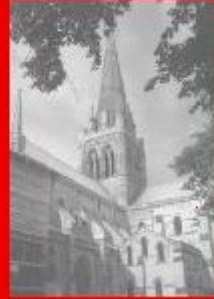


HAINAULT

Security Novels Series - Episode I



John M Upton

The Episodes of the Security Novels Series:

Episode I - Hainault	Episode XII – Marylebone
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Hainault

The genteel ticking of an old mantelpiece clock was the only sound trying to compete with the seemingly insistent ringing of the telephone that sat on the hall table below it.

It was almost three in the morning, a warm early morning in early September and it was beginning to seem that the telephone would remain unanswered but it continued to ring as the sound of rushing footsteps drew closer to the front door swiftly followed by the clattering of keys in the lock.

The door creaked open as Security Service Deputy Commander Tracy Caverner entered, quickly slinging the uniform jacket and bag she was carrying casually on the hall table and cursing quietly under her breath as they promptly slid off onto the floor.

"Hello yes?" she answered almost out of breath, she had just worked two consecutive eight hour duty shifts and was understandably fatigued as she listened to the caller who it turned out was a clerk from the Security Service's personnel department with a unique opportunity.

"Are you having a laugh?" Tracy's slightly London accented voice echoed around the deserted hallway as she reached for the light switch which shed modest light on the scene.

Looking up in the hall mirror, she continued to listen as she looked up at her reflection which showed a slightly tired young woman in her early thirties attired in her Security Service uniform complete with gold lettering on the epaulettes.

"Yes, all right, I'll be there" Tracy responded to the no doubt relieved Clerk who could finally go home himself now his task was complete.

Putting the telephone down, she looked once again at her reflection in the mirror. "Well Tracy old girl" she said to herself "looks like we are off to Haychester".

It was quite obvious to anyone who ever saw the City of Haychester in a morning rush hour that its road layout, mostly designed by the Romans some two thousand years earlier, were never intended to handle this much motorised traffic.

The usual combination of parents taking their children to work, commuters heading into work and the nearby railway line lowering the crossing barrier gates every five minutes in amidst the chaos saw to it that Tracy's journey into the County Head Office of the National Police & Security Service was a slow and laborious one.

Her small red painted Ford Fiesta marked patrol car was but one of a huge number of vehicles seeming crawling around the City's one way system with its myriad of roundabouts that thanks to the best efforts of the local highways department, seem to breed like rabbits.

Tracy's mind was starting to wander, she never was the most attentive driver in the world and this was suddenly ably demonstrated when with a sudden crunch, her car was shoved forward and the distinctive tinkling of glass on hard ground confirmed her instant guess that she had just been rear ended.

With a deep breath, she got out of the car and looked back at what had hit her, the scene of a large white single deck bus, the front orange, red and blue stripes now somewhat dented, and the small pile of broken red glass from her rear lights, quickly telling the story.

The bus driver looked on from his cab, and seeing the uniformed officer heading towards him, her shoulder length brown hair almost trembling with fury, he realised he was in trouble.

"Err sorry about that" said the driver rather feebly as Tracy just stood at the window and glowered at him. On the first day in a new job, wrecking one of the company's cars was not the best impression to make on her new boss.

"Acting Deputy" she paused, 'Tracy, remember, you've been promoted' she thought. "Deputy Duty Commander Tracy Caverner" she continued with a furious flourish brandishing a now inaccurate warrant card.

The bus driver leaned philosophically on the edge of the open window as the impatient queue of vehicles built up behind, and looked her up and down for a moment. "Don't tell me he's fired another one?" he replied curiously.

The County Headquarters building was an unusual structure, built in the 1960's originally as a College campus, its main front building featured a vee shaped roof where the first floor lecture theatre once was.

However, none of this was really noticed by Tracy as she arrived at the front entrance, and continued through the heavy aluminium framed doors into the main reception area.

The creak of the doors made the receptionist look up from her computer and see the slightly rain sodden officer make her way towards the large round reception desk set between the staircase and the marble lined corridor that led to the rest of the site.

"Can I help you at all?" the receptionist asked cheerily in a way so typical of her profession, waving her pen around like some staff of office.

"Tracy Caverner, I am the new Deputy Duty Commander," she announced almost out of breath having run from the scene of her accident just ten minutes earlier.

The receptionist produced a black leather bound visitor's book from behind the desk. "Sign in please" she insisted, proffering her pen with a look that said give it back or else.

Tracy did as she was instructed for fear that the stern receptionist would probably have had her arrested, she decided not to dwell on what probably more sincere punishment may await if the pen was not returned unmolested.

"Commanders office is through that corridor" the receptionists arm shot out to point firmly in the direction of the nearby connecting corridor, nearly taking out Tracy's eye in the process "past the first two main blocks to the command block beyond".

"Thanks" Tracy cautiously replied before resuming her journey deeper into the heart of the complex.

It was a typical 1960's building, slightly tired marble lined corridors, peeling paint and scuffed brickwork lined the corridors. Various officers and civilian staff bustled about the place and the smell of fried food permeated from the nearby staff canteen.

At the end of the corridor, she found the building she was looking for. It was pretty similar to the other two main office buildings on the site, but unlike these impressive glass clad four storey structures, Tracy's destination was a poor late 1970's imitation with exposed concrete barely improved by faded blue wooden cladding.

At least, she had to assume it was the right building though as it appeared that the sign indicating as such had fallen off with age and landed in the adjacent somewhat straggly hedge.

Tracy took a few moments to take in the not too impressive sight of the building that was about to become her new base of work before making her way down a short set of steps to the main entrance and an automatic glass sliding door.

As any stranger to this door would expect, she assumed it would open automatically. To her surprise it didn't and with a dull thud, she promptly walked straight into it.

The doors eventually creaked open only after Tracy had stood in front of them for a number of seconds, and she was finally able to walk in, rubbing a slightly sore nose in the process.

A small faded list was only just attached to the wall to her left giving the location of the various sections housed within the building. 'Duty Command Office' was shown as being located on the second floor between the International Division and the Typing and Administration section.

As was often the case in that building, the lift was out of order and the stairs seemed to her like the slopes of Everest, the second floor being reached after what seemed like forever. The top door opened out into a corridor of numbered doors, people darting in and out of most, barely giving a glance at the new stranger in the building.

Tracy interrupted one officer as he made his way past her, "Excuse me" she asked politely, "where might I find the Duty Commander's Office?"

Seeing the badging on her uniform, the officer quickly realised that Tracy must be the new Deputy Commander. "Oh right erm" he began. He quickly regained his

composure and pointed down the left hand side of the corridor towards Tracy's intended destination.

"First door on the left, office number C208" he announced with a flourish, "you can't miss it, it's the one with the loud one sided argument in it".

"Right, thanks" Tracy responded with a curious expression before she continued her way slightly hesitantly towards the office indicated, and looked at the typically cheap wooden plywood door, the office number 'C208' and the legend "Senior Department Commander' carried in white lettering on a rather cheap small red plastic plaque.

Standing as close as she was to the door, Tracy could quite easily hear coming from inside the office, the sound of a very one-sided conversation. Two people were involved but only one person was really speaking, loudly, angrily and very much to the point.

"It doesn't matter how many times you appeal to me, the Chief Superintendent or God for that matter, you bungled an investigation, lost evidence and generally screwed up just to further your own career, and on that basis you are still, twelve hours after I first told you, a disgrace and very very fired!"

A feeble murmur was the only reply that Tracy could make out before the original voice started again.

"I don't care that you Uncle is the County Chief, he agrees with me, you're still fired, please do not hesitate to never darken my door again, good day!

'Oh....my.... gawd.....' Tracy thought to herself as she stood outside the door. She stepped back a little as the rather sorrowful looking and now unemployed officer came out looking like he had just been up before a firing squad with blank bullets.

He shuffled off down the corridor and away, while Tracy composed herself, brushed her uniform down as best she could. Then, with a deep breath, she approached the office door, knocking three times.

"Come in" replied a by now calmer voice. Opening the door, Tracy found herself somewhat surprised by what, or rather who she found inside.

The sun was finally managing to break through the dense grey cloud that hung over the Threnfall Private Prison Complex as a small white prison van drew into its impressive Victorian built front entrance.

As the van drew to a halt, it began to rain again and four prisoners, each clad in the standard uniform of a category 1X prisoner, shuffled, heads bowed, out of the main door of the reception block, accompanied by a number of guards, all heavily armed.

"Four of the country's great unwanted for you Dave" called the lead prison officer to the van driver. Dave took out his clipboard from the vehicles glove compartment and walked round to the rear of the van.

"Where to then Guvnor?" he asked the leading prisoner in typically sarcastic tone.

As he opened the back of the armour plated van, the four prisoners, without any struggle, or argument proceeded inside and sat in their assigned internal compartments, a seat inside a small box, a door on one side, a small smoked window on the other.

The lead prison officer and his two colleagues checked all was secure before getting in the back whilst the driver returned to his cab.

Driving away, Dave couldn't help thinking that something wasn't right here. It was highly unusual for two let alone four category 1X prisoners to travel together. However he was not to know that this was being done under a specific direct order from high up in the Prison Service management.

As he passed through the gate, he acknowledged the officer on duty there and drove off to start what he assumed would be just another day at work.

The office was pretty ordinary, much like every other room in the building, it had a standard form and shape, it was however the contents that surprised Tracy.

For a Duty Commander's office, it was not only in her opinion decidedly pokey, but also littered with what seemed to be the results of an explosion in a recycled paper plant.

Most surprising of all was the small figure that sat behind the desk, shuffling through some of the vast quantity of paper that seemed to be enveloping the room. His small stature just didn't seem to fit the voice that a few moments earlier she had heard unceremoniously firing a Security Service officer with such directness.

"Take a seat," muttered the Commander without looking up. "I'll be with you in a moment" he added.

Tracy took the opportunity to glance around the office, casting her eyes over the model bus on the top of the filing cabinet, the biscuit packet that appeared to be lodged in the safe in the back wall, and the half dozen or so coffee cups lodged in various places, before coming to light on the Commander himself, a short man who like herself, was also in his early thirties. He seemed to have the look of a man with the entire world's responsibilities on his shoulders and he was the only one who was able to deal with them.

He looked up, with a quizzical, indeed almost surprised expression, his whole tone and character seemed to change when his eyes met Tracy for the first time.

"Oh erm, I'm terribly sorry, you are?"

"Lieutenant Commander Tracy Caverner sir, I have been assigned as your new deputy sir", she replied, straightening herself to attention as she did so.

"Ah well then you've met your predecessor" he said lightly gesturing towards the door, "complete and utter useless nitwit!" he added before observing that Tracy was still stood to attention in front of his desk. A matter he quickly decided to put a stop to.

"Oh relax for goodness sake, if there is one thing I cannot stand, it is officialdom and all this saluting nonsense" he added irritated. Tracy relaxed a little and sat down, rather lost for words. It appeared that she had now wound up working for someone with all the diplomatic management skills of Genghis Khan.

"You're not from around here are you?" he looked at her more closely, squinting with obviously slightly failing eyesight, "Hants and Dorset uniform isn't it?" he asked.

"Err yes sir" Tracy replied looking down at the slightly damp uniform, which was rapidly giving her a chill.

"You best take your jacket off before you catch something," the Commander recommended seeing her discomfort.

Tracy was about to hang her jacket on the nearby radiator but the Commander interrupted her "heating has packed up by the way," therefore rendering her intentions pretty pointless. She decided to carry it with her instead.

"Well my dear, you're just in time, section briefing is in about one minute, a good opportunity to see what is, or more likely isn't going on around here" The Commander announced as he got up from behind his desk and promptly knocked a pile of paper on the floor, he slightly reluctantly bent down to pick them up and discovered one piece of paper of immediate relevance.

"Ah, there's a faxed memo about you down here", he said from down on the floor. Tracy leaned over the desk to see if he was still there, all she could hear was this rural sounding voice from somewhere below.

"Here, souvenir" he said handing the piece of crumpled fax paper to her, she could do nothing but looked somewhat taken aback by the slight eccentricity that this man seemed to have.

Opening the door for her, the Commander guided Tracy out of the office into the corridor, upon which, those officers who were still around promptly proceeded as quickly as possible to the briefing room a few doors down. The Commander was apparently notorious for showing guarded displeasure at those who did not turn up to morning briefings on time without good reason.

Pointing to a number of doors he pointed out various rooms quoting the various numbers and designations, "C208, my office, C209, your office, C210 section general office and C211 Briefing Room".

"Right" Tracy responded as she continued to take in her new surroundings. A murmuring of 'morning sir's' perpetrated the air as the two officers arrived in the briefing room.

"Morning!" barked the Commander "can I have you undivided attention please". The various officers in the room put down papers and phones and listened intently from behind the numerous desks and other furniture that filled the room.

"First item" he continued "I would like you to meet my new Deputy C O, Mrs....."
"Miss" Tracy interrupted; he continued, "Oh err sorry, Miss Tracy Caverner. I know you will all give her a warm welcome. Hopefully she will last longer than the previous three Deputy C.O.'s I've had this year".

'Crumbs' was the thought that went through Tracy's mind at that point. It seemed that hers was a position with a higher employment turnover than the rest of the Department put together.

"Second item, Geoff, any luck on that armed robbery?" he asked.

Lt Com Geoff Johnson, a bearded but balding man in his forties rose from behind his desk in the corner.

"We've got a muddy footprint from the carpet, possible fingerprints on the counter plus some very murky CCTV footage that might as well be of Lord Lucan for all the help it will be, but Metropolitan Division have been on to us and say they may be a connection with an earlier robbery in Islington a few weeks back, same M.O. and so forth".

"Keep on it" responded the Commander with an encouraging tone.

Tracy listened intently from the corner by the doorway as the briefing continued. She tried to assess some of the characters of the people that were present and quickly concluded that they were many and varied as the Commander continued to run through the items of the day.

"Item 14, overnight reports, anything?" he asked more out of desperation for something to have happened in the rather quiet area that is the City of Haychester, rather than professional interest.

The section's administrator and secretary, Janice Long stood away from the wall she had been leaning on and read from a clipboard.

"Well" she replied reluctantly, "We've got a taking and driving away of an Austin Montego...."

"Not planning a fast getaway then?" responded a wag at the back of the room.

"....a report from an old dear in Springdale about a, quote 'huge pile of elephant dung' unquote, in the middle of the road and finally a busted window in the High Street, all quite quiet really" she sighed gently.

The Commander sighed slightly with disappointment. Ever since he took over this area four years previously with his more forthright methods of operation, crime levels in the area had fallen to unprecedented low levels, leaving any major crime something of a light relief.

"The tension around here must be unbearable," muttered Tracy with a sarcastic tone to one of the junior officers adjacent to her.

"Pretty typical" the officer replied, "Ever since the Commander arrived with his err..." he paused for the right word "...autocratic style, there's barely been a crook left for us to nab".

"Oh yes?"

"Take for example the other day" the officer continued "The boss recommended one repeat offender be jailed for fifteen years".

"Sounds all right to me" Tracy commented, not taking her eyes off the Commander,

"For double parking?" the officer replied.

"Ah!" Tracy responded with understandable surprise, "I see what you mean by slightly autocratic".

"Does he have a name?" Tracy motioned to the Commander as he proudly presented his currently most wanted criminal under his 'Scumbag of the Week' feature.

"Nobody actually seems to know it" the officer replied, "Everyone calls him The Commander, and appear to have done so since he first joined the Department, what 15 years ago now. Aye he is a bit of a mystery all right, oh yes and a born workaholic to boot".

Tracy watched the Commander intently, who barely stood 5' 7" in his shoes as he closed the meeting.

"Final item." he paused either for some dramatic effect or the fact that this was not really good news "Friday is the annual Security Department Dinner and Dance".

The room groaned at this news as the Commander continued "as you know attendance is compulsory unless you're on duty that night, like me. Anyone here want to volunteer for extra overtime on Friday night?"

The entire room put their hands up at this point. "Mmm" thought the Commander, "same as last year then, and the three years before that now I come to think of it". He wrapped up the meeting and dispatched them all on their way.

He turned to Tracy with a wry look, "You know, one day we might just get someone to go to that dinner". Tracy smiled with amusement, thinking back to the time when she used to do anything she could to get out of school concerts.

"Right then" the Commander announced "the guided tour and the right uniform for you my dear".

As he drove along, the prison van driver began to think about average everyday mundane things, what to do about lunch, and what on earth should he get his wife for an anniversary present being top of his mind.

The dual carriageway seemed unusually quiet compared with the normal rush you would expect at that time though, and the quietness meant he was still thinking along the lines of anniversary presents when the large white lorry began to pull alongside him.

He looked in the side mirror, thought nothing of it, and assumed that the lorry would pass him by as other traffic.

Inside the van, prisoner 1545J121-1X Garforth, James was smirking. Through the small smoked window of his cell, he too could see the lorry pulling alongside, although his expression turned slightly to annoyance to see the lorry clearly had the identity of none other than his own half brother on the side of it.

"Idiot!" he murmured as he continued to observe the vehicle's progress.

"Two months of planning and behold" he thought to himself, a little feeling of pleasure beginning to come over him.

It was through a wealth of well placed high up contacts that he was about to get out. The whole thing had gone to plan, the fake transfer orders and paperwork, the blackmail, the bribes.... He reached under the simple bench seat and removed a small black plastic bin liner, taped in place with duct tape.

Tearing the bag open revealed a revolver, slightly battered but useable and all his unnamed associates could manage in the circumstances. Turning the weapon over and over in his hands, Garforth realised that this was just the beginning of the road to revenge; he had a job to finish.

The driver was startled from his thoughts by the sudden impact of the lorry veering into the front of the van. "Christ!" he yelled as he tried to stop the suddenly uncontrollable descent down the side embankment of the road.

The last thing he was to see was the tree branch smash through the windscreen as the van came to a halt on its side, before he slipped into unconsciousness.

"Welcome to your office" the Commander announced as he opened the door for Tracy and she stepped inside.

She looked around the dusty room which clearly had not been used for a while, "Your predecessors didn't use it" the Commander explained "I think they were probably too close to my office for comfort" he explained as Tracy brushed away cobwebs off the desk lamp.

"Apart from the usual bits and bobs" the Commander continued as Tracy tried to rotate the swivel chair only for the arm to fall off, "We have our exciting collection of Department manuals for every little emergency from the fire drill through to nuclear war and what to do if aliens land in the High Street - probably on a Thursday".

She took a couple of booklets from the shelf he had indicated and looked through them, "You weren't kidding about the aliens were you" she commented with a chuckle as she looked through some of the titles of the booklets "but why will it happen on a Thursday?"

"Because Thursday is the day the weekly paper comes out" the Commander explained as he leaned back against the edge of the desk, "It's printed on a Wednesday and anything round here always happens so that it's a week before we read about it, by which time we'll have forgotten about it anyway, it sort of typifies the nature of this place really".

"Ah well, Simple logic really" Tracy replied with a shy smile as she returned the booklets to the shelf.

The rain had mercifully stopped as the two officers left the building. Guiding her up the side road of the site, he pointed out a series of buildings that made up the complex.

"Front block is the administration section, and main reception" then moving his arm further down the row of four storey blocks that make up the site he pointed out 'A Block' home of Customs & Excise, Transport and Traffic, 'B Block' Firearms, Vice, Trading Standards and oddly in Tracy's opinion Environmental Health.

"C Block where you will be based with the front-line division, also home to the International Division, area control room, typing pool etc.

The newer building behind it was subsequently identified as the main custody and operation office or the "Tradesmen's Entrance" as the Commander referred to it.

"The various buildings scattered around about contain libraries, canteen, stores, vehicle workshops and laboratories, forensic and medicinal oh and the armoury" The Commander seemed a little hesitant when mentioning the armoury which seemed a little strange to Tracy, after all the Security Service required all its offices to be armed at all times and indeed had insisted on this for the last ten years or so.

A small wooden hut on the far side of the site was their initial destination. It was a typical 1950's design portacabin that had been recovered from an old building site and

reflected a lot about the slightly ramshackle nature of the place, probably because it was cheap and available.

The building's age was further emphasised by the sign on the door, which was so faded that it was almost impossible to read, but Tracy managed to decipher "Personnel" from it.

"You've got your warrant card?" the Commander asked as he opened the door of the hut. Tracy reached inside her jacket pocket and removed the small plastic coated card mounted in its leather wallet together with the cast metal badge of the Hants & Dorset Division.

"Morning, I've got a new'un" the Commander announced to the distinctively bored looking personnel division officer behind the desk.

"What'll it be?" the slightly fed up but not unsurprised officer responded, as she reluctantly rose to shake hands and greet Tracy. The Commander looked across at his new Deputy as she stepped forward and asked for a complete corrected Warrant Card and new uniform set.

"I'll need to know you size, full name, rank and position, oh and also all medals and decorations held for the ribbons on your uniform" the Personnel Officer responded casually tossing a form across the desk towards Tracy.

To the Commander's surprise, Tracy proceeded to record no less than six high-ranking medals on the part of the form for decorations, to the point where she almost ran out of space.

"I've been busy!" she casually replied with a shrug of her shoulders upon seeing the Commanders surprised reaction.

"Blimey, at that rate you'll have almost as many as the Commander" the Personnel Officer responded, taking the completed form from her.

"Eight in case you were wondering..." the Commander added as he began to guide Tracy out of the door.

"By the way sir..." the personnel officer continued in a more ticking off tone "we had to steam clean your best dress uniform *three* times to get all that chip fat and goodness only knows what else out of it". The Commander clearly irritated at a hidden attack on his rather unhealthy diet, glowered momentarily before deciding to make a quick exit.

They proceeded next door to a second identical wooden hut, this one Tracy noticed had more heavily secured windows and doors than the personnel section and was unmarked by any signing.

"The Armoury" the Commander announced as they entered the dingy interior of the hut. The Security Department's policy of arming officers was always controversial but the Commander put up with it.

The Armoury Officer stepped out of his back office to greet the two officers as they entered. He was a short man in his sixties, small round-framed glasses enhancing his character and reminded Tracy of a character she once saw in an old Spaghetti Western film that she saw when she was a kid.

She removed her gun from its belt-mounted holster and presented it together with her Department Firearms Licence.

The Armoury Officer looked it over for a few moments before he spoke. "Yes, we'll get this number changed on the documentation, save a lot of trouble" he commented handing the gun back to Tracy.

"Before you go" the Armoury Officer began as the Commander turned to leave "I've finished fixing your gun sir". He picked up a revolver from the back cabinet and handed it across to the Commander who reluctantly took it.

"What was wrong with it?" he asked rather uninterested.

"Oh the firing pin was seized, it would help if you fired it occasionally rather than using it as a hammer" the Armoury Officer responded with a dismissive tone.

"Aye" the Commander responded begrudgingly before the two officers thanked the Armoury Officer and left.

"I take it you don't like guns then?" Tracy asked as she observed the rather elderly revolver in the Commander's hand.

"No I don't" he replied as he put the gun away in his own belt holster. "Although I have had this all my career, it hasn't been fired in anger for nearly five years".

Tracy was pondering this impressive achievement until the Commander suddenly stopped abruptly and held his arm across in front of her, preventing her from being struck down by the large tow truck which came speeding past them down the service road heading for the main workshop.

On the back was Tracy's rather dented official marked car. She cringed with embarrassment as the Commander noticed the coincidence of the number on the side of the car and that on her lapel. Suddenly she had this urge for the ground to swallow her up there and then but it didn't happen.

"I shouldn't worry too much about it," the Commander reassured her "its only Hants and Dorset's car, not one of ours" he chuckled.

Tracy breathed a huge sigh of relief.

"Oh there is nothing like a little good old fashioned bribery and corruption to open doors" James Garforth exclaimed as the lock was cut off the door of the van.

Walking casually from the back of the van to a nearby silver Mercedes limousine, he paused only briefly to administer a swift kick in the side of one of the unconscious prison officers lying on the hard tarmac of the carriageway.

Coming into the light for the first time, the men who had assisted his escape saw a changed man from the James they saw locked up twelve years previously. Now in his mid thirties, he was prematurely greying and although still physically fit, he looked a little thin for his 6' 3" frame.

He approached a younger man standing by the car and smiled a knowing grin, looking around with small approving nods before giving his verdict on the operation so far.

"Nice One!" he said to his half brother, "Pity you used a marked van though..." he continued with a disappointed and villainous frown.

He patted his brother on the shoulder and got into the car where the three other prisoners who were being transported with him were now waiting.

"My little brother's made a mistake, can you believe that?" he gestured in false disbelief to the heavily built henchman sitting in the drivers seat of the limousine.

He looked out of the side window at the men including his brother over by the lorry who was just clearing up the final remaining evidence of his escape.

Casually he waved and smiled before closing, electrically, the tinted window, upon which his expression markedly changed. Coolly and calmly Garforth leaned across to the driver.

"Elimination please, and make it interesting" he requested at which the driver gave a subtle almost unseen signal from his side window across to one of the men stood on the carriageway.

The grunt of the limousine's engine as it pulled away drowned the two gunshots that would otherwise have echoed across the deserted carriageway.

Tracy surveyed the scene with little enthusiasm. In her career she had seen a number of different Security Department staff canteens, and to be honest, this one was about on par, i.e. awful.

There were about 100 officers and other assorted people in the canteen. The kitchen come serving area stretched across the back wall and a number of drinks machines were littered among the various doors along the opposite side.

"All human life is here....." Tracy commented with a concerned frown.

"Aye, and quite a lot of bacteriological an all I'll bet" the Commander concluded.

"Drink?" he offered "I'm paying".

"Err tea please" she replied although she was not too confident at what she was going to be served with from the machine they were now standing in front of.

The little plastic cup popped out from the bottom of the machine after what seemed an eternity of clicks and whirr's, together with a swift kick in side from the Commander.

"Err thank you..... I think....." Tracy replied as she looked down at the greenish yellow liquid in the small plastic cup that purported to be tea. They sat at one of the many rather grubby tables that littered the room.

"What will be my role in this assignment?" she inquired as she took a sip of the mysterious liquid, a move that the Commander could tell by the way her face suddenly screwed up in disgust she instantly regretted.

"Well basically, you will be required to do the same work as me but for 10% less money!" he replied causing Tracy to smile with amusement,

"Plus" he continued, "You get to do anything I should be doing that involves anything to do with boats or heights, especially helicopters as, and don't tell anyone this, I have a slight problem with heights and flying".

"Right" Tracy pondered thoughtfully. Her expression changed from one of intense interest to morbid curiosity.

"Chips at this time of the morning?" she asked, looking across at the plateful that the Commander was eating.

He paused, and looked up as though slightly surprised by the question.

"This is one of the four main food groups" he explained.

"I must have missed something during Home Economics classes" Tracy replied.

"The four 'C's, chocolate, caffeine, cake and of course....." he held up a particularly long chip to emphasise the point ".....chips".

"Yes that's all very well" she replied with a facial expression that said it certainly wasn't "but for breakfast at 9.45 in the morning?"

"The canteen staff cook these for me specially, something wrong with that?" he replied slightly sharply, resenting the criticism. A few moments later his attention was drawn away from the chips, or breakfast depending upon your point of view, to a small group of people sitting on the opposite side of the canteen.

"Well, well, well...." murmured the Commander, pushing his chair back and standing up. Picking up his chips, he beckoned to Tracy to follow. They walked over to the group, consisting of three officers and a dishevelled looking gentleman in his late fifties.

As they approached, Tracy could tell from the uniform insignia that these officers were from the Customs and Excise division.

"Hello Geoff!" the Commander called with a welcoming sarcastic smile. The man he named as Geoff threw his head back in irritation at the realisation that he had been well and truly rumbled.

"What name did he give you guys" he asked the officers present.

"Albert Harworth".

"Wrong!" replied the Commander. "Tracy, meet Geoffrey Hainsworth, smuggler and dodgy dealer in various hot, or at the very least warm consumables".

