showing them his Army issue rifle.

“I've got old faithful here” the Commander produced his ever present if elderly six shot revolver which did not impress Tracy too much.

“Why do you persist with that antique?” she asked out of curiosity.

“I like it” the Commander explained “It's saved my life on a number of occasions has this.”

“Hey, what have our friends got in the motor?” Bob suggested as he went around to the back of the car and opened the rear door “Ah here we go” he declared as he retrieved a semi automatic pistol and spare clips and passed them to the Commander “Try this for size and keep old faithful as you call it for backup.”

“Looks like we have the makings of a plan” the Commander declared as he took the new weapon and put the spare ammunition clips in his pocket “All we need now is to decide who is doing what?”

“Well you two are in uniform and I am willing to bet that everyone knows who you are” the Major remarked “Therefore I suggest that Bob, Collins and I go in the front way, the Commander and the lovely Ms Caverner go in the back way.”

“I hate being sneaky” the Commander remarked “I have always been a kick in the door and ask questions later kind of chap.”

“No kidding love” Tracy agreed with a giggle “Your foot print is on several doors across Westminster if I recall should anyone want any evidence.”

“Right then” Bob declared “I suggest we all check that we have the same time” he checked his own watch as the others did the same “I make it two minutes to eight now. At exactly eight o'clock we will drive up to the front gate and try and create as much distraction and confusion as possible, that's when you two make you entrance hopefully undetected.”

“Good luck everyone” the Commander declared as hand in hand, he and Tracy left them and headed for the small side gate in the wall nearby.

“Ok then” Tracy remarked as they arrived at the small gate and she took a look at the lock “Lets see what we have got here shall we?” she suggested as she extracted her lock picking equipment and proceeded to work on it.

“Watch out for any sensors or triggers” the Commander reminded her as she worked on the lock.

“Ah there is the little darling” Tracy remarked as she noticed a small thin wire running from the gate latch away to some sort of detection trigger equipment nearby “If we open this gate now, the wire you can see there will break, the alarm goes off and its us against those aforementioned very large dogs.”

“I don't do dogs” the Commander reminded her.

“So what I have to do is carefully disconnect the wire from the latch before we open the gate” Tracy continued as she looked carefully and reached through a crack with a pair of thin pliers to the wire beyond “Got it!” she declared with success as she managed to successfully disconnect the wire “All we need now is to open the gate when Bob and the boys gate crash the place.”

“Any moment now I should think” the Commander confirmed as he checked his old pocket watch with a torch.

Around at the main gate, Bob was driving the vehicle dressed in a jacket that matched that of the guards which he had found in the back. Also following on foot close in behind the rear of the vehicle were the Major and Collins with guns drawn ready to cause havoc when required.

“Evening” Bob called as he drew up to the gate and the guard on duty came over to the driver’s side window “Cold tonight isn't it?”

“You can say that again” the guard agreed, not noticing the stranger in the vehicle thanks to the combination of the friendly relaxed conversation and the poor light obscuring Bob's facial features “Ok, come on through, shift change in a minute anyway.”

“Thanks mate” Bob confirmed as he released the handbrake and advanced slowly through the gate. Before the three guards on the gate realised what was happening though, two of them were overpowered by the Major and Collins whilst Bob quickly got out of the vehicle to take care of the third one who had been taken by complete surprise.

“Chuck them in there” Bob indicated the nearby guard’s office where they duly proceeded to drag the three unconscious guards only for them to meet a couple more coming along the driveway from the house.

“Hey!” one of the approaching guards called out seeing his colleagues being dragged away by three strangers “Stop!” he called again, backing up his demand with a quick volley of gunfire in warning.

“Showtime” Tracy declared as they heard the gunfire in the distance and the sound of footsteps nearby running away from them as guards from around the grounds made their way from their posts towards the main gate in response.

Quickly Tracy opened the gate before she and the Commander trained their guns inside, up the garden path where they found no one waiting for them.

“Come on” the Commander declared as he and Tracy scuttled across the old Victorian kitchen garden to the shadow of the slightly dilapidated ornate greenhouse.

“Watch it” Tracy suddenly pulled her husband back as she noticed he was about to hit something partially hidden right next to his feet.

“Trip wire” the Commander declared as he bent down and examined the device
“Clever girl.”

“And I am willing to bet there are more of them as well” Tracy added as they both carefully stepped over the trip wire and headed towards the main house cautiously.

“Whoa” the Commander cautioned Tracy, this time it was his turn to spot a potential trap as they narrowly avoided coming into the line of sight of a CCTV camera mounted on the wall above the kitchen door into the house.

“I’ll say one thing for Devlin” Tracy remarked wryly “This guy is serious about his security isn’t he?”

“You can say that again” the Commander agreed as they both hugged the wall and sidled past the camera, keeping out of its line of sight to reach the door “And guess what” he called back as he tried the handle.

“It’s locked?” Tracy asked.

“Got it in one” the Commander confirmed as he let Tracy pass him so she could work on the lock.

“Hello...” Tracy declared as she worked on the lock and noticed another obstacle to their progress “Looks like we have some alarm tape here.”

“Isn’t there supposed to be some trick with chewing gum or something?” the Commander whispered.

“Old wives tale that one” Tracy confirmed “Trust me I know more about breaking and entering than most of South East London, anyway no one leaves their burglar alarm on when they are in the house do they?”

“I hope you are right” the Commander responded.

“Trust me” Tracy confirmed as she opened the door with no alarm going off “See what did I tell you darling, rule number two, Tracy is always right.”

“Right, we are in” the Commander looked around the kitchen area which was deserted “Where do we find our friend Mr Devlin?”

“I just break into places love” Tracy declared as she put her lock picking equipment away and pulled her gun from its holster “Finding people is your bit.”

“Let’s try upstairs” the Commander suggested nodding towards the stairs nearby which led up to the living floors from the basement servant and kitchen level in the bottom of the house.

“Are you thinking what I am thinking?” Tracy asked as they reached the top of the stairs and exited out into a corridor down the end of which they could see the main hall and front door of the house.

“This is too easy” the Commander responded, exactly reflecting what Tracy was thinking as so far they had encountered no one in the house.

“Oh bugger...” Tracy suddenly called out as she lifted her foot off a rug in the hallway, bent down and pulled it away to reveal a pressure pad underneath which she had just trodden on.

“Whoops...” the Commander remarked “Maybe it wasn't switched on?” he asked.

“Erm...” Tracy looked up with a worried expression at a small red light mounted in the wall above them which was now flashing silently.

“And then again maybe not” the Commander concluded.

Upstairs in the study, Devlin was on the telephone to his guards at the front gate to the manor house who had now managed to overpower Bob and the others who had surrendered as not only were they outnumbered, they also realised that their job of covering Tracy and the Commander's entrance into the premises was over by now.

“Nice job gentlemen” Devlin confirmed “Have them thoroughly searched and then bring them to me” he instructed before hanging up.

“Do you want me to put my boys on standby?” the Colonel asked.

“No, I don't think that will be necessary” Devlin confirmed “It's all been taken care of.”

“Nice work” the Colonel commented.

“Well you trained my guards” Devlin responded “Best investment I have ever made, I value my privacy, especially in my line of work you understand.”

“Absolutely” the Colonel agreed as he recharged their glasses from the decanters “This should be interesting, mind if I stick around.”

“Please do” Devlin readily agreed.

A few minutes later a large group of guards showed the three men into the study calmly.

"Good evening gentlemen" Devlin greeted them "Most unexpected but please take a seat."

The guards, who had brought them up, escorted each of the men to a seat before standing behind them.

"Now who do we have here?" Devlin declared "Robert or Bob Morton, Chief of the Security & Police Service Armed Response Division, Major Ronald Ford of the Army Specialist Services Unit and finally David Collins, Deputy Section Director of MI5 and I assume standing in for the injured Sir Richard Crowthorne."

"You seem remarkably well informed" Collins commented.

"In my line of business gentlemen it pays to know everyone you may come across in the course of day to day business" Devlin confirmed "The one thing I don't quite understand is why are you three?"

"We were in the neighbourhood and thought we would pop by and say hello" the Major remarked.

"Still as witty as ever" the Colonel remarked "Yes, I recall you well from my Army days."

