

MARYLEBONE

Security Novels Series Episode XII



John M Upton

The Episodes of the Security Novels Series:

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Marylebone

Baroness Jacqueline de Wente, the Secretary of State for the UK Government's Justice Department had a distinctly worried look about her as she left New Scotland Yard and climbed into the back of her official ministerial car.

"Now there goes someone with a lot on her mind" Tracy Caverner, Divisional Commander of the Metropolitan Division of the National Security & Police Service commented to her husband, the Regional Administrator General of the service as they observed the Justice Minister's car speed off up Broadway heading in the direction of central Westminster itself.

"Someone probably just discovered another cock up at the Home Office" the Commander commented wryly "They haven't had one for nearly a week so they are a tad overdue."

"Tell me" Jack Thornton, a twelve year old lad who through a set of complicated circumstances had now become part of their family "Is it being high ranking law enforcement officers that makes you both cynical or some form of natural talent?"

"General rule of thumb usually says the higher up in the Service you go" the Commander confirmed "The more no neck talent less politicians you have to deal with and in direct proportion the more cynical you get."

Tracy was indeed correct as it turned out, the Justice Minister did indeed have something on her mind. This was a situation that began the moment she had bumped into Jack with his new foster parents in the reception area of New Scotland Yard some ten minutes previously.

As her ministerial car proceeded around Parliament Square, her mobile telephone rang and with some reluctance once she saw the number of the caller, she answered it.

"Hello?" she called "Yes it was definitely the late Philip Thornton's son, no doubt about it" she confirmed.

"Is the meeting set?" she enquired.

There was a brief pause as the caller confirmed the details during which the Justice Minister listened intently as if her life depended upon it.

"Very well" she confirmed "Location green in one hour."

With the call concluded, the Justice Minister considered her options for a few moments before leaning forward.

"Clive" she called to her regular driver "Back to the office quickly please."

"Welcome to the family" the Commander declared as along with Tracy he raised his glass to Jack in the restaurant where they were having lunch.

"Thank you" Jack responded "Of course you do realise I am missing a day of school today don't you?"

"Given the circumstances I think this can be allowed this once" Tracy responded.

"So how is this going to work?" Jack asked "I like to know where I am. That comes of having spent two years living off my own wits."

"Well you can have the spare bedroom" the Commander confirmed "It needs some decorating but you are welcome to choose how you want it."

"And no questions asked?" Jack asked.

"I figure that if you want to talk about anything" the Commander concluded "You will get to it in your own time."

"Great" Jack confirmed "Let's eat" he declared.

The security guard at the main entrance allowed the Justice Minister in through the imposing doorway of the extremely anonymous office building without any fuss, question or impediment.

Once inside, she was escorted through the seemingly empty but thoroughly modernised building to a set of large opaque glass doors that when opened, revealed a formal boardroom dominated by a large glass table around which were sat a number of well turned out individuals awaiting patiently her arrival.

"Ah Ms de Wente" the most senior looking man present declared as she entered the room "We have been expecting you. Would you care for a drink?"

"Not right now thank you Number Three" the Justice Minister confirmed as she took her seat at the table "I cannot stay long, matters of state to attend to, you know how it is."

"Indeed I do" Number Three confirmed confidently.

"To business then" de Wente declared as she prepared to explain the reason for the swift calling of this unscheduled meeting.

"As this committee is aware, two years ago we dealt with a potential threat to the integrity of our organisation when a senior member of the Foreign Office went 'off message' and threatened to expose our operations before we were ready" she explained.

"And very successfully if I recall" one of the others recalled.

"With just two problems arising from that" de Wente continued "After the termination warrant had been executed and the information enclosure team had finished their work, we were never able to find either the target's briefcase containing his files or his only remaining member of his family, both of which we know for a fact were in the vehicle when our representatives interceded."

"Which I assume brings us to the point of this little gathering?" Number Three asked.

"Indeed" de Wente confirmed "A little over one hour ago, the young man in question appeared on our radar for the first time since that night."

"Has this been confirmed?" one of the others asked.

"Our usual sources have been successful in obtaining CCTV footage which appears to match our own records" Number Three confirmed as he passed around printouts of stills of young Jack Thornton taken just hours earlier inside New Scotland Yard.

"That's our boy" one of the others confirmed as she checked this new image against an old record being displayed on a laptop computer.

"And looking in rude health for someone who officially has been dead for two years" Number Three agreed "It is impressive that he has managed to avoid appearing on the grid for all this time."

"If he possesses those missing files" de Wente continued "then he poses a clear and present danger to this organisation, which brings me on to the next major problem."

"The Regional Administrator General" Number Three remarked "How does our beloved Commander fit into young Jack's life?"

"He and his wife Tracy have just adopted him" de Wente explained "And that means potentially he could find out about our little group before we are ready to go online."

"Ah..." Number Three remarked "Very noble and humanitarian of him to help a lost sheep in this way but from our point of view a potential obstacle to our unilateral objectives."

"That is what I thought" de Wente agreed "Which is why I felt it necessary to bring this to the central committee's attention as soon as possible."

"You have done well" Number Three agreed "Very well, this is what we shall do. Number Nine, have your team do a full work up on little friend Jack here, the Commander, his close associates and establish exactly what he knows, is likely to find out and provide us with a full threat assessment for tomorrow."

"It's going to be tricky" Number Nine remarked "You don't just waltz into the Commander's ball park uninvited unless you have a lot of protection."

"I appreciate that this will be difficult" Number Three agreed "However these are difficult times."

"What about Number Seven?" de Wente asked "If we do need to bring our timetable forward significantly then we will need him, his talents and resources."

"Indeed we will" Number Three agreed "Best get him moved quickly."

"I'll go and see him in the morning and in the meantime get the paperwork started" de Wente confirmed as she gathered together her papers.

"In which case if that is all" Number Three declared as he rose from the table "I will brief the Chief and we shall meet again here in exactly twenty four hours."

As the committee members rose and began to file out of the room under the watchful eye of Number Three, he called upon one of them.

"Number Eight, could you remain a moment please?" he called causing the youngest member of the group to pause and wait until everyone else had left and the door was firmly closed.

"Are our suspicions about our contact Number Eighteen as worrying as we feared?" Number Three discreetly asked.

"It would appear so" Number Eight confirmed with a hint of regret "As a precaution I took the liberty of excluding him from our current discussions."

"Very wise" Number Three agreed "I have already consulted with both One and Two on this matter and they both feel it is time this potential problem went away before it develops further" he passed across a signed document from his inside jacket pocket "The warrant has been issued. It needs to be today and cleanly, I know I can count on you."

"Consider it done Sir" Number Eight confirmed before turning smartly on his heels and leaving.

The busy central London thoroughfare of Oxford Street was always a chaotic place at the best of times but today with good weather and it being the height of the tourist season meant the shopping street was even busier than usual.

In a side street off of Oxford Street, near the entrance to Bond Street tube station it was a bit quieter as a tall man in his mid thirties left what appeared on the outside to be a solicitor's office carrying a dark leather folder.

Blending into the crowds, the man went completely unnoticed as he walked to the end of the side street before entering Bond Street Underground Station.

He took the short flight of steps down into the ticket hall and passed through the barriers before starting down the escalators that led down to the Central and Jubilee lines.

As he stepped onto the escalator however, two men who had been standing over by the side wall of the ticket hall as if waiting for something or someone specific, duly followed, lining up behind him as they descended.

Approximately two thirds of the way down however, the two men stepped out and passed the man, heading down the left hand side by foot and soon disappeared into the crowds at the bottom.

Moments later the sound of screaming shrieked through the station passageways as the man reached the bottom of the escalator and fell forward onto his face revealing a knife firmly embedded in his back.

Amidst the panic and horror as the public gathered around the body, some coming forward to help, others transfixed by the horrific sight before them, one of the on duty station staff came forward, pressing the emergency stop button on the escalator to try and prevent the crush of people that was building up from getting any worse.

"Let me through please" the staff member called before reaching the body and kneeling down to check for any signs of life.

A check quickly revealed that whoever the victim was, he had died instantly upon being stabbed and there was nothing anyone could do for him now.

"Control, this is Brian at the bottom of escalator three" the staff member called into his radio "We've got a dead stabbing victim down here, shut down the station and call the Old Bill please."

"Structuring demand responsive enforcement for a customer focused service" the Commander read from the front cover of the latest ideas briefing document to come from the Home Office "What a load of..."

"Sounds riveting love" Tracy remarked as she entered the Commander's office "How many daft directives is that this week?"

"Only three" the Commander confirmed with a wry smile "Something must be up over there."

"Never a good sign" Tracy admitted.

"Well I think I have had enough of that" the Commander declared as he tossed the pointless document in the bin alongside his desk "So what can I do for you my dear?"

"Just thought I would let you know Fuller is on babysitting duty" Tracy informed him.

"Eh?" the Commander responded with a slightly confused expression.

"Our newly adopted son Jack?" Tracy reminded him.

"Oh yes" the Commander remembered "I have to admit it's a bit odd suddenly finding ourselves parents."

"Yes, it is a bit of a culture shock isn't it?" Tracy admitted "And he hasn't even reached his new home yet."

At that moment they were interrupted by the telephone ringing which the Commander reluctantly leaned across the desk to answer.

"Yes?" he answered as politely as he could.

"Sir Richard Crowthorne on the scrambler for you Sir" the P.A. confirmed.

"Thank you" the Commander responded "Put him through."

"Eddie" Sir Richard, head of the National Anti-Terrorism Committee and former head of operations for MI5 called with a ominous tone.

"Uh-oh" the Commander remarked "You only ever call me Eddie if there is serious trouble looming."