Hainsworth looked up and smiled a sarcastic, not to say cheesed off welcome to her before returning to his mood of suddenly imposed doom and gloom.

"Robert Hepworth is the name I last saw him use" she announced, it was clear a mutual acquaintance had been discovered here.

One of the Customs division officers was busily trying to write down all the aliases they had come up with. They had been working on the theory that their prisoner had no record whatsoever.

"Get Commander Cairns over in records to cross reference him and you'll learn a lot about our friend here" the Commander advised.

The Customs division officers, suddenly stunned, thanked him for his assistance while Geoff just murmured something unfathomable, indeed probably unprintable in irritation. He knew he had just had any forthcoming sentence at least quadrupled by the Commander's timely presence.

Returning to their original table, the Commander was about to start questioning Tracy on her career and experience when a polite interrupting cough was heard.

"Control's been trying to get hold of you two for the last five minutes" came a voice, that of one of the Commander's most experienced junior officers, Al Longton, an expert in computers who had proved an invaluable aide to the division over the past few years.

Unlike his two senior officers, he was markedly tall, over 6 feet which gave him a very overwhelming presence. In his late twenties, it was clear his enthusiasm and expertise would always become a major figure in the future of the Security Department operations in the area.

"What's up?" asked Tracy, welcoming the distraction from the so called cup of tea she had been trying to pluck up the courage to drink.

"Armed robbery in progress in East Street has now escalated into an armed siege", Longton explained, still somewhat out of breath having run all the way from the office.

"I don't believe it, a serious crime" the Commander responded with enthusiastic sarcasm. "Armed response teams there yet?"

"Well....." came the seemingly inevitable reply "...they're stuck in traffic on the wrong side of the County and Control was wondering if you could bring you usual skills to the situation".

"Right" the Commander consumed his last chip and slightly hesitantly rose from his seat, motioning to Tracy as he did so.

"Come on lass, work to do".

"Send this to forensics for me will you" Tracy asked as she passed the cup of what was allegedly tea to Longton with a wry smile, "apparently it may be tea but frankly I'm not convinced".

Longton could do no more than stand there with the cup of semi-warm liquid in his hand as the unlikely duo headed for the exit.

Garforth surveyed the site carefully, an old Government warehouse deep in the heart of the most rural part of the countryside, fifteen miles from the nearest serious civilisation worthy of any mention.

"I like it" he commented with an agreeing smile as the rest of the group left the limo outside the large sheet metal grey warehouse building, and went inside.

As they entered, Garforth greeted a gentleman who was waiting for him, dressed in a long dark trench coat. They shook hands, obviously knowing each other well even though the mystery man was shrouded in the darkness of the unlit interior of the abandoned building.

"Everything is in place as you asked" the mysterious stranger announced. Garforth took a briefcase from his driver standing behind him and handed it across.

"I trust you will find this all in order, a nice donation to party funds you could call it" he joked with a sinister chuckle.

The stranger took the briefcase and placed it on the bonnet of his silver grey BMW. Upon opening it, he saw inside a considerable quantity of money, all in untraceable used notes, a sight which caused him to smile.

"On behalf of The Secretary Of State and G.B. Private Prison Services PLC, it has been a pleasure doing business with you" he replied as he closed the case again and

secured the catches. With due haste he quickly shook hands with Garforth once again and got into his car.

Driving out of the warehouse and away, he did not see Garforth gesture to one of his henchmen nearby with a characteristic finger cutting across the neck.

It was with an evil glee that Garforth observed the BMW speed off down the dusty track and away before he turned to the three other prisoners who had been freed along with him, whom by now had changed into civilian clothes.

He took a dossier from off the top of a pile of old packing crates, before beckoning them over to a small office situated in the corner of the building.

Opening the well-worn wooden door, he invited the men to take a seat before making his way to the front of the room and opening a large projector screen. At the nod of a head, one of the minder's at the back of the room pulled the elderly blinds closed as best he could and turned off the lights.

"Right gentlemen" Garforth began "I have fulfilled my part of the deal with you; I've got you out of otherwise permanent detention, now it is your turn".

The three prisoners ceased talking amongst themselves and paid attention as Garforth began his presentation.

"You have been carefully selected by me for your individual expertise in those sadly rarely practised skills of demolition, assassination and general violence against the so called judicial security organisations of this great country".

Those gathered in the room murmured with amusement, evil was there stock in trade, and they were anxious to get back into business.

Garforth looked around the room, attempting to drum up greater enhancement for the continuation of his speech.

"Twelve years ago, I was locked up for doing a job on behalf of certain Government influences who at the time guaranteed my freedom, and indeed if it were not for the extra effort put in by four then junior officers of Her Majesty's Department Of National Security I would have been fine".

The Security Service was an enemy that all four shared, a factor on which Garforth was depending.

"Now the time has come for a little light revenge" he continued, "indeed to finish off the job".

"Thanks to the support of my contacts in Her Majesty's Government, I am as you can see, now free and have the resources to carry out my original objectives." Garforth continued to pace up and down in as he delivered his speech like a General before a battle

"In addition, I am going to see to some pay back that's owing". He clenched his left arm with a grimace at this point; he could still feel the pain from being shot twelve years previously.

"Now because these four individuals are no longer in the one place at the one time, I will need help, and that's where you three come in" he nodded at the three prisoners seated in front of him.

"I am assigning one of you to each officer, but one in particular I am saving for myself". He walked over to the projector and turned it on. An image of a security officer appeared on the screen.

"Let me introduce you first to Lieutenant Commander Claire Farmer, Divisional Records Officer, Central Office, Birmingham" he announced.

"Haliwell, she's yours" Garforth handed a small dossier over to the first prisoner, Robert Haliwell, a heavily built man in his forties and a well renowned specialist in the use of explosives.

Garforth pressed the button on the side of the projector to reveal another photograph, this time of a male security officer.

"Deputy Divisional Commander Simon Holroyd, Special Investigations Division, Truro, Cornwall". He passed a second dossier to the next prisoner, Graham Butcher, a slim short man in his twenties and a well respected firearms specialist in the criminal fraternity.

Another press of the button on the projector and a third Security Officer was illustrated.

"Thirdly" he continued "Commander Julie Fraser, Commanding Officer, Forensics Section, 'B' Division, Bracknell, Berkshire".

The third prisoner, Henry Silver, a balding man heading for his early sixties now, leaned forward to receive the his dossier, before sitting back and joining the others looking through the detailed and well researched documentation with which they had just been presented.

".... and finally" Garforth continued with a flourish "...my old friend the Commander himself. He used to have a code name, Kestrel, although gawd' knows why, he hates flying!" The photograph being projected changed to that of the Commander himself, a covertly captured image of him standing recently on the platform at Haychester Railway Station.

A look of controlled hatred and an eagerness for revenge crept into Garforth's voice as he said with determination "...he's mine".

For what seemed like an eternity, but was in fact only a few seconds, Garforth fixed his stare on the photograph before he broke off.

"Right you know what to do, they are to come to some harm, I don't want them dead just yet, although if that happens I won't lose any sleep over it" he added as though death was a matter of fact.

"Payment is as per agreement and your hardware and equipment is over there." he said gesturing towards a number of sealed green metal cases stacked in the corner of the warehouse, "and the transport is waiting outside to take you to your destinations. Good luck gentlemen".

For an official car, the Commander's marked patrol vehicle was certainly careworn if not decidedly battered. However he had always liked it and so far had refused any replacements.

Tracy was driving, navigating her way through the chaotic and historic streets of Haychester, crowded in a manner so typical of a busy mid morning, with the patrol car's blue lights and sirens heralding their presence at full blast.

The Commander meanwhile was sat alongside in the passenger seat, trying to read her personnel file and give directions at the same time, neither with a great deal of success.

"Which idiot designed this road system?" she demanded to know as she swerved to avoid an obviously deaf elderly lady in a mini who decided to cut her up at the roundabout leading into West Street.

"I blame the Romans," he replied, trying to hold on for grim death as the handle above his door came off in his hand. Tracy swung the car around the corner as fast as possible.

"Pretend we are a bus and ignore the one way... past the cathedral" he instructed her. Tracy just guessed and ploughed straight on ahead, only to suddenly be forced to hit the brakes sharply only a few yards later.

"It's him again!" she called out, a gesturing arm of irritation being offered in the direction of the same bus driver who had hit her car earlier that morning. Now armed with a fresh vehicle, he had just pulled out straight in front of her.

Realising who it was he had just annoyed, again, he shouted an apology as Tracy swung around the bus.

"You know my dear that between a Ford Sierra and eleven tons of bus, we come off worse," the Commander advised her in a vague if sarcastic attempt to get her to slow down a little.

They stopped by the medieval market cross clock tower that was situated at the intersection of the city's four main roads where a large inquisitive crowd had gathered, being held back by a couple of patrol officers armed with little more than a roll of tape and a megaphone which was suffering from flat batteries.

"Get out of the way, go on, shift it will you!" the Commander called out somewhat undiplomatically to the thronged crowds who had gathered, as both he and Tracy attempted to make their way through.

Once they had managed to make their way through the throngs, both officers looked down the eerily empty East Street, the silence only broken by the bank's burglar alarm ringing away, and the murmurs from the excited and nosey crowd.

On site operations officer Lt Commander David Wilkes, an experienced officer from the Traffic Division came over. He and the Commander had been colleagues for many years and knew each other well.

"What's occurring?" the Commander inquired, looking down the street with a worried yet business like frown.

"Standard nutter, botched robbery on the Wessex County Bank, got disturbed by one of our patrol officers." He showed the Commander and Tracy to a video link he had established in a nearby van specially designed for just such situations.

"This is linked in with the security cameras in there". He pointed to a scruffy worried figure in the top left hand corner of the screen "That's him, semi automatic he's got, although no shots fired, yet".

"Hostages?" asked Tracy looking up from the monitor. "Three, the Manager, and two counter staff" replied David, "Everybody else legged it out the back".

"That restores my faith in Bank security" the Commander wryly commented before taking a closer look at the gun the man was carrying.

"Ah well" he commented before standing up and looking across at the crowd still trying to push forward for a better view, seemingly oblivious to the potential threat to their safety.

"Right, first thing David, shift that lot" he gestured towards the crowd, "those who don't shift, nick em' for obstruction".

David went over to the crowd and attempted to shift them back as best as he and the two patrol officers could.

The Commander took his gun from its holster and checked the chamber before looking across at Tracy who was doing the same.

"What's your aim like?" he asked.

"My last test was 96.5% actually" she replied with some pride.

"Heck of a lot better than mine then" he replied with a smile.

"When I say go, head for Tesco's" he gestured to the small supermarket adjacent to the bank about a hundred yards away.

Upon his signal, the two officers both walked briskly but quietly over to the front door of the store and took up position standing just inside the entrance where the Commander's attention was momentarily diverted from the bank by the display of freshly baked double chocolate chip cookies by the door.

"You're a stranger to healthy food aren't you?" she commented in a whispered voice.

"Got vitamins in that you know" he replies looking again at the biscuits as he tried and probably failing to justify his eating habits. "Besides I think better when I'm eating chocolate".

"Right lass, here's what we are going to do". He looked around the corner of the wall along the front of the bank. "Follow me to the door and then stay there while I go in and get him out".

"Simple as that?" Tracy asked.

"Simple as that" he confirmed.

"What happens if he shoots you?" she asked evidently slightly sceptical at his plan.

"Unlikely" the Commander replied "he's still got the safety catch on on that thing, you could see it on the monitor back there" he explained as he smiled and winked at her before moving off towards the bank's main front door.

From his position by the market cross, Wilkes could only look on bemused as the Commander just casually strolled into the Bank. Tracy stood flat against the outside doorpost, her gun ready.

"I am having a really bad day and I am not afraid to use this!" the robber yelled, waving the weapon about aimlessly.

"The management regrets to inform that it just got a lot worse," a voice behind him suddenly announced, causing the robber to swing round suddenly whereupon he found himself face to face with the Commander.

Seconds later, the robber flew out of the door, having been unceremoniously shoved out of the building.

"Freeze scumbag!" Tracy's reaction was immediate as she trained her gun on the robber who instantly froze and put his hands up in surrender.

"All right, all right, I give up, just get little miss lethal weapon here away from me!" the robber quickly spluttered.

"Right then" the Commander announced as he calmly stepped out of the Bank and addressed the robber "You're nicked, you have the right to remain silent, however if you do so I will become extremely agitated, which is not a pretty sight, all right?"

As Tracy handcuffed the bemused robber, the Commander held his ears and looked up at the alarm bell mounted above them on the front wall of the Bank.

"Will someone do something about that dam alarm please?" he asked having almost to shout to make himself heard above the din that was emanating from it.

Tracy, who was by now becoming rapidly familiar with the Commander's no-nonsense style, swung round, trained her gun on the exterior alarm bell box and opened fire twice.

"Nice one!" the Commander replied as he gave a look of sincere approval while the alarm box crashed to the ground and the bell was silenced.

Visitors to the city looked on in disbelief, whilst locals, more familiar with the his methods of operation just stood back and smiled as both Tracy and the Commander bundled the robber into the back of a waiting van.

The Right Hon Trevor Sharman M.P. a man charged with the heavy responsibility of the office of Her Majesty's Home Secretary, looked up momentarily from his copy of The Times as a messenger approached him, walking briskly across the crowded House of Common's tea-room bearing a small folded piece of beige paper.

Sharman slowly took the note from the messenger and grudgingly thanked him. He waited until no one was near him before unfolding the paper, this was a message he had been awaiting for most of that morning, and he nodded in agreement and pleasure at reading the curious wording in front of him.

It read simply "Objective obtained, mission completion initiated, your co-operation appreciated" the message being signed "Your respectful servant".

The Home Secretary screwed the piece of paper up tightly and dunked it in his almost cold cup of coffee, causing the ink to run and make the writing on it unrecognisable, before placing his newspaper under his arm, and leaving the room.

Seated upon one the public benches that lined the south side of the street, Tracy looked up at the impressive exterior of the recently restored cathedral spire, as the Commander, seated alongside her, chomped his way through another of double chocolate chip cookies he had just purchased.

In front of him was Tracy's personnel file, which he was studying with keen interest whilst brushing off biscuit crumbs from the pages as they fell.

"Three distinguished conduct awards, I am impressed," he mumbled, still stuffing his face with biscuit. Tracy looked across at the Commander and smiled. She was beginning to really like him; he had a unique and mysterious personality that really rather appealed to her.

His attitude to work was one of pure professionalism. If there was a job to be done, anything unnecessary was ditched and the source of the problem tackled direct.

"How do you run your ship?" she asked, keen to establish the foundations of a good working relationship right from the start.

"Well" he replied having finished his third cookie "I like to see hard work, and lots of it. I have no time for idiots, timewasters, politicians, wingers or lead swingers".

"Hence your reputation for firing people, frequently. Do you think I will last?" she asked slightly nervously.

"I do hope so. And judging from what I have seen so far, I would say you will be around for some time yet" he replied "unless of course you want to leave...."

"Oh no, this is the position and challenge I've been looking for, for some time" She was clearly keen to emphasize her commitment to the job.

"Also." he continued "I will not permit in my Department or presence, political correctness, so called modern management techniques, stress counselling or any other of that American style codswallop neither".

"Right, understood",

"Oh yes" the Commander added "I frown deeply on so called healthy food as well, but then again you probably worked that bit out for yourself".

'You do surprise me...' she thought sarcastically, but she kept it to herself.

He got up and walked back to the car. "I'll drive this time" he said, not wanting to go through another of Tracy's hot pursuit driving sessions as he was still trying to recover from the last one.

As the Commander drove through the southern part of the City, he introduced Tracy to some of its few, indeed very few highlights.

"Welcome to Haychester, population 85,000 odd, sometimes very odd people, average age seemingly about 150, national pastime, complaining about anything and everything to the 'Whinger's Weekly' or 'Haychester Gazette' as it should be more correctly referred to" he announced, the latter parts in particular in a more sarcastic tone.

"This City has the dubious honour of being the largest place in Southern England without a cinema or major leisure facility because the locals have spent thirty odd

years arguing over it” he added. “If you ever wanted a better example of small town petty bureaucracy, you could not find a better example than this place”.

He did nothing to hide his frustration at the population of the city. "Here, you will find a motley collection of clapped out hypocrites and whingers who wouldn't know how to say thank you if you gave them an instruction book".

"Sounds familiar" Tracy put in, the scenario reminding her of the small town in Hampshire where she grew up.

As they rumbled over the railway level crossing, she looked ahead with interest. A short distance further on, the road turned sharply right as it swerved around the old canal basin, and it was what was happening alongside it that was attracting both her and now the Commander's interest as he drew the car to a halt.

"What's up or down as the case maybe?" the Commander asked the operator of the large crane that was positioned alongside, his boiler suit style uniform signifying him to be a Security Service officer employed in the recovery, engineering and ancillary operations division.

"Car's gone in" he explained simply in a wonderfully original Brummy accent.

As the two continued to converse, Tracy got out and walked over to the water's edge. Emerging from the depths as the crane hoisted away, was a car which she discerned it to be a fairly new silver grey BMW and the thought of so called joy riders or similar went through her mind.

The Commander joined her and they both looked on as the car was swung out and across onto a waiting flatbed lorry, water, weed and rubbish from the bottom of the canal basin dripping all over the place.

"Probably nicked" he declared, "waste of a good motor though".

Tracy looked in the front of the car at the empty front seats "no driver" she remarked.

"Someone was seen legging it after shoving it in about twenty minutes ago" the crane operator called as he stepped down from the controls. "Your patrol officer over there is getting the statements" he gestured to a small crowd of people a few yards away.

The Commander pondered the vehicle, his instinct told him something wasn't right here, and the look on Tracy's face seemed to agree.

"Get it to forensics or someone, give them something to get their teeth into" she told the crane operator, clearly by now starting to establish a confidence and authority in her new position.

"Back to the office then?" the Commander suggested as the lorry containing the soggy car moved off. Tracy nodded in agreement and got in the patrol car before the Commander acknowledged the officers present with a wave and drove away.

The Haychester area control room was fairly quiet that morning. With the exception of the bank alert, an old lady in a Mini causing havoc on the city bypass and the car in the canal basin, there had been little to tax the duty despatch officer since he signed on at 9.30 that morning.

Getting up from his chair, he stretched as he walked over to the CCTV monitor desk and looked over the shoulder of the monitor clerk.

"Have they got that car out of the drink yet?" he asked.

"The car's out, removed and on the way to the mechanics shop now" she replied, "also" she added "the Commander and his new sidekick are safely ensconced back in the building, which reminds me, who won the last sweepstake on how long his deputy would last?"

The conversation was interrupted by the whirr of a teleprinter. They looked up to see which of the three rather elderly but reliable machines present had leapt into life.

The duty despatch officer raised a surprised eyebrow when he saw it was the machine reserved for nationally issued urgent messages. The thing hadn't seen any use for months almost to the point that he suspected it might have broken down

As he walked over to it, he made out the text as it was being printed. Certain key words and names appearing before him, especially the combination of '...alert Commander...', '...James Garforth...' and '...escaped...' saw his facial expression change abruptly from one of inquisitiveness to one of sheer shock at the events being notified before him.

He tore off the paper from the printer, scanned its contents quickly and turned on the spot to the clerks in the room.

"George, get this confirmed now, Jenny, alert the boss fast!" he blurted out, clearly shocked.

The Commander paused in the corridor momentarily and stared straight ahead at the wall at the gable end of the building. Tracy carried on until she realised he had stopped and looked back.

"Are you all right sir?" she asked, her concern obvious.

"It's probably nothing" the Commander replied shaking his head, "Just that feeling you get when someone walks over your grave".

They both turned round when they heard the sound of urgent hurried footsteps running down the corridor towards them. The source of the footsteps turned out to be

one of the despatch clerks approaching with a piece of paper, which she handed to him.

Tracy looked on with some concern as the Commander's mood changed right in front of her eyes, to the point where she began to think that maybe it was that premonition of a few moments previously actually coming true.

He looked up at the ceiling momentarily and took in a sharp intake of breath before turning sharply to both the clerk and Tracy.

"Call in every senior officer for an emergency briefing in" he looked at his watch "twenty minutes, 12.50 and while you're about it you had better cancel all leave as well".

He reached into his inner jacket pocket and pulled out a piece of old and crumpled lined paper which he unfolded and passed to the clerk.

"Get hold of these three people, Longton will know who I mean" the Commander requested with clear and serious insistence

"I believe he's already onto it sir" the clerk replied before she turned sharply on her heels and walked quickly back to the control room.

The Commander watched the clerk disappear before turning to Tracy and looking her straight in the eyes. She could clearly see the look of concern more for her than himself, indeed there maybe even have been a slight sense of fear that he was trying to suppress.

"You are about to get a baptism of fire, not to mention a potentially rapid promotion" he announced, trying to let a little light comic comment hide his concerned state of mind.

"Wh...what do you mean?" she asked, confused as she walked alongside him until they reached his office where he paused, pondering and looking at the cheap plastic plaque fixed to the door.

"Lets put it this way, if this is true" he handed her the piece of paper he had just received and turned to face her "There is a pretty good chance I could be dead by the end of the week".

Lieutenant Commander Claire Farmer picked up the pile of files from alongside the computer where she had been working. Walking over to her semi-partitioned office that was situated in the corner of the Security Department's West Midlands Central Records Hall, she found cause to pause for a moment.

The same shiver that had affected the Commander a few moments previously many miles away, overcame her as well for a moment. She was alone in the room; a quiet

Monday morning had meant that most of the staff were away on an early lunch break, whilst she had decided to stay behind to check through some old archives.

Shrugging off the momentary feeling as nothing, she entered her office and settled down behind the large mahogany desk, care worn with age and use.

Something still didn't feel right though; she looked across at the photograph on the wall. It was of four young looking security officers in full dress uniform taken many years ago in front of an old battered office building, behind them three flagpoles with flags at half-mast. Two of the people featured were herself and the Commander.

Her thoughts were interrupted however by a knock at her office door. She looked up to see one of her assistants standing there with a pensive look on his face.

"That was a quick lunch Gary" she remarked as the assistant nervously cleared his throat,

"Something urgent has come up, and I've got to get some records over to the Aston office, only my car is on the blink, any chance I can borrow yours?"

"Of course" she reached back to her uniform jacket to retrieve the keys from one of the pockets.

"Thanks" he replied as she tossed him the keys. He turned to leave before realising the second thing he meant to do.

"Oh yes, nearly forgot." he fumbled around in his pocket "Urgent message for you from down south" He handed the piece of paper to her.

Claire thanked him and watched him walk out of the door and away.

She thought something was a bit odd as by coincidence, she was due to travel down that way that very afternoon, another reason she was staying behind during lunch in order to make up the time.

Unfolding the piece of paper, she read the message, paused and then read it again twice more to confirm what she hoped she had not read the first time.

"Oh I don't believe it!" she called out to anyone within earshot, although by then she was alone.

Once again she looked up at the picture on the wall, the significance of that photograph, and the message in front of her was even deeper now and she had to act quickly.

Her thoughts however were abruptly interrupted by a sudden rush of air, which preceded the deafening screech of an explosion, blowing in the windows of the office.

Years of experience and training meant she instinctively threw herself behind her desk as debris flew across the room.

After a few moments, silence fell about the site. Only the sound of pieces of chipped masonry and glass falling to the ground interrupting the stunned and sudden quiet.

As the dust cleared, Claire looked up. The fire alarm bell in the adjacent corridor, damaged by the explosion, began a feeble ring while the sound of people moving began to be heard.

Standard procedure meant immediate evacuation of the building, and as she left, her feet crunching through the layer of plaster, rubble and broken glass that covered every surface on the window side of the room, she saw the source of the explosion.

Most of the cars outside had been either heavily damaged or totally wrecked, a few were burning and one had virtually disappeared into a crater that had become formed into the thick concrete surface.

She did a quick count of the wrecked vehicles; the one that should have been in the place now occupied by a three feet deep crater was her own. Combined with the note she had just received, there was only one conclusion, all this was meant for her.

"And so it begins" she murmured as she surveyed the scene of devastation, people wandering around dazed and in shock and the distant approach of sirens.

The murmuring of the assembled officers quickly ceased as the Commander entered the briefing room and held up a large photograph for all to see.

"Pay very close attention." he began "let me introduce you to Mr James Edward Garforth, 31 years old, 6 feet 2 inches tall, 12 stone". He handed the photograph to Tracy for her to pass back around the room. "If you should ever meet him then it is extremely doubtful you will live long enough to tell anyone about it. What we have here ladies and gentlemen is your classic grade 'A' psychopathic nutcase".

He paused for a moment to collect his thoughts before continuing.

"He was jailed for life twelve years ago by yours truly for the very controlled and highly professional assassination of this county's first group of passed junior officers of the Security Department, exactly fourteen years ago today".

Tracy grew concerned as she and others in the room could see where this was leading. The date could surely be no coincidence and neither could be the serious concern which had obviously overcome and affected the Commander since he received the message some twenty minutes previously.

"There were eighteen officers in that group, fourteen minutes later only four were left" he added, a rarely heard modicum of sadness entering his voice at this point. An unstable shocked silence overcame all those in the room at this revelation as the Commander continued.

"At the time, the initial enquiry, called the Hainault Investigation after its senior investigative officer, found evidence that highlighted a possible political connection which was believed to be an attempt to undermine the then embryonic Department Of Security" the Commander continued to explain as he tossed an official looking but elderly classified report onto the desk in front of him

"After that the Government, through various agencies and operatives, covered it all up, gagging the press with 'D' notices and so forth".

Some of those in the room just shook their heads slowly in disbelief whilst others seemed frozen, no reaction at all as they digested the unsettling information being set out before them.

"Now, all was fine," the Commander continued with a slightly more sarcastic tone "until approximately 8.30 this morning when, for no readily apparent reason, he and three other category 1X prisoners were mysteriously the subject of a transfer order from Threnfall Private Prison in Berkshire".

The room was silent with tension as the Commander continued to relate the sorry tale "This morning, they all escaped through a carefully organised ambush near junction 10 of the M27 in Hampshire, which I hasten to add is just twenty miles away from here".

"Was it an inside job?" one officer asked from the right hand side of the room.

The Commander looked across, glad to see that not only was someone actually listening carefully to one of his briefings for a change, but were actually prepared to ask the right questions as well.

"I wouldn't be surprised. I want you and Weller to look into that side of it". The two nominated officers nodded in agreement.

"Tracy" asked the Commander "tell us about the other three please".

Tracy, who by now was dressed in her new correct uniform, it having been delivered to her office only minutes earlier, stood up and walked across to the front of the room.

"I am passing around copies of photos and details of all four involved." There was a shuffle of papers as those present began to assimilate the information being presented before them.

"All four are to be regarded as armed and very dangerous" she continued, her face full of seriousness. Her professionalism to the job was really starting to show through now.

She held up a photograph of the first subject. "First up" she announced with a clear authoritative tone "is Graham Edward Butcher, twenty four years old, five feet eleven inches high, slim build, serving life for the supply and use of restricted grade one firearms to various overseas factions, including anti tank missiles and fourteen

millimetre cannons". This revelation caused many in the room to take in a sharp intake of breath.

"He is also a proven marksman, an expert with rifles of many types" she added, her voice becoming more confident as the briefing went on.

A second photograph was held aloft as Tracy introduced "Henry Theobald Silver, sixty one years old but don't let the age fool you, he's good. He's also approximately five foot eleven but of heavier build. Currently supposed to be serving life for explosives charges. Err no pun intended". There was a chuckle as she moved onto the details of the third escapee.

"And finally" she announced "Robert Alfred Haliwell, forty four, six foot one inch, heavy build and locked up with Silver on similar charges of handling and using explosives". Much scratching of pens on paper filled the air as notes were taken down by those present.