"I thought I recognised your style of work over the last few days" the Major responded "The mercenary trade must be doing well I assume?"

"Certainly more profitable than the Queen's shilling that is for certain" the Colonel confirmed.

"Ah..." Devlin suddenly announced as he looked at a small status monitor upon returning to his desk "I am beginning to see why you three are here now."

"Something wrong?" the Colonel asked.

"It would seem we have some more uninvited guests in the building" Devlin explained "Our three friends here were the diversion I would guess."

"Where abouts are they?" the Colonel asked.

"One floor down over in the east wing" Devlin confirmed as he went over to a larger wardrobe type cupboard and opened it to reveal an impressive array of high-tec weaponry "My samples" he explained as he extracted a couple of lethal looking automatic weapons, one of which he passed over to the Colonel "You never know when potential customers may drop by."

"What about these three" the Colonel indicated the three restrained men.

"Guards, keep our guests entertained" Devlin declared as he and the Colonel marched towards the study door purposefully "We have some rodent control to do."

"See I told you, must have been switched off" the Commander confirmed as they made their way through the ornate dining room on the first floor of the east wing "Otherwise we would have been overrun with gun toting nutters by now."

“That's just it” Tracy whispered back as they cautiously crossed the dining room, one each side of the long medieval dining table that dominated the centre of the room for its entire length “Haven't you noticed its gone kind of quiet in the last five minutes?”

“Ah...” the Commander admitted as he too realised that the silence must mean that their three colleagues at the gate had either been captured or killed “You have a point, but at least they don't know about us yet.”

A sudden volley of gunfire from a balcony above overlooking the dining hall caused Tracy and the Commander to dive behind the dining table for cover.

“You were saying love?” Tracy retorted wryly as a further round of gunfire impacted into the table narrowly missing them.

"Good evening" Devlin called from above "I have to say all this attention is very flattering but not exactly welcome" he declared before casually letting off a few more rounds.

"Charming fellow" the Commander remarked aside "I don't suppose if I asked nicely to put down your weapon and put your hands on your head, you would at least consider it?" he called up.

"Erm..." Devlin mockingly thought for a brief moment "No not really" he casually confirmed, reinforcing his point with a further burst of gunfire.

"You know in movies where the good guys are hiding behind a car or a table for cover and are protected from enemy fire?" Tracy asked the Commander as they reloaded.

"Err yes" the Commander responded, uncertain where this was leading.

"Well it doesn't work" Tracy confirmed "bullets pass through pretty much anything."

"Now you tell me love" the Commander responded "We had better find a way out of here" he suggested.

"Are you still there?" Devlin called from the balcony above.

"Yes!" Tracy and the Commander responded in unison.

"Just checking" Devlin replied before opening fire again, narrowly missing them as the table disintegrated still further.

"Is this the time for a Betelgeuse death anthem?" the Commander asked.

"Maybe not" Tracy whispered as she noticed something over in the corner of the room and motioned her head towards it.

"Something wrong?" the Commander asked.

"I think we may have a way out" she explained, indicating the corner of the room
"That looks like a concealed servant's door to me."

"I'll keep him talking, you make a run for it" the Commander suggested.

"Oh no, you go first" Tracy replied quickly "I'll distract him."

"Are you sure?" the Commander asked with some concern.

"Get going will you?" Tracy urged.

"Ready" the Commander confirmed as he braced himself to make a run for it when Tracy created her diversion.

"Now!" Tracy called as she popped up and opened fire with the MP5 causing Devlin to dive for cover as she managed to rake the balcony with gunfire.

With Devlin ducking for cover, the Commander was able to scuttle across the floor from beneath the table to the old servants access door in the corner and dive inside it.

A few moments later he was joined by Tracy who managed to escape whilst Devlin was cowering.

"Well that worked" the Commander remarked.

"Told you it would dear" Tracy confirmed with more than a sense of relief.

"Come on, lets get out of here before he works out where we got to" the Commander suggested.

"Where the hell are we?" Tracy asked as they squinted to see anything in the narrow dark and dusty former servant's access corridor.

"Old passageway" the Commander informed her as they cautiously advanced "These old manor houses are usually riddled with them, they allowed the serving staff to pass through the house without being seen by the residents."

"This could wind up being a long night" Tracy commented.

"Maybe not" the Commander responded as he came across a diagram on the wall covered in dust and cobwebs but still legible.

"A plan for a plan" Tracy remarked as she looked at the old map of the servants corridors once her husband had brushed off the worst of the cobwebs.

"I think we are about here somewhere" the Commander pointed out part of the plan
"So let's try down this way."

"After you my love" Tracy urged.

On the other side of the wall, Devlin, the Colonel and a couple of guards were walking briskly down the ornate corridor trying to work out where the two officers had managed to escape to.

"They must be around here somewhere" the Colonel remarked as he opened a cupboard as they passed it and peered inside.

"This place is a rabbit warren" Devlin confirmed as they reached the east wing rear staircase and headed up "What we have here is a serious rodent problem gentlemen."

As they headed up the stairs, the echo of their footsteps could be heard immediately below by Tracy and the Commander who both stopped and listened intently to the path the steps took above them.

"Looks like they are heading that way" the Commander pointed up and ahead.

"That looks promising" Tracy shone her torch down the corridor to their right and illuminated the bottom of a stone spiral staircase.

"Ladies first" the Commander allowed Tracy to go first "Do you think there are any ghosts down here?"

"Probably" Tracy commented as they headed up the narrow stone spiral staircase "They don't bother me though."

"You didn't say that when you realised who the tall top hat wearing chap you bumped into at Covent Garden Station was that time" the Commander remarked wryly.

"Yes thank you" Tracy responded "How was I supposed to know he was the ghost?" she asked.

"Sssh!" the Commander cautioned her as he heard distant voices from a room above them.

"Is that Bob?" Tracy asked after they listened intently to the distant voices that were filtering through.

"Sounds like there is quite a party up there" the Commander agreed "I wonder if we can pull an invitation?"

"Check down there" Devlin instructed the Colonel as they arrived back at the door of study "You two go with him" he added.

Devlin watched until the three men had disappeared from sight down the corridor, before walking back into his study where Bob, Collins and the Major were still seated and restrained with their guards standing behind them.

"You will have to excuse my absence" Devlin apologised as he returned to his desk and sat back down, casually tossing his gun onto the top "Slight rodent problem but I suspect you three gentlemen know something about that."

"Tried a mouse trap?" Bob sarcastically suggested as both he and his three colleagues noticed that the connecting door between the study and the adjacent room had opened slightly and realised it may well be in their best interests to keep Devlin and his guards distracted and occupied for the next few minutes.

"Tell me" Collins inquired "We were debating while you were out how much you are actually worth, I mean this place must have cost a few quid for a starter."

"And the services of the Colonel and his merry band don't exactly come cheap either" the Major added.

"I admit he's not listed in the Yellow Pages" Devlin responded "The Colonel is very selective about his clients."

"Given his specialities, I am not surprised" the Major remarked "So what is your speciality then?"

"Me?" Devlin replied now considerably more relaxed "I'm just a middle man, a glorified shopkeeper in many ways, well more wholesale than retail really."

"About time you were retired by my book" the Commander suddenly declared as he appeared through the connecting door with his gun aimed directly at Devlin's head.

"Don't" Tracy called as she entered by the main door and covered the guards "Drop the toys and move over there" she ordered them.

"See, told you" Bob remarked to his two fellow captives as Tracy released them once the guards had been disarmed and moved away.

"Commander" Devlin responded "This is an unexpected pleasure. I always had the feeling we would meet professionally one day, just not under these circumstances."

"Well it is your lucky day" the Commander informed him "I want a long chat with you" he confirmed as he took Devlin's gun and tossed it to Collins.

"May I enquire as to the subject?" Devlin asked.

"Guns, lots of them" the Commander confirmed "Particularly the import and supply of them and other weaponry and explosives to some very unpleasant people."

"My client confidentiality bond is one of my strongest business tools" Devlin explained "Of course I am always happy to have a chat to the authorities on a purely theoretical level and in the presence of my solicitor naturally in return for some form of negotiable consideration."

"How about you spill the beans and I won't drag your arse to jail with you holding the shattered remains of your kneecaps in a plastic bag in your hand?" Tracy aggressively suggested.

"Charming..." Devlin remarked.