"Are you alone?" Sir Richard asked.

"Tracy is here with me but that's all" the Commander confirmed as he looked up to his wife who had a look of concern on her.

"Can you meet me outside Bond Street Tube in fifteen minutes?" Sir Richard enquired "There is something I need to show you and discuss as a matter of urgency."

"Yes, sure" the Commander responded "What's all this about."

"Not over the telephone" Sir Richard evasively explained "Not even via scrambler."

"Very well, if you insist" the Commander agreed "I'm on the way."

"What was all that about?" Tracy asked, sensing that something that almost certainly spelt trouble was seemingly brewing upon the horizon.

"I have no idea love" the Commander was forced to admit with a shrug of the shoulders as he got up from behind his desk.

"We've only just finished putting out the flames from the last crisis" Tracy remarked.

"I'm sure its nothing to worry about love" the Commander reassured her with a kiss before hearing for the office door.

"Will you be home on time tonight?" Tracy asked "Only it is Jack's first night with us you know and really we should both be there for him when he comes home."

"I'll be there" the Commander confirmed "Even if I have to shut down the entire City to do it."

"Let's hope it doesn't come to that" Tracy admitted "Although these days nothing surprises me anymore."

"See you later love" the Commander called before leaving.

The Justice Minister managed to arrive in her office in the Ministry of Justice building in Horseferry Road without being noticed.

Sitting behind her desk she reached down to the bottom right hand drawer and unlocked it before opening it in order to extract a black leather bound notebook.

Placing the notebook on the desk, she opened it and flicked through the pages with their copious handwritten notes until she found what she was looking for.

Once it had been located, she dialled a number and after a brief pause her call was answered by a very officious sounding voice.

"Extension one seven nine" was the simple yet direct response.

"This is de Wente" the Justice Minister declared "I need to arrange a Section Fourteen release order for a Code Nine contact."

"One of ours?" the authoritative voice asked.

"Number Seven" de Wente confirmed "I think he is in Northolt High Security Prison."

"You will need to contact him direct and notify our friend of his impending release before we arrange his movement" the voice explained.

"Easy enough" de Wente agreed "Spot prison facility inspections are in the job description. I can go in the morning."

"In which case we will process his transfer for the usual three o'clock van run" the voice confirmed.

"I'll be the bearer of glad tidings in the morning then" de Wente confirmed before hanging up.

"Good grief" the Commander exclaimed as he stepped off the number eight bus at the corner adjacent to the entrance to Bond Street Underground Station.

Not only was the busy area around the Station crowded with the usual Oxford Street late afternoon shoppers, there was also the additional disruption being caused by the station being closed and a significant number of emergency service vehicles parked all around causing heavy traffic congestion.

Making his way through the chaos, the Commander managed to reach the taped off scene where he was let through by one of the officers on duty before heading down into the station itself.

In the ticket hall there was a throng of high visibility jacketed personnel in amongst which could be seen the tall figure of Sir Richard Crowthorne looking on from the sidelines with a concerned expression.

"Thanks for coming" Sir Richard declared as the Commander joined him.

"So what's the story here then?" the Commander asked indicating the hectic scene before them.

"Someone I want you to meet" Sir Richard cryptically responded which was always a bad sign "Follow me."

With that, Sir Richard led the way across the ticket hall through the personnel and then down the now stationary escalator to the lower levels.

As they descended, the Commander noted the forensic examination tent that had been erected at the bottom of the escalator surrounded by white suited scientific officers.

"This someone you want me to meet wouldn't happen to be in there would they?" the Commander asked.

"I am afraid so" Sir Richard ominously confirmed as they reached the bottom before going up to the open entrance of the tent.

"Drew, give us a minute will you?" Sir Richard called to the forensic examiner inside the tent who nodded in agreement and left, leaving the two men alone.

"I'll let you do the introductions" the Commander remarked as he saw the body lying face down on the ground in amidst a pool of semi-congealed blood that made him wince.

"William Gretna" Sir Richard declared, "To all and sundry a dedicated if unremarkable member of the Civil Service. He was on his way to a meeting when he had his journey unexpectedly terminated."

"How did he die?" the Commander asked, not overly keen to look too closely as he was never fond of the sight of blood and gore.

"Stab wound to the back" Sir Richard responded with regret "Poisoned blade, he was dead before he knew anything about it."

"Nasty" the Commander remarked "Did anyone see anything?"

"There were two men who specifically followed him down the escalator before passing him and disappearing" Sir Richard retold the tale "The first anyone was aware anything was wrong was when he fell forward dead as a doornail at the bottom of the escalator."

"Poisoned blade" the Commander remarked "That's a bit over sophisticated for your average knife nutter."

"Indeed" Sir Richard agreed as they left the tent and began back up the escalator towards the surface.

"So what's the real story?" the Commander asked.

"What makes you think there is an alternative version to this?" Sir Richard asked.

"Come on, this is me you are talking to here" the Commander pointed out "You wouldn't invite me here to see an ordinary stabbing unless you had some sort of involvement."

"Let's discuss this over a drink" Sir Richard suggested "I need one and I think you will too."

Five minutes later the two men were sat in the saloon bar of a nearby pub where Sir Richard duly bought the drinks, putting them on his tab as usual.

"Do you want to take it from the top?" the Commander asked.

"Are you sitting comfortably?" Sir Richard asked "Then I shall begin."

"Let's start with the dead civil servant in Bond Street Station" the Commander suggested.

"He was one of my little collection of special operatives that I have on a retainer outside of the usual circles" Sir Richard explained "Needless to say the existence of these covert operatives is not generally known."

"Including my office" the Commander confirmed "Although I have to admit I have suspected you may have been running something like this for a little while."

"Well walls do have ears as they say" Sir Richard responded "Even around your hallowed towers."

"So what was the investigation?" the Commander asked.

"The late William Gretna was in fact one Stewart Forrester, working as a civil servant in the Foreign Office but reporting directly to me with anything he found relating to certain concerns I and a few like minded individuals have" Sir Richard explained.

"Concerns?" the Commander quickly picked up on Sir Richard's tone and expression.

"As you no doubt know" Sir Richard continued "There have always been little cliques running throughout Government, the Civil Service, big business, etc. You and I have run into these in various forms before."

"The last bunch of over ambitious no necks tried to have me assassinated at Victoria Station" the Commander recalled "They didn't last long once we got our collective teeth into them."

"Indeed" Sir Richard agreed "However about two, two and a half years ago when I was still at MI5, a seemingly innocuous report crossed my desk by mistake which when I looked into it seemed to indicate the existence of what was described as a 'circle of friends' who were organising certain events with some sort of hidden agenda."

"Nothing too unusual there" the Commander admitted "Unless they turn out to be more serious, connected and organised than the usual goons."

"I put tabs on them early on, not really expecting it to come to anything" Sir Richard continued "and for a while all was quiet to the point where I nearly gave up on them."

"Nearly gave up?" the Commander inquired.

"Something rattled whoever this lot were big time about three or four months ago" Sir Richard continued "It was at the same time that I was hospitalised so it meant I could devote some time to it."

"So you sent your man in" the Commander concluded.

"He was a guy I knew in the Foreign & Commonwealth Office who had heard some of the same rumours that I had" Sir Richard confirmed "Someone was putting together a particularly powerful clique that was apparently well financed. Two hours ago my man calls me saying we need to meet urgently as apparently something was about to happen but on his way over..."

"He got done in" the Commander concluded "So where do I fit into this little mess?"

"You remember I told you that the Prime Minister will want to talk to you soon?" Sir Richard asked.

"Just this morning if I recall" the Commander recalled. "Does he know anything about this?"

"He knows" Sir Richard confirmed "He doesn't know you know and wasn't going to bring you in until we had something more concrete to go on."

"So what has changed then?" the Commander asked.

"Apart from the dead body in the depths of Bond Street tube, there is also the missing three million in cash from yesterday's debacle and to cap it the same name has cropped up in two different places" Sir Richard explained.

"Lord Lucan?" the Commander asked with a cheeky smirk.

"Harold Devlin" Sir Richard responded "Not only did you put him away for a smorgasbord of offences from money laundering to arms smuggling at the same time

that this group became more active, he is also the main owner of that old printing works in Bethnal Green that the cash disappeared in and to cap it all, his name has cropped up in a couple of well connected whispers."

"So assuming for arguments sake they were planning something" the Commander concluded "Bumping off your guy so publicly is either a sign of them moving up their timetable rather dramatically or alternatively..."

"...a warning to me to keep off the grass" Sir Richard concluded.

"So what do you want of me?" the Commander asked.

"Two things" Sir Richard responded "Firstly, keep your ears to the ground and be prepared to call up any and all reliable contacts you may have because when they make their move, it will be dramatic."

"And secondly, make sure I talk to the Prime Minister at the earliest opportunity?" the Commander guessed.

"Making sure no one knows anything about it in the process" Sir Richard confirmed.

"In which case I had better switch my mobile on" the Commander confirmed "I just hope he has my number handy."

"He's the Prime Minister" Sir Richard remarked "Next to me, he has the largest rolodex in the City."

"So this terminal can access pretty much every camera across the city then?" Jack remarked as Commander Simon Fuller was showing him some of the extensive collection of electronic toys he had at his disposal.

"And more" Fuller confirmed "We can also trace the journeys of every Oyster Card on the system."

"That's how you knew I was still at Liverpool Street yesterday?" Jack asked.

"Exactly" Fuller responded "For example, if I do my regular check of the Commander's Oyster Card, we can see that he last appeared exiting from St James's Park Station about three minutes ago."

"Boo!" the Commander responded as he came into Fuller's office.