Now seated in the front corner of the room, the Commander looked across at Lieutenant Commander Longton.

"Longton, I want you to get over to the site of the escape, find out all you can and give our colleagues a boot up the jacksi from me".

"Aye, right away sir" Longton replied, getting up from behind his desk and making hastily for the exit. He was not going to waste any time at all.

"Any questions?" Tracy asked still standing up at the front of the room.

"This Garforth, is he mad?" one young officer asked slightly nervously.

"Oh no lad..." the Commander replied "he is very sane, extremely intelligent, resourceful and evil but definitely not mad".

"One thing is for certain" he added as he stood up "He does not care whom he kills in the attempt to reach the objective of his mission. He is dangerous, very dangerous. From now until further notice you will all compulsorily carry side arms and Kevlar vests for your own safety".

The Department' civilian office administrator, Janice Long walked up to the door of the room at that moment causing the Commander to look across. With a nod of the head, he beckoned her in.

"Control room's just reported an elephant stolen from a circus in Little Regis last night, they wanted to know where that 'dung' was reported" she replied with an amused smile.

The Commander grinned with light relief; "ask George" he gestured towards one of the officers nearby.

"Anything else?" Tracy enquired of her.

Janice looked down at the clipboard she was carrying and pointed at it with a pencil "Three things, the Chief Super wants to see you and the Commander now, Morris in the car workshop wants to see both of you as soon as, and that robber you nicked this morning will only speak to the pair of you, as well".

"Right, thank you" the Commander responded, now slightly irritated at the thought of having to see his boss. He resented interference from upper management in his sphere of operations.

Tracy walked alongside the Commander as they made their way out of the briefing room and down the corridor towards the south staircase.

She looked across at him, trying to gauge his mood or reactions to the events of the last half hour, however she soon came to a conclusion which she hoped was not right.

"You're one of the four survivors aren't you?" she asked almost in a whisper.

The Commander paused as they reached the separating fire door and looked directly at her with curiosity.

"How the hell did you fathom that out?" he asked slightly surprised.

"I can add up you know" she replied. The Commander continued to look slightly puzzled as he opened the door for her and they began to proceed up the stairs to the third floor of the building.

"When you received the message, you asked for the 'three others' to be notified," she explained.

"Oh." the now enlightened Commander responded.

Tracy looked at the door at which they had stopped in front of. A smart plaque on the door read 'Chief Superintendent Charles E Edwards OBE'. The Commander straightened out his crumpled uniform as best he could, took a deep breath, knocked three times and entered.

Garforth looked out from the door of the warehouse across the rolling fields of the South Downs and took a sip from the glass of whisky he was holding in his hand. He thought back to the day, fourteen years previously, when he had initiated his mission as requested.

In his mind he went through the events of those fifteen minutes or so, until he became aware of someone approaching from behind him. Swinging round sharply, he stared sternly at the approaching minder, the one who had earlier driven the limousine and essentially Garforth's right hand 'heavy'.

The heavily built man offered his profound apologies to his boss and quickly stated the reason for the disturbance.

"The Guvnor's on the phone for you", he replied, holding out a small mobile phone for Garforth to take.

Taking the phone from the minder, he paused for a moment of reflection before taking the call.

"Yes?" he inquired abruptly.

"Haliwell's boobed" a deliberately muffled voice on the other end informed him. "He blew up the right car but it did not have the right driver in it. Took out a small chunk of downtown Birmingham in the process. Very public".

"Nobody will miss a bit of Birmingham surely?" Garforth jokingly replied.

"You were paid to do a job by myself and those who I represent, we've been waiting fourteen years for you to deliver the final four instalments" the voice on the other end cut back sharply but he was interrupted by payphone pips at that point which meant a brief pause in the conversation.

"Make no mistakes and ensure that nothing is traceable back to me or you can count yourself dead as well" the caller warned "I trust we have an understanding" he hung up.

"Charming fellow" Garforth commented to himself as he folded up the phone and stared at it momentarily.

"Hold Haliwell's payment" he called across to the minder, "He won't be able to spend it where he's going anyway".

The two officers stood together slightly uneasily in the Chief Superintendent's office. He was a fairly elderly man approaching retirement, who looked up briefly from his desk at them, his facial expression not changing.

"Sir?" the Commander inquired slightly tersely.

There was to be no introduction, idle chitchat, or pleasantries here, instead the Chief Superintendent went straight into his speech.

"You walked into an armed situation with no backup except Deputy Commander Caverner here and a chocolate chip cookie!" he barked, agitated.

"This is my City, I am in charge of operations, I don't have time to faff about waiting for the overpaid high and mighty brigade to turn up when I can deal with the situation perfectly adequately myself, .Sir." the Commander replied with the firmness and determination a wayward son would give to a father.

"God damn it Commander!" the Chief Superintendent replied, looking up at the Commander from his desk straight in the eyes. "You could have got yourself killed, I can't afford to lose you!" he continued. "You are the best damn officer in the service and if you had any sense you would have accepted a promotion to Divisional Chief years ago".

The Commander shifted slightly uneasily from one foot to the other, not sure if this was a grilling or a hidden compliment.

"However, if you were anybody else," the Chief continued "then I would have sent you straight to directing traffic ten years ago, but you're not, so we'll let it drop".

There was an uneasy pause during which Tracy contemplated hiding under the desk in case she got hit by the shrapnel.

"You've made the paper again" he Chief commented, picking up a copy of the Haychester Gazette from his desk and passing it across.

Tracy took the paper and began to scan the front page. The Chief Superintendent saved her the trouble

"Between 'Flood of Complaints over Illuminated Sign' and the article about the local library staff being described as a branch of the Gestapo".

"Oh." she responded reading the headline adjacent to the rather elderly stock photo of the Commander which read "CITY SECURITY COMMANDER FIRES THIRD DEPUTY THIS YEAR".

"Garforth has escaped?" the Chief asked sternly as he stood up and paced across to the window, looking out on the fairly quiet scene outside.

The Commander confirmed this with a nod of the head and gave him a few of the details he had concerning the escape.

"Right, if you are going to head this, I am going to insist on a few alterations to your normal working methods" the Chief continued.

"Such as" the Commander inquired warily, foreseeing unwanted interference coming his way.

"Caverner here will accompany you at all times until Garforth is back where he belongs" the Chief Superintendent ordered. He stopped pacing up and down and swung round to look Tracy in the eye.

"I've know him...." he continued, pointing a finger at the Commander "...since he was five years old, he may be eccentric, have all the emotional responses of a house brick, a heart of pure granite and be a tad unusual in his working methods but he's unique, irreplaceable, gets results and I don't want to see him wind up six feet under so look after him".

“Yes Sir!” Tracy nodded in understanding.

“You better treble your life insurance” the Commander whispered aside to her which made Tracy giggle.

The Chief Superintendent let that remark go by “You better get a new car as well. That relic you're driving is past it” he continued.

“What's wrong with it? It goes doesn't it?” the Commander asked, somewhat taken aback by this suggestion.

The Chief rounded on him with insistence. “I have here the latest mechanics report on your alleged pride and joy” he announced picking up a document from the desk and waving it prominently.

“That relic - car registration number D401 DCD - has done nearly 110,000 miles over 11 years and I've got at least three replacement forms of various dates in various files for it which you simply 'forgot' to process” the Chief continued, pointing at the various items on the papers he was holding.

The Commander liked that car, to him it didn't seem to need replacing but Tracy had seen and driven it herself just that morning and certainly thought otherwise.

“I'll see to it sir” she announced as she took the requisition form from the Chief.

“You'll be needing new wheels as well?” the Chief asked her.

“Ah yes, I'm afraid so” she replied hoping that the Chief had not heard about her accident, which he had. She decided a change of tack was called for. “Any chance of something with two wheels, I'm safer on a bike!”

The Commander just managed to avoid choking and merely restricted his shock to a suppressed gasp. After all, she was bad enough on four wheels, just how bad could she be on two?

“County under 18 girls motor cross champion three years running in case you were worried” she replied with wry smile upon seeing the Commander's reaction, as the chief thanked his budget that he still had on hold the funds to replace the Commander's car three times over.

“I think we can manage something” the Chief replied, it was worth it he thought for the Commander's reaction a few moments earlier.

“Right get on with it” the Chief urged, upon which Tracy nodded an acknowledgement and left first, the Commander following right behind her. As he reached the office door the Chief Superintendent called after him.

"I think you two are going to get on well, look after her" he urged., "Oh and for god's sakes be careful". The Commander looked back and nodded slightly pessimistically as he closed the door.

As phone boxes go, it was a pretty insignificant one, set in a secluded corner of St James Park in Westminster, London. However today it was to acquire a little bit more recognition.

One of the park keepers approached it as he did every day about this time whilst inspecting the flowerbeds and pavements for anything that required attention and as usual, all seemed well and normal that morning.

As he passed the unoccupied phone box he gave it a mere cursory glance and passed by, only to stop in his tracks a few steps later when he realised that there was something there that really should not have been.

He returned to the phone box and opened the heavy red cast metal door. Inside lying on the small shelf where at one time the telephone directory used to be stored, was a manila folder with a large number of papers inside.

He picked it up and began to flick through the papers present. Such words as 'Eyes Only' and 'Government Officials' made him take in a sharp intake of breath. Whilst the leaving of Government papers around the place in an area of London synonymous with the seat of the country's parliament and democracy was not unusual, there was something different about these particular documents.

Looking around to see nobody saw him, he took the folder, placed it under his overalls and quickly scurried away.

The Duty Custody Officer accompanied the Commander to the number six cell in the Custody Block.

"Here's your robber, a Mr Parrot sir, he's all yours" he announced as he held open the heavy cast metal door.

The Commander thanked him as he turned and walked away. Sitting on the bench adjacent to the door, he passed the cup of tea he was carrying over to Parrot.

"Thank you Sir" was the polite if quiet reply.

"What did you want to see me about?" the Commander asked. Parrot gulped down a mouthful of tea and sat back against the stark wall.

"The gun" he began, clearly nervous "I was given it in payment for a little supply job for a" he paused and looked around, still nervous as though expecting someone to be

eavesdropping "err 'Top Man'" he explained, stammering as if extremely afraid of something or someone.

"Drugs? Money?" the Commander asked, quite clearly seeing that this man was in fear for his very life.

"Nope..." Parrot replied, shaking his head violently, spilling some of his tea as he did so. He paused, took a deep breath and then let out the surprising reply "...t-t-t-traffic cones" he stammered.

The Commander had to sit down at this revelation, he really was not expecting that one.

"Traffic cones?" he replied incredulously.

Parrot looked up and smiled a little "Well not just traffic cones, there were signs and lamps as well, this geezer, no names though, said he wanted a road closed this morning, so I and a couple of mates did it, sounded like easy money at the time until I found out half hour ago what it was all really for".

Longton pulled across the closed off carriageway and parked up. Getting out of the car he could see various officers and officials busying about.

"Lieutenant Garforth, who's in charge?" he asked generally as he approached the scene.

A senior officer approached him from the side of the prison van, still lodged down the embankment.

"Commodore Appleton, Serious Incidents Officer, Hants and Dorset" he responded shaking Longton's hand in a business like manner.

"What have you got?" Longton asked as Appleton, an astute and sincere looking man in his fifties, guided him around the scene.

"It seems to work like this" he explained, "someone using nicked road signs, cones etc. from the South Hampshire Highways Department sealed off the road this morning, quite professional job too, there was even a fake permit lodged with the Council".

"Nice!" Longton commented as Appleton continued.

"It was all geared to allow the prison van through onto an isolated section of carriageway, to permit the escape to take place".

"Anything left behind apart from the road signs and cones?" Longton asked.

"Two badly injured prison officers plus the van driver, one lorry and err, oh yes I nearly forgot, a dead body".

"We've finished changing the equipment over to your boss's new motor" boomed the Welsh accent of Morris Stanley, the divisional motor engineer from across the garage.

"What will happen to the old one?" she asked. Morris dressed in the typical oily overalls of an expert and experience mechanic laughed.

"I intend to get it as far away from here as possible before the Commander tries to get it back, Super's orders!" he replied.

Even Tracy was starting to fight back the giggles now as the Commander entered the garage.

"I still maintain there is nothing wrong with that car" he stated as he walked over to them.

"Oh no..." replied Morris sarcastically "except its knackered beyond redemption".

"All right, all right, point made" the Commander conceded now seeing he was well and truly in a minority of one of this issue.

Morris pointed over in the corner of the roomy oil stained garage at a gleaming new Ford Mondeo saloon in the corner

"There she is, Trevor is trying to sort out the number plates now" he announced.

"Chief said something about a motorbike?" Morris asked Tracy as he wiped oil from his brow but only succeeding in making it worse.

"What have you got?"

Morris swapped the spanner he was carrying for a piece of oil stained paper in his pocket. Reading from it he announced her choices

"We have a standard list of approved models, you can have any one of them provided we can get hold of one. Traffic Division use the Honda Pan European, but the uniform division tend to go for one of those" He pointed to the corner behind the Commanders new car.

Tracy's jaw dropped as she made her way over to where Morris was pointing. The Commander stood behind her, "It's just a motorbike" he said with a flat tone.

"That's not *just* a motorbike," she gestured with enthusiasm towards the machine sitting in the corner "that's a Harley Davidson Electroglide".

“Same spec as the ones the Highway Patrol uses in California,” added Morris with pride, “except ours are painted red of course plus a few other minor alterations. This one is taken, but I can sort you out with one in a day or two”. Tracy just nodded with an obvious yet stunned enthusiasm.

“What was it you wanted to see us he asked about?” the Commander interjected as he could see that they were all drifting off the original point of the garage visit here,

Morris beckoned them over to the adjacent vehicle inspection area. As they entered Tracy recognised the silver grey BMW from earlier.

"This car that got pulled out earlier, err were you there....?" Morris began. The Commander nodded and confirmed he knew about it.

"Well" Morris continued consulting another piece of oil stained paper "this car belongs to a Mr George Farnham-Smythe of Westbourne". Tracy looked around the car as Morris continued, "Would you like to meet the owner?"

Tracy looked up from examining the tyres and raised a surprised eyebrow. "What?" she replied somewhat surprised.

"Nice car this" Morris continued as he opened the door to show the interior "Full extras, electric sunroof, leather upholstery, C.D. radio, immobiliser and a boot big enough to accommodate" he opened the boot lid "one dead owner!".

Tracy and the Commander peered over the sides of the boot, both having to hold their noses against the foul stench of mouldy canal basin water and whatever it contained that assaulted them upon the opening of the car's boot.

Inside, amongst the silt and mud, lay a soggy corpse, the frozen facial expression being bizarrely one of extreme irritation.

"Blimey!" the Commander exclaimed. "Ah well saves us the job of tracing him then" he added ruefully as he tried to wave away the smell of rotten water and fish.

Her curiosity suitably raised, Tracy looked closer at the body. "I've seen this bloke before somewhere" she clasped her chin in thought and shook her head gently, "I just can't place where".

"Havers, have you got hold of that privatised prison yet?" the Commander demanded as he entered the divisional general office.

Havers cupped his hand over the receiver of the telephone he was on "They keep putting me on hold and playing 'I Want To Break Free' at me" he announced, clearly tired and irritated.

On the other side of the office, the external phone line started to ring. The Commander picked up the phone and listened intently as Tracy walked in bearing urgent news from the control room.

"Ah, Longton, Anything interesting?" the Commander asked.

"Well Sir, the whole thing was well set up, nicked road works equipment sealed off the section of the road allowing the prison van to be intercepted with little or no witnesses".

"That pretty much tallies with what I have just heard here" the Commander added as Longton continued,

"In addition I am looking at a pair of legs sticking out of a cement mixer, it's early days but I think it may well be Garforth's half brother sir".

"Also there is something fishy about these transfer papers" Longton added with concern, he looked down at the slightly rain sodden paper in front him that he had retrieved from the prison van "these papers did not go through normal channels, these came from very high up, we could be looking at major supporters behind this I think".

"Right", the Commander responded, "Get that i.d. of the body confirmed and get back here as soon as you can".

He put the phone down as Tracy handed him a Telephone Trace Form.

"I've checked Parrot's contact number; it's a phone box in St James Park, London". She announced.

The Commander pondered it for a moment "Interesting" he replied, "I wonder if Parrot's 'top man' is in Whitehall, it would tie in with the papers Longton found".

"That could well explain this then" one officer seated nearby injected into the conversation as he handed over a fax copy of the prisoner transfer order, the same one that Longton had found "this came from way up the tree, order speaking".

"This whole thing seems 'well iffy'" Tracy concluded.

The Commander went over to the white board, cleaned a space on it as best as he could and began to draw a sort of diagram upon it.

"Right" he began "Lets theorise, A Mr 'X', a so called 'top man' hires a barely even third rate tea leaf to nick a quantity of traffic cones and highway signs, equipment etc. and set them up on the M27, closing off a section of it for twenty minutes".

"During those twenty minutes, Garforth and Co do their runner in that closed section of carriageway" Tracy put in.

The Commander nodded in agreement "Now" he returned to the white board "someone, again at the top, indeed probably our 'top man' or an associate arranges the

iffy transfer order *and* the official looking road closure notification permits, thus setting up the scene for the escape to take place".

"I smell the proverbial overweight rodent here somewhere" Tracy commented.

The Commander looked at the stick man marked 'Mr X' at the top of his diagram "but who is the 'top man'? That is the question," he asked.

"Garforth?" Tracy suggested.

"No" he replied with a despondent shake of the head "all he organised probably were the three suitable prisoners he escaped with, no doubt specially selected for their slightly dubious talents".

"Are you still on hold?" he called over to Havers just out of curiosity,

"Yes sir" he replied "they're playing the theme tune from The Great Escape now!"

"Don't you just love a prison company with a sense of humour!" Tracy commented with a sarcastic tone.

Janice the administrator looked around the doorpost with a look of worry. "Its just been on the telly" she blurted out as the Commander looked up, "Someone's just tried to blow up one of your old colleagues sir".

"Transport Police, Duty Office, West Division" replied section duty officer Gibbertson, having picked up the phone that was ringing away to itself on his desk in a small office situated in the heart of the Capital West Security Department area building.

"I'm on my way" he quickly replied before rapidly leaving the small and indeed slightly squalid office, grabbing his uniform jacket and cap as he went. The job in hand was not far away though, only just across the heliport area in the railway yard on the other side of the site.

As he arrived on site he took out a folded up orange high visibility vest from his pocket and threw it over his shoulders and approached two railway engineers.

"Where's the stiff?" he enquired.

"Over by the shunter mate" came the response, one of the engineers arms pointing in the general direction of a maroon and gold painted diesel shunting locomotive stabled nearby.

Trudging through the ground water that lay all around from the earlier rain, he reached the body, lying between the rusted tracks of the little used siding.

Gibbertson rolled the head of the body towards him to take a look at the face and raised a surprised eyebrow. Taking a folded piece of paper which he had had faxed to him just 30 minutes previously, he called to one of the engineers now standing over him.

"Got a phone I can borrow mate?"

The Commander looked over the brand new shiny Ford Mondeo marked patrol car parked outside the main front reception block. "It is nice, I suppose" he murmured to Tracy reluctantly, all but admitting that he was finally defeated on this debate.

"There's just one thing missing" he continued. Tracy walked around the car twice looking with curiosity for the alleged missing item. However to her all seemed to be there, Departmental crests, allocation number, light bar and siren, etc.

She gave up and looked at The Commander quizzically. "Number plates" he replied tapping the empty space on the rear of the boot lid.

"Oh, Morris has got them" she looked round and saw him jogging in their direction, "there he is now".

"Don't say we don't do anything for you sir" he panted almost out of breath. "I had a word with my brother at the DVLA in Swansea, seeming as you liked the number D401 DCD so very much, I have managed to get hold of a similar number for you".

He handed the plates he was carrying to the Commander who looked down at them and smiled at seeing the number S401 DCD.

"What a nice thought, thank you Morris" he replied. Morris just shrugged his shoulders as he attached the plates to the car.

"It's nothing sir, your Deputy's idea actually".

The Commander patted Tracy gently on the back as he took the keys from her and got in the drivers seat.

"So what is it with the registration number, superstition or something?" Tracy asked as she sat in front passenger seat.

"I used to go to school on amongst others, a bus which carried the registration number 401 DCD, then my first patrol car was by coincidence registered A401 DCD and since then I have always had the same last digits" he explained. "Probably sounds immensely daft I know, but I like consistency".

"Where are we actually going?" she asked as the Commander started the car for the first time having now fathomed out the differences in the controls from his old vehicle.

"London, to see the Managing Director of err..." he fumbled around for a piece of paper "...G.B. Private Prison Services PLC. Having spent an hour getting nowhere with the lower echelons, I'm going to the top".

"Right" Tracy replied, by now realising that the Commander was a person who did not like being messed about.

It was a short drive as it turned out. She looked on surprised as they passed the signs for the London road and proceeded to the south end of the city centre.

"The railway station?" she asked surprised as the car pulled into the passenger car park, situated in what was once an old railway goods yard.

"Nowt wrong with train besides its quicker what with the local roads" the Commander explained as he got out of the car clutching a couple of folders and his cap from the back seat.

Tracy just shrugged her shoulders, she had expected them to drive up but the Commander was a person who usually insisted otherwise when a suitable alternative was available.

The typically early 1960's rebuilt station, constructed mostly from concrete and brick infill sections, was quiet, it was only just after lunchtime after all. The Commander purchased two returns from the ticket window and joined Tracy on the London bound platform.

"Four minutes" he said handing her, her tickets. Tracy nodded but it was obvious from her body language that she was not listening fully. Her attention was drawn to something or someone further down the platform.

She tapped the Commander on the shoulder who turned around to face the same way as her. "Shifty looking fella, overcoat and trilby, do you see him" she asked nodding in the direction of the far end of the platform.

The Commander squinted in the general direction she had indicated. "I think so" he replied straining his failing eyesight as far as he could.

"He just got off that all stops service while you were getting the tickets" she continued, eyes firmly fixed in the same direction. "I was after him last month, failure to respond to a bail order if I recall" she explained.

The London train approached at that point, its modern yellow and white livery doing little to hide its 1960's vintage as it rounded the curve into the platform, squeaking loudly as it braked to a halt.

The Commander opened the door nearest to them and allowed Tracy to step inside. He decided to sit in his usual seat on the platform side by the door. Tracy however did not immediately take a seat, instead she leant out of the drop light window of the door watching the man in the trilby walking slowly and cautiously down the length of the platform.

Brandishing her warrant card in one hand she tried to attract the attention of the Transport Section Security Department officer at the platform barrier. Failing to make contact, she sought other methods of communication and reached into her pocket for her radio. Looking down at the various buttons on it, she selected the Transport Division's frequency and tried again.

"Transport officer at platform barrier" she called. The officer startled into life, raised his radio to his mouth and responded.

"Look to your left" she added. The officer did as he was asked and saw her waving her arms out of the train window as the train's conductor, now joined by the Commander further up the train leant out of his door and looked upon the odd scene.

"Nick him!" she called, pointing directly to the man in the Trilby hat. The officer began to run up the platform whilst calling for backup over his radio.

The Commander, indeed by now the entire station looked on with amusement as the man in the trilby, now realising he had been rumbled, began to run and managed to dodge past the officer coming the other way.

As the train began to pull away, the gathered crowd on the platform and the passengers on the train cheered as the officer grabbed the trilby man who promptly tripped head first into a tub of plants outside the buffet.

The train was over the adjacent level crossing when Tracy, a smile beaming across her face, brought her head in the window and sat down opposite the Commander who had now returned from the Conductor's compartment.

"I hate unfinished business" she responded with an obvious sense of immense satisfaction.

As Longton arrived back in the general office, his uniform dripping wet from the sudden downpour he had just got caught in between the car park and the building, he paused only to answer the phone ringing on the nearest desk.

"Duty office, Haychester" he responded. After a few moments he outstretched his arm and clicked his fingers twice, Janice who was nearest quickly grabbed a pen and paper from her desk and handed them to him.

"Haliwell?" he murmured writing a number of details down, "hang on a minute mate" he cupped the receiver of the hand set, "where's the boss?" he asked looking around the nearly empty room.

"Gone to London" came the reply. Longton returned to the caller "Our boss is heading your way now, we'll divert him to you, OK? Cheers mate".

"You're dripping water everywhere!" Janice barked. Longton apologised and took off his jacket, throwing it over a nearby radiator to dry.

Turning back to Janice, he handed the slightly damp piece of paper upon which he had just taken down the details to her.

"Could you call the boss somehow and give him this, he'll be interested".

"The Commander wants you to eke out the transfer records from the Prison Company's computer system when he gets there, he'll call probably" she added as she left.

"Right" replied Longton. Perhaps it was just a gut reaction but he had this sneaking feeling it was going to be a long day and then a long night.

As the train passed the civil engineers yard at Three Bridges, Tracy picked up the cup of tea that the Commander had brought from the buffet trolley for her and took a sip as she watched him. He was away in his thoughts, looking through the condensation on the window at the gloomy scenery passing by.

He glanced back at her and seeing the cup of tea she was holding suddenly reminded him of something.

"The guys from forensics rang just before we left" he told her "That cup of 'tea' you sent them". Tracy looked up, she had forgotten all about that, indeed she was surprised that they had actually gone to the trouble of testing it, she only really meant it as a joke after all.

"There was barely a trace of tea in it" he continued as Horley station flashed by the window.

"Doesn't surprise me" she replied, shaking her head gently.

"They've passed it on to the Food Hygiene division and they are considering prosecuting the vending company under the Trades Description Act!" the Commander added.

Tracy giggled; she had never heard anything quite as surreal for a long time.

They continued to talk as the train continued to London. She was surprised with how friendly the Commander was steadily becoming, especially since her initial impression, indeed everyone's long held one was that he usually shut up like a clam but here he was being funny and friendly. If them back at office hear about this, they will more than likely faint with shock, she thought.

The rain was drumming incessantly on the windows and roof of the train as it stood at Clapham Junction awaiting the right away for the final leg of the journey to Victoria.

The Commander was by now starting to doze off slightly and so appeared startled when a sudden electronic ringing noise started to emanate from somewhere, causing Tracy to look down at her handbag.

"Wh..what's that?" the Commander asked rather blearily as Tracy opened her trusty black handbag and rummaged around inside it.

"A mobile phone" she replied brandishing the still ringing black phone in her hand, causing the Commander to momentarily glower at it. He was not a great fan of modern technology in general, especially mobile phones.

"Hello?" Tracy replied "Yes, he's right here" she replied to the caller.

"Janice for you Sir", she announced handing the phone to him. Initially the Commander thought it was faulty as he put it to his face but yet couldn't get anything out of it.

"You've got it the wrong way round" Tracy sighed as she took the phone out of his hand, turned it through 180 degrees and handed it back to him.

"Oh.....Hello?" he responded slightly embarrassed when he managed to connect with it properly.

"Janice here sir" came the voice from the other end "Transport division at Acton's been on to us. Haliwell has turned up dead in a railway siding at" there was a rustling as she searched her clipboard for the location "Elmwood Common, could you go and take a look while you were up there?"

"Yep, sure, thanks Janice," the Commander replied, before looking down at the phone wondering how to turn the thing off.

Tracy leaned across again and pressed the off button on the keypad.

"Modern technology is not your forte either is it?" she commented placing the phone back in her bag.

"The only chips I like are made of potato, not silicon!"

"What did Janice want?"

"Haliwell's just turned up dead in Acton" he replied, "We'll go and have a look when we've finished at that prison company". Tracy nodded and rose from her seat as the train pulled into the murky gloom that was platform 18 of London's Victoria station.

It was obvious to Deputy Divisional Superintendent Simon Holroyd of the Special Investigations Section based in Truro, Cornwall that there was a storm approaching, maybe in more ways than one.