"You three ready to roll?" the Commander asked Bob, Collins and the Major who had restrained the guards in the corner of the room and were now armed with their captured weapons.

"Let's get out of here" Collins suggested.

"Shall we?" the Commander asked Devlin.

"If you insist..." Devlin confirmed as he reluctantly got up and with his hands up, proceeded ahead of the officers to the door.

"Careful..." the Commander advised as Tracy leading the way cautiously opened the door and through the narrow crack observed up and down the long corridor outside.

"Nobody home" Tracy whispered back.

"Let's get moving" the Commander urged Devlin, reinforcing his point with a nudge in the small of the back with his gun "and nothing funny."

"It's embarrassing that a purveyor of such high quality merchandise such as myself is being held at gunpoint by such an antique" Devlin remarked upon seeing the Commander's old six shot revolver.

"The gun is a bit old as well" Tracy remarked wryly as they moved out into the corridor and cautiously advanced down it towards the main staircase.

"Is your wife always this sarcastic?" Collins asked.

"Only since she started hanging around with me" the Commander admitted.

"Change of plan" Tracy suddenly called as she heard voices approaching them and they backed into a side room.

There was much holding of breath as two guards appeared from the top of the main staircase and proceeded past the doorway behind which they were hiding before disappearing down the corridor, the voices becoming fainter as they disappeared out of sight.

"Ok" Tracy quietly called back before they moved out into the corridor once more and headed towards the main staircase.

"I don't like this" the Commander remarked as they looked over the balustrade to the entrance hallway below them "This is too easy."

"Well I'm not arguing" Collins replied as cautiously they headed down the ornate grand staircase, checking carefully as they reached ground level that they were remaining undetected.

"Are we really going to walk right out of the front door?" Bob asked concerned.

"Well if anyone has any better ideas now would be a good idea to put them forward" Tracy suggested as she opened the large front door and looked outside across the wide front lawn.

"We need some transport" the Commander remarked.

"There is a vehicle compound around the side to the left" the Major commented "We passed it when we were brought up earlier."

"Sounds promising" Tracy agreed "Shall we?"

"Watch out!" Bob called suddenly as two guards appeared from their left who he quickly dealt with, managing to open fire and disable them just before they were able to shoot.

"Nicely done" the Commander remarked.

"Thanks" Bob responded "Let's get out of here."

"Where did you say this vehicle compound was?" Tracy asked as she led the group out onto the driveway in front of the lawn.

"Over there" the Major indicated a couple of vehicles just visible in the gloom over on the far side across the lawn.

"Keep your heads down" Tracy whispered to the others "and do try and keep up" she suggested.

Using the cover of the darkness, Tracy led the group across the lawn, all the time maintaining a constant watch all around them for any unfriendly presence.

"I don't like this" the Commander remarked cautiously as they crossed the lawn. They had got about halfway across when powerful spotlights mounted on the manor house and surrounding walls were suddenly switched on, bathing them in light and revealing that they were in fact surrounded by up to three dozen heavily armed guards who up until then had remained secreted unseen in the shadows.

"I hate it when I am right" the Commander responded as they realised they were surrounded.

"Best security money can buy" Devlin declared with a thoroughly amused cackle as his guards released him and as the officers were disarmed, he went and joined the Colonel in the line of armed men encircling the captive band.

"Now we have a serious problem" Collins remarked with remorse.

"Tracy, get behind me" the Commander insisted.

"In the current circumstances I don't think it will make a huge amount of difference" Tracy admitted as she took the Commander's hand in hers for support.

"Never let it be said that I stand on ceremony" Devlin announced "or let such things as rank and status influence my style."

"Can we cut to the chase please" the Commander responded, deeply unimpressed by Devlin's God like attitude "I'm in no mood for petty speeches from tin pot muppets with delusion of grandeur, believe me I have heard it all before."

"Fair enough" Devlin agreed "I guess I will just have you all shot instead."

"Me and my big mouth..." the Commander remarked with a sigh of resignation as he looked across at Tracy.

"Lets go" the Colonel insisted whereupon the guards moved in and tightly surrounded the group before escorting them across the lawn towards the nearby gate house where the manor house security was based.

"This isn't looking good" Tracy whispered aside "I love you."

"I love you too" the Commander admitted.

"If my wife was here, she would be going nuts at me right now for letting myself get into this mess" Collins remarked.

"Anytime now guys would be fine" Bob remarked under his breath.

"Which one of us is Sundance and which Butch Cassidy?" the Major asked wryly.

"Not sure" the Commander confirmed "although I think we can safely say who the Bolivian Army are though."

"That's quite enough of that thank you" Devlin declared as they reached the gatehouse and some of the throng of heavily armed guards made their way inside.

"Search them again" the Colonel requested "Then bring them in to me" he confirmed as he headed inside the converted former stable block.

One by one they were searched before being led inside with the Commander and Tracy being the last to be processed.

"Get you mits off my wife" the Commander politely but firmly warned as they were jostled inside into the Security Office where they found the Colonel sat behind a desk leafing through some files in a military methodical manner.

"So what are we going to do with you lot then?" the Colonel remarked.

"I think it was Michael Caine who said once that difficult decisions are the privilege of rank" the Commander commented.

"The Ipccress File?" Tracy asked.

"The Eagle has Landed" the Commander confirmed.

"Enough thank you" the Colonel responded "I still have to decide how to dispose of you lot with efficiency but providing enough time for us to make our discrete departure out of this country."

"I'm sure a clever chap such as yourself will think of something" the Commander commented.

"What about the cellar?" Devlin suggested "Even I once got lost down there once trying to find a bottle of wine, and I own it!"

"Throw in a little carefully timed surprise package of my specialist making and I think we have a solution" the Colonel agreed.

"Sounds charming" Collins sarcastically commented "Are you throwing in some drinks?"

"Never let it be said I am inhospitable" Devlin agreed with an amenable chuckle "Colonel, would you care to have your men escort our guests to their quarters?"

"It would be a pleasure" the Colonel "Ok gentlemen and lady, lets go and please no hero crap as my highly trained men have no compunctions whatsoever about shooting you."

As the group were escorted through the gatehouse building to a sunken entrance that led down to the cellar with the Colonel and Devlin following close behind, there began the sound of a commotion outside.

"What the...?" Devlin turned around and looked out of a window.

Outside in the main gardens a significant number of military and Security Service officers had arrived through the main gate where they quickly came up against strong valiant resistance from Devlin's security guards as the loud exchange of gunfire that was now in progress testified to.

"Are you having problems?" the Major wryly asked as the sounds of battle and loudly barked orders intensified outside.

"You lot watch our backs" Devlin quickly ordered "No one passes this point unless they are dead, understood?"

"Yes Sir" the leader of the group of security guards confirmed.

"Colonel and you three" Devlin quickly identified three of the guards from the group "With me please" he requested as he led the way down the dark damp cellar steps into the murky conditions below.

"Lets go" the Colonel ordered the hostages, reinforcing his point as he shoved Tracy in the back with the butt of his gun.

"You really must like living dangerously" the Commander remarked directly to the Colonel as they descended into the depths, giving him one of his stern stares which even in the poor light of the old cellar could be clearly seen to have the angry intensity to cut through solid steel.

"Do you really think I care?" the Colonel dismissed the Commander's anger towards him casually.

"I bet your mother is really proud of you" the Major commented as they were brought through the murky dark cellar to what appeared to be some sort of cell where they were all moved inside and the guards proceeded to handcuff the five together in a group once they were sat on the ground.

"The one advantage of not having any parents my dear Major" the Colonel confirmed as he firmly closed the barred door once the captives had been secured "I can do pretty much whatever the hell I like and enjoy it."

They were joined by one of the Colonel's Sergeants who brought with him a green metal case which at the Colonel's request he placed on the ground against the barred door and then proceeded to work on some sort of control panel inside it, not visible from where the captives were.

"How long do you want Sir?" the Sergeant asked as he prepared to set the timer on what appeared to be a complex and powerful explosive device.

"Give them twenty minutes" Devlin confirmed as he removed a couple of bottles from the adjacent wine rack and placed one of them on the ground of the cell through the bars of the door "If you should get out, feel free to enjoy it" he suggested.