"See what I mean?" Fuller confirmed.

"You two conspiring to take over the world then?" the Commander asked jokingly.

"No, just watch it very carefully" Fuller responded.

"You couldn't do me a favour before you go could you?" the Commander asked "I need you to access the CCTV from Bond Street tube at about three o'clock this afternoon."

"The 'Passenger Action' incident?" Fuller asked as he began to work on the computer.

"That's an interesting way of putting it" the Commander remarked "A rather brutal cold blooded stabbing in the back would be closer to the truth."

"Ouch..." Jack responded in disgust.

"All right then, here we go" Fuller declared as he pulled up the appropriate camera view from the CCTV cameras at Bond Street Station "So this incident occurred when exactly?"

"About three fifteen" the Commander confirmed "It was on the down escalators from the ticket hall."

"In which case lets run the ticket hall and escalator cameras together from three o'clock at four times speed" Fuller declared as he started a multi-screen playback mode.

All three of them watched carefully as the view showed people streaming through the station at high speed until suddenly the playback went blank before jumping to the view from half an hour later with the station closed and evacuated with the exception of the emergency service personnel attending the incident.

"What the hell...?" Fuller exclaimed as he wound the footage back and forth only to repeat the mysterious gap in the coverage on all of the Bond Street cameras.

"I take it that shouldn't happen?" Jack asked.

"No it should not" Fuller confirmed "Sorry Sir, I don't know what the hell has happened there."

"Don't worry about it" the Commander remarked philosophically "On the contrary I would have been more surprised if the footage actually was there."

"Sorry Sir?" Fuller responded.

"Just one of those things that seem to be occurring of late" the Commander explained which actually explained very little.

"Well the footage definitely did exist" Fuller confirmed "It's just a matter of finding it."

"Who has the ability to doctor footage like this?" Jack asked.

"Not many" Fuller recalled "Myself, my opposite numbers in MI5, Transport for London Security Bureau and a select few others."

"Well let's leave it for now" the Commander remarked "It can wait until the morning."

"Sounds like a good idea" Fuller agreed "A night's sleep may give me a few ideas on how to find it again."

"In the meantime" the Commander declared as he turned to Jack "It is time you were getting home."

"Permission to feel nervous?" Jack asked as the Commander escorted him out of Fuller's office and down the corridor to the lifts.

"Granted" the Commander admitted "For both of us."

In a cell in the west wing of Northolt Prison, Harold Devlin, disgraced businessman, convicted money launderer and arms dealer relaxed as he read a novel under the light afforded by the modest desk lamp.

Unusually in this day and age of overcrowded prisons, Devlin benefited from being allocated a cell to himself proving that even on the inside, he had connections and influence.

With the evening lock up now proceeding, his reading was disturbed by the sound of the heavy cell doors being shut throughout the wing and the barking of orders from the warders.

Devlin looked up from his novel as he heard the warder approach his cell door, the hard soled shoes echoing on the wrought iron walk way accompanied by the jangling of keys.

"Devlin" the warder called when he reached the doorway "Pack your stuff, you are being transferred in the morning."

"Where to may I enquire?" Devlin enquired in his usual polite but firm business like manner.

"Don't know" the warder admitted "I'm just the messenger" he confirmed before closing the cell door and locking it.

"Interesting..." Devlin remarked to himself as he put his book down and sat back, contemplating the potential of this sudden and unexpected development.

"This is a Victoria Line train calling at all stations to Brixton" the on board recorded announcer declared as the train doors closed and it pulled away from Pimlico Station heading south. On board amongst the other passengers heading home at the end of the evening rush hour were Jack and the Commander, both slightly apprehensive. Jack because he was about to spend his first night in his new home and the

Commander for who this was the first night he was technically a parent and was still rather uncertain what to do.

“I have been meaning to ask” the Commander remarked “What's with the case?” he enquired, noting the tight grip with which Jack clutched onto the battered and broken steel briefcase as if his life depended upon it.

“Pretty much my entire life is in here” Jack explained all but slightly evasively “Memories, dreams, signs, portents...”

“Very poetic” the Commander remarked still none the wiser as to the exact meaning and importance of the otherwise insignificant looking case. “If you like I could get you a new one” he suggested “That one looks pretty beaten up.”

“It's all right thanks” Jack confirmed with a smile “It is just it has a certain sentimental value” he responded as the train began to slow for their stop at Vauxhall.

“This is our stop” the Commander confirmed as the on board announcement duly declared their imminent arrival which prompted him to rise from his seat with Jack following him to the nearest set of doors as the platforms of Vauxhall Station appeared and the train slowed to a stop.

A few minutes later, the two were on the surface, crossing the road heading towards the apartment building on the south bank of the Thames which was home. As they crossed the road however, Jack noticed out of the corner of his eye a silver saloon car pull into the side of the road behind them but he chose to say nothing.

“Well, here we are” the Commander declared as they reached the apartment on the fifth floor and the Commander opened the door, allowing Jack inside first before going in himself and closing the door behind him.

“Tracy, we're here” the Commander called out from the hallway as he hung up his uniform tunic on the coat hook next to that of his wife's.

“I was beginning to worry for a while there” Tracy remarked as she emerged from the kitchen to greet them “Well Jack, welcome to your new home.”

“Thank you” Jack responded, clearly a little overawed by the importance of this occasion, this being the first time he had been in a proper home for the best part of two years.

“Come on” Tracy declared, taking Jack by the hand, “I'll show you to your room.”

“Excellent concierge service here” the Commander joked as he followed them.

“Here we are” Tracy confirmed as they reached the spare bedroom and she opened the door before switching the light on. “Sorry it's a bit Spartan at the moment but you can have the décor any way you want and anything you need just let us know and we'll see what we can sort out.”

“I'm afraid you are sharing the room with my model railways as well” the Commander admitted, indicating the layout with its OO scale British Railways steam and diesel outline models in the corner.

“No problems with that I can assure you” Jack confirmed “I used to have some myself before...” he tailed off.

“We need to sort out some clothes for you as well” Tracy admitted “What have you got at the moment?” she asked.

“Well until yesterday, I had four complete changes of clothing” Jack admitted, “Unfortunately now all I have is my coat and this school uniform.”

“I'll give your school a ring in the morning” the Commander confirmed “See if we can get you a new uniform sorted out.”

“I quite like this one admittedly” Jack remarked, looking down at the frayed and tired uniform blazer.

“Trouble is that blazer looks like it has been right the way around London and back twice with you in it” the Commander commented.

“This from the senior officer whose name is mud with the Quartermaster's Uniform Office” Tracy remarked aside with a giggle.

“Touché...” the Commander responded.

“We'll let you get settled in Jack” Tracy remarked “I'll give you a call when tea is ready. Anything in particular you would like?”

“Whatever is going is fine” Jack admitted as he put his school bag and that battered briefcase on the bed before going over to the window and moving the curtain aside to look down into the road onto Vauxhall Bridge outside where he could see the silver saloon car from earlier still parked across the street.

“What's with the briefcase?” Tracy asked the Commander as they returned to the kitchen just as the kettle boiled.

“I asked him that on the way home but he was rather evasive about it” the Commander confirmed “Signs and portents apparently.”

“He's been watching too much Babylon 5 by the sound of it” Tracy remarked.

“Great” the Commander joked “We've adopted a Vorlon!”

Late evening on the Marylebone Road and with little traffic around the dark blue Mercedes saloon made swift progress heading west, its driver obviously eager to get out of London as fast as possible.

Alongside the driver sat his wife who like himself was deeply worried and constantly looking around as they travelled as if expecting to run into someone that they were desperately hoping to avoid.

In the back of the car sat their two children, a sleeping young girl of about seven years of age and a boy, only just ten who was aware something was wrong unlike his sister who was innocently sleeping alongside him, unaware of any of the extreme danger her and her family were in.

As the car passed Baker Street, narrowly missing the change in the traffic lights, a blue van pulled out behind it from a side turning and followed aggressively, at one point coming alongside as its driver seemed to be checking the car's occupants to confirm their identity.

The car driver's attention being turned to the wing mirror that was menacingly full of the van, he failed to notice until it was too late another van appear ahead.

Swerving in a vain attempt to avoid it, the car slammed into the van at high speed, the force of the impact being so severe that it caused both vehicles to roll violently until the car came to rest upside down on the central reservation crash barrier.

The van that had been following stopped sharply some distance behind them and two men dressed in black got out before proceeding purposefully towards the car.

"Get out" the man in the front of the car struggled to call to the only other person in the car still conscious, the boy who although dazed, was largely uninjured.

The boy responded by releasing his seat belt and then climbing through the broken rear window where he found a steel briefcase that had been thrown from the boot of the car which he grabbed as he past it.

"Run, get out of here" came the call from the boy's father as nearby the two men could be seen nearing the car and drawing guns.

Quickly the boy scrambled out of the car and headed across the road and hid in the shadow of the doorway of the Marylebone Public Library.

Looking back towards the crash scene, he saw the two men reach the car and calmly execute his father in cold blood.

At that moment with the echo of those fateful gun shots still echoing in his head, Jack awoke with a start. Even after two years since he had narrowly escaped the execution of his family, he still saw that night vividly in his nightmares.

Even now he was still afraid that those who organised the execution of his father would still come after him if they knew he was still alive as he was the only one who could identify the gunmen. Furthermore as he looked down over the side of the bed at the battered briefcase leaning up against the bedside table, he had his Father's papers and only he knew just how potentially dangerous the contents could be to certain powerful people.

The alarm clock on the table top changed to read four sixteen in the morning so Jack took a deep breath and rolled over to try and get back to sleep.

“Breakfast!” Jack declared from the kitchen as Tracy and the Commander entered.