His rural upbringing meant he instantly recognised the combination of dark clouds, fresh westerly wind and the cold crisp air that were just coming over the city of Truro. Despite it being his rostered day off, he was dressed in full uniform, on his way to an important meeting later that afternoon.

As his official car pulled around the corner of the cul-de-sac in which he lived, he stepped off the pavement to meet it.

"Afternoon Mike" he called to the driver as he got in the back. Mike acknowledged his presence and once Holroyd had correctly fastened his seat belt, they moved off.

Neither of them however were aware of the battered beige Vauxhall Astra that pulled out of a driveway behind them as they made their way up to the main road out of the city. The driver of that car was being careful to maintain contact with Holroyd's vehicle ahead but at the same time go unnoticed by its occupants.

At Holroyd's insistence, all patrol officers under his jurisdiction were on a heightened state of alert since he had received notice of the escape that morning; this was about to become a decision, which just might save his life

A patrol officer by the side of the road outside a row of small shops in one of the suburbs of the city acknowledged Holroyd's car as it passed by. He continued to watch as the car turned left onto the main road, which was when the officer noticed the car following them, instantly raising his suspicions.

Quickly, he got into the drivers seat of the patrol car and grabbed the radio.

"Control, Alpha Charlie 241", the radio crackled as Control acknowledged him "I dealt with a report of a stolen Vauxhall earlier, could you remind me of the colour and number please" he asked, concern beginning to creep into his voice.

As he waited for Control to report the number for him, he thought back a half hour to the report he made regarding that stolen car, in particular the description of some distinctive damage to the rear, damage that appeared to match that on the vehicle which had just past him.

The radio crackled back into life again and his response was immediate when Control confirmed the number and in turn his suspicions. Pulling away, he activated his sirens and blue flashing lights, speeding his way after the two cars that had passed moments earlier.

Holroyd heard the siren in the distance and casually looked back out of the rear window trying to gauge what was going on. He couldn't see much through all the rainwater on the glass so opened the side window and stuck his head out.

The driver of the stolen car had by now realised he had probably been rumbled and picked up the semi automatic handgun from the passenger seat.

Holroyd pulled his head back in the window pretty fast as soon as he caught sight of the gun pointing towards to him. Just as he did so a bullet ricocheted off the door

pillar, and his driver, an experienced man trained to the highest standards automatically began to perform evasive manoeuvres.

By now the pursuing patrol officer had caught up and, now faced with a situation of seriousness that he had never encountered before, radioed for help.

"Alpha Charlie 241 to Alpha Charlie 02", what do you want me to do sir?" he asked. Holroyd, seeing the driver was too busy to answer unbuckled his seat belt and clambered forward, grabbing the radio from the front instrument binnacle of the dashboard.

"Try to ram him, but for god's sake lad keep your head down" Holroyd yelled between swerves. A second bullet shattered the rear windscreen and grazed his arm, fortunately only damaging his uniform on its way to imbed itself in the glove compartment.

The patrol officer decided to go for broke, accelerating through the persistent wind and rain that was starting to lash down again, he rammed the gunman's car right up the back bumper before backing off.

Cars on the opposite side of the road began to swerve and brake sharply as the force of the impact strewed about glass and other pieces of debris.

Undeterred, the gunman aimed roughly out of the rear of the car and fired a third shot. This one missed but the fourth soon afterwards did not, striking the patrol car in the windscreen, shattering it.

Although injured by fragments of flying shattered glass, the officer continued his pursuit and drew alongside until his bonnet was level with the rear passenger door of the gunman's vehicle.

With one fell swing of the steering wheel, he brought the full force of the patrol car to bear on the elderly Vauxhall, the gunman losing control, the car started to slew badly sideways before rolling over.

Both the other cars braked sharply when they saw that the gunman's car was spinning out of control. A large articulated lorry coming the other way was to be the stop block. The driver of the lorry saw what was going on but not in time to stop clear, the Vauxhall colliding with the cab front before coming to rest.

Watching from a parked helicopter on an overlooking hill, Garforth seethed in irritation as he saw Holroyd, alive, well and undamaged, get out of his car and inspect the scene. Taking the rifle from the minder seated next to him, he aimed for the gunman, Graham Butcher, amazingly still alive and struggling to get out of the wrecked remains of the car. He fired once and looked again to confirm that his shot was dead on target.

Garforth angrily threw the rifle in the back of the helicopter as it took off and headed back eastwards, quickly disappearing into the mists and low cloud of the encroaching storm.

The Commander consulted his London A to Z, turning it round several times in an attempt to distinguish one street from another.

"Railway stations, tube lines, I know them all like the back of my hand. I can even find Buckingham Palace if required but I can't find the Telecom Tower for love nor money" he commented, clearly irritated.

Tracy just coughed politely and when the Commander looked across at her, she smiled, giggled a little and pointed straight up. They were standing right in front of the very building the Commander couldn't find.

"I don't see how you could have missed it" she replied looking up the tall structure to the myriad of aerials and dishes that festooned the upper reaches.

Realising that time was short, she grabbed the mumbling Commander's shoulders, one in each hand from behind, and turned him bodily to face the building adjacent to the tower.

"That is our destination I believe" she announced. The Commander snapped shut the A to Z, tossed it to her and walked briskly in the direction of the building's main entrance.

The receptionist looked up as she heard the glass doors open, and momentarily the sound of the outside world filter through. Seeing the two uniformed Security Department officers approaching, she quickly rose to her feet and smiled gleefully, "Can I be of assistance" she asked in a voice that sounded like an elderly Scottish school teacher of years past.

The Commander produced a battered warrant card and badge, "I want to see you Guvnor" he replied firmly staring her straight in the eye.

"Well.." began the receptionist before the Commander reinforced his insistence

"Now, not next week, all right", he added with a semi smile that said she would probably be arrested for obstruction if she didn't act fast.

The receptionist decided this was a time to pass the buck on to someone else and just pointed at the elevator. "Third floor!" she cried out loudly trying and failing to try and out shout the Commander.

The Commander turned sharply on his heel and walked in the direction she had indicated. Tracy followed after shrugging her shoulders at the receptionist by way of offering an apology for any hurt feelings.

Tracy looked at the fake plastic wood panelled lift doors set into the wall in an attempt to will them open, however the Commander was not a man of much patience for such devices.

"I'm taking the stairs," he announced just as the lift doors opened with a characteristic ping. Tracy glanced at him puzzled as the Commander headed for the stairs a few yards away. "I hate lifts," he explained as he walked away.

As she got in the lift and pressed the button for the third floor, she just smiled with bemusement. Watching as the doors closed and the lift moved off, she began to think about some of the events that had occurred since she first met the Commander just seven hours previously.

"What took you?" asked the Commander, standing in front of the lift doors as they opened on the third floor.

"How did you?" she began, looking around outside the lift and pointing roughly to the stairs, "Oh never mind".

Together they walked through the plush but in the Commanders opinion rather tacky semi open plan visitor area to a wooden door marked 'Managing Director'.

Knocking firmly, the Commander was irritated when he received no reply. He was about to knock again more firmly, when he was interrupted.

"I'm afraid the M.D. is not in" came a polite but worried voice. Both officers turned to see an employee of the company standing there trying to look apologetic.

Tracy, seeing that the Commander was about to get annoyed again managed to leap in ahead of him,

"Where might we find him?" she enquired.

"Mr Farnham-Smythe has vanished I am afraid. He left for an unscheduled meeting in Sussex this morning and hasn't been seen since" the employee replied, an apologetic yet mystified feeling being expressed at that point.

The employee asked Tracy if she could be of assistance instead, before the Commander in deep thought, interrupted.

"Say that name again" he asked.

"Mr Farnham-Smythe, George Farnham-Smythe" she replied. Pointing to a photograph behind them she continued "That's him over there".

The Commander and Tracy together stepped over to the photograph, stared at it incongruously for a moment then looked straight at each other.

"The body in the canal basin" they both replied in unison.

"Err I'm sorry...?" the employee blurted out, eyes wide in surprise at this outburst.

"Your boss was dragged out of a canal basin earlier this morning" the Commander replied. "Can I use your phone?"

The Minder watched from the doorway of the old warehouse as a very irritated Garforth threw the phone down. Throwing open the office door, he marched towards the minder with a look of annoyance filling his face.

"I don't know." he clamoured, "If you want a job doing, you've got to do it yourself".

"What's up boss?" the concerned minder cautiously enquired.

"We're leaving, the plan moves to phase 'B'" Garforth replied, wiggling his fingers nervously

"Yes sir, I'll get the car". He turned and walked out, removing a set of car keys from the pocket of his suit as he went.

As the car pulled up, Garforth placed a large sports bag in the boot, padlocked the door of the warehouse, got in and gave the order to move off. He was unaware however as his car pulled away down the rough track that he was being watched.

Longton was munching through his third salad sandwich of the morning. His wife had insisted on healthier food ever since she saw the Commander's usual diet, insisting if he didn't buckle up health wise he would wind up as irritable as his boss.

He contemplated her words in his mind as he watched the rather limp lettuce leaf sit there in his half eaten sandwich.

Suddenly he was startled out of his daydreaming thoughts by the sudden appearance beside him, of Janice.

"Whoa, you made me jump" he replied slightly sleepily.

"Sorry" she responded with an apologetic smile, "the Commanders on line four, urgent".

Reaching across the desk he picked up the phone, and pressed the button for line four. "Longton" he responded almost grateful for a distraction from the depressing sandwich.

"Get yourself and this call down to the IT chappie's office" the Commander ordered "and, then listen carefully".

Within a few minutes, Longton was in the amazingly unkempt office that was the home of the Department's somewhat overworked IT Network Manager. He could hear the phone ringing in there somewhere, but finding it was a problem.

“Simon!” Longton called to the Technician “I do assume that there is a phone under this lot somewhere?”

The technician, a fellow in his late twenties that could be described as the I.T. world’s equivalent of the Commander, quietly lifted a pile of printouts and revealed the phone to the open air.

“Ah hello sir, I am going to pass you over to Simon” Longton informed the Commander., as Simon sat down at his terminal and began tapping keys.

“Sir, I need a phone number and an I.P. address,” Simon informed the Commander.

In George Farnham-Smythe's office the Commander was on the phone, whilst Tracy and the employee were working on the computer. The Commander pulled away from the phone momentarily

"Err phone number and I.P. address?" he asked the employee, not really knowing what he was talking about.

The employee could only look confused before she realised what he was trying to ask.

"Ah," she responded before writing the details on a piece of paper and passing it to the Commander., who promptly re-laid them down the phone.

“Right” Simon announced as he entered the details he had just received into his computer, activating a communications program of his own making.

“You know for a prison company, this network security is a joke” he commented with a wry smile as with ease, he managed to remotely access the Prison Company’s network.

A few moments later the computer in front of the Commander sprung into life, with an on-line message coming from Longton himself.

"What do you want to know?" the employee asked.

"Everything with George Farnham-Smythe’s name on it" the Commander replied.

"Isn't this kind of illegal?" Tracy asked with a concerned look.

"Probably" the Commander responded casually "but seeing as the guy's dead I doubt he's going to be in any hurry to lodge a complaint".

The employee entered a complicated series of access codes as the Commander looked on baffled by the technology, after all a calculator was about his limit. Tracy however was more computer literate and followed carefully, understanding what was happening.

Longton was by now back on the phone, "I've got access to the company's central records database and a few ancillary systems, I'll get Simon to download any relevant files now and look them over from here".

"While you're about it" the Commander added "get someone to whip out this Farnham-Smythe's record, I want to know everything about him down to what he had for breakfast this morning, right? Cheers Al".

A few moments later the transfer was complete, Tracy thanked the employee for her help and they left. Once again the Commander made his way down by the stairs and this time Tracy went with him.

Standing outside the building, he looked up in irritation at the sight of the blustery rain pouring down again but then something else in his opinion, far more important attracted his attention nearby.

Pointing straight ahead, he highlighted the urgent business with just four words, clearly stated "Fish & Chip Shop!"

"What do you mean he's gone?" asked Sir Brian Robertson M.P. the Cabinet Secretary. He rose from his seat in the House of Commons and faced the Prime Minister's secretary directly.

"The Home Secretary has disappeared" she began to explain, "he seems to have wandered off somewhere, his official car is still out there and his secretary is downstairs but the man himself has gone".

Robertson picked up his cup of coffee from the small table beside them and was about to take a gulp when the secretary added a further note, now in a more concerned tone

"and then..." she passed a copy of the latest edition of the Evening Standard to him "there's this".

Robertson took the paper from her and read quickly the headline and first few paragraphs of the story with an expression of growing concern.

"Dear God!" he cried out "call the Prime Minister right away, I must speak with him as a matter of urgency". The secretary acknowledged him and turned quickly away.

"Did you see that sign above Goodge Street Tube Station?" Tracy commented.

Seemingly in some sort of reply, the Commander downed a chip and mumbled something incoherent as the Bakerloo line underground train of 1972 series Mk 2 tube stock approached their intended destination.

“It said ‘Offices acquired for new Security Department London Transport Division Headquarters’ on it, what a grotty pile!” she added with an accompanying smirk. “Wonder which poor so and so’s will wind up being based in that heap?”

The Commander looked across slightly nervously, “You wouldn’t believe me if I told you” he replied.

Their conversation was interrupted by the train’s much unloved digital announcement system. “The next station is Willesden Junction,.....change at.....Willesden Junction.....for suburban mail line rail services” it called out throughout the carriage in a tinny female voice, pausing as if to get its breath before and after the station name.

The Commander managed after some effort to remove the last chip from the bottom of the paper in which he had received them. "Mmm, I enjoyed them" he nodded at the now empty wrapping while Tracy just looked across at him and sighed.

"That's three lots of chips you've had today" she stated. "What about a nice salad or something?" Deep down somehow she knew she was wasting her time on this line of suggestion though.

"Yuck!" replied the Commander, perhaps slightly offended by what he saw as a preposterous suggestion "Bleedin' rabbit food that".

As the train approached the platform, Tracy looked out of the window to the road beyond. The traffic along it appeared to have been stopped somewhat abruptly at a crossroads. However the reason for this became apparent as she observed a motorcade of American style limousines, Security Department patrol cars and motorcycles passed by, sirens wailing and lights blazing.

"I wonder if that was my sister" she pondered. The Commander looked round, "she's with the Security Department Special Branch VIP Section" Tracy explained as the sirens faded in the distance and the train drew to a halt at the platform.

"Older or younger your sister?" he asked out of idle curiosity.

"Older by six minutes" she replied, causing the Commander to look surprised "Almost identical twins," she added by way of explanation.

The doors opened and the booming voice of the automated platform announcer, a morose tone if ever there was one, announced to all present to ‘MIND....THE GAP!’ again with an enthusiastic pause to emphasise the minimal risk from the ever present gap between the train and the platform.

"Charming weather!" Tracy commented sarcastically, buttoning up her uniform as much as possible against the incessant rain as they stepped up onto the platform.

In a few minutes, the two officers had arrived down the road from the station at a large gateway on the opposite side of the road.

Upon entering the yard, Tracy followed the Commander as they walked to a small hut adjacent to a large number of railway lines, most of which consisted of little used rusty sidings.

Knocking twice, the Commander entered and spoke to someone inside out of sight of Tracy who remained on the door step and looked out across the desolate looking railway yard. A few moments later he re-emerged and handed her a fluorescent orange vest.

"Put this on" he insisted as he placed his own around his shoulders, before pointing to a small group of people a few hundred yards away past the sheds and buildings that made up the Elmwood Common Depot yard.

Treading carefully over the little used rusty sidings, old debris and weeds that seemed to dominate that section of the vast site, they approached the group of people and were greeted by one of them, his uniform signifying that he too was a security officer.

"Lieutenant Commander Gibbertson Sir" he announced greeting the pair with shakes of the hand before they all moved on to the small tent that had been erected to protect the body and any possible evidence from the weather.

"What have you got?" Tracy enquired in a business like manner.

"I got called down here just after lunch" Gibbertson explained as they made their way across the yard "The body was found by some rail engineers who had come to fix that shunter" he pointed out the gold and maroon diesel shunting locomotive on the adjacent track, "it was still warm at the time, the body that is, not the loco".

Pulling back the curtain entrance of the tent, Tracy and Gibbertson both looked over the body.

"I knew who it was" he continued "because of the resemblance between him and the nation-wide fax bulletin I got a few minutes before I came out here".

"Did he fall from a train?" Tracy asked having to raise her voice to be heard over the passing of a Heathrow express service bound for Paddington.

"That was my initial thought when I first heard about it, but the body is too far from the main line, besides" he lifted the head of the body forward "the Medical Scene Examiner found this bullet wound in the back of the neck, he was dead before he got here".

She looked closely at the distinctive wound situated in the nape of the neck, before looking around behind her "Commander, look at..." only to stop in mid sentence when she realised he was not there.

"Where's the blazes has that man gone now?" she wondered, however stepping back outside the small tent and into the increasingly awful weather conditions outside revealed that he was in fact looking over the shunting locomotive outside.

"Sir!" she called out from the entrance of the tent, "I really think its this that you should be looking at".

The Commander, his perusal of the railway hardware interrupted, clambered down the cab steps and walked over to the tent.

Tracy, now stooped over the body, looked up as she heard him enter "Looks like he was executed, bullet wound in the back of the neck".

The Commander declined to examine more closely and just nodded in agreement at her assessment of the cause of death.

"Right" he replied "better send him to the morgue".

Together, Tracy and the Commander departed and began to make their way back across the yard.

"One down, three to go" he muttered.

"Well isn't that intriguing" Longton pondered as a series of numbers, names and dates flashed before him on the screen.

He scribbled a few notes down from the data before him as he realised that here could be an important connection.

"Anyone able to contact the Commander?" he asked hopefully as he looked up from the computer screen, scanning the office for anyone appropriate who could answer his query.

"Could try the Deputy's mobile again" replied one junior officer from the far side of the room, "If those two get any closer to liking each other, we'll have to enforce a shotgun wedding!" he added with a cheeky snigger.

Longton had to admit he hadn't really noticed the Commander and Deputy together but the thought of the Commander actually liking someone that much, let alone that person liking him that much in return was a thought that made him open his eyes wide and stare straight ahead in bewilderment.

"I can feel an office sweepstake coming on" he thought.

"Janice has got the number I think" the junior officer advised.

Longton went over to Janice's unoccupied desk, potentially risking life and limb as he obtained the number from her jealously guarded filodex system.

"Evening Standard, Evening Standard" came the characteristic cry from the newsstand outside Victoria station. "Home Secretary's documents found in phone box!"

Tracy answered her phone as the Commander was nearby purchasing an Evening Standard and a copy of Railway Modeller.

"Really? That's interesting" she replied as the Commander rejoined her. She looked up momentarily and mouthed quietly that it was Longton with some of the details from the prison company files on the phone.

He just nodded and let her get on with it and decided to read the front page of the Evening Standard instead. His primary attention was directed to the story at the bottom of the front page headlined 'Major Storm Warning for South East England'.

"Yep, I'll tell him, see you when we get back" she replied as the two officers walked onto the crowded main concourse of Victoria Station.

"Good Grief!" Tracy responded as having put her telephone away, she looked up and saw the crowds in the station properly for the first time. The Commander pointed through the seemingly ever moving throngs of commuters seemingly moving along on some form of auto pilot, towards the South Central services side of the station.

"Welcome to rush hour" he replied with an acknowledging nod of the head.

Looking at the rapidly filling carriages Tracy clearly expressed a doubt about travelling on this particular train.

"We're going to have to go on this one" the Commander explained "I have an important meeting later this evening, otherwise I would have opted for the next one".

They managed to find a relatively comfortable standing space in one of the luggage van areas. The Commander watched over his shoulder as the Conductor looked up and down the train, flicked the small switch above him twice to give the 'right away' to the driver and sent the train on its way.

As they moved through the suburbs of South London, Tracy passed on the message she had just received.

"Longton's been going through the files as you requested" There was too much information to relay there and then so she decided to keep it simple. "He's going to stay back at the office until we get there so he can fill us in".

"His wife will be wondering where he is I suppose" the Commander responded nodding.

"I think you may find a lot of what he has found very interesting" she added.

"You working late again Al?" asked Commander Geoff Fraser, head of the Finance and Fraud section as he poked his head around the door, "Your missus will forget what you look like before long."

"Waiting for the boss to come back, got a lot of interesting info for him" Longton explained as he yawned and stretched. He looked out of the window at the steadily darkening sky outside,

"He should be here in a minute" he added with a hopeful expression and a glance at his watch.

"I heard on the grapevine you were looking into G.B. Private Prison Services Ltd" Fraser added.

"Yeah, they are the bunch linked with that escape this morning. What about them?" Longton enquired, his attention to the case now back to full strength.

"They were given a good going over by my section colleagues in Bristol a couple of months back" Fraser explained as he chucked a large file on the desk in front of Longton who picked it up and began to thumb through some of the documents.

"There were reports of some dodgy irregularities and funny accounting although we couldn't make anything stick though, just thought you may like to take a look".

"Yeah, thanks mate" Longton replied, by now becoming deeply engrossed in the file's contents.

"What time is it?" the Commander asked as the automatic doors of 'C' block failed again.

"Six twenty" Tracy replied as she wiped some of the heavy rain from the face of her watch.

As the doors finally struggled open, she could make out the Commander muttering something about getting 'those damn doors fixed' as they made their way up the stairs back to the office.

In the general office, all was serene quiet and darkness, the only exception being the glow from a solitary desk lamp and the computer on Longton's desk.

"Welcome back" he announced, obviously happy at seeing them come in the door at last, perhaps he could finally go home was the thought in his mind at that point.

"What have you got, and make it pretty quick" the Commander inquired, sitting on the corner of the desk and glancing at his watch. Tracy joined him and Longton began to realise the point the other officer was making earlier about those two, however he quickly broke off this line of thought and began to relay his findings.

"Between myself, Havers, an old mate of mine in the Finance and Fraud section and a few others, this is what I found out" he began, shovelling his way through some of the masses of paper on the desk.

"It would appear" Longton continued as he called up a display of document details on the screen "that the now late Mr Farnham-Smythe had many fingers in many pies. He got the job as head of G.B. Private Prison Services PLC upon the recommendation of the new owners of the company, when it became the subject of a hostile and indeed potentially dodgy looking take-over about eighteen months ago".

"Go on" the Commander urged, his interest clearly alerted.

"The new owning company is, wait for it, one Garforth Investments of the Channel Islands, M.D. being a Mr Robert Garforth".

"Younger half brother of the proverbial James Garforth" the Commander added,

"...and" Tracy added "the i.d. of that body that turned up head first in a cement mixer earlier today about a mile or two from the scene of this morning's escape".

"Right" Longton replied, pointing a biro in the style of an old headmaster awarding points in a lecture.

"Does it get any better?" the Commander was almost too afraid to ask, less he be disappointed.

"Oh yes" Longton responded with obvious enthusiasm "Since this Farnham-Smythe got in, he has been pretty quiet" he paused momentarily "except that he has personally processed a number of internal and external prison transfer documents" he pointed to the monitor "all relating to the four escapees, in turn bypassing the official records procedure, including" he announced triumphantly pressing a key to display another document on the computer "the phoney transfer order that led to this morning's escape".

The Commander and Tracy appeared to be transfixed, and began to smell a seriously large rat, as a result, both officers were keen for Longton to continue.

"Now all this is fine but for one final matter. These documents Farnham-Smythe processed had to have come from the Home Office".

"The 'Top Man' in Whitehall?" Tracy speculated.

"I believe you know the Home Secretary, the Right Hon Trevor Sharman M.P.?" Longton enquired as he took the copy of that night's Evening Standard from his desk and held it up in front of the Commander.

"Yep, me and 'Big Chief Slimeball' have met all right." the Commander responded as he looked at the picture on the front page. "We never get on well though, last time we met was at a very memorable conference".

"Weren't you the bloke who called him a, what was it now, oh yes, a 'Useless twonk with all the intelligence of a run over hedgehog!' live in an interview on Newsnight.?" Tracy asked as she suddenly recalled where she had seen the Commander before that day.

The Commander smiled and looked across at the now giggling Tracy. "Yep, that was me" he replied, himself now barely able to contain the chuckles "My solitary fifteen minutes of fame, and it made all the national papers too. After all, its very rare you see Jeremy Paxman stunned into silence".

"Now my old mate Sharman here never liked even the idea of the Security Department right from day one" he added.

Longton got all triumphant again as he continued his findings, "He may well be the Home Secretary, however he is also the person who awards the prison contracts, in addition he is a major - allegedly unpaid - consultant of Garforth Investments and...." he paused again, took a deep breath and announced with a dramatic flourish "the half brother of the now late Mr George Farnham-Smythe".

The Commander appeared momentarily stunned by these incredible connections and even Tracy could not believe it totally.

"Bloody hell!" she muttered slowly, picking up the Evening Standard and looking at the Home Secretary's picture on the front of it.

After looking in his pocket, the Commander found a £5 pound note and handed it to Longton.

"Well done" he commented, "get yourself a drink, you've earned it,"

Surprised by the unusual generosity, Longton took the note reluctantly from the Commander, afraid there may be conditions attached. There were not so he just thanked him before getting up, bidding them both goodnight and leaving.

"Come on" the Commander beckoned to Tracy, "I've got a meeting to attend".

"Park here" Garforth commanded. The minder pulled into a side lane alongside a section of old dilapidated chicken wire type fencing.

"That'll do fine" he added as the car braked to a gentle halt, the scrunch of loose gravel emanating from beneath its wheels.

Garforth moved to the driver's side of the back seat, adjacent to the fence, and wound down the side window a few inches.

Picking up a set of binoculars from beside him, he proceeded to train them on the front door of an elderly 1950's style prefabricated office building, a few years of disuse showing in the rotten window and door frames and the unkempt nature of the grounds.

"Where is that idiot Silver?" he muttered with irritation as he scanned the hedgerow that ran up to and along the side of the site. Suddenly he caught sight of a person lurking in the dense undergrowth behind some garages.

"Are there he is, now lets hope he remembers what to do" he murmured.

At that moment a dark coloured official Security Department car pulled into a small lay-by at the bottom end of the driveway that lead up to the building.

Commander Simon Holroyd got out of the back of the car, and buttoning up a uniform overcoat to protect him from the incessant rain that was beating down even harder now, proceeded to walk up the drive towards the front of the building.

Only a few moments later a second Security Department car arrived and parked in front of the first one. Garforth watched through the binoculars as Commander Julie Fraser got out of the drivers seat, closed the door quietly but firmly and walked with the help of a stick, up the drive and joined Holroyd.

Lieutenant Commander Claire Ferguson was the next to arrive, a black cab dropped her outside the gate. She appeared to be slightly shaken, almost certainly an after effect of the explosion earlier that morning.

"And there is the Commander" Garforth commented as the Commander's Ford Mondeo patrol car pulled in behind Holroyd's vehicle.

Tracy got out of the passenger side of the Commander's car and stood there watching as he walked up the driveway to the group of three officers who were standing by the front door of what was the old Western Section Security Department Training Centre building.

Garforth followed the Commander up the driveway through his binoculars before suddenly panning back to where Tracy was standing.

"Well, well, well" he commented "And who do we have here?"

Tracy guessed who this little group of officers must be from the warm handshakes from the other three that greeted the Commander's arrival.

"You must be the Commander's new Deputy" Holroyd's driver commented before nodding towards the group in the near distance, huddled together in the rain.

"A more dedicated bunch of officers, you could not wish to meet" he added as if by means of reassurance.

"That's the impression I've been getting" she replied, her sights still trained on them.

"Aye" the driver continued, "between them they have more medals and decorations than the whole of the highest senior command put together, they also reputedly have the ear of President's and Prime Minister's".

Tracy looked down momentarily as she tried to think back to what the duty officer in the Control Room had called the Commander and his three former colleagues. It was a popular collective name for them throughout the Department nation-wide.