"Oh, the good stuff, I'm honoured" Collins remarked as he squinted to read the label on the dusty bottle in the murky dark.

"Well I'll bid you good gentlemen and lady farewell" Devlin confirmed as he checked his watch "We shall not be meeting again."

"In that case, can I ask you something?" the Commander responded "How do you expect to get away with this?"

"I am a perfectly legitimate businessman Mr Commander" Devlin explained coolly "I have more friends and influence in the corridors of power than you five put together, believe me when it comes to protecting my interests I have a lot of persuasion and as they say money speaks volumes, I can just speak considerably louder than many."

"Don't spend it all at once" the Commander advised "You are going to need a lot to pay for your defence lawyers."

“Not to mention the dental work if I ever catch up with you” Tracy added with clearly implied menace.

“Farewell” Devlin declared whereupon he, the Colonel and the guards departed, leaving just the Sergeant who once they were clear, flicked a switch on the device and then left himself, leaving them in near darkness.

“He's a nutter!” Collins declared.

“You only just worked that out?” Bob responded “I've had him down as damaged goods all evening.”

“He's one of those standard issue two faced establishment types” the Commander confirmed “That’s a posh name for well positioned nutter.”

“Has anyone got any ideas of how the hell do we get out of here?” Collins voice was heard to echo in the dark.

“I'm working on it” Tracy confirmed as she struggled to try and free at least one hand but without success.

“Are you all right love?” the Commander asked.

“Can anyone reach inside my tunic pocket, left hand side?” Tracy asked.

“I think I can” the Major confirmed as he moved around a bit “What am I looking for?” he asked as he felt around in the dark inside Tracy's pocket.

“You should find a small wallet type thing with a number of metal tools inside” Tracy confirmed.

“Got it” the Major confirmed as he managed despite his handcuffed hands to lift the object out of Tracy's pocket “Now what?” he asked.

“Swivel around and try and drop it on my lap” Tracy urged.

“Would someone mind telling me what is going on?” Collins asked as he was around the other side of the group and could not see anything at all of what was occurring behind him.

“Security Service Rules of Survival Number Four” the Commander confirmed “Never leave home without a locksmith’s daughter.”

“I don't suppose we happen to have one handy by any chance as that would be kind of useful right now” Collins responded.

“Hello!” Tracy cheerily called.

“See, told you” the Commander responded.

“Right” Tracy declared as she leaned forward and opened the wallet with her nose to reveal her lock picking tools which she squinted at in the dark gloomy conditions trying to make out which one was which “Second from left should do it love.”

“Right, hang on a second” the Commander called as he moved himself around so that his hands behind his back were next to Tracy before feeling with his fingertips the tools.

“Next one” Tracy confirmed “That's it.”

“Got it” the Commander responded as he managed to successfully grab the tool from the wallet and secure it in his fingers.

“Ok” Tracy instructed “Swivel around until we are back to back and then pass it into my hands.”

“All right” the Commander confirmed and after some shuffling about, their hands met “Here it is dear” he declared whereupon Tracy took the tool.

“Right, now hold still” Tracy instructed as she turned the tool in her fingertips and then proceeded to work blind by touch alone on the handcuffs binding the Commander behind her.

Above ground, the Colonel escorted Devlin out of the cellar entrance that at one time had been the old coal chute, exiting into the vehicle compound where they could see the gunfight between his security guards and the authorities was continuing with both sides very firmly dug in.

“They are making a hell of a mess of my lawn” Devlin casually remarked as a nearby explosion sent a quantity of turf and soil up into the air.

“Better than making a hell of a mess of us” the Colonel confirmed as he found a vehicle with the keys in the ignition and got in “Come on, we had better make a swift exit while we still can.”

“Agreed” Devlin confirmed as he got in the vehicle himself and the Colonel started the engine.

“Got it” Tracy declared with triumph as the handcuffs gave way and the Commander was released.

“Thank you my dear” the Commander responded as he got up and proceeded to help the others to their feet “How the hell do I get you out?” he asked.

“What about that?” the Major nodded towards an old wood axe in the corner of the room, probably more normally used for prising open crates of wine.

“Hold still love” the Commander insisted “and put your hands as far apart as possible on the ground.

“Whoa!” Tracy called out as she saw the Commander holding the old axe with some uncertainty.

“Trust me” the Commander confirmed with a weak smile.

“You can barely see in daylight with the lights turned on” Tracy reminded him “and you are going to try and hit the chain with that in this gloom.”

“There is a cigarette lighter in my pocket” the Major suggested “It might shed a little more light on proceedings?”

"Good thinking" the Commander agreed as he reached into the Major's pocket and found the lighter which he passed to Bob to hold as best he could.

"I don't want to appear to be impatient or anything" Collins remarked as he looked through the bars of the door at the explosive device "but the clock is ticking, literally..."

"Hold still love" the Commander urged Tracy as he donned his small reading glasses and took aim with the axe over the outstretched chain of the handcuffs.

With a loud clunk, the Commander brought the full force of the axe to bear on the chain and they snapped clean in two to everyone's relief.

"Well done" Tracy congratulated her husband as he helped her to her feet before she proceeded to work on the handcuffs of the others quickly releasing them.

"I think we can open the door with this" the Major suggested as he attempted to force it open with the axe.

"There are times when subtlety works better than brute force" Tracy suggested as she moved the Major aside and examined the lock "Besides, its a cheap standard lock" she declared as she inserted one of her coarser lock picking tools into the keyhole and turned it, releasing the lock in one swift move "A three year old with a screwdriver could open it."

"Trouble is there is never a three year old around when you need one" the Major remarked wryly as he exited the room and examined the explosive device carefully.

"Can you do anything with it?" the Commander asked as the Major and Bob worked on it.

"Leave it to us" Bob advised "You go and get that muppet Devlin before he does any more damage."

"I'm not arguing with that" the Commander agreed "Let's go shall we?" he suggested.

"Good luck guys" Tracy called as she, Collins and the Commander left them to it, quickly disappearing out of sight up the gloomy dust laden corridor.

"Alone at last..." the Major remarked wryly as he proceeded to dismantle the device "Who wired this contraption?" he asked as he opened the control panel and revealed the complex wiring beneath.

"Red wire or blue wire?" Bob remarked as they both looked at the interior of the device with some discomfort.

"Not to mention green, orange, black and several other colours" the Major confirmed "If anyone has any ideas now would be a good time."

"Does anyone know where we are going?" Tracy asked as they made their way down seemingly endless dark passages.

"Err no actually" the Commander was forced to admit "But at least we are moving."

"Something down there" Collins declared as he shone his torch down a side passage and illuminated some steps in the distant gloom.

"Well done" the Commander declared as they headed towards the steps and cautiously ascended up to the surface, emerging into the kitchen of the manor house.

"Looks clear" Tracy confirmed after checking around the corner and seeing the place was empty.

"Would now be a good time to point out we have no weapons?" Collins remarked as they went through the large kitchen to the back door.

"No it wouldn't" the Commander admitted as they left by the door and crossed the former kitchen garden bound for the gate in the wall where they had come in earlier.

"Trip wire" Tracy reminded her husband just in time forcing him to take a sudden giant step over it.

"This guy takes his security seriously doesn't he?" Collins commented as he followed, also carefully stepping over the wire before they reached the gate.

"That he does" Tracy confirmed "He'd be going ape if he knew we had left the back gate unlocked mind" she added as she opened the gate and they all exited out into the track way outside.

"Well there is the cavalry" the Commander confirmed as they looked to their left to see numerous Security Service and Army vehicles parked all up and down the main driveway to the front gate.

"And it sounds like quite a party" Collins remarked as they listened to the sound of gunfire echoing from within the manor house garden main walls.

"Hey!" the Commander called with a shrill whistle to catch the attention of some Armed Support Unit officers who were just arriving and alighting from their vehicle.

"Good evening Sir" one of the officers responded "What's occurring?"

"I'll fill you gentlemen in whilst you sort us out with some fresh weaponry" the Commander confirmed.

"Take the next right down the side of the house" Devlin confirmed as the Colonel steered the car through the rear grounds of the Manor House.

"Just there?" the Colonel asked seeing a hidden gate on the right hand side set into the wall.

"Yep that's the one" Devlin confirmed as they pulled up to the gate "I'll get the gate, you drive through."