“Well I am impressed” the Commander remarked as Jack finished setting out the breakfast upon the kitchen table.

“I have been making breakfast for myself for the last two years” Jack admitted “So it was the least I could do to thank you two.”

“It makes a change not to be woken by the smell of incineration from the toaster for a change” Tracy joked as they sat down to breakfast.

“Did you sleep all right last night?” the Commander asked Jack as they tucked into breakfast.

“Yes, certainly” Jack confirmed with just a hint of evasion.

“Only I thought I heard something in the night” the Commander continued.

“Probably the drains or something” Jack remarked.

“Jack” the Commander stated politely “I have gone up against some of the biggest liars in the business, arms dealers, murderers, armed robbers, civil servants, Home Secretary's, so when someone is being evasive or just good old fashioned outright lying, I know it.”

“All right maybe I was a little restless” Jack admitted “Probably just sleeping in unfamiliar surroundings I expect.”

“Sounds reasonable” the Commander agreed although the look that he and Tracy exchanged across the table at that moment showed that both of them were not convinced.

“Oh blimey!” Jack exclaimed as he looked at the time on the kitchen clock “I had better get going” he confirmed.

“It's a bit early for school yet isn't it?” Tracy remarked as Jack got up and put on his battered uniform blazer.

“I like to be first there” Jack explained “Besides there is someone I want to see today.”

“Well be careful” the Commander advised as Jack grabbed his school bag and headed for the hallway “If there is anything you need...”

“You will be the second to know about it” Jack confirmed as he left “Bye!”

“Were you ever that eager to get to school when you were his age?” the Commander asked.

“Quite the opposite actually” Tracy admitted with a wry smile “Ten to one there is a girl involved.”

“Do you want to know something” the Commander remarked “He didn't take his briefcase with him.”

“Are you thinking what I am thinking?” Tracy asked.

“Absolutely” the Commander confirmed with a knowing look before rising from the table and going to Jack's room where he found the briefcase. With care, he brought the badly battered and damaged case back to the kitchen and placed it on the table.

“Heavy old thing isn't it” Tracy remarked as she looked over the exterior of the case which looked like it had been in a major accident with one of the securing catches ripped off by some tremendous force in the past.

“Can't see anything in there” the Commander confirmed as he looked through the crack in the side where the lid was partially deformed and no longer afforded a tight closure due to the previously sustained damage.

“Allow me” Tracy responded as she turned the case around so that the one remaining working lock catch faced her where she promptly got to work on it using her lock picking skills. After a few moments of work, the lock released and they were able to open the case to see what was inside.

“Well what do we have here?” the Commander remarked as he picked up the first item which when opened was revealed to be a photograph album with various family snapshots in there, the young boy in them recognisable as a younger Jack.

“Family album I guess” Tracy remarked “This is more recent though” she picked up a loose photograph of Jack taken far more recently with a girl of about the same age.

“I know her” the Commander recognised the girl in the picture with Jack, “That's Megan, his friend. I met her at Jack's school the other day when I was looking for him.”

“Told you there was a girl involved didn't I?” Tracy remarked with a smile.

“Birth certificate” the Commander declared once they had put aside the photograph album and moved to the next items in the case in the form of various items of official looking documentation “Jack David William Thornton” he read from the certificate “Born 12th October...” he tailed off “That's today.”

“Why didn't he say anything?” Tracy asked bemused.

“He probably has his reasons I guess” the Commander remarked “I can never remember my birthday.”

“April 24th” Tracy responded “But you don't deliberately refuse to acknowledge its existence do you?”

“You have a point” the Commander admitted as he put aside the birth certificate aside whilst Tracy moved onto the next item, a brown envelope that when he looked into it, revealed to contain another official looking document.

“A death certificate” Tracy confirmed as she looked at it before reading the details in handwritten ink on the traditional looking form “For a Jack David William Thornton...”

“I knew that his death and that of his parents and sister were registered less than two hours after the hit and run that killed them” the Commander confirmed “Not many people get to see their own death certificates though.”

“Darling, look at this” Tracy pointed to the date of registration on the certificate “According to this, his death was October 12th, two years ago.”

“He lost his family on his tenth birthday” the Commander concluded with a note of sadness “No wonder he doesn't like birthdays anymore.”

“Is it me” Tracy asked as she looked at the depth of the case both on the inside and the outside “or does this case have a much shallower inside than outside?”

“False bottom” the Commander concluded as he tapped the bottom of the interior of the case “Interesting...”

“The last one of these little tricks I saw” Tracy commented as she started fiddling with the catches of the case “You had to do something with these to release the panel. Ah, that sounds promising” she declared as a click was heard and the false bottom of the case interior suddenly jumped up a bit allowing it to be easily removed.

“His father's papers I presume?” the Commander commented as he and Tracy looked inside the case when they removed the panel to reveal a significant collection of official looking files and documentation, some of it bearing royal coats of arms of a number of Government ministry's and departments.

“Ministry of Defence, Foreign Office, Eyes Only” Tracy read briefly from some of the file covers “Good grief, what was Jack's father into?”

“Sir Richard claimed he was just a high ranking civil servant in the Foreign Office” the Commander remarked as he looked through the files.

“I think he was a bit more than that” Tracy commented as she pulled out one particular file marked with nothing on the cover bar the initials 'S.I.E.' and an 'Eyes Only' warning “Even we don't have access to Specialist Intelligence Executive reports and its certainly not the thing that would pass through the Foreign Office either.”

“Look at this” the Commander remarked as he opened the S.I.E. report file and flicked briefly through the pages “This is a briefing document on a Declaration of National Emergency evacuation procedure. There is locations of the emergency

operations centres, helicopter and radio designations, call signs, the Andromeda Directive procedure, everything.”

“What's an Andromeda Directive when it is at home?” Tracy asked.

“Basically it is an executive order issued by either the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Home Secretary or Justice Minister that in a time of National Emergency, key personnel are rounded up and escorted immediately to one of three emergency operations locations located around the country” the Commander explained.

“Not the sort of thing a civil servant from the Foreign Office should be wandering around town with that is for certain” Tracy remarked.

“Agreed” the Commander confirmed “Basically it's an emergency recall order for all the Regional Administrator General's of the service, the chief operating officers of MI5 and MI6, the Prime Minister, the head of the National Joint Anti-Terrorist and Organised Crime Committee and a few others or their nominated deputies if they were incapacitated or otherwise unavailable.”

“I don't need to guess who your nominated deputy is then?” Tracy remarked.

“Don't worry” the Commander confirmed “The chances of it ever happening must be pretty remote I would have thought.”

“So what are we going to do with all this lot then?” Tracy asked looking down at the plethora of files through which they had only time to have a brief look at some of them meaning there were still plenty of surprises waiting to be discovered therein.

“I need to talk to Sir Richard” the Commander confirmed “I think it is time he was a little more up front about the exact nature of the late Philip Thornton of the F.O.”

“In a late change of plan, the Home Secretary has been replaced by the Justice Minister, Baroness Jacqueline de Wente QC as Government representative at the opening of the new thirty million pound prison wing here at Northolt” the BBC News 24 presenter reported from outside the gates of the prison as the ministerial car with its escort of motorcycle outriders swept past her into the main gate.

“The Justice Minister is expected to go on a fact-finding tour of the entire prison including its soon to be closed former Victorian elements prior to going on to the formal opening ceremony for the new section later this morning” the reporter continued as the camera she was speaking to panned to the left to show the beaming Justice Minister, always one for playing up to the press get out of her car.

“Baroness” the Prison Governor called as he greeted her at the main entrance “It is an honour to have you here today.”

“Thank you Governor” the Justice Minister confirmed with a beaming smile “The Home Secretary sends his apologies for not coming himself but unfortunately he was tied up on matters of state.”

“I fully understand Minister” the Governor confirmed “If you would like to follow me, I am sure you will enjoy a tour of our extensive facility before we move on to the new section.”

“Lead on” the Justice Minister confirmed as she and her aides duly followed the Governor and two of his officers inside.

As the party disappeared from sight inside the prison entrance, the ministerial escort car that de Wente had arrived in was driven over to a secure parking place where its driver, Jennifer Caverner, the head of the VIP Protection Division turned off the engine and relaxed back before reaching for her radio.

“Victor Pappa X-Ray One to control” Jennifer called “Sandpiper is in and all is quiet” she reported.

Inside the jail, de Wente was being given the formal guided tour and had reached the west wing with its traditional style cell block on three levels with the walkways when she turned to the Prison Governor with a request.

“Would it be possible to meet with one or two of the inmates?” de Wente asked “I’d like to get some idea of how they see the conditions here if that is all right?”

“Indeed it is” the Governor confirmed with a knowing smile, this particular incident having been set up in advance the night before “I anticipated a request such as this so set it up for you. If you will follow me please?” he led the way up the wrought iron stairs to the second level.

They quickly arrived at one particular cell whereupon the Governor stood by the door on watch as the Justice Minister entered.

“Hello old friend” de Wente declared as she met Devlin inside the cell “It’s been a while.”

“It has indeed” Devlin agreed as he stood up and they shook hands “Congratulations on the promotion to Baroness by the way.”

“Thank you” de Wente responded “I take it you have been kept informed as to what is going on?”

“Oh you would be surprised at what I hear about in here” Devlin remarked wryly “Actually being in prison is very therapeutic I have found, very restful, gives a man a chance to catch up on the novels he has never got around to reading and plan for the future.”

“Well you have got your marching orders” de Wente confirmed as she passed him an envelope that she produced from her inside jacket pocket.

“Smuggling things into one of Her Majesty’s Prisons?” Devlin commented with a chuckle “Naughty girl!”