"Ah yes - The Four Commanders of the Apocalypse" she remembered with a slight smile of affection.

"Oh aye!" Holroyd's driver looked up surprised at the sight of the Commander beckoning Tracy over "you must be special".

She made her way up to the small group, adjusting her cap as she did so. When she reached the group the Commander made the introductions and warm handshakes were exchanged as opposed to official rank and file greetings which was what she had been expecting.

"We were just saying" the Commander continued "that so far today two of the escapees have had a go at two of us today.

"My car's got bullet holes in it courtesy of a now deceased Mr Butcher" Holroyd explained.

"At least yours still goes" Farmer added, "There isn't anything left of mine" she commented with a rueful smile.

The Commander, Holroyd and Farmer wandered off around the side of the building to discuss earlier incidents of the day, as the gentle calming voice of Commander Fraser explained the purpose of this gathering to Tracy

"We meet here every year on the same day at about the same time, to remember, there being no official recognition any of this ever happened" she paused and looked up at the roof line above the main entrance of the neglected building, "fourteen years to the day" she added, sadness echoing in her voice.

"That's where it all ended" she continued as she pointed up "The Commander tackled Garforth on the roof, he was the last one still able to stand up, just, but...." she paused and watched as though the incident was replaying through her mind "he ran out of bullets so he just charged at him and threw him off the roof".

Fraser walked over to the other side of the path in front of the main entrance and nodded downwards. "Here's where they landed, Garforth broke the Commander's fall and got a fractured spine, amongst other injuries for his troubles".

Tracy began to picture the scene in her mind as Commander Fraser wound back time to start the sorry tale to start from the beginning.....

Everybody had gone into the main hall at the far end of the west wing for that evening's official award ceremony and dinner except for five of the junior officers. The small chap who would become the Commander, plus Fraser, Holroyd, Farmer and another junior officer called Lindsey Hepburn.

As the site was only a training facility, the rest of the site was dark and deserted, its typically uninspiring 1950's concrete pillar and glass panel corridors doing little to brighten up the gloomy interior.

"Come on!" Lindsey called to the others excitedly as they made their way down the long corridor towards the hall "we are going to be late!"

"Look" the Commander replied with typical reluctance, "You go, I've still got some work to finish" he added pointing back in the direction of the general office from which he had just been dragged.

Fraser and Farmer both turned sharply on the spot to face him "You're going" they both stated in unison.

"You work to flaming hard, try to learn to relax will you?" Fraser added by way of friendly advice.

The Commander stopped dead in his tracks and glowered "I am perfectly relaxed!" he bellowed back with his head rocking to each syllable in a manner that stated he most certainly was not, "besides" he continued "it being an official Departmental do means they'll be no flaming chips or anything, so there really is no point you know".

Holroyd stood nearby and just laughed. He knew that they were going to get nowhere unless that is someone from senior management made attendance compulsory, introduced chips and banned overtime all in one fell swoop.

By now Hepburn, slightly delirious at the thought of a good official Security Department evening 'nosh up' just looked over her shoulder and carried on walking towards the hall entrance.

She was to never say another word again.

The Commander, his argument won, was on his way back down the corridor to return to his work when his instinct told him something was wrong.

A sudden hushed silence had come from the corridor behind him that led through the west wing into the hall; he looked up concerned as the corridor lights above him began to flicker momentarily.

He spun round just as a rush of hot air preceded a huge explosion, which swept though the hall and west wing of the building. Dust, loose panels, light fittings and masonry began to descend from all around, whilst the reflections of flames could be made out emerging from within the west wing corridor.

The force of the blast, channelled by the west wing to the corridor where she was, killed Lindsey instantly as she was thrown through the main entrance's glass doors onto the grass outside.

The then Lieutenant Commander Edwards came out of a side door in the corridor, attempting to rub dust from his eyes.

"What the hell is going on.?" he asked as both he and the three remaining junior officers began to run in the direction of the west wing.

Fraser was the first to reach the scene but she was forced back by a sudden surge of gunfire. Clasp ing her abdomen, she fell back against the opposite wall and sank to the ground.

All she could do was watch in pain, and pretend to be dead as a shadowy figure, that of James Garforth stepped calmly out of the cloud of dust and smoke that hid the devastated west wing of the building from her view.

With his gun in his hand, he proceeded to look at a signing in book that had been provided for that evening's event.

Scanning down the list of names ticked off, he was annoyed that five junior officers appeared to be missing, he noted Fraser lying slumped in a corner and Hepburn's body lying outside the main doors.

"Three to go" he said to himself in a determined voice. He swung round the corner to look up the corridor, there was no one there, the Commander, Farmer, Holroyd and Edwards were lying back in a recessed doorway opposite the stairs about twenty yards away.

The Commander beckoned Farmer to grab Edwards's gun. As he could not see through the dust in his eyes, he wouldn't be able to use it anyway.

"You stay here and look after him" the Commander whispered as Farmer tossed the gun over. "Me and Simon will try and divert this nutter".

"I'll try and get out, summon help" she replied.

Without a further word, the Commander and Holroyd indicated to each other using hand signals. At the nod of a head, the Commander passed across the corridor to the stairway, Holroyd covering him with the gun before he too rolled across the floor to the join the Commander.

Garforth heard the movement through the rumbling of the aftermath of the explosion and looked up. He couldn't make out much through the dust and smoke that filtered through the air, illuminated only by the poor emergency lighting.

He started to advance towards the recess where Farmer and Edwards were hiding.

Holroyd looked carefully around the corner to see Garforth approaching quickly. He tuned and indicated to the Commander that a diversion was needed if they were to avoid Garforth finding the defenceless pair in the recess.

The Commander nodded and they backed slowly up the staircase so that they would see Garforth's back before he saw either them or the other two.

As he approached the bottom of the stairs and was about to look towards the recess, Garforth heard a shrill whistle from behind him. As soon as he had whistled, the Commander ducked back behind the banister and Holroyd jumped out from behind the other banister, saw Garforth turn, aimed and fired.

He missed, the bullet ricocheting of the pillar next to Garforth and forcing him to duck momentarily.

Seeing their chance, Farmer put her arm around Edwards's waist and made a bolt down the corridor towards the east wing of the building. Holroyd now facing a gun was grateful for the distraction as Garforth turned again and fired down the corridor, the spark from the bullets hitting the walls and floor showing up like fireworks in the semi darkness of the badly damaged building.

Reaching the end of the corridor, Farmer kicked open a door and dragged Edwards inside. Once in there she opened the main electrical circuit control boxes and shut off power to all sections of the site that weren't already either destroyed or cut off.

Garforth decided to make his way up the stairs. As he reached the turning point halfway up the staircase, he glanced upwards as the lights went out, now there was only the glow of fire and the beams of moonlight through shattered windows to illuminate the way ahead.

He swung round and aimed at the upper part of the staircase, expecting to see the two remaining officers there. He pulled back when he saw the place empty bar a few pieces of rubble from the ceiling littering the steps.

The Commander and Holroyd had moved upstairs and were now positioned one inside each of the first two doorways from the top of the stairs that lined one side of the upstairs corridor.

Behind the first doorway was the Commander who had the gun and planned to draw Garforth's fire whilst Holroyd crept up behind him and tackled him. He tensed slightly when he heard the crunch of rubble under foot at the top of the stairs but a few feet away.

Garforth approached that first doorway, glancing inside to see where the two officers were. He was desperately close to the Commander before a noise further down the corridor behind him distracted his attention.

Swinging round, he heard a sneeze come from the second doorway, the dust had set off Holroyd, a mistake that was to prove unfortunate but thankfully not fatal. Garforth's pace quickened as he walked towards the second doorway, aimed for the wall to the left of it and fired three times.

The bullets pierced the poor quality plaster and board wall and embedded themselves in Holroyd's back, causing him to slump into view in the doorway. Garforth was

moving in to finish him off when the Commander stepped out behind him and fired twice, hitting Garforth's hand and arm, in which he was carrying his gun.

It didn't affect him enough though as he fired twice behind him, hitting the Commander in the leg causing him to collapse to the ground in excruciating pain.

Clasping his injured arm, Garforth transferred his gun to his left hand and was about to fire again when he saw a movement outside through one of the side windows that overlooked the front entrance area.

"You two can wait, you're not going anywhere" he muttered as he glanced back and forth at the two injured officers.

Farmer, with Edwards slumped across her shoulders made her way as fast as she could across the front lawn of the building, only to be stopped in her tracks by a series of bullet shots striking the ground in front of her.

Falling over on to her back she looked up at where the bullets had apparently come from. All she could see was Garforth standing on the roof and silhouetted against the glow of the burning west wing, his gun aiming directly at her.

As he aimed, she closed her eyes and waited for the worst. A gunshot rang out and she opened her eyes to discover no hit on either her or Edwards. Garforth was looking across the roof to his right to see the Commander, blood pouring from his leg, and barely able to stand.

"You missed!" Garforth called out with an evil cackle.

"Well you can't blame a man for trying" the Commander replied with a painful grimace and a casual shrug of the shoulders before he pulled the trigger again.

Farmer clearly heard the outburst of frustration from the Commander, as the gun failed to go off, it was empty. Throwing it away, he wondered what on earth he was going to do next.

Edwards was trying to whisper something to Farmer and she had to bend right over him to make out what he was trying to say.

"Run for gawd's sake" he said. Without any argument, Farmer turned to run but received two bullets in her left leg for her trouble, causing her to stumble and fall just a few yards further on.

As Garforth was firing, his attention had turned away from the Commander who with a sudden lunge tackled him, the pair of them falling to the ground and two further gunshots ringing out in the struggle. Both of the men fell silent when they hit the ground with a low thud, as the sound of approaching sirens could be heard in the distance.

The Commander managed to look up for a few moments, and saw the unconscious Garforth laying there a couple of yards away.

"Nice of them to bother!" he muttered as he heard the approaching sirens get ever closer before he finally lost his battle with the pain and slipped into unconsciousness.

".....my God!" Tracy murmured as Commander Fraser finished telling the story,

"So what happened?" she asked.

"Holroyd had to have a metal pin put in his back" Fraser replied as she looked across at the others a few yards away. "The Commander still has two of the four bullets in his body and has hated guns ever since, I still have trouble sleeping sometimes whilst Garforth, when he was recovered enough to go for trial, got life fourteen times over".

Tracy could only shake her head in disbelief at the outrageous loss of life that had taken place.

"They covered the whole thing up?" she demanded to know with anger in her face.

"Aye" the Commander replied as he rejoined Tracy. "Apparently there were rumours that this was an officially backed set up, Garforth being hired to do the job and so forth".

"Basically a blanket story was put out about some coach crash or something" Holroyd added. "Whilst the press and TV were gagged by a 'D' Notice from a very high authority from what we could make out".

"They demolished the remains of the west wing and hall and refurbished the remainder for further use as a training base" the Commander added as together with Tracy, they looked up at the building. "But there were reports of people seeing ghosts and getting the heebie geebies in there, so they finally closed it down a few years back".

Tracy was about to continue when a movement nearby caused her to stop in mid sentence, the others carried on talking as she attempted to focus her eyes through the misty rain at the figure in the hedgerow that had attracted her attention.

"Look out!" she called, pointing straight ahead at the spot where she had just seen and recognised Silver as well as what appeared to a rifle.

The Commander turned sharply on the spot and looked towards where she was pointing but realising he had been seen, Silver had gone. They all looked around as the sound of a trial motorbike starting up could be heard nearby.

Tracy grabbed the Commander and bodily threw him to the ground to protect him just as a red motorbike roared past and headed up the path that ran out alongside the side of the site.

"A....After....." the Commander began before he pausing and turning to Tracy.

"Tracy my dear, will you get off me please!" he asked.

Tracy quickly apologised and got up, helping the Commander to his feet.

"Someone get after him" he resumed pointing in the direction of the rapidly disappearing motorbike.

As the officers departed at some great speed in pursuit of the motorbike, Garforth put away his binoculars and looked on scornfully.

"I don't believe it" he commented "I've been set up with a bunch of lemons, these idiots I got lumbered with, couldn't shoot something at point blank range!"

"I suppose I'll have to do this myself" he muttered furiously as he got out of the car before removing a sports bag, two cans of petrol and a toolbox from the boot.

Checking around to make sure everyone had gone, he casually strolled up the driveway and into the abandoned building as his minder looked on.

Despite the encroaching storm, it was still relatively light for the early evening as the Night Shift Senior Despatch Officer allocated a couple of officers to investigate a report of a burglar alarm sounding in the city centre.

The wind whistled through the slightly ajar window along the west side of the building as she saw the red light on the radio controls flash, indicating an incoming message on the priority emergency channel.

"Night shift, duty despatch officer" she responded. Listening intently for a few moments she nodded in understanding at the urgent message that was being re-laid to her over the radio.

"One of the escaped prisoners is making a run for it over the back of the Downs near Hepson, get somebody up there with some back up quick" Tracy called.

The two other dispatch officers in the room sensed something was wrong and turned round to look at her as she put the radio down.

"I need as many bodies as possible over towards Hepson Down" she instructed them, "Escaped convict has been sighted".

Driving through the village of Hepson, situated upon the side of a hill, in front of the rolling down land that dominated the area, the Commander pondered in his mind where Silver might be heading.

"We'll need something more substantial" he murmured as he looked around the interior of the patrol car. He pulled up outside a small flint and brick house that Tracy

estimated dated from about the 18th century or thereabouts, before the Commander fumbled in his pocket for a set of keys.

"Where do you want me?" Holroyd called as his car pulled up alongside.

"Head for the east cattle track" the Commander suggested "I'll go up the west, I don't know how far you'll get but you can point the back up when or if it comes in the right direction" he added as he waved his arm in a generally easterly direction.

"All right then!" Holroyd replied before he called to his driver to turn right and head along the upper road. Tracy watched the car pull away until the Commander called after her.

"Follow Me," he instructed as he locked the car.

Walking down the path to the front door of the house, the Commander turned the key in the lock and before opening the door, looked over his shoulder at Tracy with a clear and stern look.

"Beware of the cat!" he calmly advised.

As he opened the door and switched on the light, Tracy could see what he meant. Trudging in a menacing way down the hall towards her was an elderly looking brown/silver tabby who advanced to a point two metres in front of Tracy, stopped, sat back on her slightly arthritic hind legs and stared at the stranger who had arrived in *her* house.

"Tracy - Cat, Cat - Tracy" the Commander said by way of introduction. The cat stood up and stepped forward to examine the stranger carefully. Anyone unknown in the house usually required a full inspection and approval from the cat before entry was permitted.

After a few moments, the cat finished her inspection and seemingly with a flick of the tail, allowed Tracy to pass, leaving her to think she had just been granted a great honour.

As she joined the Commander at the rear of the house, Tracy first thought was that she was not very impressed by his kitchen. In her opinion it was all a bit of a mess.

"This place needs a woman's touch you know" she responded, gesticulating around the room.

The Commander looked up from the drawer he had been searching in to see a grinning Tracy leaning against the kitchen cupboard.

"Are you making me an offer?" he casually inquired before finding the second set of car keys he had been searching for.

He grabbed a packet of biscuits off the hall table, before they walked outside and around to the adjacent garage, leaving the cat to return to her sofa.

Inside the garage was the Commander's Security Department Land Rover, also bright red as was the rest of the county's fleet. Getting in, he placed the biscuits on the dashboard, started it up and with Tracy safely sat down alongside him, pulled away, the wheels crunching on the gravel outside.

Just a few hundred yards further on, he pulled across to a gateway set in a long stone wall. Tracy took a pair of padlock keys from the Commander and got out in order to open and unlock the rickety old wooden gate. She waited for the Commander to drive through before closing the gate firmly and rejoining him in the vehicle.

"I think he's heading up over the back hills towards the top of the main stretch of the Downs" the Commander explained as the encroaching storm began to open up and the rain became progressively heavier.

"You know this area well then?" Tracy remarked as the Land Rover lurched across potholes and ruts in the worn track.

"Yep" the Commander replied having to raise his voice to be heard over the noise from the engine and the drumming of the rain on the steel roof "I've been here ever since I was little fella." he explained.

"Can you get the map out of the glove compartment" he asked as switched the headlights to main beam, "I need to look at something".

She managed to find the map in the gloomy interior and despite the failing light managed to find the correct area. The Commander glanced across at it between swerves of the wheel as he struggled to control the vehicle on the heavily rutted track.

A Couple of miles away on the other side of the hill the Commander was tackling, Holroyd's driver pulled up halfway along another rough track, his official car was bogged down in a sea of mud and was not going to be going any further.

Holroyd got out and was surveying the stormy darkness of the surrounding countryside when he became aware of another vehicle coming up behind him. Waving his arms, he attempted to flag it down.

The passenger side window of the Security Department Land Rover wound down and the face of a somewhat tired Longton appeared.

"Good evening sir" he responded almost cheerily as the rain lashed at his face through the open window, "You wouldn't happen to know where the Commander and his lovely assistant Tracy are by any chance?"

Holroyd smiled, he knew the area also from when he used to live not far from there. Looking up the track he pointed to the back of the small hill adjacent to them.

"He wants your lot to head up across the back section in the direction of the main reach of the Downs" he replied, screwing his eyes up to try and keep out, at least some of the rain.

"Right you are sir" Longton responded, "If you could pass that message on to the Dog Division who should be behind us somewhere, then we'll see what we can do about getting your car out when we come back, Thank you".

The window wound up and the Land Rover moved off, its tail lights disappearing into the cold wet night.

The rain had made the track that Silver was trying to negotiate muddy and rutted, his motorbike struggled to get any grip before it finally stalled.

He tried to restart it but with no success. Getting off, he bent down to look at the engine section, caked with mud, but seeing that it was no use, he pushed the bike into the hedge.

Lights in the distance from an approaching vehicle were visible now further down the track, also in the air was the sound of distant voices and dogs.

Tracy was beginning to wonder if the jarring from the rough track was doing her back in, it certainly felt like that to her as the Commander continued to struggle on in the driving rain and wind that was now lashing his windscreen.

"I can't see a damn thing!" he yelled out, still struggling to control the vehicle. A few yards further on Tracy suddenly noticed something by the side of the track.

"Hang on a moment, I think I've just seen something" she announced.

The Commander paused and then reversed the Land Rover back a few yards until Tracy told him to stop. Leaning out of the window she saw what appeared to be the bike lodged in the hedge, and opened the door so the Commander could lean across and see for himself..

"Yep that's the one" he responded as Tracy shut the door again and they continued a short distance before tuning up off the track into an open clearing.

Before them in the gloomy darkness were a series of fields stretching an estimated six or seven miles.

Stepping out into the rain, the two officers were joined by Longton and a couple of men from the dog division.

"Evening Sir, Maam, Nice weather for it!".

Standing on the doorsill of his Land Rover, the Commander trained a pair of binoculars over the fields ahead but stopped panning around when he saw movement towards one side.

"Is that him do you think" he said pointing towards the area where he had seen the movement. Both Longton and Tracy struggled to make anything out in the encroaching gloom.

"Could be, mind you it might just be a deer" Longton replied thoughtfully "but if it is, we'll never get him from this distance" he added with a tone of regret.

Their deliberations were suddenly interrupted when the Commander Fraser was suddenly heard booming from a loud hailer. Looking up, they saw a Security Department helicopter coming in to hover overhead.

The noise of the wind, now mixing with deep rumbles of thunder that were running through the low clouds like bowling balls, together with the hammering of the rain was by now so intense, they never heard the helicopter approach.

The Commander gesticulated towards where he had seen the movement in the field and waved the helicopter on, before following it down a sidetrack in his Land Rover.

"Bring us up behind and over him," Fraser instructed the pilot who nodded and proceeded to fly as directed over Silver.

Opening the door, Fraser leaned out of the helicopter and when she was within reach of the rapidly tiring escapee, she lunged at him, grabbing him around the neck and together they landed on the ground.

Silver, by now extremely tired and exhausted, just surrendered immediately, putting his hands up as best he could. The helicopter landed a short distance away as the Commander and Tracy pulled up.

"Nice one lass" the Commander replied at the sight of the arrested Silver "Can you take him back to the office in your chopper before you go home?" he asked.

The fierceness of the weather almost drowned out most conversation but Fraser nodded an acknowledgement and with Longton bundled the now handcuffed prisoner into the rear of the helicopter, waved goodbye and took off into the distance.

Looking around, Tracy expressed concern at the rapidly worsening weather conditions, the severe storm promised earlier had arrived in force and all around thunder, lightning and wind were beginning to tear away at the countryside.

She was about to say something to the Commander when a bolt of lightning thundered through the air with an ear splitting crack, grounding itself just a few hundred yards away.

"Lets get the hell out of here!" the Commander suggested, seeing that everyone else had now departed. Tracy was about to agree when they heard an almighty crash from close by.

The Commander closed his eyes and threw his head up in disbelief. He knew the moment he heard the sound, what it was, a fact confirmed when he turned to see a huge oak tree embedded in the now somewhat squashed Land Rover which they had arrived in.

The Duty Despatch Officer looked about in irritation but not any great surprise as the power failed in the control room. One of the despatch clerks produced a torch and began pressing buttons on her console to see if there was any response.

Simon Fuller, the IT Manager who was working another late night of unpaid overtime, put his head around the door, illuminated by a lighter he was carrying,

"Looks like the entire county's off" he declared. The Duty Despatch Officer looked up, her eyes becoming adjusted to the light now she could see the deep blue of the dark night outside the windows.

"Phones, radio?" she asked more out of hope than any great realism. The second dispatch clerk picked up the outside line phone and pressed the receiver switch a number of times.

"Nope" he replied with a shake of the head.

In the almost total darkness of the building, a mutual consensus was that the night was a write off. Nothing could be done, and travelling outside in the storm would be highly dangerous. There was however a moment of excitement in the Control Room when the radio burst into life.

"Err go ahead" she responded surprised.

The Commander was calling but he didn't get very far "We're stuck....." there was then a huge screech at both ends of the conversation before the radio fell silent.

"Ouch!" the Commander cried out, throwing away the radio from his ear.

"What happened, are you all right?" Tracy asked, her concern obvious as she attempted to achieve some shelter under the tree that was embedded in the Land Rover.

"Well something's happened" he replied lifting his binoculars and training them in the distance upon a hill that overlooked the whole area.

"What can you see?" she asked out of curiosity as she wiped rain away from her face. The Commander focused upon a metal structure on the top of the hill a few miles distant, sparks and flashes of discharged electricity sparking around the remains.

"Ah rats! The area radio transmitter's been struck" he responded with an air of irritation before lowering the binoculars. He grabbed a large plastic box from the remains of the car and looked across at Tracy.

"There's no way we can cover eight miles of wooded countryside in this weather and in the dark!" he responded having to raise his voice to be heard through the howl of the high wind.

By now shivering with cold, Tracy began to glance about in desperation "Well we can't stay here all night!" she responded.

The Commander pointed back down the track "There's an old barn about half a mile down there, its not much but it will have to do".

"Where the hell have you been?" the Cabinet Secretary asked as a very bedraggled Home Secretary walked in through his own front door. Making his way into the lounge he looked up to see warmth in a roaring fire, and a colleague in a roaring rage.

"I'm sorry" the rather soggy Home Secretary replied. "I had to get away urgently and arrange an urgent family matter," he explained. In fact he was making it up as he was going along and not doing a very good job at it either.

The Cabinet Secretary could tell and was not impressed but did not let on. "You've read the Standard tonight?" he asked clutching a damp rolled up copy and waving it at him.

The Home Secretary just nodded and sat down by the fire. He looked up at the rain beating incessantly against the windows. "Just a silly mistake" he murmured, "don't worry about it".

Relaxing a little, the Cabinet Secretary stood up and placed the coffee cup he had been drinking from on the table, "The Prime Minister has authorised you to appear on BBC News 24 at 1 o'clock tomorrow, a debate about security and lost Government documents" he instructed. "Calls it damage limitation, he knew you'd enjoy that!" Looking up from the fire as he tried to dry himself, the Home Secretary just nodded, resigned to his fate of a public grilling.

"Watch out in that storm" he advised as the Cabinet Secretary turned to leave, "Its rough out there."

"Not exactly the Hilton but it'll do" the Commander announced as he swung the torch around the inside of the old barn. Tracy sat down on an old sofa that was in the middle of the floor.

Seeing that she was cold, the Commander took off his jacket and put it round her, before beginning to look around for anything useful.

"What's in the box?" she asked motioning to the large green plastic case the Commander had brought with him from the Land Rover.

The Commander found an old oil lamp in a corner and blew off some of the years of accumulated dust before bringing it over.

"Well" he replied, "living on the edge of a large rural area with little or no outside world contact means you have to be prepared for any eventuality".

He walked over to her, knelt down and opened the box. "Everything for a Security Officer on his holidays" he announced as he passed some items out to her.

"Matches, spare torch, first aid kit, flask" he held it to his ear and shook it "empty unfortunately" he added.

As Tracy looked over the things, she attempted to control her shivering as the Commander returned to looking over the lamp. He was able to discern that it was still workable and even had some oil left in it.

After removing the glass lens and wiping away some of the years of sooty deposits from it, he carefully lit the lamp and reassembled it.

Once he had achieved a moderately satisfactory light from it, he passed it to Tracy so that she could get some warmth from it.

"Biscuit?" he asked proffering a slightly rain damaged packet of Custard Creams towards her "You'll need to keep you strength up and this is all I've got" he added.

Tracy leant forward and took the packet from the Commander. She hungrily tucked into a couple of the biscuits as she watched him walk over to one of the broken windows in the south side of the barn.

Clearing some of the dust laden cobwebs from the opening, the Commander scanned the skyline through his binoculars. Looking through the darkness to see any indication of life on the flood plain below the Downs that led all the way to the sea, there was barely a light to be seen.

"Looks like the power's off across the county and probably beyond" he called back to Tracy, by now on her fifth biscuit.

"Doesn't surprise me" she responded still with her mouth full "this weather is enough to stop an entire country".

He rejoined her and sat down alongside. With a concerned look the Commander looked across at Tracy.

"Are you sure you are warm enough?" he asked, momentarily captivated by the way the flickering of the lamp light caught her eyes.

Although Tracy nodded, it was clear to him she was still feeling a chill so he tried to fold his jacket around her tighter to retain as much heat as possible.

It was with a tired voice that she mumbled a thank you to him as he continued to look worried for her. He knew that in these type of weather conditions she could fall seriously ill if she was not kept warm enough, so could he for that matter but for some strange reason he could not account for, he was not worrying about himself.

"You get some sleep lass" he said, "I'll keep an eye on you".

Tracy, her face illuminated like an angel by the light from the lamp leaned across and kissed the Commander gently on the cheek.

"What was that for?" he asked surprised, maybe even a little stunned.

"Just saying thank you...." she replied smiling. If the light had been bright enough, she would have seen him blush.

The Commander continued to listen to the wind and rain beating against the exterior of the building as with a yawn, Tracy slowly laid back, closed her eyes and quietly drifted off to sleep.

"Haven't you managed to get that radio working yet?" asked a despondent Chief Superintendent Edwards as Longton fiddled with an old 1960's wireless that he had found in a cupboard.

As the first rays of sunlight emerged over the horizon and came in through the Control Room windows, the radio crackled and burred static until a voice became clear and distinctive.

"I think I've got something!" Longton announced with triumph.

Nearly all the staff on the site had gathered in the Control Room, the power cut and the inability to travel home in the storm meant they could do little else.

'This is the BBC World Service from London', the time is six o'clock'. At that moment everyone began to listen intently to the news bulletin.

'The South of England is beginning to wake up and assess the aftermath of one of the most devastating storms in recent years' the radio announcer went on 'Overnight, communications and power were lost across eight counties as storm force winds and up to three inches of rain lashed the area incessantly from 20:00 hours onwards with gust of over 110 miles per hour reported in some places'.