"Right you are" the Colonel confirmed as Devlin got out of the vehicle and went up to the gate where he produced a set of keys and unlocked the heavy old padlock that was securing it.

Seeing that Devlin had managed to unlock the gate and was about to open it, the Colonel put the vehicle in gear and prepared to move off.

However as Devlin opened the gate, both of them became blinded by the headlights of vehicles beaming back at them.

"Don't move!" the Commander's voice was heard to command "You are surrounded by armed officers."

"Oh I don't think so..." the Colonel grimly responded as he swiftly put his vehicle into reverse and plunged the accelerator, speeding off backwards back into the grounds and away leaving Devlin looking on slightly gob smacked.

"Don't you just hate it when that happens?" the Commander remarked as he walked up to Devlin who had been quickly grabbed and restrained with little resistance.

"That just isn't cricket" Devlin remarked still surprised by being so suddenly abandoned to his fate by the Colonel who had now disappeared out of sight back into the grounds.

"You'll get over it" the Commander confirmed as Devlin was led away in handcuffs and under armed guard to a waiting vehicle.

"Lima Mike One from Lima Alpha One" the Commander called into his radio to Tracy who was on the other side of the manor house grounds organising things there.

"Go ahead love" Tracy's voice was heard to respond amid a background noise of intermittent gunfire.

"We've got Devlin, but our old friend the mad Colonel is loose in the grounds somewhere and probably headed towards you" he informed.

"Well we are making some inroads into the unfriendly locals" Tracy confirmed in between firing her gun at the enemy and in the process sending one of the guards to the ground "So if he turns up I will be sure to say hello."

"We are going to work our way in from the back gate where Devlin tried to come out of" the Commander responded "I suggest we meet in the middle."

"Sounds good to me" Tracy agreed "be careful love" she added sincerely.

"You too" the Commander confirmed before turning to the officers with him gathered around the gateway "Right ladies and gents, let's get moving" he declared.

As they moved in through the back gate, the three dozen or so officers that the Commander had managed to get together, split up into three groups, one each going around each side of the vast manor house whilst the Commander himself led the third group to the back entrance to the house.

"Locked" one of the officers confirmed.

"Not for long" the Commander responded as he decided the time for diplomatic subtlety was over and he kicked the door in, sending bits of it splintering onto the floor inside.

"Very nicely done Sir" the officer remarked as they entered the house and scanned around the interior.

"Thank you" the Commander responded "I'm kind of getting used to it."

Proceeding through the seemingly deserted ground floor, they methodically searched room by room but found no one.

"There are never any bad guys around when you want some" the Commander commented as they reached the large ornate front entrance hall having found the place to be deserted.

"What's that?" one officer asked as he listened intently to a wooden wall panel, coming from behind which he could vaguely make out approaching footsteps.

"I may just be going barmy" the Commander commented "or that looks like some sort of hidden door."

With one exchanged look of realisation between them they all stepped back and aimed their weapons at the panel door in expectation.

A few moments later the door began to open slowly with an eerie creaking.

"Don't move!" the Commander ordered as two figures began to emerge from the dark doorway covered in dust, soot and cobwebs.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa!!" the Major called as he and Bob emerged into the light with their hands up "It's us, don't shoot."

"Damm it Bob" the Commander responded as they lowered their weapons "You almost gave me a heart attack."

"We gave you a heart attack?" Bob retorted.

"Where's the bomb?" the Commander asked not seeing any evidence of it with them.

"Lets just say we had some problems with it" the Major admitted as behind him a distant explosion gently rocked the manor house causing the chandeliers to swing and twinkle gently whilst a plume of smoke emerged from the passageway.

"So I see" the Commander responded as the sounds of gunfire outside coming from the main front garden area suddenly intensified "Come on, we are missing the party."

"You've got to give them credit" Collins remarked as he, Tracy and a number of other officers took cover behind an ornamental fountain that was being steadily demolished by incoming gunfire "They are certainly committed."

"This is hopeless" Tracy responded as she ducked amid a shower of pieces of stone and dirt "It's a stalemate until one side or the other runs out of ammo."

"Lima Mike Zero One from your husband" the Commander's voice came over the radio "How are things on your side of the battle?" he asked.

"Not great if I were to be honest dear" Tracy admitted before momentarily popping up from behind the fountain, offering a few shots at the enemy and ducking back down again before their response came "How's your evening coming along?"

"Well the house is clear as far as we can tell" the Commander confirmed "Looks like all the guys with guns are out there with you."

"Any sign of the Colonel?" Tracy asked.

"Not yet" the Commander responded "Listen, I think I have enough guys to surround these nutters from the rear but we need to co-ordinate our efforts."

"Sounds like a good plan thus far" Tracy agreed "But you had better hurry up as we are getting rather low on bullets back here."

"I hear you" the Commander confirmed "One minute and then we'll go in" he confirmed.

“For God's sake be careful” Tracy urged “I've nearly lost you twice this week already.”

“I'll try” the Commander replied as positively as he could under the circumstances before turning to Bob “Ok then, this would appear to be your specialist subject, any ideas?”

“Well looking out here” Bob remarked as he went up to a window and surveyed the large ornate garden across which both parties were spread and firmly dug in whilst exchanging gunfire “The guards seem to be backing themselves over into this corner to the left here.”

“If we come around the right hand side past the east wing then that should cut them off” the Commander commented as he too surveyed the scene.

At that point they were joined by the other two groups of officers who had gone around and through the end wings of the house and like the Commander's group had found nothing and no-one present.

“Place is clear Guv” one of the officers confirmed as they arrived.

“Right” Bob duly took charge, taking a weapon from one of his officers so that he too was now armed “I want to set up a pincer movement around the end of the east wing and cut off our unpleasant friends so they have no choice but to surrender.”

“And keep an eye out for our friend the Colonel” the Commander added with a strong warning tone “He's loose on the grounds somewhere and is more than capable of taking a lot of people out before he will go down.”

“Ok then” Bob declared “Lets saddle up and earn some overtime.”

“There's the bastard!” Tracy declared as she noticed in the shadows near the west wing a figure making a discreet attempt to escape amid the chaos, the tall statuesque figure being unmistakably the Colonel who had abandoned his vehicle and was attempting to make his escape on foot using the fire fight for cover.

“Where are you going?” Collins asked as Tracy left with a look of grim determination on her face.

“There is no way I am letting him get away again!” she confirmed as she headed off away from the battle in the direction of the west wing.”

“You are surrounded!” suddenly declared a voice over a loudhailer from behind the guards “Put your weapons down and stand up, taking two steps backwards with your hands on your heads.”

As the gunfire subsided, most of the guards who had been taken completely by surprise, realised quickly that there was no point in resisting any further and proceeded to surrender although a few tried to run, this however only elicited a response from the Commander of firing his gun at their feet.

“Think carefully” the Commander strongly advised whereupon the few who tried to flee decided better against it and joined the rest as they were disarmed, searched, arrested and restrained prior to being led away.

From the opposite direction, the rest of the armed officers on site moved in to make doubly sure that no one could get away and as the last echoes of gunfire finally died down, the Commander looked around with a satisfied look.

“Well that went better than expected” he remarked as he returned his gun to its holster.

“I reckon so” Bob agreed as his men led the guards away.

“Where's Tracy?” the Commander then asked as he realised she was not anywhere to be seen.

“She headed off towards the west wing in pursuit of the Colonel” Collins confirmed as he came running up to them.

“Come on” the Commander called whereupon he set off quickly across the battle scarred gardens with Bob towards the darkness of the west wing.

Seeing that the battle was over, the Colonel realised that he would have to make good his escape quickly and so looked around for something to help him scale the high manor house wall as heading towards one of the gates was out owing to the almost inevitable chance of being captured.

A large wooden tool shed next to the main ornamental greenhouse looked promising as he encountered it. Looking inside, he could see a length of rope and some gardening shears which he quickly took and fashioned into a makeshift grappling iron that once back at the wall, he swung upwards.

Whilst the first attempt to hook the makeshift device on the top of the wall failed, the second worked and he carefully tested the grip on the rope before starting his climb.

“Not leaving us so soon I do hope?” Tracy called as she caught up with the Colonel and grabbed his trailing leg, pulling him sharply back down to the ground where he landed in a propagator housing, crushing it under his weight.