“Your transfer van arrives at three o'clock this afternoon” de Wente informed him “Ostensibly its bound for Albany on the Isle of Wight but lets just say it will have a little 'accident' on the way there. Once you are on the ground, those are your orders, destination, time, where to pick up money, etc.”

“In which case” Devlin remarked as he went over to the modest closet and opened it to reveal his best suit in a clear plastic bag hanging up “I had best get myself presentable. There is a lot of work ahead of us.”

“There is indeed” de Wente agreed “Until tonight then?”

“Until tonight” Devlin confirmed with a smile of satisfaction as the Justice Minister and the Governor left the cell.

Despite having to travel a greater distance to school today, Jack was still one of the first through the gate at seven thirty as the Site Manager duly let him in and he proceeded to the main entrance to the typical 1950's brick and concrete structure that was solid and functional if a little dull in appearance.

Unusually today however Jack was met in the main entrance by the Headmaster, a tall man in his late fifties who towered over the small lad when he arrived.

“Morning Jack” the Headmaster greeted him “This way please.”

“Morning Sir” Jack responded with a worried look. Most pupils were never met by the Headmaster in person unless they were in serious trouble usually “Am I in trouble?” he asked.

“Well you did miss a day off school yesterday but in the circumstances” the Headmaster responded “I'll let you off this time. It would seem you have friends in high places” he remarked as they went to his office.

“I'm sorry Sir” Jack responded “What is it I am missing here?” he asked, his curiosity having now got the better of him.

“By order of your newly adopted parents” the Headmaster explained “You are having a new uniform” he declared as he duly produced a full brand new set of school uniform clothing and passed it to Jack.

“Wow” Jack responded rather lost for words for a change “I don't know what to say.”

“Try thank you” the Headmaster suggested “I suggest you go and get changed.”

“Right” Jack agreed “Thank you Sir” he responded as he turned to leave the office, still looking at his brand new uniform in its plastic bag.

“Oh and Jack” the Headmaster called after him “I know you don't like them much but at least try and have a happy birthday?” he suggested.

“Yes Sir” Jack confirmed before leaving the office.

“Good grief!” Megan exclaimed as she arrived in the classroom where she, Jack and the rest of their form were due to have morning registration in twenty minutes “You actually have a new uniform at last” she remarked upon seeing Jack standing there in his new uniform.

“Pretty sharp huh?” Jack admitted, clearly very happy to see Megan again.

“I was beginning to think you had been welded into that old thing” she indicated the old blazer draped over the back of the chair next to Jack “Is it your birthday or something?”

“Err yes” Jack admitted sheepishly “This was a present from my new parents.”

“Jack, I'm your friend, we've known each other for nearly two years” Megan advised him sincerely and with all seriousness “Why didn't you say it was your birthday, and for that matter what new parents?” she asked.

“It's a long story” Jack admitted reluctantly as Megan came and sat down alongside him and held his hand for support, clearly recognising that Jack needed it.

“I'm not going anywhere” Megan admitted.

“My parents, my real ones that is, were killed in a hit and run accident two years ago” Jack admitted “I have been living on my own using whatever resources necessary ever since. My last place was an old printing works in Bethnal Green.”

“Hang on” Megan recalled “You don't mean that place that went bang the other night do you?”

Jack merely nodded with a wry admission.

“You weren't mixed up in that mess were you?” Megan asked with clear concern for her friend.

“Well...” Jack admitted “It's complicated.”

“And these new parents of yours?” Megan asked.

“I have now been adopted by the Regional Administrator General Edward Regent and his wife Divisional Commander Tracy Caverner of the National Security & Police Service” he admitted.

“Bloody hell...” Megan exclaimed “I met the Commander just the other day. He was looking for you as it happened.”

“Friends in high places” Jack remarked wryly.

“Next thing you will be having tea with the Prime Minister” she joked with a giggle that made Jack smile properly for the first time since her arrival.

“I'll give him your regards if I see him” Jack confirmed.

“One thing I don't get” Megan remarked “If you have been living on your own for two years, why come to school all that time?” she asked.

“Two reasons” Jack admitted “My late father always taught me that education is important and he was right so I tried to keep up, I have always enjoyed school.”

“And the other reason?” Megan asked.

“I'll let you work out that one” Jack responded smiling at her. “Listen, I have to leave later, things to do you understand. However I would like to see you later.”

“I'm always here” Megan admitted “Anyway, it gives me time to think of a birthday present for you.”

At that point their close conversation had to end as some of their class mates arrived in the room where they too were astounded to find their popular friend Jack attired in a new uniform.

“Sir Richard Crowthorne to see you Sir” the PA called over the intercom on the Commander's desk.

“Send him in” the Commander confirmed “And can we not be disturbed please?” he requested.

“Yes Sir” the PA confirmed before Sir Richard entered the office looking rather pensive.

“Summoned, I come” Sir Richard declared as he closed the door behind him and took a seat in front of the Commander's desk, still unaware of why unusually the Commander had requested his presence there in the most business like manner without stating the reason or subject for this meeting.

“Great” the Commander remarked wryly “First Vorlon's, now Minbari.”

“Sorry you've lost me” Sir Richard responded.

“Never mind” the Commander dismissed the random thought that had crossed his mind in response to Sir Richard's remark when he had arrived “Thank you for coming.”

“Your note seemed to imply the impending arrival of two large broad shouldered goons threatening to drag me to a sound proof room so I thought I had better head over here quickly” Sir Richard admitted “May I enquire as to the subject?” he asked.

“Did you bring your little toy?” the Commander asked.

“Ah yes” Sir Richard confirmed as he reached inside his jacket pocket and extracted his little anti-surveillance jamming device which he placed on the desk in front of him and switched it on “There you go” he declared.

“Philip James Thornton” the Commander declared.

“Jack's father?” Sir Richard checked.

“The same” the Commander confirmed “If he was an ordinary high ranking Civil Servant in the Foreign Office than I am Darth Vader.”

“May the force be with you” Sir Richard responded “On what basis do you come to this rather drastic conclusion?”

“You told me that when Philip Thornton died in that hit and run accident on the Marylebone Road that he had been investigating something within the Foreign Office?”

“That was the rumour on the back channels at the time” Sir Richard recalled “The theory at the time was he stumbled onto something he shouldn't have and was about to get closed down by the Civil Service Internal Security Unit when he was killed in that accident. When the coroner declared it accidental death, it was written off as a sad coincidence, the death of an entire family. Besides any paper evidence he may have collected was never found.”

“Tell me” the Commander asked “have you ever heard of the Andromeda Plan?”

“It's a strategic theatre emergency exercise” Sir Richard admitted.

“In English please” the Commander responded “In my book a 'strategic theatre emergency exercise' was what we had when Abraham Lincoln said to his wife one evening, I know dear, lets pop out and see a show.”

“Basically it was a 'What if?' type scenario put together by a few clever high ranking boffins about three years ago” Sir Richard explained “If there was a time when a major National State of Emergency was imminent, certain people such as yourself and others would be rounded up from wherever they were at the time and escorted under heavy guard to one of the three secure emergency control centres out in the sticks, code named Epsilon.”

“Epsilon Three being the nearest to here underneath a very large hill near Aylesbury according to this” the Commander remarked.

“How the hell did you know that?” Sir Richard was astonished by the Commander's response “There are only two people in the country who know that and neither you nor I are they.”

“Philip Thornton had gathered a significant number of documents along with a journal of his investigations” the Commander explained “He had it with him when his car

crashed and the reason no one ever found it was because Jack has been carrying around his father's battered briefcase with them in ever since."

"Oh my God" Sir Richard exclaimed slowly as he reached for the crystal decanter on the side to pour himself a much needed stiff drink.

"Would you like to take it from the top?" the Commander suggested "We've known each other since I was a kid yet for the first time, you lied to me."

"I'm sorry" Sir Richard apologised "I omitted certain unsubstantiated facts. However the existence of Philip Thornton's briefcase and papers does rather add fuel to the fire here."

"Go on" the Commander prompted.

"Three years ago, Thornton came to me at MI5" Sir Richard explained "He had obtained evidence that certain elements in Government were up to something, the same elements that my man was trying to infiltrate when he met his sticky end at Bond Street yesterday."

"So you got Thornton to collect evidence, files, keep a journal of anything he found" the Commander concluded.

"Exactly" Sir Richard confirmed "He couldn't contact me directly as the beady eyes of the Civil Service Internal Security Bureau were everywhere and for him to be seen having tea with an Operations Director of MI5 would have tipped them off."

"So you never saw any of the evidence he collected?" the Commander asked.

"The next thing I knew was when I read in the Standard of the death of him, his wife and his two children in that hit and run near Marylebone Station" Sir Richard confirmed. "His papers were never found, until now."

"Jack must have known he needed them to prove his existence and stay alive when the time came" the Commander concluded.

"It would appear my old opposite number at MI6 was right" Sir Richard admitted "If anyone were to know Jack was still alive then both he and they would be in trouble which is why he kept off the grid all this time."

"And if they had known about this little bombshell" the Commander duly produced the briefcase from beneath his desk and put it on the top before pushing it across to Sir Richard "I am willing to bet all hell would have been let loose."

"Do you mind if I take a look?" Sir Richard asked.

"Help yourself" the Commander confirmed "But that case and its files do not leave this room under any circumstances."

“A very wise idea” Sir Richard agreed as he began to look through the case, removing the photograph album before reaching the false bottom and extracting the files through which he looked with a worried frown.

“The journal was in code” the Commander explained “I have passed that to Fuller to get him to break it. There was also some encoded data disks or something in there as well.”