The Duty Despatch Officer nearly jumped out of her skin when the phone adjacent to her rang.

"Must be back on " Longton commented rather obviously.

"Hello?" she enquired. There was a pause as the caller spoke.

"Yes Mrs Caverner, it is." she replied. The radio had by now moved onto other news stories and the attention of most of the people in the room were turned to the conversation on the telephone with Mrs Caverner.

"Hang on a moment please" she asked before turning to the Longton.

"You don't know where the Deputy is do you, her mum said she didn't come home last night". Longton looked bemused, partially because he didn't know and partially because he was surprised that a lady like the Deputy Commander still lived with her mother.

He shrugged his shoulder and shook his head, "You could try the Commander's place," he suggested.

"We'll see if we can track her down Mrs Caverner." the officer replied upon returning to the telephone. "Yes, that's quite alright, goodbye".

Longton was already on the phone to the Commander's house, however after a while he shook his head and put the phone down.

"No reply" he announced.

"Where was them two last?" asked Janice, glancing down as her torch batteries ran out and the light dimmed suddenly.

"They were still out over the back of the Downs when I last saw them" Longton replied with a worried frown,

"Oh god, you don't think they are still up there do you?" he asked rising from his seat and looking at the map on the wall.

The Duty Despatch Officer looked across at the map "We can't get anyone out there now, they're trees down everywhere and the helicopter is grounded". For a few moments she looked around for inspiration. "Someone find me a phone book" she demanded.

"Aye, it was a bad night out there all right love," commented Brian Davenport to his wife as he came into the farmhouse kitchen where his wife was just preparing his breakfast.

Mrs Davenport, a short round lady in her mid sixties looked up as he entered. She was of similar age to her husband, as well as being round and very jolly, the sort of grandmother any child would be glad to have.

"Any damage Brian?" she asked concerned, "the electricity is still off."

Brian hung up his cap on the peg by the door, "Robin has just arrived with the Tractor, and he says there are trees down all over the place". He looked across to the window and out on the bright early morning light illuminating the surrounding valley.

"Pity help any poor soul lost out in that weather" he added thoughtfully.

The ringing of the telephone however cut short his thoughts. Indeed he was quite surprised that the lines were still working as he went over to the elderly Bakelite telephone and answered the call.

"Davenport Farm, Good Morning" he responded.

"Ah err, Lieutenant Longton, Department of Security" came the voice at the other end "Sorry to disturb you at this time of the morning Sir but we were wondering if you've seen two of our officers" Longton explained.

"Our Commander and Deputy Commander Caverner were up on top of the hills above you farm last night as the storm came in and we haven't heard from them since".

Brian Davenport paused thoughtfully "Whereabouts exactly were they?" he asked trying to conjure a mental picture of the area of the farm in his mind.

"I believe it was an area ahead of a small hill about eight miles up from the village" Longton replied as he referred to the map in the Control Room.

"You see we can't get anyone out there at the moment because of the blocked roads and the helicopter being grounded" he added.

"Well if they were out there all last night in that weather, they may be in trouble" Brian replied, expressing clear concern in his voice. "I'll take a look straight away and let you know if I find anything" he added before turning to his wife.

"Put the breakfast on hold my dear" he announced as he reached for his cap from the door, "I have two lost souls to search for".

The Commander opened his eyes just in time to see the first few rays of sunshine pierce through the doorway of the old barn. The next thing he knew however, he was gasping for breath.

"What the heck....." he spluttered before he realised Tracy had rolled over in the night and grabbed the Commander around his chest and neck tightly to the point that he thought he was suffocating.

Careful movement of the interlocked arms around him managed to solve the problem. Tracy didn't respond very much, just shifted sleepily from one side to the other.

The Commander looked across at her with not a little admiration before lifting himself up and walking over to the door.

Looking out he could see a rapidly lightening blue sky, the rain and wind were gone but a survey of the surrounding scene revealed trees down everywhere. He was contemplating a long walk when he heard Tracy stir.

"What time is it?" she asked sleepily, yawning and stretching as she did so.

"About quarter past six" he replied before he was interrupted by a sudden cough that came from the opposite doorway. They both looked round to see standing there what Tracy could only describe as a County Gentleman in his early sixties, dressed very much as how a farm manager or Lord of the Manor would appear.

It was a very rural voice that spoke as he saw the uniforms of the two occupants. "The Commander and Miss Caverner I presume" he enquired

"Yes" the Commander confirmed, "How did you know that?"

"I just had a phone call from your Mr Longton Sir," Brian replied with a pleased smile, he turned to Tracy who by now had stood up and was brushing herself down.

"Your mother phoned up your office, apparently she was worried so she telephoned them and they telephoned me" he added.

"It was a pretty easy job to find you, I found your vehicle, or rather what's left of it and reckoned you would make your way here". He looked around the interior of the barn "And I was right too" he concluded.

"All right then" he rubbed his hands together with anticipation. "Who's for breakfast?"

"Yeah, thanks Al, I owe you one, another one" the Commander added before putting the phone down. Tracy looked around the kitchen of the cottage as the cheery voice of Mrs Davenport announced the arrival of breakfast.

Mrs Davenport came in bearing a steaming hot pot of tea and plates of freshly fried eggs and bacon.

"There's the toast, milk etc." she added pointing to the large old oak table in the middle of the kitchen.

Tracy smiled and thanked her, as did the Commander as he sat down opposite Mr Davenport.

"What were you lot doing up there last night?" Brian enquired "I heard the helicopter, plus I saw you wrecked Land Rover this morning".

"Well" the Commander replied chewing thoughtfully on a bacon rasher "to cut a long story short, we were chasing an escaped prisoner over the back of the downs".

"By the time we had got him" Tracy continued the story "The storm was well and truly setting in, and then the car got hit by a tree and we were stuck".

"I remembered about the old barn, it seemed the safest place considering" the Commander added.

"You're probably right, that storm was deadly all right" Brian replied. He got up and walked over to the open back door.

"Robin!" he called to a chap in the farmyard, the bearded man turned round when he heard his name being called.

"Would you mind having a go at retrieving the Commanders car for him, its under a tree by Rabbit Field" Davenport asked.

With a nod of the head, the man he called Robin walked over to a nearby tractor, loaded a chain saw onto the trailer behind, got in and drove away up the rutted farm track.

"You own most of the land around here don't you?" the Commander enquired of Mr Davenport as he sat back down again.

"Yes, well farm it anyway, not exactly own it as such" he replied smiling ruefully.

"The chap we were chasing was heading north, and he was definitely heading somewhere specific, can you help?" Tracy asked as she took a large gulp of much welcome coffee.

Davenport pondered for a moment "Might well have been the old Government Warehouse up there". The Commander looked up, his attention alerted as Davenport continued "It was closed down twenty odd years ago now but I did see someone up there yesterday".

"Can you describe this person" Tracy asked leaning across.

Davenport gazed into the distance as he tried to call up the picture of the man he saw in his mind "I would say this fella was early to mid thirties, average build, six foot odd".

Tracy and the Commander looked at each other with shocked expressions.

"Oh yes" Davenport added "He had a heavy looking bloke with him, possibly a minder I would say".

"Can you take us to this barn?" the Commander asked. A nod of agreement from Brian was however quickly vetoed by his wife.

"You two are not going anywhere until you finish your breakfast" she insisted.

The old warehouse had suffered somewhat from that night's storm. As the Commander approached it he could see that some of the corrugated panels that made up the structure's outer skin had been damaged whilst others were missing completely.

"Careful" he cautioned Tracy a few steps behind him who was attempting somewhat unsuccessfully to remove some of the mud from her shoes.

"Looks interesting" she commented as she began to look over the door lock with a close eye. She gave up her show cleaning attempts to briefly fiddle with the old padlock. Quickly and with a clank it came apart and she let it fall to the ground.

"How did you do that?" he asked as he looked down at the lock with surprise and pointed.

"My dad was a locksmith, he taught me a few tricks" she explained "besides" she added with a wry smile "It wasn't even locked properly".

Opening the door, she tried to make out the contents of the building in the gloom as the Commander followed behind her and handed her a torch, which she promptly trained on the interior of the warehouse, panning around until the light caught something on the floor.

"Hello!" he responded stepping forward to look at the object, nestling among a pile of old fertiliser bags strewn in a heap on the floor.

Tracy recognised the object as a mobile phone, picking it up carefully she looked it over.

"What's the verdict?" the Commander asked.

"Someone's been here very recently, look the batteries haven't even run out" she responded.

"I wonder" she began to ponder before dialling a number on the phone and then waiting for a response.

"Sir!" she suddenly called out "Listen to this!".

She held the phone up so that both could hear it, "Its the answering service" she explained as they listened to the messages.

"James, err I mean Mr Garforth, can you call me at home after midnight, its urgent" came the first message of a man sounding very worried.

They continued to listen as a second message was replayed which began with a series of phone box pips.

"Your transport has been arranged" the unknown caller announced. "Temeraire well be waiting at the arranged co-ordinates, and will rendezvous at 02.00 hours".

"No more" she announced before dialling a new number into the phone.

"Who are you ringing" the Commander asked from over by the small dusty office in the corner of the building.

"The Office" she explained. "I am going to see if I can get a trace on the calls made to the phone". The Commander nodded vaguely in agreement as this was modern technology and not his bag whatsoever. Instead he disappeared from Tracy's sight as he went into the office.

"Deputy Divisional Commander Caverner, can you put Lieutenant Commander Longton or someone in the section office on the phone, thanks". There was a slight pause during which she walked outside to try and get a better reception.

"Longton" came a reply.

"Are you still there?" Tracy asked somewhat surprised.

"I am afraid so" came the very tired reply.

"We've found what might have been Garforth's base, except he's legged it" she explained.

"This mobile got left behind and there were two calls lodged on the answering service, see if you can get a trace on them and any other calls made can you?"

There was a scratching of pencil on paper at the other end as Longton noted down the mobile's number "Will do" he responded, and hung up.

The Commander rejoined Tracy, in his hand he was carrying a number of manila folders.

"Look at these" he said, handing the folders across to her, "Security Department classified personnel files on Fraser, Holroyd, Farmer and myself. These came from the main office in London".

Tracy looked at the names on the front covers of the files and the markings reading 'Not to be removed from Central Personnel or copied'.

"Well that settles it then" she responded with a concerned frown, "Garforth has definitely got a high up contact."

"Yep!" the Commander replied "and I want his proverbial body components on a platter".

"You couldn't reduce my phone bill while you're about it could you?" Janice joked as she looked over Longton's shoulder at the phone details on the screen of his computer terminal.

"Call me later!" he responded before leaning forward suddenly and pointing at one particular number on the screen.

"Gotcha!" he gleefully called out.

"Now this should display a list of all calls made to and from this number in the last month or so" he explained as he called up an option on the screen with Janice and several others who had now gathered around the screen, all watching intently.

At a press of a key, a list of numbers appeared together with a list of dates and times.

"Right, a printout of this lot" he announced pressing a further key "and then" he continued, turning to the gathered officers behind him "we're all going to start making some phone calls".

Tracy and the Commander bid farewell to the tractor and trailer as it pulled away from the Commander's house.

Once inside the Commander went upstairs whilst Tracy walked into the front room. The Commander's almost permanent state of being on duty meant that the room saw little use, and its generally neglected condition backed up this view.

"I could do something with this place you know" she responded when the Commander returned having changed into a clean uniform jacket and trousers.

He had to admit to himself that it was a tempting offer, especially if it meant having Tracy around more but he said nothing for the moment as they walked out to the car.

The Commander wiped some of the windswept leaves from the windscreen, as Tracy climbed into the passenger seat.

"Temeraire, it might be boat or something" she suddenly announced.

"Used to be the name of a locomotive" the Commander added "but that's long gone".

"Try running it through the Customs division or the Coastguard when we get back" he suggested as he joined her in the car, "You never know, our luck has to improve at some point".

"Say that again?" Janice exclaimed in response to the person on the other end of the phone, "Right thank you" she replied, a puzzled expression clearly visible now for all to see.

"This one's weird" she called over to Longton, "Here take a look". She passed a piece of paper from her clipboard over to him.

Looking at it, he quickly agreed with her opinion as to the nature of the phone number she had just called. It was the last one on the list that he had drawn off the computer listing of calls made to and from the mobile phone that had been found.

Walking over to the white board situated at the top end of the room, Longton proceeded to add it to the list of details already on there, as he did so, the Commander walked in.

"Ah there you are sir!" Longton called with a tired smile.

"You look like you could do with some sleep" the Commander suggested upon seeing the state that he was in.

"What's sleep?" came the quick witted reply accompanied by a jokey quizzical expression.

"Good God!" Janice pronounced with clear surprise "I do believe the Commander just smiled".

"Now, now" the Commander responded, looking across at her "Its too early in the morning for sarcasm, even in this office".

"What came of the telephone details?" he asked as he turned back to Longton.

"So far we've come up with a car repairs place, two take away restaurants, the Classic FM competition phone line, directory enquiries, Garforth's Aunty, and several calls to and from a phone box" Longton replied with an authoritative tone.

"What phone box?" the Commander asked sensing a connection here somewhere. Longton walked back to his desk and picked up the copy of the previous day's Evening Standard.

"This one in St James Park, London" he announced, holding the paper aloft so the front page faced the Commander.

"What?" called one officer at the back of the room, "The same one where those papers were left yesterday?"

Longton looked over his shoulder "The very same" he replied.

There were murmurs of disbelief and astonishment in the office at this news, in the Commander's mind he put two and two together and got.... well, big trouble.

"Temeraire you say?" Commander Louise Sheldon of the Customs & Excise division asked Tracy.

"Yes" she responded slightly reluctantly "It's a long shot but I thought it might be the name of a ship of some kind".

Commander Sheldon looked through a list of recent arrivals and departures from ports nation-wide on her computer, "Exxon Valasquez, Thornton Voyager, QE2, Kobayashi Maru....." she murmured as she scanned the listing in front of the two officers, "No, nothing there" she concluded.

Getting up from her seat she called to one of the other Customs officers seated a few yards away

"You know of a ship called Temeraire?" She asked the officer who thought for a moment before responding.

"Sorry, doesn't ring any bells with me".

Tracy decided to throw in the towel for now "Never mind, thanks anyway" she replied, turning to the door.

"I'll get our offices in the area to keep their ears and eyes open" Sheldon called, as Tracy left, "You never know".

"Thanks" Tracy responded closing the door behind her. Sheldon turned to the officer at the other end of the office

"Issue an all ports bulletin, anything carrying or associated with the name 'Temeraire' to be reported to the Deputy Commander at Haychester" she ordered.

As Tracy walked down the corridor she passed the Commanders office. She stopped abruptly when she heard the distinctive voice of Chief Superintendent Edwards coming from inside.

"You want to arrest the Home Secretary!?!" he bellowed with clear astonishment.

Tracy politely knocked before opening the door and looking around the edge of it to see if there was any flak flying about before she entered.

"Have you heard this?" Edwards called, turning to her as she came in and pointing straight at the Commander

"Your immediate boss wants to arrest one of the most highly respected politicians..."

"Slimeball more like" muttered the Commander half to himself at that point.

"...in the country, in fact the entire ruddy Commonwealth!".

Tracy just looked on slightly stunned, as Edwards wavered about as though he was about to have a heart attack.

"I have enough evidence to nick him immediately, at least for questioning if nothing else, look at this" the Commander responded tossing across files of papers to Edwards side of the desk.

"Someone in the Home Office...." he went on "has been instrumental in this from the very beginning, not just lately with the dodgy documentation and the phoney transfers but right from the beginning fourteen years ago!"

"What about the personnel files Garforth had?" the Commander demanded as Edwards sighed in the face of a losing battle

"But you just can't go in and arrest senior politicians just like that!" Edwards replied, now a little calmer but not much. "There are such things as diplomacy and niceties to be observed".

"Cobblers!"

Tracy just stood and watched the conversation bounce between the two men as the Commander, undeterred, continued his justification.

"Even fourteen years ago the now Home Secretary objected to the formation of the Department, it was adopted instead of his plan for a privatised system which would probably have netted his wife's company a small fortune, so what does he do?"

Edwards just stood there as he began to realise the implications that the evidence was pointing towards.

"If he's greedy or barmy enough, then all he has to do is find someone, a rebellious person, perhaps someone expendable to finish off the Service before it even gets started" Edwards concluded "Dear God!"

"Did Garforth have any previous resentment to the Service?" Tracy asked as she tried to avoid looking too shocked, without, it has to be said, much success.

"Garforth was kicked out of the training programme for a number of major misdemeanours, then he sort of turned feral" the Commander replied, looking across at her.

"If the now Home Secretary was involved then that might explain the cover up all those years ago" she added.

Edwards had by now changed his mind, even though he probably couldn't stop the Commander doing what he wanted anyway.

"Right" he ordered turning to leave the room "Nick him as soon as possible but for gawd's sake do it quietly".

"Yes Sir!" the Commander responded as Edwards left and closed the door.

"Got any ideas how we might find him" he asked, turning back to Tracy.

"Just maybe....." she replied with a thoughtful look.

The Special Branch VIP Protection Division Office, situated in a discreet corner of an office building in London's Docklands area was generally quiet that morning, but this was a peaceful moment destined not to last.

"If I never see the Faradon Islands Ambassador again it will be too soon" called out Lieutenant Commander Jennifer Caverner as she marched in furiously and slung her handbag unceremoniously into the chair behind her desk

"What a complete.....!" she began to add just as she sat down on her handbag ".....oh rats!". She extricated the now rather squashed bag from behind her and dumped it on the floor alongside before sitting back.

Her commanding officer, Divisional Commander Trevor Jeffries walked over to the still sulking officer.

"What's up Jen?" he asked handing her a cup of coffee.

"Don't ask, I just need to get some sleep that's all" she responded taking the coffee.

A shout from the other side of the office made her look up. "Jen" came the shouted voice "Your sister Tracy is on line seven".

Jennifer leaned across and picked up the phone on her desk. "Hi-ya Trace!" she replied "What can I do for you siss?".

Tracy was at first a little evasive and sheepish in her conversation with her sister.

"I need a very big favour" she asked "only it's not exactly going through regular channels if you know what I mean" she added glancing around the otherwise empty Commander's office to make sure no one was eavesdropping.

"Shoot!" Jennifer responded grabbing a piece of paper and pen and also motioning to her Commanding Officer to remain.

Tracy decided to come straight out with it "I need to know the movements of the Home Secretary for the next few hours".

"Oh" Jennifer replied sarcastically "Is that all. You do know that's classified information". She looked up at her own Commander who was looking rather concerned at the way the conversation was going.

After pondering for a moment Jennifer returned to the phone. "What do you want to know for?" she asked.

"Its a tad difficult you see" Tracy explained in even more of a hushed tone "You see my boss wants to arrest him!"

"Right I see" Jennifer replied before it hit home what Tracy had really said. "WHAT!" she exclaimed, "Arrest the Home Secretary? Have you lost your mind?"

Jennifer's Commanding Officer had allowed his concentration to waver to other parts of the office but that last statement made him sit up with a sudden jerk of shock.

"Who wants to arrest him?" he asked by now curious at to what was going on.

"Yes good point, exactly who wants to arrest him?" Jennifer re-laid.

Tracy looked around the office once more. "My new boss, the Commander of Haychester Division".

By now Jennifer had put the call on her speaker so that her Commander could join in.

"Not *the* Commander" he asked with some incredulity.

"Well yes I suppose so" Tracy replied with some surprise clear in her voice.

Commander Jeffries stood up and moved round to the back of the desk next to Jennifer, "Well why the hell didn't you say so in the first place!" he cried out, "Nothings too much trouble for the Commander".

"Hi Al, where are you?" Tracy inquired.

Longton on his mobile phone, looked across at the Commander and two other officers from the Metropolitan division standing opposite him on the other side of the road.

"Security Office in Tottenham Court Road" he replied having to raise his voice to be heard over the traffic.

Tracy moved to the back of the Commander's desk and sat down, "My sister says the Home Secretary can be found at the BBC Television Centre from about 12:50 onwards".

Longton looked up and down the road before crossing it, phone still in hand as Tracy re-laid the rest of the details she had to him.

"Deputy Commander Caverner reports that the Home Secretary is at the BBC from one o'clock doing an interview" he informed the Commander "On Security and Safety would you believe" he added as he put his phone away in his back pocket

"Right, cheers" the Commander responded.

The two Metropolitan officers, Garley and Paine showed the Commander and Longton to a patrol car parked a few yards away. Getting in, the Commander advised

them of their destination before they drove off into the bustle of London's traffic only to be brought to a prompt halt again few yards on.

"Lunch time traffic sir" Garley explained looking over the back of the passenger seat, "Always gets pretty bad, mind you it never seems to get any better the rest of the day though" she added.

The Commander seated in the front passenger seat looked at his watch, tapped it in irritation and sighed.

"I don't suppose you have an advanced driving qualification do you by any chance?" he asked Paine.

"Indeed Sir!" Paine responded enthusiastically. He did not need any further commands before he activated the sirens and lights and put the accelerator to the floor.

Speeding through the streets of London, the occupants held on as tight as possible as they weaved through traffic and pedestrians, many of who had to move quickly out of the way at the approach of the speeding patrol car.

"That's a bit better, now we are getting somewhere" Longton commented from the back seat as the streets of central London flashed by in a blur.

The security guard on the gate had just let a couple of people through the gate at the front of the BBC's Television Centre in Wood Lane, West London when the patrol car pulled up at the barrier.

The Commander leaned out of the window, brandishing his i.d. card and badge together with a warrant for the Home Secretary's arrest.

"Open the gate!" he demanded knowing that time was running out before the Home Secretary was due to depart.

Pulling up sharply outside the main entrance, the Commander got out and then turned to Paine and Garley.

"Take the motor around the back just in case he decides to leg it" he suggested. The two officers nodded in agreement as Garley moved to the front passenger seat and together they drove away.

Entering the main foyer, the Commander made a beeline straight for the reception desk. There sat two receptionists whose main purpose in life appeared to be telling visitors, and indeed anyone else for that matter, to go away. He was about to ask where the News & Current Affairs section was when he caught out of the corner of his eye what appeared to be an almost familiar face.

He turned to greet the uniformed Security Officer who stood up to greet him, "Lieutenant Commander Jennifer Caverner sir. You must be the Commander".

"I can see the family resemblance," he commented noting that Jennifer was almost identical to her sister Tracy except for her slightly longer hairstyle and, rather oddly he thought, the different colour of her eyes.

"Trace was right" she exclaimed with a cheery smile and a chuckle "You are kind of cute!"

The Commander didn't know whether to faint, go mad or what. Longton standing behind him meanwhile almost collapsed with badly suppressed giggles. Indeed he found he was unable to control his laughter and momentarily ducked behind a nearby pillar to let it all out in a huge guffaw.

"Longton" the Commander calmly called as he reappeared, his face still red from the hilarity of Jennifer's comment, "Not a word of this back at the office right or you are unemployed" he insisted, reinforcing his point with a firmly pointed finger. Longton managed a nod but still couldn't quite get over it.

All three quickly regained their composure for the task ahead.

"Where's the slime ball, I mean the Home Secretary" the Commander asked.

"Oh you've met him then!" Jennifer replied showing a guiding arm down the corridor behind the reception desk "He is in the News Centre, this way".

"You must be the outspoken one of the pair" the Commander remarked to Jennifer as they walked down what seemed to be an endless series of corridors.

"Well yes" she replied casually, "Trace thinks a lot of things like I do but she tends to be a bit shy, only I have really ever had the courage to say them!"

"You don't say!" Longton commented. What he would give for a tape recorder at that point, as this was hilarious. Especially Tracy's passed on comment about the Commander.

He began to wonder what other things she had said to her sister about him as they arrived at a large double glass door with the legend 'BBC News Centre' across its engraved panelling. Above it, an illuminated sign advised intending visitors of the current 'Live Transmission'.

"The Commander hasn't arrested him yet then" Chief Superintendent Edwards commented as he saw the Home Secretary on the television that was on in the main office.

Gathered around watching intently were all the staff of the section including Tracy and a few officers from other sections who had come along purely out of curiosity.

"Hello!" one officer remarked as he pointed towards the Home Secretary on the screen "Is it my imagination or has he's just started to look rather worried". The

Home Secretary had indeed noticeably changed in demeanour from calm and collected to suddenly nervous and glancing to his left at something or someone off screen.

The answer was someone rather than something and that someone was the Commander, who with Jennifer Caverner and Longton, was standing by the newsroom studio stage entrance next to one of the cameras.

As the Home Secretary began to sweat nervously a little, the Commander stared him straight in the eyes, his intention being to make him as uncomfortable as possible.

Longton looked across at the Commander staring, he had seen this before. His stare was well known in Department circles and probably could give the grim reaper a run for his money.

The Home Secretary was stammering his final comment of the interview and it was there that the interviewer wrapped it up.

“Home Secretary, thank you” she said before turning directly to face the camera.

Seeing that the Home Secretary was about to leave, the Commander motioned Longton forward.

"The honour is all yours mate" he whispered, whereupon Longton took a deep breath and stepped forward. As the Home Secretary started to walk towards him he began his piece.

"Trevor Sharman" he began brandishing his i.d. card in one hand and thrusting the arrest warrant across with the other "I'm arresting you in connection with the unlawful passing of restricted documents, contrary to the Official Secrets Act, compromising Her Majesty's Security Services, contrary to the National Security Measures Act, collaboration in the escape of known convicts, namely Mr James Garforth, Mr....."

As Longton continued to list the misdemeanours, Sharman lost what little remained of his cool temperament.

“The time is 1:20 and you are watching BBC News 24” the newsreader announced before she was rudely interrupted by an unexpected arrival on her desk.

"Crikey! I think that was Al!" Janice exclaimed as a figure in a Security Department uniform crashed past the view of the camera.

Chief Superintendent Edwards proceeded to just look down and shake his head in slow disbelief at the events unfolding on the screen before him. Already he could foresee a nasty phone call from the Administrator General winging it's way through the phone lines to his office right now.

Sharman made a bolt for the opposite exit to where the Commander and Jennifer Caverner were waiting. He thought quickly and grabbed a camera, pulling it across and towards the two officers whilst he made good his escape from the studio.

In a manner that extolled BBC professionalism, the newsreader just kept going presenting the news over the semi-conscious Longton who was still partially lying on the desk, although only his feet were visible in shot for all the nation to see.

Stepping calmly out of the rear entrance of Television Centre into a covered driveway, Sharman spotted his official car parked opposite. He walked over to it and spoke to the driver standing by the front bonnet.

"I'm driving" he announced in a determined and menacing voice.

The Driver looked at Sharman as though he thought he had gone nuts only to get a response in the form of a fist around the back of the neck, rendering him immediately unconscious.

Sharman pulled the driver away from the car and then got into the driver's seat before starting the powerful Jaguar engine and driving away at high speed, the tyres squealing on the smooth tarmac surface.

He only managed to travel a short distance within the BBC site however when he came across a patrol car blocking the way ahead. Reversing quickly, he backed out onto a side street and pulled quickly away. Paine and Garley, in the patrol car gave chase as Caverner and the Commander emerged quickly from the back door of the BBC Television Centre main building.

Glancing down the road, they could see the two cars speeding off into the distance.

"We'll take my car" Jennifer motioned towards a dark coloured Rover parked opposite, causing the Commander pause for a moment with a somewhat apprehensive look.

"There is the face of experience" Jennifer commented with another chuckle, "You've experienced my sister's fast driving I take it?"

The Commander nodded in a worried manner as he got in the passenger seat,

"Don't worry" she reassured him "I've done the advanced driving course, I do after all drive VIP's around you know!"

The Commander reached down and placed a magnetic blue flashing light through the side window onto the roof as they pulled away, in pursuit of the other two vehicles.

"Ah yes" Jennifer added by way of justification "My double hand brake turns are legendary".