However before Tracy could retrieve her gun, the Colonel had leapt back to his feet and charged at her, knocking her against the wall.

"If you don't mind" the Colonel responded directly "I am getting out of here."

Tracy managed to get back to her feet slightly dazed in time to see the Colonel attempt to resume his escape.

"Oh no you don't!" she declared as despite her somewhat shorter stature compared with her opponent, Tracy caught up with the Colonel, grabbed him roughly by the collar to turn him around and struck him across the face with a heavy punch.

"Oomph" the Colonel let out a muffled cry as he was struck and doubled over in response.

"You are under arrest!" Tracy declared as she grabbed him forcibly whilst he continued to struggle and resist valiantly.

"Bollocks" the Colonel responded defiantly.

"You have the right to remain silent" Tracy continued as she threw the Colonel through the window of the greenhouse, emulating her sister's effort earlier that day "So do us both a favour and shut the hell up!"

"Get stuffed...." the Colonel replied slightly wearily as the result of his resistance.

"You have the right to legal counsel" Tracy continued as, seeing the Colonel continuing to make an effort to escape she quickly stepped through the hole in the green house window and punched him hard in the stomach which sent him sprawling back to the ground again.

"Had enough of resisting arrest yet?" she asked as she grabbed him by the hair and stared pointedly straight at him.

"All right, all right..." the Colonel finally conceded.

"Terrific" Tracy responded as she turned the man over and handcuffed him before unceremoniously dragging him out of the greenhouse and dumping him on the path outside where she was joined by her husband who had near sprinted across the manor house grounds.

"Having fun dear?" the Commander asked, relieved to see Tracy was fine and the Colonel was restrained and going nowhere.

"I was but sadly he gave up just as I was about to get to the fun bit" Tracy admitted wryly.

"Right then you" the Commander declared as he and Bob who had now caught up with them, grabbed the Colonel and dragged him back onto his feet "We've got a nice comfortable cell waiting for you, come along."

"You know you have no case against me" the Colonel weakly defied as he was dragged away.

"Oh I don't know" the Commander calmly responded "I am sure I will think of something and even if that fails, I have a veritable queue of my opposite numbers from around the world who would dearly love the chance for a quiet chat."

Under heavy guard, the Colonel was escorted to a waiting Security Service prisoner van and unceremoniously bundled inside without further protest.

"Can we please go home now?" the Commander asked generally as the prisoner van with its heavy escort departed.

"Absolutely" Tracy agreed willingly as they hugged each other "I can get Simon to run amok through Devlin's files in the morning."

"Sounds like a good idea" the Commander agreed "Just one thing left to check before we go though."

"Oh blimey" Tracy exclaimed as she remembered "The four containers, I had forgotten all about them."

"Lima Alpha One to Control" the Commander called into his radio as he and Tracy went over to a nearby patrol car and got in it "Can you patch me through to our surveillance teams?" he asked.

"Control" came the response with a noticeable tone of reluctance in it "They called in a few moments ago, the message was a bit garbled but there was something about a traffic jam caused by a burst water main."

"That doesn't sound too good" Tracy remarked.

"Apparently by the time they got out of the traffic jam" the officer in the Control Room continued "the trucks were in the terminal and being unloaded."

"Get me Commander Fuller on the line" the Commander requested.

"Evening Sir" Fuller's voice came through a few moments later "Don't panic, all four containers are being loaded onto that Freightliner train later tonight."

"Thank God for that" the Commander responded with relief.

"Can I suggest we check they are actually there?" Tracy suggested "Only the way our luck has been running lately..."

"I'll get back to you" Fuller confirmed.

"In the meantime" the Commander responded "We'll go back to the Conference Centre, I am in dire need of a cuppa."

The distinctive sound of the powerful class 66 Freightliner locomotive at the head of the train grew louder and more intense as it accelerated with its heavy load of containers through Ipswich station.

In the rear cab of the locomotive, three of the Colonel's men led by the Sergeant, relaxed as the platforms of Ipswich station with its small number of waiting passengers lurking in the semi darkness of late evening, passed by the windows.

"Making good time tonight" one of the men commented, having to raise his voice a bit over the sound of the locomotives loud powerful engine.

"Yep" the Sergeant agreed with a grin of satisfaction "We were lucky to get the stuff all onto an earlier train, it means we might get home early too."

As the train proceeded west towards London, the long consist of flat wagons with a myriad of differently sized and coloured containers mounted on them, weaved its way along the tracks with an accompanying soundtrack of squeals and rattles from the running gear.

The Colonel's men had managed to con their way on board to escort the four containers positioned nearest to the locomotive thanks to false papers supplied by one of Devlin's contacts which appeared to make their presence legitimate.

With the train well on its way and a long journey ahead of them, the three men settled back and relaxed, exchanging anecdotes and memories of their past mercenary exploits.

Indeed so engrossed were they in recalling tales of old that as the train approached Stratford in the east end of London, they didn't notice that it had switched over to another track and stopped at a signal until one of them realised that the engine had quietened down and was now idling.

"Signal check?" one of the men asked as they went and looked out of the side windows to see what was going on.

"Looks like it" the Sergeant confirmed upon seeing the red light of the signal showing brightly in the darkness with the lights of Stratford Station just beyond.

With a rather jerky start, the brakes were released and the train continued, moving off slowly, passing through the station at little more than walking pace with the low metallic clunking as the wheel sets passed over the joints in the tracks.

"See, nothing to worry about" the Sergeant confirmed as he returned to the seat.

With the long train bearing right onto the North London Line in order to circumnavigate around the City, its progress was being carefully monitored by Fuller from his computer terminal back at the Conference Centre.

"Jim just confirmed our containers are on that train" Fuller informed Tracy and the Commander who were stood behind him "Three army type guys lurking in the rear cab of the locomotive."

"Well that ties in with some of the paperwork we found" Tracy remarked "Sneaky of them to catch an earlier train though."

"What is its booked route?" the Commander asked.

"This should be it right here" Fuller duly displayed a map of the rail network on the screen with the path of the train highlighted in red upon it.

"Right around the North London Line to Acton and then down onto the south western division and on to the main through to Eastleigh and Southampton" the Commander confirmed as he traced the course of the green line across the screen and demonstrated his extensive knowledge of the national rail network.

"We need somewhere to stop this thing that is as quiet and unpublic as possible" Tracy added "I am willing to bet these goons won't come quietly."

"Well the North London lines are about as public as it gets" Fuller confirmed.

"Can we communicate with the driver?" Tracy asked.

"Through the signal control centre at Willesden yes" Fuller confirmed "Do we have a plan?"

"Maybe" Tracy responded "What if we divert the train here to these sidings?"

"Old Oak Common depot" the Commander examined the screen carefully "Plenty of space, that could work."

"If we can divert the train without them noticing" Tracy warned.

"I shouldn't worry love" the Commander reassured her "I am willing to bet that our friends on that train don't know their Old Oak Commons from their Nine Elms."

"Especially in the dark" Fuller added.

"What's the fastest way we can get out to there?" the Commander asked.

"You would be pushing it to make it by road I would have thought" Fuller commented as he did some mental arithmetic on potential journey times "We do have the helicopter parked outside though" he suggested.

"Oh no...." the Commander looked upwards with a resigned sigh "Not again..."

"I'll hold your hand love" Tracy reassured him "Simon, get onto signalling control and get them to slow that train down and then divert it into Old Oak when we give them the word."

"Got it" Fuller agreed as he reached across the desk and picked up the telephone.

"Then have the Willesden Office boys quietly evacuate the place and seal it off" she added "The less uninvolved bodies around the better."

"I'll go and rouse Bob and his boys" the Commander confirmed.

"And I'll go and warm up the chopper" Tracy added.

"Where are we?" one of the men asked as he wiped off the condensation from the cab window and peered out at the passing lights in the dark outside.

"Coming up to Willesden I think" the Sergeant responded "Mind you one dark line side building looks much like another to me."

The men braced themselves as the locomotive lurched over point work as it switched tracks.

"Well we are definitely approaching somewhere" the other man commented as the train began to slow whilst running on what was noticeably rougher jointed track, the squeal of the brakes indicating they were coming to a stop.

"Are we scheduled to stop anywhere?" the Sergeant asked generally.