“I hope he is not using a system on recognisable premises” Sir Richard commented.

“Don't worry” the Commander confirmed “He has taken the material to a very safe location elsewhere.”

“Well there is enough information here to take over the entire Government with room to spare” Sir Richard remarked “Disaster scenarios, strategic plans, the Andromeda Directive plan, Epsilon Project plans and locations. He must have found this in the possession of someone who was not supposed to have it.”

“Your boys who did your Bond Street guy in?” the Commander suggested.

“Maybe” Sir Richard agreed with an ominous tone “Whatever, the consequences of this kind of material in the wrong hands doesn't bear thinking about.”

“Why is life never simple?” Fuller remarked to himself as he worked on the encrypted files on one computer as next to him, a second computer worked on trying to break the code used for Thornton's journal.

For over two hours now, he had been on his own in the depths of the former King William Street Underground Station working at the files and getting no closer to unravelling their mysteries than he was when he had arrived at the strategic emergency control centre whose existence beneath the streets of the City near London Bridge were known only to a very select few.

As he continued to work on the files, Fuller's mobile rang. Looking at the caller display he was happy to see that it was his wife Jennifer calling.

“Hello love” he answered “How's your morning been?” he asked.

“I drew the short straw” Jennifer admitted as she got out of her Ministerial Escort Car in a side street not far from the VIP Protection Division head office in Cardinal Place near Victoria Station “I had the dubious pleasure of the Justice Minister's company all the way to and from Northolt Prison on a 'fact finding' junket would you believe.”

“Bleugh” Fuller responded “That woman is walking political disaster zone.”

“You can say that again” Jennifer admitted “If she was any further up her own arse she would turn inside out. Anyway, I called in at your office but you weren't there. I thought we could have lunch together.”

“Lovely idea my dear but unfortunately I am working on something special for the Commander” Fuller admitted.

“Uh-oh” Jennifer remarked wryly as she crossed Victoria Street “That sounds ominous.”

“It maybe nothing” Fuller admitted “However when the Regional Administrator General sends you to work on something but insists it is done in the depths of King William Street it may be time to be a little concerned.”

“How about I bring lunch to you then?” Jennifer suggested “I am free until three o'clock then I have the excitement of escorting the Prime Minister to the dentist.”

“Sounds like a good idea” Fuller readily agreed “Lunch that is, not the Prime Minister and the dentist.”

“I'll see you in about half an hour” Jennifer confirmed.

“So how much does the Prime Minister know about these clandestine goings on?” the Commander asked as he placed the briefcase in his personal safe before securing the door firmly.

“I have been keeping him briefed off the record on my little group's activities” Sir Richard confirmed “I believe he will want to talk to you fairly soon, possible sooner if I tell him Thornton's papers have been found and what was in them.

“Do you think Jack knows how serious this is?” the Commander asked.

“Hard to say” Sir Richard admitted as they left the office “When you have a father who works in senior Government, even at his young age you would pick up on certain things. One this is for sure though, I am willing to bet our Jack knows just a bit more than he has told us so far.”

“You had best get back” the Commander suggested “If your sources should hear anything...?”

“I will be sure and let you know” Sir Richard confirmed “Be careful, watch your back” he warned before leaving.

“Always” the Commander confirmed before heading to the main Control Room where he found Tracy at the main console overseeing ongoing everyday events involving the service across central London.

“Hello love” the Commander declared as he joined her and they kissed “Everything all right?” he asked.

“The Prime Minister just booked a car to take him to the dentist this afternoon” Tracy remarked “Two robberies in the east end, one stolen bus in Romford, the usual

plethora of muggers, thieves, dealers, pimps, nutters and RTA's, not to mention about a thousand lost tourists as usual, nothing overly spectacular.”

“Let’s just hope it stays that way” the Commander remarked.

“I’ll drink to that” Tracy agreed as she reached across the desk to answer the telephone as it began ringing at that point “Hello?” she answered “Yes. He’s right here” she confirmed before passing the telephone to her husband “It’s for you.”

“Hello?” the Commander answered.

“This is the Switchboard Sir” the operator responded “We have a call for you from a Megan Stewart. She claims it is about a Jack Thornton and asked to speak to you directly?”

“Err yes” the Commander confirmed “Put her through” he instructed as Tracy looked on wondering what was going on.

“Mr Administrator General Sir?” the voice of a young girl asked as soon as she was connected.

“Yes, that’s me” the Commander confirmed “What can I do for you?” he asked.

“I’m Megan, Jack’s friend” she explained “We met the other day at Leytonstone High School.”

“Yes I remember” the Commander recalled.

“Jack’s gone missing” Megan explained with clear concern in her voice “He has been off colour all morning as if something was on his mind. We talked earlier and apparently today is his birthday and something seems to be eating away at him.”

“Right” the Commander confirmed “What time did you last see him?” he asked.

“About half eleven” Megan confirmed “Then at the end of the science lesson, he says goodbye and leaves and that was the last any of us saw of him.”

“Don’t worry” the Commander reassured her, picking up on Megan’s serious concern for her friend’s wellbeing “I have a pretty good idea where he has gone. I have the services of the entire law enforcement and security community at my fingertips so he will be all right.”

“Thanks you Sir” Megan responded “When you find him, can you ask him what he wants for his birthday as I want to get him something. I think it would do him good.”

“I will” the Commander agreed “You best get back to class and I will let you know when we find him.”

“Thank you Sir” Megan was clearly very grateful for the Commander’s reassurance “Good bye.”

“So where do you think he is?” Tracy asked as with a thoughtful expression, the Commander hung up the telephone.

“I think I have a pretty good idea” the Commander admitted knowingly “Listen love, can you show me as being off the system for an hour or so?”

“Yeah sure” Tracy confirmed.

“I’ll have my radio with me if it is really urgent though or if the Prime Minister calls” the Commander commented.

“Are you expecting a call from the Prime Minister?” Tracy asked with a raised eyebrow of surprise.

“It’s in the Job Description” the Commander remarked wryly “I always expect a call from him.”

“If you say so” Tracy commented.

“Oh and can you put a call in to Commander Elizabeth Baker” he added “Ask her to come down to the big smoke on the QT, bring her friend and a couple of trustworthy colleagues. Usual address and contact details.”

“Her friend being that rather tasty high velocity sniper rifle I take it?” Tracy asked.

“The same” the Commander confirmed “I am not convinced she isn’t married to it” he remarked.

“I’ll make the call” Tracy agreed.

“Thanks” the Commander responded before kissing her “I love you, see you later.”

“I love you too” Tracy confirmed before the Commander swiftly departed.

Inside his jail cell deep in the heat of Northolt Prison, Devlin completed packing the last of his few belongings into the bag provided before him before discarding his prison issue jacket and shirt, to replace them with something far more tailored and refined.

“Ah, that’s more like it” he remarked as he put on the carefully pressed shirt and buttoned it up before tucking it into the top of his tailored pin stripe trousers. Looking across at the mirror on the wall which was patchy and peeling with age, Devlin checked himself carefully before putting on his gold enamelled cufflinks, the circular design of which he turned towards the mirror so that he could see the dark blue circle with its gold engraved Omega symbol upon it.

He allowed himself a brief smirk of satisfaction before putting on his suit just as the wardens arrived to escort him to the processing area prior to his transfer.

“Devlin, 312543J” the lead warder called at the doorway.

“Yes Sir” Devlin confirmed.

“Step outside” came the order which Devlin duly followed, not wanting any trouble at this stage when his goal was so close at hand.

“After you officer” Devin remarked as he stepped outside the cell, his bag of possessions in his hand before being escorted away. As he passed a group of inmates on the landing, one in particular, an old man in his sixties with thin grey hair and the look of having seen a lot of life over the years paid particular attention to this departure.

Soon Devlin was being escorted into the processing area where another warder behind a desk was assembling his file and processing the documentation for his transfer.

“The prisoner Sir” the escorting warder confirmed.

“Thank you” the desk warder confirmed “Harold Devlin” he declared “You are being transferred this afternoon to Albany Prison on the Isle of Wight, there to carry out the rest of your sentence. Is that understood?”

“Yes Sir” Devlin confirmed with respect.

“Very well” the desk warder responded “If you would sign here to confirm that you are aware of this transfer and that you have all your belongings please.”

Devlin duly did as he asked and leaned forward to sign the form in the three places indicated by the warder. “Well it has been a pleasure” Devlin remarked casually as he finished signing “I’ve always wanted to go to the Isle of Wight.”

“Have a pleasant trip” the desk warder remarked with little sympathy before turning to the other officers “All right, get him out of here.”

Devlin was duly led from the processing area to the vehicle loading dock where an armoured prison van was waiting to receive him and a number of other transfers who were already waiting there to be loaded aboard.

“One at a time” the supervisor called to the prisoners “Find yourselves a seat in one of the bays and then sit back and enjoy the journey.”

Without any fuss or commotion, Devlin waited until it was his turn to board the vehicle whereupon he was led up the access steps into the back before being shown to one of the individual cells inside where he was duly shut in just as the engine of the van was started and his journey began.

The Commander alighted quickly from the seven car train of 1972 Tube Stock forming the northbound Bakerloo Line service onto the platform at Marylebone, the

original name of Great Central still visible in the original tiling on the platform tunnel walls.

The exit from the station led by way of passageways and the usual escalators right into the heart of the concourse of the small but busy Marylebone main line railway station itself with its impressive original Great Central Railway architecture serving just six platforms with services to Aylesbury and the south midlands.

Leaving by the main exit brought the Commander out into the side street outside where buses passed frequently to stop beneath the front canopy of the station. It was in the shadow of the impressive frontage of the station itself that the Commander paused to consult a London Underground 'Continuing your journey from...' leaflet of the local area that he had picked up on his way out of the Underground section a few moments earlier.