On the television, a news flash was broadcast that reawakened the attention of the officers present in the office.

"Don't tell me this gets worse" the Chief Superintendent muttered under his breath as the news reader announced the breaking news story of a high speed chase of the Home Secretary through the streets of central London from Television Centre.

"I'm afraid it does" Tracy confirmed with a worried frown as she handed him the telephone.

"The Administrator General would like a not very quiet word Sir" she announced.

Pedestrians ran for their lives as the powerful Jaguar car roared through the crowded streets with three department vehicles now pursuing it, all with lights flashing and sirens at full volume.

A very nervous Home Secretary saw the chasing vehicles in his rear view mirror and began to swing violently from side to side in an attempt to shake them off. This manoeuvre had the effect of throwing Paine and Garley in the lead car off the chase when they slewed sideways into a traffic island, the car being written off immediately, although thankfully, it appeared that neither officer were seriously hurt.

"Hey up, he's desperate!" Jennifer commented as she performed a hand brake turn through Trafalgar Square. Unusually, the London traffic was generally responding to the sirens and moving out of the way as they approached.

"Where the blazes is he going?" the Commander asked as they tuned yet again this time into the wide-open Whitehall road.

"Palace of Westminster maybe?" she pondered as she changed gear for the umpteenth time.

The Home Secretary was becoming more and more desperate to get away and so far he had had no success in losing his pursuers. He forced his way across the traffic at Parliament Square and swung round, turning into the grounds of the Houses of Parliament, sending tourists flying out of the way in the process.

A matter of seconds later the Commander and Jennifer Caverner pulled in behind him. They were however too late to stop him getting out of his car and running into the building.

The Commander turned to look as he heard a familiar voice behind him. "Where is that little scumbag!" Longton yelled. He had arrived in the next car in the pursuit, and was still in some pain and discomfort from when he was tackled back at the BBC.

There were shouts of consternation, as the normally quiet and secure Palace of Westminster, the seat of British Government, suddenly became overrun with several Security Officers and one desperate Home Secretary.

At Jennifer's suggestion, they split up with various officers pursuing down the many different corridors that made up the complex building.

Seeing the Commander appear at the far end of the room he was in, the Home Secretary resumed his escape, only to see a very annoyed Longton suddenly confront him at the other end.

Stopping for a moment, he looked around for a means of escape, selecting a side door leading to a staircase up to the first floor. With Longton, the Commander, Caverner and several internal security guards now in pursuit, the chase began to take on some air of an old Ealing Studio's farce as they rushed through various rooms and corridors throughout the building.

As the Commander and Longton made their way quickly down a corridor running alongside the River Thames, they were aware they were careering towards a group of smartly dressed people who had just appeared in front of them.

"Out of the w....!" The Commander's warning call was too late and was interrupted by a huge crunch as they all collided and people were thrown to the floor in all directions. The two officers offered very quick apologies as they picked themselves up and carried on down the corridor.

Pausing at a connecting door for a breath Longton looked back.

"That chap back there, that wasn't..." he inquired".

"Yep" the Commander confirmed, "That was him".

"Ah well, there goes my knighthood!" he jokingly commented as they resumed the chase, however they were forced to stop abruptly when they reached a dead end.

"Where the hell did the little bugger go?" the Commander asked as they looked around the room, which seemingly had no obvious alternative means of exit other than the door they had just come through.

Jennifer joined them, muttering something about the Prime Minister being knocked over, a fact that both Longton and the Commander decided to pretend they knew nothing about.

In the silence of the room, the Commander's attention was caught by a slight wooden like creak from alongside them.

There was a large antique oak cupboard almost right next to them. Being set into the wall and made of matching material to the wooden panels that lined the walls of the room and indeed much of the surrounding parts of the building, they had barely given it a second glance.

Jennifer also became suspicious as she too heard the creak and put her ear to the door and listened.

"You may think I am going barmy" she whispered "but I think this cupboard is panting for breath!"

The Commander produced his gun and pointed at the door as Longton opened it. The exhausted Home Secretary, realising that the game was up, simply stepped out and put his hands up in surrender.

"Now" Longton continued, stepping forward and grabbing the Home secretary firmly by the arm, "As I was saying before you so rudely interrupted me, Trevor Sharman, I am placing you under arrest".

The press were crowding the main entrance of the Haychester Security Department building as the receptionist and the Chief Press Liaison Officer tried to sort them out, while questions were being fired at them at an alarming rate, and all at the same time.

Tracy was observing from the back corridor through the fire doors and was singularly unimpressed at the progress of the rather unofficial and impromptu press conference.

She decided it was time for her to make an entrance and sort out the mess and so having brushed down her uniform, with menace and purpose she pushed open the fire doors and marched into the foyer.

"What the hell is going on!" she bellowed.

The thronged press took little notice whatsoever as they continued to swamp the reception desk. Tracy decided that drastic action was called for before public order offences were committed, and climbed up onto a chair behind the desk.

The thronged mass were suddenly silenced when a gunshot was suddenly heard ripping through the air. Tracy stood in front of them on the chair, her arm pointing straight upwards from where she had just fired her gun and whiffs of smoke still just visible emerging from the barrel.

"RIGHT!" she continued to bellow with the authority of a Head Mistress in a bad mood. She saw she had achieved her aim of outstaring everyone present "Now that I have your complete and undivided attention, I will answer questions, ONE AT A TIME".

Hands were rather feebly raised as Tracy re-holstered her gun and pointed to one of the members of the press.

"Geoffrey Smith, Daily Star, Why has your Guvnor arrested the Home Secretary?"

"He has been arrested in order for him to assist us with our enquiries" she replied now in much calmer tone, "We may be releasing further details later today".

A few camera flash units flashed and many of the reporters present began jotting down quotes or holding forward tape recorders as Tracy pointed to another reporter for the next question.

"Brian Hanrahan, BBC Television, Is it true that this may be connected with events that occurred more than fourteen years ago?"

Tracy hesitated at first and she could see that even from that pause, many of the press were already beginning to draw their own conclusions.

"Events of fourteen years ago may be connected to this case, however we are concentrating upon the current misdemeanours and will only bring older charges into this if the need arises" she replied in a manner that was diplomatic to a level which the Commander was definitely not capable of.

"Very diplomatic!" muttered one of the photographers in the crowd.

"James Coburn, Haychester Gazette, Will the Home Secretary be brought here for questioning".

As she was about to respond Tracy noticed a large Department van draw up outside and the Commander and Longton emerge from the vehicle's cab.

"I believe that he has just arrived," she announced pointing to the exit.

"Oi you! Out now!" the Commander ordered pointing at the ground outside the rear door of the van. Rather sheepishly the Home Secretary stepped out and was fitted with handcuffs, which the Commander then attached to Longton's wrist.

As they were about to make their way in the front entrance they met the eager press coming the other way firing questions and taking pictures.

"Tracy!" the Commander called as he managed to force the door open against the tide of people, "Get down from there and nick this lot for obstruction!"

"Name?" the custody officer asked not looking up from the form on the table in front of her. The Home Secretary was initially silent until the Commander side kicked him in the shins as a reminder

"Ouch! Err Trevor David Wilberforce Sharman M.P."

"Humph!" came the begrudging reply as the custody officer recorded the name, before moving on "Occupation?"

"Home Secretary for Her Majesty's Government" came the reluctant reply as Sharman wondered if he still had the job, probably not was his conclusion.

"Oh yeah?" the Custody Officer replied sceptically looking up. She turned to the Commander "Next thing you'll be telling me you've arrested Elvis for shoplifting in Tesco's!"

Once the formalities were dealt with the Commander ordered an immediate interview.

"Tracy, you're with me," he called. As he was about to make for the nearest available interview room he turned to Longton.

"Go home now and get some sleep" he insisted, "that is an order".

"I though you'd never ask!" he replied gratefully before yawning and leaving the Custody area.

The Commander opened the door marked 'Interview Room 3' and made his orders to the now probably Ex Home Secretary quite clear.

"In there, sit down and shut up now!" the Commander barked. Tracy followed them in the room and went over to the tape recorder setting it up for the interview.

Starting the tape running, she nodded to the Commander who made the introductions as per standard procedure.

"This is an interview with Mr Trevor Sharman, those present are myself, Lieutenant Commander Tracy Caverner and of course the man himself" he announced to the tape recorder.

He switched on a desk lamp and shone it towards Sharman. "I know" he responded seeing Shaman's surprise, "Its an old cliché but believe me it works" he jokingly announced, besides the main light bulb has gone.

Taking a seat opposite Sharman the Commander folded his arms, sat back and relaxed.

"We know you supplied documentation to get Garforth out" the Commander calmly informed the slightly trembling Sharman.

"We also know you supplied him with materials, clothing, guns etc. and I suspect you are probably an accomplice to the theft of a quantity of traffic cones and associated paraphernalia from the Queens highway".

The Commander leaned forward with menace and stared Sharman square in the eye, only a matter of a few inches separating the two men.

"Why don't you tell us the rest of this sorry little story" he quietly suggested, "Sort of fill in the blanks like?"

"Can you protect me from Garforth?" Sharman asked nervously, his hands still shaking as he lit a cigarette. He took a puff and exhaled deeply before continuing "Protect me from Garforth and I will tell you everything".

"Done!" the Commander responded with a positive nod of the head. Sharman took another puff, then a deep breath before he began.

"You probably know I was opposed to the Security Department from the very beginning".

"We'd kind of guessed that!" Tracy replied before allowing Sharman to continue.

"We had an idea, if there was a suitable disaster or something to undermine the Department right at the start then maybe it would be seen as a bad idea and be replaced by one of my schemes, so I hired Garforth to create a little undermining".

"Funny idea of a little undermining!" the Commander bellowed back with disbelief.

"Well how the hell was I to know he'd go that far, that was never meant to happen which is why it was covered up from the top level" Sharman replied with clear insistence. "I'm sorry".

The Commander shook his head slowly with disbelief at what he was hearing. Tracy too was stunned by the revelations as Sharman went on into detail about how Garforth had blackmailed him into organising the escape, the documentation and all the rest.

"Where is Garforth now?" Tracy demanded.

Sharman looked up at the Commander and responded simply in a hushed tone.

"He's waiting for you so he can finish the job he started fourteen years ago".

Longton sat down with a welcome pint of cold draught beer in the bar of the Sailors Rest in Emsbourne. Looking around, he saw that there were a few other people in, the nearest to him being a small group of mature students from the local Technology College, apparently quietly arguing over logic gates or something equally unfathomable.

He sat supping as he watched the remarkable trio, two women in their late forties and early fifties and a younger man in glasses in his mid twenties with a confused look on his face. They were obviously having a late working lunch, as there were numerous bits of paper being passed about between them with much thoughtful argument among them in progress.

As Longton pondered this little group his wife Caroline walked in.

"Hello Love!" he responded, kissing her.

"Howdy stranger" she joked in reference to Longton's rather long work stint of the previous couple of days.

"You look shattered" she commented noticing the bags under Longton's eyes "You need some sleep" she added firmly.

He took another large gulp of the well-earned drink. "Aye you're probably right" he replied, "Its this business with the Home Secretary and what not".

The barman suddenly realised the connection and gesticulated a tea towel clad arm in Longton's direction, "Saw you on the telly earlier nicking the Home Secretary, well I saw your feet anyway!"

Longton just smiled meekly at his moment of fame and glory as he took another gulp of beer.

"The Commander has got a new Deputy you know" he continued, "I think those two are going to get on like a house on fire!"

Caroline took the glass of mineral water she had just ordered from the bar and perched herself on the stool next to her slightly bedraggled looking husband.

"Oh yes? Is that the one he spent the night in the barn with?" She was feeling inquisitive. "What's she like then?"

Longton pondered for a moment, carefully considering his reply.

"Well, imagine a female version of the Commander, except computer literate and with a much more healthier taste in food and you should just about have it" he replied. "She's already had at least two goes at him about his diet so far that I know of".

"Sounds like they were made for each other!" Caroline replied with a cheery smile,

"and" Longton continued with a knowingly suggestive nod of the head "Judging by what I heard from a relative of hers earlier, I would say she is very taken with him if you know what I mean, and its not just one-way traffic".

"Bloody Hell!" was the slow whispered response as a look of astonished amazement flashed over Caroline's face, and indeed that of the Barman who had been listening intently to all this as well.

Longton just laughed before he took the last gulp from the bottom of the glass and then held it aloft for a refill. Whilst he waited he glanced around the oak beams and medieval panelling of the pub interior, past the group of three mature students, the younger of which had given up arguing and decided to concentrate in a thoughtful manner on his lunch, chips as it turned out, the Commander would have approved.

The walls were decorated with memorabilia, photographs and documents from the landlord's days when he was in the Royal Navy, and it was a photograph of a trio of frigates in Portsmouth Harbour that was the image that Longton suddenly locked onto, in particular the caption showing the names of the three vessels, Birmingham, Defiance and...

"Temeraire!" he cried out attracting the attention of most of the pub's occupants. Quickly he turned to the barman "Bob, can I borrow you phone mate?"

"How do you know he's going to be here?" Tracy asked as she peered through the pair of binoculars the Commander had just passed to her.

The Commander glanced back across to the old Western Division Security Department building.

"Logical my dear" he explained, "Garforth has a job to do, and this is where it all started and where he'll want to finish it" he added as Tracy continued to scan the apparently deserted building through the murky light of dusk,

"I can't see anyone there" she commented. The building appeared dark and silent, more or less the way it had been for these past few years, with its flaking concrete walls and many boarded up windows.

Taking the binoculars back from Tracy, the Commander trained them on one part of the building to confirm a suspicion.

"There's a window open, upper floor above the main entrance, it definitely wasn't open yesterday" he pointed out with concern creeping into his still whispered voice.

"Well what do we do now, shouldn't we wait for back up?" Tracy asked looking across at the Commander as he stood up.

"The Chief Super would never grant anything on a whim, especially after the grilling he got from the Administrator General" he replied, before moving off down the side fence of the site, motioning Tracy to stay close in behind him.

Checking that all was clear, the two officers scurried around the back of the site to what appeared to be the old boiler room area, its red brick tower construction contrasting with the tatty neglected pre-fabricated concrete sections of the main building.

"Kitchen entrance" he pointed towards a set of old double doors a short distance ahead. "We'll get in through there".

Being careful to keep their heads down, the pair scurried once again across to the doorway he had indicated where the Commander leant back against the wall alongside and motioned to Tracy to unlock it.

From a pocket Tracy produced a number of screwdrivers and proceeded to pick at the lock. With a sudden click it was open.

"We're in" she confirmed.

Standing up, the Commander opened the door slowly and Tracy stepped inside training her gun first up and then down the dark dusty and abandoned room they had just entered.

"Clear!" she called quietly back to the Commander who also stepped inside and looked around with a torch. As the beam illuminated the interior of the building, it

illuminated years of abandonment and neglect with festoons of gathered cobwebs, dust, broken abandoned furniture and rotting peeling paintwork.

Tracy observed the look on the Commander's face as he looked around, thinking that he looked as though he had just become reacquainted with an old friend.

"Sorry, I was just thinking about all those chips I ate in here over the years!" he replied when he saw her concerned look.

She smiled and as the Commander shone his torch ahead, they proceeded into a dark unlit corridor, the overhead lights long since broken and smashed. Even if they were operable, there was no electricity supply to run them anyway.

As they walked cautiously along with their weapons drawn, Tracy sniffed the air gently and quickly became concerned.

"Can you smell something, like petrol" she asked nervously.

"I can but I'm trying not to think about it!" the Commander replied as he kept his concentration fixed straight ahead.

"Whoa!" he called out suddenly as he thrust his arm across in front of Tracy, stopping her dead in her tracks..

He stooped down and began looking at a piece of metal wire that appeared to stretch across the floor just a few inches from the ground. With the torch he followed it up the side of the wall and into a sealed cupboard door alongside them.

"This place is wired, probably one on each corridor leading to the stairwell" he announced with a worried frown. Tracy stepped back a little as the Commander grabbed a piece of wood and hoisted it forward to trip the wire.

Tracy suddenly screamed with shock as a crossbow bolt leapt out of the dark and embedded itself in the opposite wall just inches away from her.

The Commander philosophically stepped forward and looked closely at the bolt in the wall.

"Nasty!" he commented. Tracy held her hand to her chest as she tried to get her breath back.

"If my mother was here," she said ruefully "she would have said 'You could have somebody's eye out with that!'"

The Commander smiled and when he had made sure she was all right and ready to continue, they moved on towards the bottom of a flight of stairs.

Looking up, the Commander listened intently for a moment before indicating to Tracy using only his hands to be as quiet as possible as they headed upstairs.

Quietness was not to be maintained for very long however when, with a sudden crash, the Commander disappeared from Tracy's immediate line of sight right in front of her.

He had failed to see that the stair supports, already weakened with age, had been further deliberately tampered with, something he only found out about when he fell through the tampered steps and landed in the remains of the old caretakers office below.

Tracy tried to grab him as he fell but she was too late and it was with some trepidation that she shone the torch into the space below. A great sigh of relief came over her as she saw an understandably very miffed Commander looking up at her from below, he was conscious, a little dusty and battered but otherwise fine, or at least so it appeared.

"Are you all right love?" she asked clearly deeply concerned for the Commander's well being. He tried to move but found that his leg was trapped under a piece of masonry.

"I can't move, my leg's trapped" he responded, obviously in some considerable discomfort and pain which he tried without much success to disguise.

The building echoed to a sinister laugh from somewhere upstairs, a laugh that the Commander instantly recognised as if from some long forgotten nightmare.

They both looked about, in full knowledge of the owner of that evil sounding voice.

"Don't worry, I'll get him!" Tracy reassured him as she checked her gun and began to proceed up the stairs.

"No! You'll get yourself killed!" he warned, the concern for someone he really cared about obvious. It was probably not the moment or the situation for sarcasm but Tracy threw some in anyway,

"Well if I should die now, for gawd's sake no flowers, they make me sneeze" she called.

The Commander took a few seconds to realise the strangeness of this last statement but by the time he had, she was gone and he was left alone and helpless.

Entering the upper floor corridor, Tracy swung round the corner and aimed for anyone who might be there, but it was empty with the exception a few up tipped empty filing cabinets and years of accumulated dust.

From behind her, the tinkle of a metallic object like a coin hitting a floor caused her to swing back suddenly to face the door in the end of the corridor and fire twice. The sound of the bullets echoed seemingly forever along the deserted corridors of the abandoned building.

When she went into the room however, there was nobody there except the odd spider and maybe a few mice, there was however an open window leading to the roof ladder.

Garforth surveyed the view from the roof above the main entrance of the building. Looking across over the coastal strip of the county he could make out the lights of cars, streetlights and buildings stretching for many miles across the coastal flood plain right down to the sea.

As he watched the illuminated view becoming ever more distinct as the darkness became more intense, he was suddenly aware of an approaching person, the footsteps crunching on the gravel that covered the flat roof.

"Good Evening Commander!" he called without turning, "I've been expecting you". The voice was cool, calm and collected.

"Oh! My profound apologies!" he added as he turned and saw Tracy there a few feet away from him, a determined look on her face and her gun pointed straight at him.

"Sorry about that" she replied with an almost apologetic shrug of the shoulders "I am afraid that the Commander is temporarily unavailable". Garforth held his hands open in front of him and smirked with false disappointment.

"Oh and I had been so looking forward to meeting him again" he commented menacingly. "Never mind, you're much more attractive!" he added with a sinister grin.

"This is where it all happened you know" he told her as he looked around as though reminiscing. "At the end there was just myself and your good Commander, well Lieutenant in those days of course".

Tracy simply remained silent and kept her gun trained on Garforth as he continued his reminiscing.

"Landed just down there we did" he said pointing to a spot on the ground just in front of the building.

Tracy glanced sideways momentarily to where he indicated before reaffirming her grip on the gun and continuing to hold her sights on Garforth as he started to step towards her.

"And now my dear, a little mathematics for you" he announced. "That" he pointed to the gun she was holding "is if I am not mistaken a six shot weapon" he concluded.

"Now let me see, you fired two bullets just now" he pondered before delivering his conclusion "Which means you have four bullets left!"

Garforth suddenly lunged forward menacingly as if to make a grab for Tracy. She fired directly at him and under the impact of the shot, he wavered momentarily, before, much to Tracy's surprise and shock, he straightened himself up and stepped forward again.

Pulling the trigger again, Tracy fired three further times each time sending Garforth a little further back until he had almost reached the edge of the roof.

He momentarily grimaced before taking off his coat and removing a now battered bullet-proof vest. Casting it aside, he looked down at it with an impressed smile,

"Never leave home without it!" he commented with a chuckle, "Wish it was available when I first did this job!".

Tracy attempted to fire again only to hear a click of an empty gun. Garforth pointed at her with a wagging finger.

"Told you! Basic mathematics you know" he stated menacingly.

"All right then, your move!" Tracy called, expecting the worse.

"As you wish my dear" Garforth responded as he stood by the edge of the roof and produced a small box from his pocket with a switch on it and turned to face Tracy directly.

"Oh by the way, you were right, there definitely is petrol down there," he announced.

With a menacing chuckle he pressed the button, threw the box at Tracy and suddenly leapt off the roof. She ran to the edge of the roof and looked down in disbelief as Garforth got off a large trampoline positioned directly below where he has been standing just a few moments earlier.

As she looked down in shocked disbelief, Garforth took a lit petrol bomb from his minder and casually tossed it onto the trampoline, destroying it almost instantly and cutting off her last possible means of safe escape from the now rapidly burning building.

Seeing that his work was now complete, Garforth looked up, waved and calmly walked away.

"Dam it!" Tracy cried out throwing her empty gun at Garforth in fury. However she now had bigger problems than her quarry, who by now was back in his car and being driven quickly away.

There was a roaring noise coming from below her feet and it was starting to get rather warm. Quickly looking down at the building below her, she could see flames licking the windows of both of the floors immediately underneath her.

Running quickly to the roof ladder, she made her way back inside. Once inside she had to shield herself from the intense heat and smoke that had built up from Garforth's incendiary devices. Coughing and spluttering, the smoke confused her causing her initially to open the wrong door, a sheet of flame rushing out across the ceiling above her and making her duck instinctively.

Realising her mistake she managed to quickly close the door and, still stooped down, tried to head down the stairs.

Halfway down, she reached the hole where the Commander had fallen, except he had now gone, the piece of masonry, which had trapped him, was now discarded to one side.

It was then that the smoke got through to her; her vision became blurred and she collapsed on the stairs, slipping into unconsciousness.

The next thing she saw was the interior of an ambulance, on its way to hospital.

Blearily she tried to focus on the interior of the vehicle and respond to the familiar sounding voice,

"Tracy, are you all right love? Can you hear me?" the voice asked.

She came too more fully at that point and threw off the oxygen mask which she had had forced upon her a few moments previously by the paramedic.

"He's gone" she spluttered incoherently.

"Who's gone, Garforth or me?" the Commander asked quizzically as he leaned over her and looked into her eyes. However she did not have the energy to respond clearly and decided to take the oxygen mask back for a few moments.

The ambulance stopped and the rear doors opened. The next thing she knew, she was being lifted out and taken into a hospital, the lights in the ceiling passing overhead as the trolley on which she was lying, moved down corridors and through doors until she reached a cubicle in the Haychester General Accident & Emergency Department.

For a few moments after the Paramedics had left, she was alone, the noise of a busy hospital, shielded from view by the curtains of the cubicle, filling the air however it was not long before a Doctor arrived to examine her.

"Where's the Commander?" she asked with a look of concern.

"Relax, he's fine, he's just gone to book you in Miss Caverner" the Doctor responded in a voice that was full of calm reassuring soothing tones.

The Doctor finished his initial examination and left the cubicle. Tracy could hear him speak to someone outside before his footsteps disappeared off into the distance.

Moments later, the curtain moved back and the Commander entered, a little smoke blackened but smiling,

"Mines bruising, apparently yours is smoke inhalation," he announced with a smile.

Tracy had pretty much recovered so the Commander helped her to sit upright by lifting the back of the trolley's headrest.

"He got away," she said apologetically.

"I know" the Commander replied with a reassuring hold of her hand, "It doesn't matter at the moment, you're alive and well, that's the most important thing as far as I am concerned".

The Commander looked at his smoke blackened jacket "That's two uniforms I have managed to ruin in twenty-four hours" he joked.

Tracy gave a coughing interrupted giggle and a smile that seemed to light up the cubicle before looking down at her own uniform, it being in similar condition, she didn't have much to be proud about as regards her appearance either.

The hustle and bustle like background noise of the hospital filled the momentary silence that followed as the two looked each other in the eyes for a moment, there was an unspoken conversation occurring but the Commander wasn't entirely sure what it was or what it meant for that matter, but he liked it.

Both of them looked round when suddenly there came the sound of Longton's voice.

"Blimey! What happened to you two?" he asked quizzically.

The driver extinguished the car's headlights as he turned into a small side road, an unmade track of loose gravel and weeds. He was careful to avoid attracting attention from anyone who may have been watching from any of the one or two houses that dotted the nearby landscape.

At the end of the short track was situated a lonely and semi-derelect jetty. Old wooden planking, green with years of algae deposits. The silent and still night air was only broken by the gentle metallic tapping of wind disturbed rigging banging against the masts of the many small yachts and pleasure craft moored in the area.

As the car pulled alongside the jetty, the driver could clearly see a small motor launch, its engine ticking over quietly. Getting out of the rear of the car, Garforth put on a uniform jacket and cap of a Royal Naval officer, before walked business like over to the motor launch. He saluted the Royal Navy seaman who stepped off the boat to take Garforth's bags and help him aboard.

The minder watched from the car as Garforth took a seat at the rear of the boat and waved for them to move off. The isolated darkness and quiet of the night was restored as the car and launch disappeared in opposite directions into the pitch-blackness.

Garforth could make very little out as the launch sped onwards, just a sprinkling of lights on the shore from those few houses whose occupants were still awake. It was after all now nearly two o'clock in the morning.

The splashing of water against the side of the launch and gentle chugging of the motor were the only sounds to break the eerie silence.

Garforth took a moment to reflect on the past couple of days, which had had its good points and its bad points. The Home Secretary, the man who had started all this off as far as he was concerned was behind bars whilst his greatest enemy, the Commander plus his Deputy were probably little more than charred remains in the smoking ruins of the building he had left a couple of hours previously.

He thought of the days ahead, on the high seas heading for some far away place, and he lamented on the fact that he would never return to the UK ever again, at least not if he could help it.

He looked up as he heard the motor being slowed down and the lights of a large ship appear from out of the darkness.

The steely grey bows of the vessel hovered into view, characteristic rust marks of age down the sides. The pilot of the launch drew alongside the ship and pulled in adjacent to a rope ladder that was lying against the tall steel sides of the vessel.

Garforth stood up and grabbed the ladder, making his way up the wooden steps he remembered in his mind the cover name he had been given for this part of the journey, a name he was to state as he set foot on the wooden plated deck of the vast vessel.

In the dark it was difficult to see much of the ship, most of the exterior lights were either broken or switched off, however he did become aware of a figure in naval uniform approaching and saluting.

Garforth coughed momentarily before he presented himself using his new false identity.

"Captain Ian Reynolds" he stated with his best authoritative and naval like accent, "Permission to come aboard?"

"Granted" the officer who had greeted him replied warmly, "Welcome aboard sir, this is a real honour" he continued as he guided Garforth along the deck towards the steps that led up to the bridge.

"The pleasure is all mine, believe me" Garforth muttered under his breath.

Longton led the way out of the main hospital entrance with Tracy and the Commander following close behind.

"You haven't been home yet have you!" the Commander commented with irritation when he realised the dishevelled state that Longton still appeared to be in.

"No sir" Longton explained "I had an idea you see, a sort of inspiration you could call it" he continued as he opened the drivers door of his patrol car.