"With the number of interconnected lines around London" one of the men commented "It was likely we would need to stop somewhere."

With the engine of the locomotive reducing to an idle as the train came to a halt, the Sergeant grabbed his gun and checked it before opening the cab door and looking outside.

"I'm going up front to check" the Sergeant declared "Keep an eye out."

"Yes Sir" the two other men confirmed as the Sergeant left the locomotive cab. Climbing down the side steps, he stepped carefully from the bottom step onto the ballast, the loose stones crunching beneath his military boots.

Looking around in the gloom, the Sergeant could see that the Freightliner train had stopped in a seemingly deserted and disused rail yard of some kind, a few rusting spot light towers shedding some light down on the weed strewn sidings with only a few wagons and a couple of stored Class 56 heavy freight locomotives visible.

"Hey you two, get down here" the Sergeant called up to the rear cab of the locomotive "I don't like this."

Quickly the two other men came climbing down the cab access steps and joined the Sergeant on the trackside and joined him in looking around the seemingly deserted yard with some minor concern.

“What about the driver?” one of the men asked nodding up to the front of the locomotive.

“You stay here and watch the merchandise” the Sergeant confirmed “I’ll go and check.”

As his men looked on, the Sergeant walked down the length of the locomotive and climbed up the access steps at the front cab, pausing when his head was level with the bottom of the cab door so that he could open it cautiously and scan around inside using the torch light mounted on his weapon.

Seeing to his surprise that the cab was deserted, the Sergeant climbed the full way up the steps and entered it, giving the interior a further sweep around to be sure he was alone.

Such was the darkness of the late night, the beam of the Sergeant's torch could be seen moving about inside the leading cab of the locomotive from some distance away even without the benefit of the binoculars that Tracy was using to observe proceedings from her seat in the cab of one of the stored locomotives on the other side of the yard.

“I think now would be a good time to move your boys into place” she suggested to Bob who was with a couple of other officers standing behind her in the rather cramped cab.

“Right you are Maam” Bob confirmed as he and his officers departed by way of the cab door on the far side away from the scene unfolding in the centre of the old yard.

“Lima Mike One to Lima Alpha One” Tracy called into her radio “I do believe that our unfriendly friends are a bit confused now.”

“Good” the Commander responded “Time to spring the trap then” he declared.

“We're hooked up” the driver of the Freightliner Train confirmed as he joined the Commander in the cab of a second Class 66 locomotive that had been coupled quietly up to the rear of the train which thanks to its length meant it was out of sight to the Sergeant and his men.

“I've always wanted to drive one of these things” the Commander declared as he released the train brakes and advanced the power regulator forward, taking the load of the train behind the locomotive.

“What the...?” one of the Sergeant's men exclaimed as they realised something was going on. They both looked down the train from their locomotive to see all but the two container flat wagons nearest them start to pull away into the distance.

“Sergeant!!” the other man called, running to the front cab whereupon his superior office looked out of the cab window.

“What's going on?” he asked, quickly sensing the panic in his man's voice.

“I think we have train robbers Sir!” the soldier explained, pointing frantically in the direction of the back of the train, the vast majority of which was now travelling off into the distance.

“We've been rumbled” the Sergeant confirmed grimly “Make sure no one gets near the containers” he ordered “I am going to summon the reinforcements.”

Quickly the two men took up defensive positions on the flat wagons either side of their containers and donned night vision equipment to look around the yard.

“Uh oh” one of the men confirmed a few moments later “I got Armed Support officers heading across the main lines towards us from the south.”

“Same here” the soldier on the other side of the now rather truncated train confirmed.

“Hold tight onto something” the voice of the Sergeant confirmed over their radio head sets “I am going to get us out of here.”

With that the locomotive with the Sergeant now driving from the lead cab started to move forward under its own power, quickly gaining momentum as it was hauling very little load compared with when it had a full length train earlier.

As the train accelerated to somewhere just above walking pace, the two men were able to jog up to the front cab and board the locomotive without the need for the Sergeant to slow down.

“Oh hell” Tracy responded seeing that the locomotive and its two wagons were under way down the length of the large yard “Lima Alpha One, do you want the bad news of the bad news?” she called over the radio.

“Give me the bad news first” the Commander confirmed as he brought his train to a stop now that they were well clear of the yard.

“Well the bad news is that they had night vision goggles of some kind and clocked our guys closing in on them” Tracy confirmed.

“And the really bad news?” the Commander enquired with a bit of a resigned sigh.

“They know how to drive a locomotive” she confirmed as she panned across the yard matching the slow but methodical pace of the train as it tried to make good its escape.

“Is there anyway we can overtake them?” the Commander asked the driver sat in the second man's seat alongside him.

“It would take at least ten minutes to uncouple this lot, run round, change the points and proceed onto the adjacent line” the driver confirmed “By that time chummy and my loco will be half way to Acton.”

“What about that one over there?” the Commander pointed to another locomotive stabled nearby, visible bathed in the light of a solitary working yard lamp that illuminated it clearly.

“It's on the right road” the driver confirmed “I just hope you know how to drive a Class 52 because I don't.”

“I once drove a Bullied Pacific from Waterloo to Clapham Junction” the Commander confirmed as he and the driver abandoned their locomotive, climbing down the cab steps and then jogging across the yard “Of course I was only ten at the time mind.”

“Get me Willesden Signal Control on the phone” Tracy called into her radio as she watched the scene unfold having now climbed down onto the track bed to see the captive train making its way away from them down to the far end of the yard and the main line beyond.

“Willesden Signal Control” came a response a few moments later.

“Divisional Commander of the Security and Police Service Metropolitan Division” Tracy declared “You've got a stolen locomotive and two wagons heading west along the lines of Old Oak yard and about to hit the main line, locomotive number 66574.”

“We can divert it onto an old reversing spur just before they reach the main line” the signal controller advised as he leapt up from his desk to survey the illuminated track plan on the wall in front of him, paying particular attention to the travelling light that indicated the progress of the captive train.

“Do it” Tracy confirmed “How long until they reach it?” she asked.

“At their current speed about three minutes” the signal controller confirmed as he returned to his desk and began to change the points remotely using the computer “Just hope they stop before they hit the buffer stops though otherwise there will be a heck of a mess, especially with that light locomotive coming up behind it.”

“Err what light loco?” Tracy asked only for the mystery to be quickly solved as the roar of a Class 52 'Western' type locomotive came into earshot as it approached on the parallel running line.

“Come on” Tracy called to the officers with her as they proceeded across the yard, carefully stepping over running rails and discarded track debris as they went.

“Welcome aboard” the Commander called as he was joined in the cab of the locomotive by Bob and a couple of his men who had climbed aboard when he had slowed down passing them.

“You can drive this thing Sir?” Bob enquired being somewhat surprised when entering the cab to find the Commander in the drivers seat.

“Drive yes” the Commander confirmed as he moved the power controller back up one notch to regain his earlier speed “Stop, I am not so sure about.”

“Lima Alpha One from Lima Mike One” Tracy's voice called over the radio “I'm assuming it is you darling driving that antique maroon thing.”

“You never would have guessed would you” the Commander confirmed “What's the status with our friends up front.”

“Still three of them” Tracy confirmed slightly out of breath as she and her officers continued to run down the yard towards the western end as quickly as they could “I've got signal control to divert them onto a dead end spur at the end of the yard so they don't escape onto the main line.”

“I've got some of Bob's guys on board” the Commander confirmed “I am going to get him to distract our three unfriendlies for as long as possible until I can get the four containers away from them and secure.”

“I guess we'll meet in the middle somewhere then” Tracy confirmed.

As they approached the west end of the yard, the Sergeant noticed that ahead the points that should take them out onto the main line had been switched.

“Stand by guys” the Sergeant confirmed as the locomotive and its two wagons rumbled over the points and slewed to the right “Looks like we are going to be taking a detour.”

“Where is the backup supposed to meet us?” one of the men enquired as the ride became noticeably more uncomfortable due to the little used and elderly nature of the spur they were now on.

“They should be meeting us down this end” the Sergeant confirmed but before he could say anything more, there was a groan of breaking metal from beneath the train as the old rails on which it was running collapsed and the locomotive grounded the wheels of its lead bogie in the ballast and came to a juddering and sudden stop.