His destination was the Marylebone Road, the main thoroughfare through the area that linked the very western edges of Greater London right into the heart and the Euston Road east of Great Portland Street. Marylebone Station itself was set back from the main street, linked to the main road itself by a number of short side streets, any one of which would bring him to his destination and he hoped where he would find Jack.

Heading down Great Central Street, past the rows of articulated buses at their stand waiting to commence their next runs on the 453 route brought the Commander to the Marylebone Road itself, a busy dual carriageway in the heart of the city, heavy with traffic constantly stopping and starting according to the whims of the many traffic lights controlling the junctions visible in each direction.

Looking down the road in an easterly direction towards Baker Street, the Commander could see on the opposite side of the road the imposing frontage of the Westminster Town Hall with its stately columns and alongside it, to the right the slightly smaller but no less modest stone structure of the Marylebone Public Library. It was then that he saw Jack, leaning on a traffic barrier barely able to see over it with his short stature, watching the traffic as it negotiated the junction with Upper Montagu Street.

"I thought I might find you here" the Commander remarked as a couple of minutes later, having crossed the road, he joined Jack at the pedestrian barrier along the southern edge of Marylebone Road.

"That sort of thing is in your job description I would have thought Sir" Jack admitted "How did you know I was wandering if I may ask?"

"I got a telephone call from a very worried young lady of your acquaintance" the Commander explained which made Jack smile "Added to certain other evidence that has just come to my attention and it was logical really."

"You had a look through my briefcase then I take it?" Jack asked.

"Err yes" the Commander admitted as he reached into his pocket and produced a brown envelope from which he extracted the green death certificate with Jack's name on it "This was the clincher, then there was the nightmare you had last night, the rest sort of fell into place after that."

“As my grandmother used to say” Jack remarked casually “There are no flies on you.”

“You want to talk about it?” the Commander asked.

Jack looked behind them at one of the public benches in the shadow of the Library and indicated towards it “Maybe its time I finally told the story” he admitted whereupon they both went over to the bench and sat down, looking out at the busy Marylebone road passing in front of them across the width of the pavement.

“In two years” Jack began “I have never spoken of any of this to anyone, let’s just call it a survival instinct.”

“I know the feeling” the Commander admitted.

“There are only two people in the world I would trust with what I am about to tell you” Jack continued “Fortunately you are one of them, do I really need to say who the other is?”

“No” the Commander agreed “Carry on.”

“My father always did his best to keep his work and his family life separate” Jack began “Even still that was not always possible and even when you are ten years old you pick up on things, partial conversations overheard, documents found on desks, that sort of thing so I knew fairly early on that something was wrong.”

“For nearly all my life until I was about nine” Jack carried on as he recalled long buried memories “my Father was in the Foreign Office which meant we often travelled around the world from country to country. A seemingly never ending procession of embassies and consulates around the world. Europe, the US, the Far East, Australia, even the Falkland Islands. Then about six months before he died we were recalled at short notice back to the UK.”

“Was that when things started to change?” the Commander asked.

“All of a sudden things changed dramatically” Jack explained “My Father started working very long hours and then there were the unscheduled trips to various Government Departments out of hours, clandestine telephone calls and meetings in his study with various strange people.”

“Did you ever meet any of these people personally?” the Commander asked.

“Most of them seemed to me to be anonymous civil servants” Jack admitted “Faceless bureaucrats and no necks is what my Father used to call them.”

“Nothing changes” the Commander remarked wryly.

“Things continued pretty much the same until the day before my tenth birthday when my Father was woken by a telephone call at three thirty in the morning” Jack recalled “I remember it clearly as I had not been able to get to sleep and was just finally dozing off when the sound of the telephone ringing woke me again. I never heard

what was said in that call but the following morning over breakfast, it was clear that both my parents were nervous about something.

“That day I went to school, as normal but couldn't stop thinking about the strange mood of my parents” Jack carried on “They tried their best to hide it and my sister was completely oblivious to what was going on but I knew something wasn't right.”

”Did you like your birthday before that day?” the Commander asked.

“Oh yes” Jack admitted “Indeed no sooner did I get home from school that afternoon than there were my parents waiting for me with my presents and we had a proper party like tea as well.”

“I think the last time I had a birthday party I was probably about your age” the Commander admitted “Complicated child hood” he explained “Anyway, back to you.”

“Afterwards, I went upstairs to my room to put my brand new locomotive on the track to give its first run” Jack continued “About an hour later the door bell sounds and so, being curious I look out of my bedroom window down to the front door below to see three two men in trench coats standing there talking to my Father. They had arrived in two cars but after a few minutes, both left in just one, leaving the other parked out the front.”

“That was when things started moving I take it?” the Commander asked.

“Indeed” Jack confirmed “Within a minute of their departure, my Father comes running upstairs and comes into my room, telling me to be calm, not to ask any questions and pack a few essential things quickly. You see despite his best efforts he knew that I was aware of some of the things that was going on so he tried to be as honest as possible about our situation at that moment without getting me involved any further.”

“Well I packed some things together as he requested” Jack continued “You know, change of clothes, school stuff, favourite toy, emergency chocolate supply, that sort of thing and then went to my Father's study where I found him taking his files out of the safe and putting them into the bottom of his briefcase along with a large quantity of cash.”

“You shouldn't be seeing this” my Father advised me in that calm tone of his when he saw me standing there in his study.

“I asked my Father to be honest with me” Jack admitted “Pointed out to him that I was a bright lad, I knew there was something going on and asked him were we in trouble.”

“He admitted that yes we were” he recalled “Then he closed the briefcase and resealed the safe. The next thing he said will stay with me forever.”

“What was that?” the Commander asked.

“He showed me the briefcase and said to me that no matter what happened, that case was never to fall into the wrong hands” Jack explained “Needless to say I asked whose were the right hands at that point to which my Father replied that I would know if it came to that decision. Most importantly he stressed that the contents of that case were more important than his life which was a shock but oddly not that much of a surprise.”

“So what was the plan?” the Commander asked “Fast boat to Cuba?”

“Not far off” Jack admitted “We all piled into the car that had been left by the two men earlier. In the glove compartment was a folder containing new passports and identity papers plus tickets and visa for a flight out of Heathrow scheduled to leave at about one in the morning. I have no idea where to though.”

“You don't come across that sort of fresh identification and travel docket on EBay” the Commander remarked “Smells like an MI5 special job to me.”

“Well someone was carefully organising what I believe the Americans call an 'exit strategy' or whatever they call it” Jack remarked “Anyway, we left in the car provided and headed at high speed across London. I don't remember the route exactly but it was probably Leytonstone to Farringdon and then up onto the Euston Road always heading west.”

“The odd thing about that journey” Jack recalled “We were travelling through central London at ten o'clock at night and yet the traffic was very light, there were no patrols of your lot around despite the fact that we were pushing eighty miles an hour at some points which normally would attract someone's attention and to cap it all nearly all the traffic lights were green all the way.”

“All of them?” the Commander asked.

“Odd isn't it?” Jack asked “I mean look at this lot” he indicated the heavy traffic on the Marylebone Road in front of them that was pulsing and surging as the traffic lights that controlled the many junctions along its length changed frequently “Doesn't add up does it?”

“No it doesn't” the Commander agreed.

“So we were making good progress” Jack continued “I was paying close attention to everything that was going on, watching the roads outside the car window. My sister was asleep in the back with me totally oblivious as to what was going on whilst in the front my father was driving with my mother sat alongside him looking concerned but maintaining what us Foreign Office types still referred to as a stiff British upper lip.”

“I think that must be the first thing they teach at Civil Service school” the Commander remarked wryly “No matter how serious the crisis, maintain a stiff upper lip and go and put the kettle on. Someone once told me that the only reason why the notice of a nuclear attack is four minutes is so that it gives enough time for the people of Britain to go and make a cup of tea before the end.”

“As we passed Baker Street Station” Jack continued “I noticed a large blue van pull out of Baker Street itself and start to follow us. It could have been coincidence but the way it was being driven and the manner in which its driver seemed to direct the van towards the car I was in suggested otherwise.”

“We should be able to find that on the CCTV from the traffic cameras” the Commander remarked “Assuming that whoever was responsible for the Bond Street cut out didn't get to them first.”

“It wouldn't surprise me” Jack remarked “As we approached the junction down there with Gloucester Place” he indicated to their right at the junction at the east end of the Town Hall “the van accelerates and pulls alongside and I well remember the face of the guy in the passenger seat looking in to see who was on board. As soon as he caught sight of my father, they slowed, pulling well back as we went over the junction.”

As Jack retold the story, reaching the critical point the Commander looked down the Marylebone Road visualising the scene in his mind as it was told.

“My father reacted by accelerating” Jack confirmed “The lights here on the Upper Montagu Street junction changed to green as we were approaching but just as we reached the stop line just there, they slammed back to red suddenly and this second van appeared from the side and rammed us at high speed.”

“Oh my God...” the Commander remarked as he pictured the scene as it would have looked on the junction before him.

“I'm not sure what happened next” Jack admitted “The force of the impact must have made the car roll several times as when I came to a few moments later, we were upside down perched on top of the crash barriers about a hundred yards or so down the road.”

“The car was all crushed and wrecked” Jack recalled “I remember being covered in shattered glass and then I saw the blood.” At this moment Jack paused in reflection as he recalled the hardest part of what happened on that tragic night “My mother was impaled by a road sign post as we had rolled, she died instantly. I think my sister was crushed by the door coming in on her but my father was still alive, struggling to turn around and see if I was all right.”