The Commander got in the front passenger seat whilst Tracy settled down in the back. Longton proceeded to drive off out of the Hospital car park and into the dark streets of Upper Haychester as he explained the reasoning he had come up with.

"Temeraire, the name of the, well whatever it was that you came up with, I figured out what it is".

Tired and in need of sleep, the Commander yawned but tried to pay attention as best he could while Longton continued.

"We had discounted the possibility it was a boat because there was no vessel of that name registered on the Customs Division records right?"

Tracy seated in the back nodded in approximate agreement, her head was still a bit groggy from the smoke earlier, which combined with the late hour of the night, or early hour of the morning depending on how you looked at it, meant she was somewhat tired and not really paying full attention.

"Well" he went on "What we didn't take into account was that those records only record civilian vessels, not Royal Navy ones".

The Commander smacked his forehead in irritation "Of course why didn't we think of it before".

"Yep" Longton continued "its a warship, well a frigate to be precise".

"All right clever clogs" Tracy asked as she leant forwards "Where is this here ship now then?"

Longton turned the car into the driveway leading to the main entrance of the Department building, now quiet and dark, as most of the staff with the exception of the duty night shift had gone home for the night several hours previously.

"HMS Temeraire has been rendered surplus to requirements so the Navy has sold it to some foreign government, a remote island in the Pacific Ocean I think" Longton replied. "Anyway it left Portsmouth on the overnight high tide about an hour ago" .

"If Garforth is on that boat and goes outside of National territorial waters, we'll never get him" Tracy responded "and it's a pretty good chance that the destination of him and that boat doesn't have any extradition treaty neither".

As they got out of the car the Commander began an assessment in his mind of what they required. Reaching the main office, Tracy turned on the lights and the Commander sat down behind Janice's desk and started looking through her filodex.

Tracy got a pen and paper whilst Longton went off into the darkened building in search of some urgently required coffee.

"Right" the Commander announced "We need a number of balls to be set in motion" he turned to Tracy and handed her a card with two phone numbers on it.

"Call the Coastguard station, Solent area and find out where that boat is right now, which way it is headed and how fast it's going". Tracy nodded and took the card from him, before picking up the nearby telephone.

"I meanwhile" the Commander continued "will have to wake up someone from the Customs & Excise division as well as the Military Police".

He let out a sigh and rubbed his eyes. Even a workaholic like the Commander sometimes felt tired, especially after the last couple of day's activities.

"I just love cross departmental operations!" he commented sarcastically.

By the time Longton had returned with three hot steaming mugs of coffee, Tracy and the Commander were ready to go.

"That ship isn't too far away fortunately" she announced looking at her pad for reference. The Commander looked up at the clock on the wall anxiously as he gulped down the black coffee with five sugars whilst trying not to scald himself.

"I just remembered I hate coffee" he then commented as he looked despondently into the bottom of the now empty cup. Tracy giggled as the three officers left the office, Longton switching off the lights as they went.

As the Commander pulled up on the dockside quay, a stout gentleman in immaculately presented military uniform stepped forward from the long shadows. The Commander got out and shook him warmly by the hand.

"Hello Cliff, good to see you" the Commander greeted the gentleman with a warm shake of the hands as Tracy and Longton joined them.

"Tracy, Longton I would like you to meet Sergeant Major Clifford Tattersall, Military Police. As we are technically about to set foot on naval territory, its his jurisdiction" he explained.

Together they walked over to the Customs Division patrol boat SDV Phantom moored adjacent to the quay. As Longton, Tracy and Tattersall started to climb aboard, a Customs Division Officer appeared on deck.

"Commander Louise Sheldon, Head of Division sends her regards and this boat and in addition the hope that she will one day get the pleasure of waking you up at two thirty in the morning for a favour sir!" the officer announced cheerily.

"Go get him lass" the Commander told Tracy.

"You're not coming?" she asked surprised.

"I have this problem with boats" he replied slightly reluctantly clearly none too willing to reveal any more behind his decision. Thankfully Tracy, realising time was pressing, did not pursue her curiosity and gave the nod to cast off as the Commander, standing alone on the quayside waved off the boat as it disappeared into the gloom.

As it moved off into the dark, he focused on Tracy as she looked back, her face expressing a feeling of slight sadness at seeing the Commander alone in the dark on the quayside. However he had good reason for staying behind, as one thing the Commander most certainly did not possess was a good set of sea legs so he pulled rank and elected to stay firmly on dry land.

"Solent Coastguard, Solent Coastguard, calling Security Department Vessel Phantom, over" came the voice over the radio. The Customs division officer piloting the boat indicated to Tracy to answer it. She got up, walked forward and picked up the handset.

"SDV Phantom, SDV Phantom, Solent Coastguard, receiving loud and clear over" she responded.

"Solent Coastguard, SDV Phantom, be aware vessel Temeraire is currently positioned five miles nautical south-south-west of your current position. She has now moved off on a bearing of 195 degrees magnetic at an average speed of eight knots over".

"All received thank you" Tracy replied. She turned to Longton who had noted down the details and with the assistance of Tattersall, had begun to plot them onto a map of the area.

"Just about here" Longton called pointing at an area of the map. Tracy nodded in understanding, communication being difficult with the noise of the engine and the splashing of waves against the side of the speeding vessel.

"It is good of the Royal Navy to come and see the old girl off" the officer on the bridge of the Temeraire commented. Garforth, still keeping up his cover responded using the story he had been given by Sharman.

"Well this ship is still the property of the Royal Navy until we reach her new home you know, it's standard practice to have a representative aboard, so I volunteered" he explained convincingly and with plausibility.

The officer nodded as Garforth looked ahead out through the bridge windows into the cold black night in the English Channel. His thoughts turned to relaxing on some far flung desert island, sipping cocktails and counting all the money he had blackmailed out of both the Home Secretary for this latest incident plus the Government for the original misdemeanours of fourteen years earlier.

The throbbing of the ships engines continued as it made its way serenely through the waters of the Channel. The calmness of the sea seemed to add to the quiet almost

ghostly atmosphere, which Garforth soaked up as he stepped outside to view the night, yawning as he did so.

Leaning forward onto a railing, he suddenly became aware of the sound of another vessel approaching. As he turned round to identify the source of the sound, he was suddenly struck in the eyes by a powerful searchlight.

“HMS Temeraire, this is the Security Department Vessel Phantom, you are ordered to heave to and drop anchor immediately and prepare to be boarded!” Tracy called through a loud hailer.

Garforth quickly realised that he had to act quickly if he was to avoid capture.

Looking down the side of the ship to see the wash from the bows diminish as the ship began to slow, he knew that his time to act was short.

Tracy repeated her announcement once again as Garforth ran across to the opposite side of the ship and down the starboard side, his feet clanging on the metal decking.

At the rear of the ship were situated a couple of motorised inflatable dinghy's that were intended for use by the small skeleton crew in case of emergency.

On the opposite port side, Tracy, Tattersall, Longton and the Customs Officer had boarded by way of a rope ladder that the crew threw over. The officers split up, Tracy making her way to the rear of the ship whilst the others headed for the bridge.

It was as she reached the stern of the ship she suddenly heard the starting up of an outboard motor.

"Oh no, not again" she cried out as she saw Garforth, waving away cheerily, speed off into the darkness of the night.

Garforth's minder was just finishing off a bacon sandwich and coffee from an all night cafe when his mobile rang.

The call took him by surprise but he decided he should answer it anyway. He was even more surprised by who was calling.

“Head for Dolphin Island Wharf as fast as you can!” Garforth called. He was having trouble however controlling the small boat with one hand and holding the phone to his ear with the other. “It’s all gone belly up, we need plan ‘B’ and bring some appropriate hardware”.

“Right boss” the minder responded as he got back in the car.

“Be quick” Garforth urged, “If little Miss Caverner survived my little barbeque party, you can bet the Commander is around somewhere”.

The minder started the engine but before he drove away, he took a rifle from the behind the passenger seat, checked it, placed it alongside him on the seat. Then with the crunch of tyres on loose gravel, he sped away.

“This is the BBC World Service, the time is 4 o’clock” announced the newsreader over the radio in the Commander’s car.

“The UK Government has announced that it will be making a statement later this morning on the mysterious circumstances surrounding the arrest of the Home Secretary, the Right Honourable Trevor Sharman MP” the radio continued with a typically authoritative and reassuring BBC tone.

“The Security Department Administrator General, Sir Charles Greening, would only confirm last night that a member of Her Majesty’s Government was being held by senior officers at Haychester in Sussex in connection with possible events and crimes from both the last week and also fourteen years ago, including the escape earlier this week of four highly dangerous prisoners from a prison van in Hampshire. The Home Secretary was arrested in the House of Commons yesterday after escaping capture live on BBC News 24. We will be returning to this news item in depth later in the program”

The Commander was dozing off in the front seat of the car. As the news broadcast finished and the shipping forecast came on he looked at his watch,

"Tracy love, where the hell are you" he muttered to himself seeing that the time was now quarter past four.

His attention became alerted when he heard in the distance the sound of a boat approaching the nearby key. Assuming it to be the SDV Phantom returning, he got out of the car and walked over in the direction of the quay. However when he reached the water’s edge, he was surprised to find an inflatable dingy there, no sign of any occupants at all.

As he continued to look down over the quayside at the small craft he suddenly heard a voice behind him that filled him with dread.

"Hello Commander, for someone who was supposed to have been barbecued by now your looking remarkably well!"

"Mr Garforth, Good evening" the Commander calmly replied as he turned slowly to face his nemesis whilst placing a hand down by his holster.

"Rats!" he muttered quietly to himself when he then realised his gun was in the car some distance away.

Garforth looked at the Commander and chuckled quietly "You know, none of this would have happened if you had done the decent thing and died!" he looked across at the empty holster by the Commander's side.

"How is it" he continued "that whenever we meet you never seem to have any bullets? Your nice lass Tracy was the same earlier, not enough bullets either you know!" he added in a sinister voice.

There was no-one around except the two men on the quay, just a couple of street lights illuminating the scene, the silence of the night carrying their voices quite some distance out to sea behind them.

"I want to know something" the Commander asked "Why did you not kill the other three of us when you or your goons had the chance".

"Oh you mean your three fellow apocalyptic Commanders?!?" Garforth responded,

"That was just to keep Sharman in the dark he explained. "He thought I wanted to finish off the job he commissioned me to do when all along, all I really wanted to do was kill you!"

"Oh I'm honoured".

Garforth paused to consider something for a few moments "You know, maybe I should add that nice little lady of yours to my personal hit list".

The Commander became unusually defensive "Touch Tracy and I swear I'll have to make your life a permanent nightmare!" he warned, his determination clear.

"Whoa!! You do like her don't you?" Garforth responded almost surprised.

"Anyway" he continued, "I don't have time for chit-chat, you know, people to see, travel plans to arrange so I must dash!"

The Commander quickly realised his time was running out. "Before I go, its time I showed you how these little meetings of ours should go" Garforth announced.

Suddenly, he pulled a gun, pointed and fired two shots. The Commander instantly fell to the ground, no word spoken, no defence offered.

"COMMANDER!" Tracy yelled from the approaching vessel as she saw the Commander slump apparently dead to the ground just a hundred yards away. She looked around to gauge the distance between the boat and the land and decided to swim for it.

Longton tried to stop her as she leapt over the side into the water but he was too late. She quickly swam to the quayside and hauled herself up onto dry land.

Garforth looked up to see the boat docking alongside the quay. Realising there was a real danger that he was about to be captured once again, he turned to run.

When he turned to make good his escape, he suddenly came face to face with a very soggy and extremely angry Tracy and was sufficiently surprised enough not to be able offer any defence against the heavy blow she rapidly administered to his midriff.

As Garforth doubled over in pain, Tracy made sure of her man by striking him across the face and kicking him hard in the crutch.

Garforth bounced off the patrol car's side window and crashed to the ground, rendering him unconscious almost immediately.

Longton came running over and took charge of the unconscious Garforth while Tracy ran over to the Commander lying on the ground a few yards away.

"GET AN AMBULANCE!" she screamed, holding the Commander in her arms desperately looking for some sign of life whilst trying to suppress her tears of emotion.

Tattersall collected the radio from the patrol car and began to call for help whilst Tracy looked into the Commander's eyes. She was surprised, shocked and yet delighted when she heard him start to mumble rather incoherently.

"Tracy love, do you mind, I would like to get this vest off!" he muttered with a grimace.

Tracy looked puzzled for a moment before she examined the Commander more closely. Beneath his uniform jacket she discovered he was wearing a bullet-proof vest for what must have been the first time in his entire career.

"Are you all right?" Tracy asked, delighted but still cautious as the Commander still appeared groggy from the shock of the bullet impacts.

He vaguely nodded and Tracy hugged him, grateful that he had not been taken from her, an outcome that seemed likely when she saw Garforth shoot him just moments earlier.

Suddenly the Commander perked up, reacting quickly as the clonk of a car door came from behind Tracy and he made out the shape of a figure approaching from within the darkness.

Quickly he grabbed Tracy's gun from her side holster, pushed her aside and fired straight ahead, hitting and wounding the minder who was approaching with a rifle aimed straight at Tracy's back.

Tattersall ran over and restrained the injured minder, kicking the gun away and holding him down.

With Tracy's assistance, the Commander sat up and surveyed the scene, his eyes coming to alight on the unconscious Garforth a few feet away.

"Blimey, what hit him?" he muttered still a little incoherently. Tracy looked round and smiled as Longton joined them,

"She did" he replied as he pointed to Tracy. "Give Mike Tyson a run for his money she could!" he added jokingly.

Still grimacing in pain, the Commander asked to stand up, Tracy and Tattersall assisting him over to the patrol car as an ambulance and further Department vehicles arrived.

Tattersall offered a hip flask to the Commander, "This'll help," he said as Tracy administered. He gulped down a mouthful of the contents, thanked them both and looked across to Garforth who was now standing, handcuffed to Longton and another officer.

"Is he fit to interview?" the Commander asked, an ambulance man who had looked Garforth over turned to him and gave the opinion that he was.

"Tracy!" the Commander ordered, "Read the gentleman his rights!"

All was quiet in the custody area as the Commander, who was still grimacing slightly entered with Tracy, Longton and Garforth.

The Duty Custody Officer looked up from her clipboard when she heard the door open, and observed the small group make its way down the clinically clean modern corridor towards her desk.

Tracy began to go through the details for the record. "This is James Edward Garforth, who is charged with escape from prison custody, plus additional charges of theft, murder, blackmail, impersonating a member of the Royal Navy and a whole lot of other minor charges too numerous to mention right now".

The Commander limped over and looked Garforth straight in the eye as best he could with the height difference of nearly five inches between the two men.

"Don't suppose you want a lawyer do you?" the Commander asked with a sarcastic tone, Garforth simply glared at both him and Tracy.

"I have one word I want you to keep in mind until we meet again" Garforth calmly responded.

"Oh?"

"Omega" he added "In the meantime, you'll keep, See you soon!" his voice never wavering from its controlled quiet and sinister tone.

A deep evil laugh echoed down the corridor as he was led away to the cells, the laugh only being silenced suddenly by the loud clang of the heavy metal cell door closing firmly.

The Commander turned to leave, but he had trouble walking so Tracy offered her shoulder for support. As they left, he noticed a prisoner lying asleep in the corner awaiting processing. He stopped and turned to the officer sitting next to him.

"What's he in here for?" he asked quizzically, the officer looked a little uncomfortable, indeed embarrassed at the response.

"Taking and driving away of a vehicle, namely one elephant, possession of a dangerous animal, fouling of the Queen's highway, namely elephant dung and drunk in charge of an elephant on the Queen's highway Sir".

The Commander just looked on surprised and shook his head whilst Tracy again smiled and giggled in that characteristic way that seemed to epitomise her whole character. Stepping out into the cold night air, they looked up at the first rays of dawn rising over the horizon. Tracy looked around the quiet Security Department site yawning quite loudly until suddenly a peculiar thought occurred to her.

"Where do you suppose Traffic Division have parked that elephant?" she asked.

Tracy was not quite sure if the reactions of the residents of the City were admiration at her new Security Department motorbike, a distinctive Harley Davidson in standard Department vehicle red but with plenty of chrome work catching the sunlight, or they were just relieved she was now driving a form of transport on which she was a lot safer.

The distinctive engine note stopped when she parked outside her building on the Security Department site, whereupon she removed her helmet, which she perched on the seat, before removing a folder of papers from the left side pannier, itself emblazoned with a gold and blue version of the Department crest.

With a slight mutter of irritation, she removed a dead fly from the otherwise spotless windscreen, before glancing down at the number plate. 'S402 DCD', she had requested that vehicle registration number so it was consecutive with the Commander's car. It seemed appropriate somehow.

Seeing in the distance another unwary visitor become impaled on the automatic doors, she decided to take a detour and enter by the normal doors further down the front of the building.

It was as she was about to enter the Commander's office that she heard the voice of Chief Superintendent Edwards. As usual he did not sound happy, mind you, she thought to herself, he never did.

“You’ve seen the papers have you?” Edwards asked, waving a pile of newspapers at the Commander. The Chief Superintendent proceeded to throw them on the desk upon which the Commander started to read through the headlines.

“Home Secretary Arrested In Hainault Enquiry - The Times, BBC Nicked 24 - The Sun, Serves Him Right For Giving Planning Permission To That Gravel Pit - Haychester Gazette”.

“An odd mixture I must say” he commented with a sigh.

“Also” Edwards added “you and Tracy are now officially the heroes of the hour, which means that the Administrator General wants you two at the Annual Dinner and Dance”.

The Commander began to stammer a protest but found himself cut off abruptly.

"I'm sorry Commander but this order comes from the very heights of the management" Edwards insisted. "You're going whether you like it or not!" Edwards waved the official memo from the Administrator General in front of the Commander, seated behind his desk, as if to emphasise the point..

"How high up?" the Commander asked reluctantly.

"About two floors above God and left at the coffee machine!"

"But I'm supposed to be on duty tonight, so is every person in this entire section now I come to think of it!" the Commander threw a ball point pen onto his desk as if to emphasise his irritation.

Edwards sat down and tried to remonstrate with the Commander.

"I am afraid your section's overtime scam has been rumbled, all overtime tonight has been cancelled and you" he pointed straight at the Commander "are going to the official dinner and dance in" he paused as he looked up at the clock on the wall "twenty minutes!" Edwards turned to leave only to meet Tracy coming in.

"You're going" Edwards reaffirmed. Tracy sniggered a bit but her face turned to slight shock as Edwards then turned back to her, “And so are you!” he added before promptly leaving, closing the door firmly behind him.

"What have you got there", the Commander asked as he stood up and made his way reluctantly over to a locker in the corner of his office. Tracy placed the papers carefully on the desk with a pen.

"Sign here" she pointed to a part of the form "and the High Security Prison at Helmlhorpe will entertain Garforth for the rest of his life".

The Commander turned quickly and signed on the dotted line with obvious enthusiasm.

"Its probably not the last we've heard of him, but it'll do for now" he said as he signed the paper.

"How's the motorbike?" he enquired as he made doubly sure his signature was in the right place on the form.

"The *Harley* is fine thank you" Tracy replied with a beaming smile, "very good at squeezing through pedestrian subways in rush hour!"

The Commander paused for a moment with a slightly worried frown when he heard that but then assumed she was joking, which of course she wasn't.

"Looks like we've got a dinner and dance to go to sir" Tracy announced. The Commander opened the locker and removed his dress uniform from it, encased in a plastic cover.

"You better change into yours, somehow the standard Department motorbike clobber may not go down well with the chief" he replied looking slightly despondently down at his own uniform.

"Then" he added. "you can come and help me get into this thing, I could have sworn the damm thing has shrunk".

As Tracy opened the communicating door between the two offices she decided to be bold and add a condition to the Commander's request.

"I'll help you if you promise me the first dance!".

The Commander just looked up still slightly depressed, however this offer had a certain appeal about it. "Done!" he replied.

The dance and dinner had already started as Tracy paused in the main entrance of the Security Department complex, dressed in her full dress uniform complete with gold braiding and medals proudly on display.

The event was taking place in the main hall on the first floor above main reception. Reaching the reception desk she paused, listening to the sounds of music and conversation filtering down from above.

Upon hearing approaching footsteps from behind her, she turned around to see the Commander jogging, in fact almost limping up the corridor. He too was in his full dress uniform, but his general expression was one of a man who was feeling like a fish out of water. Tracy also noticed that he appeared to be holding something behind his back.

"You look nice!" she commented as the Commander stopped alongside.

They both waved to Longton and his wife as they came in the front entrance and made their way up the stairs. When they were out of sight Tracy looked down at the Commanders sword that hung from its gold holster on his belt.

"Where did you get that?" she asked.

"What this?" he replied glancing at the engraved sword, "All officers of Divisional Command rank and above have one of these in this division" he explained.

He brought his left hand from behind his back and produced a long case, opening it along its length, he held in front of him facing Tracy.

"This one is yours, *Commander Caverner*" he added with a smile.

Her eyes full of sudden overwhelming delight, Tracy took the sword from the case and looked at it before hugging the Commander, much to the amusement of Longton and his wife who were discreetly observing them from the overhead balcony.

"Your promotion was confirmed this afternoon on the personal joint recommendations of Chief Superintendent Edwards, your old Commanding Officer in Hampshire and above all, myself," he added.

Tracy was speechless as the Commander helped her attach the sword to her belt. "There. Also you'll also need these" he added taking a set of Commander's epaulettes from his pocket and proceeding to change her shoulder insignia.

When he was satisfied that her uniform was correct he nodded to her and smiled. It was then that his eye caught something unusual above the reception desk.

"What the" he began to exclaim and pointed upwards with bemusement. "There's a bullet hole in the ceiling" he announced. Tracy glanced round and pretended not to know anything about it

"Oh yeah, so there is" she replied as innocently as she could. "Probably mice I expect!"

Quickly changing the subject she proffered her arm to the Commander.

"So are you going to escort me to the ball?" she asked proffering her arm.

The Commander looked at her and wondered whether he should be having the feelings he was having towards her. That sort of thing was definitely not his area of expertise so he decided to put them aside and just her arm in his.

"I'd would be deeply honoured" he replied as they made their way up the stairs.

The hall was originally designed to be a lecture theatre, hence the characteristic inverted design of its roof. From the wooden beams and panelling, the administration section had made a good effort of decorating the hall with trailing plants and the air was filled with chatter and the sound of the Department of Security Brass Band.

The gathered guests came from across the full spectrum of the Department's operations. All were dressed in full dress uniform, and many seemed to be dreading

the inevitable speeches that many wished they could avoid at all costs later in the evening.

Longton had had a busy day rounding up all those involved in the recent recapture of Garforth, the three other 'Commanders of The Apocalypse', Tracy's sister Jennifer, plus himself and his wife Caroline.

This group were positioned in a corner over by the stage, initially trying to avoid the top brass and their legendary boring conversations.

All of them looked up and observed with surprise as they saw the Commander and Tracy enter arm in arm.

"Well, well, well!" Jennifer Caverner muttered, Longton too was considering his response.

"Is anyone opening a book on those two" he asked around casually.

As the two came over Jennifer greeted her sister with a hug, "Hello sis, heard your driving hasn't improved!" she said jokingly. The Commander greeted the others present amid a friendly exchange of greetings.

Holroyd stepped over to the Commander, joined by Farmer and Fraser, "I hear you've locked up Garforth for good then" he said, a relieved tone in his voice, which was echoed by the expressions of the other two.

"Aye, although I don't know how long it'll be before he pops up again" the Commander replied.

"Excuse me" Tracy interrupted and turned to the Commander, "I distinctively remember something about promising me the first dance".

The Commander nodded in apprehensive admittance while those present who knew him well looked on in an equally apprehensive frame of mind, knowing full well that the Commander's dancing skills were as good as Tracy driving on four wheels.

He made his excuses to those present before taking Tracy and proceeding to sweep out ever so slightly unevenly across the dance floor.

Tracy smiled and looked straight into the Commander's eyes, she was at this moment as happy as was he, well as much as he could be when not on duty, always his preferred way of passing the time, maybe that is until now.

"I'll give it twelve months" Longton's wife Caroline commented philosophically, as she observed the couple from across the hall., a statement that caused Jennifer and Longton to look across at her with puzzled expressions.

"Err twelve months until what?" Longton asked bemused.

"Well isn't it obvious" Caroline pointed across the hall, "Those two are up the aisle, I tell you there is love in the air!"

Jennifer looked, and then smiled in the way only a twin sister could at the thought of the happiness of her opposite twin. She could see it instantly now someone had actually said it. Longton on the other hand, needed more convincing, after all the words 'The Commander' and 'love' in the same sentence were, as far as he could recall, totally unheard of.

"Nahhh, I can't believe it!" he responded after a few moments thought.

"Ten quid on it..." his wife added, knowing full well that the Officer Sweepstake King that was her Husband would not be able to resist the challenge.

"Done" he replied, another office sweepstake was underway although this one could, he thought be a little less predictable.

"Put me down for eleven months, I think she's got a point," Holroyd added looking on "They definitely seemed to be falling for each other".

"Trouble is." Longton added with a slightly worried frown, "I don't think either of those two have a clue what the blazes they should do about it".

As they spun around, the Commander caught sight of something odd through the window over Tracy's shoulder. He stopped dancing and stared incredulously ahead. Tracy puzzled by his expression also turned, indeed by now almost the entire room was moving towards the front windows which looked out over the front entrance and driveway of the Security Department Site.

"Tracy" the Commander asked curiously, "is it me being blinded by the sight of your beauty and warmth in front of me, or" he paused momentarily and pointed ahead "is there really an elephant running up the drive with the Administrator General chasing after it".

Tracy looked on as she saw the large lumbering animal make a leap for freedom in the general direction of central Haychester before turning back to the Commander.

"You're with me and off duty, I shouldn't worry about it" she replied.

"Ah he's got it" Longton called as he saw several people manage to stop the rampaging animal before it reached the main road. Everyone looking on cheered so loudly that those restraining the animal some two hundred yards away, decided to take a bow in acknowledgement.

Longton and the others turned away from the windows to see that the Commander and Tracy had disappeared from view.

"Now where the hell did those two go to?" Jennifer asked as she looked around the room to no avail.

The Commander held open the door as the two stepped out into the pleasant evening air outside the front entrance. By now the elephant and its captors had moved on and they were alone. A couple of cars and a large blue van passing along the nearby ring road, where the only signs of life out there in the darkness of the warm late summer evening.

The Commander looked into Tracy's eyes, he had never felt like this about anyone before. Somehow, the pair were made for each other, and there were gasps of shock from those in the hall above them as the couple just went with their instincts, put their arms around each other and kissed.

"Bloody hell!" Caroline Longton murmured, almost dropping her glass of wine in shock "Old stone heart has finally cracked!"

"That's it" Longton added, "I'm going to start to believing in miracles!" whilst Edwards quickly leapt forward to catch Tracy's sister who nearly fainted.

"I've been meaning to do that for the last two days" the Commander announced in a soft, almost emotional voice.

"And I've been waiting for you to do that for the past two days!". Tracy replied with a beaming smile of pure happiness as she tightened her grip around him.

They kissed again. Primarily because they wanted to, but also to confirm the thoughts of those watching above just in case they didn't believe what they saw the first time round.

However their moment of closeness was suddenly interrupted by a bleeping noise, whereupon the Commander looked down with a slight dismay at his pager. Normally he would have jumped at the chance to get away from a formal function, but not this time.

"You wouldn't read about it would you!" he responded as he read the message flashed on his pager.

Tracy's reaction was immediate. "You're going nowhere, you are off duty and staying right here with me," she insisted, strengthening her grip on the Commander almost to point of strangulation.

She looked around, before taking the Commander's pager and tossing it up at the open windows above where it was caught by Longton.

"Someone get this will they" Tracy called up, "We're off duty!"

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To be continued.....