“End of the line” the Sergeant declared as he and his men grabbed their weapons and abandoned the locomotive.

“Lima Mike Six One Three” came a rather urgent sounding call over the Commander's radio “Perimeter breach at the western end.”

"What was that all about?" Bob asked as the Commander looked all around from the cab windows at their surroundings.

"Looks like our three friends invited some friends along" the Commander responded indicating an over bridge up ahead where a pair of Army style Land Rover's could be seen unloading its unwelcome cargo of armed men who proceeded quickly down the embankment and into the rail yard.

"I count about a half dozen" Bob confirmed as they drew across the points onto the old spur and slowed coming up behind the back end of the somewhat truncated train.

"Right, you and your boys keep them occupied until the cavalry arrives" the Commander instructed "You take over and keep you head down while I couple us up" he informed the driver.

"Good evening Sergeant" the leader of the reinforcements called as they met at the base of the embankment "I take it we have problems then?"

"Just arriving now" the Sergeant nodded in the direction from where they had just come from.

"Ok, lets get this sorted" the leader of the reinforcements declared.

"Bloody hell!" Bob exclaimed as a rake of gunfire forced himself, his officers and the Commander to all dive for cover either using the wagons and containers or behind piles of discarded sleepers and rails that were piled up around the place.

"I hate guns" the Commander confirmed as he shuffled forward underneath the wagons, squeezing under the leading bogie to reach the coupling where the train was connected to the locomotive.

Once clear of the wagon under frame and using the rear locomotive cab as cover, the Commander got up and proceeded to release the coupling.

"Now!" he called up ahead to the driver between bursts of gunfire who proceeded to apply the power of the rear locomotive and pull the wagons with their precious yet deadly cargo away.

As the space between the derailed locomotive and the departing wagons increased, it provided better cover and the Commander was quickly joined by Bob.

"That'll annoy them" he remarked ducking back between the gunfire.

"Lets get out of here" the Sergeant declared seeing that their cargo was now disappearing into the distance and there was now no further reason for them to remain there.

"Covering fire gentlemen" the Sergeant called whereupon the men launched an all out blanket of gunfire to suppress their enemy while they fell back and made good their escape.

Gradually they retreated back up the embankment to the roadway and regrouped at their vehicles still parked on the top road.

However as they got in their vehicles and prepared to depart, they suddenly found themselves cut off as a large detachment of the Major's men appeared and sealed off all means of escape in both direction.

A couple of the enemy offered up some resistance but no sooner had they fired at the Major's men than they fell to the ground.

As the echoes of the gunshots died away into the night, Tracy emerged at the front of the line like an angel of death with a look of grim determination.

"You are surrounded, outgunned and outnumbered" Tracy declared through a loud hailer "Put your weapons on the ground and step away from the vehicles with your hands on your head" she ordered.

"That's my girl!" the Commander remarked with delight upon hearing Tracy's voice above on the road at the top of the embankment.

"Typical" Sir Richard Crowthorne remarked as he read the headlines in the morning paper, still in his hospital bed "I'm out of it for a while and my Deputy goes and blows the entire overtime budget."

"Good morning old friend" the Commander called as he and Tracy entered the private hospital ward.

"Are, there you are" Sir Richard responded "I see you two have been busy" he indicated the newspaper.

"Gunfights, loonies, megalomaniacs, stolen locomotives, the usual" Tracy casually admitted with a giggle.

"So how are you shaping up?" the Commander inquired as he joined Sir Richard at his bedside.

"Oh me? I'm on the mend apparently" he confirmed "Still going to be limping for a while though. By the way how did that Deputy of mine, Collins work out?"

"Yeah, he's good" the Commander replied "I think he was a bit taken by surprise at some of my err methods but he soon got the hang of it. He's back at the office with O'Connell and representatives from various other global Security agencies tossing coins to see who gets to grill Devlin and that dodgy Sheik first."

“Well I hope he likes the limelight” Sir Richard admitted “As of this morning he gets my seat at MI5 permanently.”

“I figured as much” Tracy remarked.

“You took the job then?” the Commander asked.

“Indeed my lad” Sir Richard confirmed “As of nine this morning, I am the Chairman of the new National Counter Terrorism Committee.”

“I knew you would get it” the Commander remarked “I was the one who recommended you for the post to the Prime Minister.”

“That’s a drink I owe you then” Sir Richard confirmed “Anyway, its going to be a big job, there are so many lunatics out there now with little brains and big ideas, it was about time we coordinated all our efforts centrally to nail the buggers.”

“Well you have a got a pretty good start” Tracy remarked “Once Fuller has finished stripping Devlin’s place to the frame and extracted all his files, you’ll have plenty to go on I should think.”

“Indeed” Sir Richard agreed “and hopefully by now our arms dealing friend should be singing like a canary, and if he isn’t I’ll just threaten to send you two in to see him.”

“I don’t know though, he’s pretty crafty and well connected” the Commander admitted “He could say he was made of cheese and his brother was a purple wombat and the world would believe him.”

"Lies need to be covered up, the truth can run around naked" Tracy commented.

"Freud?" the Commander casually asked.

"Johnny Cash" Tracy confirmed.

“Well I think it is safe to say we have not heard the last of our friend Mr Devlin” Sir Richard agreed “Or his legacy of weapons to the highest possible bidder with no questions asked.”

“Hey, speaking of not heard the last of, have you seen little Jack around? We called by the children’s ward on the way here but nobody had seen him” the Commander asked.

“I asked this morning when they brought me my breakfast earlier” Sir Richard replied “Apparently he checked himself out late last night, no forwarding address either.”

“He’ll turn up I expect” the Commander responded with a tone of concern “I don’t think we have seen the last of him either, at least I hope not, I owe him a drink as well.”

“A soft drink I hope” Tracy interjected “He’s what? Eleven?”

“Something like that yes” the Commander confirmed.

“Well I can tell you now I think there is a very good reason why he left on this particular day” Sir Richard explained “I did some digging around and found out some interesting tidbits of information, mostly circulating around his parents and their death in a car crash a couple of years back.”

“The incident on the Marylebone Road?” the Commander confirmed “Well I expect the reports are in Traffic Division aren’t they?”

“Since when has anything ever been that simple?” Tracy remarked.

“Correct my dear” Sir Richard duly confirmed Tracy’s experienced scepticism “The files are in fact very much buried, deep in the secure vault of MI6 under the Political & Diplomatic Security Division but if anyone ever asks, I never told you.”

“Message received and understood” the Commander confirmed with a knowing look “Looks like I need to get Fuller to do some of his favourite breaking and entering when he has a spare minute.”

“I hate to break up this little reunion” Tracy informed the two men “but at least one of us has to go back to the Security Conference.”

“Oh joy...” the Commander responded with a distinct lack of enthusiasm.

“Who’s giving today’s lecture then?” Sir Richard asked.

“Hang on a minute, I’ll find out” the Commander responded as he proceeded to scabble around in his pocket and produced a very battered agenda for the conference which after donning his small reading glasses he studied carefully.

“Oh bugger, it’s me” he declared.

“Whoa!!” Tracy exclaimed.

“Oh now this should be good” Sir Richard remarked “Just try not to get yourself killed this time.”

“I’ll try” the Commander agreed “I’ll see you at the first Anti-Terrorism Committee Meeting then, and the drinks are on you.”

“Agreed” Sir Richard responded “Be careful now...”

Outside the hospital main entrance, the Commander looked around as the fresh air of the early morning was starting to give way to the first wave of rush hour commuter traffic.

“Are you all right love?” Tracy asked.

“As long as you are with me I will be” the Commander confirmed, giving her a kiss.

“Do me a favour darling” Tracy requested as they looked into each others eyes “When you have finished entertaining the world’s politicians and security service representatives, come straight home this time please?”

“I will” the Commander confirmed but as they proceeded to the brand new marked patrol car parked nearby a thought occurred to him “Of course we could do this the other way around” he suggested.

“Huh?” Tracy responded as they got in the car with the Commander in the driver’s seat.

“When you finish at the Yard you could always come up to the Conference Centre hotel” the Commander explained “I still have the key to the Presidential suite” he smiled.

“Deal” Tracy agreed with a beaming smile as the Commander started the car and moved off, quickly reaching the end of the Hospital access before merging into the traffic flow and away.

To Be Continued.....

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