“He had blood coming out of his mouth and I could just see his legs were trapped in the foot well but he managed to reach around and release my seatbelt” Jack continued “Then he told me to get out quickly, grab the case and run. That was when I saw them coming...”

“The guys from the first van I assume?” the Commander asked.

“Yep” Jack confirmed “They had stopped at the junction here and were walking down the street towards the wreckage. My Father had seen them coming and knew he couldn't get out so made sure I did. As I climbed out of the remains of the back window I found the case, grabbed it and used the smoke billowing up from the wreckage of the van that had hit us to escape without being seen.”

“And the two men?” the Commander asked.

“Never saw me” Jack confirmed “I went around one side of the wrecked van as they passed around the other approaching the car. I was pretty badly beaten up but I could still walk so I ran up as far as here and hid in the shadows of the library doorway up there. Just as I got here I looked back in time to see the two men calmly walk up to the drivers window of the car, pull out silenced guns from inside their coats and kill my father and for good measure shoot my mother too just to make sure.”

“So what did you do?” the Commander asked.

“I stayed in the shadows of that Library and watched over the next half hour as things happened” Jack confirmed “The two men spent a few minute gathering things from the car wreckage before they walked calmly back up the road, got in their van and drove away as if nothing had happened. Within moments of them leaving, the emergency services arrived to sort out the mess.”

“I have a report that Traffic Division from Euston attended what was officially described as a hit and run incident in Marylebone on that date” the Commander confirmed “However all of the evidence gathered at the scene was seized by some special operations investigation unit about two hours after the incident and was never seen or heard of again.”

“That fits” Jack admitted “I knew there was no way this was going to be written off as an ordinary car accident once your guys found the bullet wounds unless the evidence was knobbled.”

“Did you see anything out of the ordinary after the two men had left?” the Commander asked.

“Everything seemed normal at first” Jack remarked “You know the drill better than I do of course but there was the usual taping off of the area around the scene, road closures, Traffic Division investigation guys and the Fire Brigade present but after about an hour they were withdrawn and these unmarked vans appeared with men in suits milling around the place. When they started to do a thorough search of the surrounding area I realised I had to move so I left.”

“You must have been pretty badly injured yourself?” the Commander asked.

“Cuts and bruises mostly” Jack admitted “I think I broke a few fingers and maybe cracked a rib as well but there wasn't much I could do about that. I walked east along the Marylebone Road, hoping to find some place where I could slip onto public transport unnoticed, eventually finding Great Portland Street Station” he explained “When I got down to the platform there was no one about so I boarded the first eastbound train, hid in the drivers cab in the centre between the two units that make up the train and used the first aid kit in there to patch myself up.”

“Boy scouts?” the Commander asked.

“East London University of Life and Hard Knocks” Jack confirmed “Passed with first class honours I reckon.”

“Welcome to the club” the Commander admitted “Although I was more affiliated with the Lewisham branch.”

“Ah, a south easterner eh?” Jack remarked “Thought I could detect a bit of repressed cockney in you there.”

“So what was the plan then?” the Commander asked, returning to the past.

“I decided to head back home” Jack confirmed “Didn't really know what to expect when I got there so no surprise really when I arrived to find the house and street sealed off with vehicles parked all over the place.”

“My lot?” the Commander asked.

“Uniforms were guarding the perimeter of the sealed off area all right but whoever were searching the house were no regular Security Service guys” Jack remarked “I managed to sneak in around the back and then climb up the drain pipe to get into the house before going straight to my room.”

“I was lucky that there was no one in there” Jack continued “Whoever they were, they were far more interested in the rest of the house, my Father's study in particular. It was obvious they were looking for something specific.”

“Probably what you were carrying around in that case for the last two years” the Commander remarked “They wouldn't have found it in the car because you had it so the next logical place to search would have been your Father's study.”

“Makes sense” Jack admitted “Anyway I realised I couldn't hang around there for too long so I grabbed a few things, some food, money I had saved and got the hell out of there as fast as I could.”

“You are sure no one saw you?” the Commander asked.

“Absolutely” Jack confirmed “They were more interested in finding papers and the journal than worrying what had happened to me at that point.”

“So then what did you do?” the Commander enquired.

“Well obviously I needed a place to stay” Jack admitted “Regroup, get my thoughts together and try and sort out what the hell was going on so I headed over to the canal basin. A school friend of mine's father had a narrow boat moored there which he was in the process of restoring but he was on a round the world cruise at the time so I knew I could stay there undisturbed for a few days at least.”

“The next morning I wake up and look out of the narrow boat window across the canal basin and the sun is rising, the birds are singing as it is as if nothing had happened” Jack remarked “I decided to go for a walk, clear my head and try and work out what to do next. I was walking past Leyton Station when I saw the Standard seller

putting up the headline poster on his stand 'Four dead in tragic accident' it read so naturally I bought a copy.”

“Quite a surreal experience to read of your own death isn't it?” the Commander asked.

“It is that” Jack agreed “I can remember it clear as day as I read it sat on the station platform at Leyton, 'Entire family of four killed in a tragic hit and run accident on the Marylebone Road. The other vehicle involved was reported as having left the scene quickly which is odd considering when I saw it all there was left was a smouldering wreck.”

“To cap it all the names of the victims were the replacement identities we had just been issued with, including mine” he reached into his uniform blazer pocket and produced the replacement passport that had been made for him from that tragic night “There you go, David Henry Perivale was who I was set to become.”

“Do you mind if I show this to a guy I know later on?” the Commander asked “We might be able to get a lead on all this from the craftsmanship.”

“Be my guest” Jack confirmed “I would like it back though as it has certain sentimental value.”

“I'll make sure I take good care of it” the Commander confirmed as he put the passport inside his tunic pocket.

“Well after that I realised that if I were to reappear anywhere then it was highly likely that whoever was behind all this would reappear to finish off the job so I chose to live off the grid for the next two years” Jack confirmed “I had a network of friends who I used to barter and trade with, make a little money, keep the old cash flow rolling thanks to the wonders of East London's black economy.”

“The death certificate” the Commander asked carefully.

“Ah yes, that” Jack responded “I used a friend's name at the Westminster Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages to get a look at the books and request a copy of the death certificate. As soon as I saw that I had been officially declared dead less than two hours after the crash I soon realised I was history in more ways than one.”

“Happy Birthday” the Commander remarked with a tone of sadness and sympathy.

“Thanks” Jack admitted as he stood up and looked across the junction where two years earlier, the tragic events he had just retold for the first time had occurred.

“A certain young lady of your acquaintance wants me to ask you what do you want for your birthday” the Commander remarked “Any ideas?” he asked.

“Oh I'm sure I will think of something” Jack remarked as he looked across the road to the opposite side, noticing in Balcombe Street that a silver Lexus salon car with two people inside was parked up, pointing in his direction.

“Something wrong?” the Commander asked, sensing Jack's concerned look across the busy dual carriageway.

“There's that silver car again” he remarked “Lexus with two guys in it parked across the street. They were outside your place last night as well.”

“Ah” the Commander confirmed as he joined Jack back at the pedestrian barrier along the leading edge of the pavement “Two of Sir Richard's specialist guys” he explained “Keeping an eye on you as it happens. You weren't supposed to notice them.”

“When you have been looking over your shoulder for two years” Jack admitted “You pick up a few tricks and tips of the counter surveillance trade. No one is exactly what they appear.”

“What is it with everyone and Babylon 5 quotes today?” the Commander remarked.

“Perhaps they all have good taste in science fiction” Jack admitted “Anyway, how come I am sufficiently important to warrant Sir Richard Crowthorne's specialist attention all of a sudden?”

“Your Father managed to uncover some sort of potential plot to take over either the Civil Service or maybe even the Government itself” the Commander explained “The files are full of evidence as is the journal if we can ever crack the code he used to write it with.”

“Well I can find that for you” Jack confirmed “If it is still there it will be buried in a very safe place I know.”

“Lead on” the Commander agreed as they left the junction and headed across the road, bound for Marylebone Station.

The prison van transporting Devlin and the others southwards around the M25 was making slow progress. A combination of road works and heavy traffic conditions meant that it was pretty much stop-start all the way around the western half of the orbital motorway past the junctions for the west end of London and Heathrow.

“This isn't doing the van much good” the driver remarked to his colleague sat alongside him “Look at the radiator temperature, it's going up alarmingly.”

“What do you expect from van twenty three?” the other officer remarked “It's always been a bit of a cow this one.”

They persevered onwards along the motorway but by the time they reached the junction for Heathrow, it was clear that the over heating of the engine was now reaching a critical point and with that, the driver took the decision to pull off the motorway at the next exit and head into the service station car park.

By the time they had reached the car park, the note of the engine had become noticeably rougher and steam was beginning to emit ominously from the radiator.

Once stopped, the driver got out and with his colleague they opened the front access flap to the engine compartment and once the initial cloud of steam released had cleared, took a closer look inside.

“This is cooked” the driver remarked to his colleague who simply nodded in agreement.

“Looks like we are stuck here” the colleague agreed “Better call it in I suppose.”

The driver duly went around to the cab of the van and reached inside the window for the radio before calling for assistance.

“Van Echo Two Three to Control” the driver called as he waved away some of the steam that was drifting past him.

“Control, go ahead” the response came from the Prison Service Transport Control Room.

“We’ve overheated and come to halt in the car park at the Heathrow Junction Services” the driver informed his control “Looks like we need a replacement vehicle out here to meet us as soon as possible.

“Van Twenty Three again huh?” the Control Room officer remarked “No surprise there then. We have an empty van heading the other way in your area right now. If I can get a hold of the driver, he should be with you in about ten minutes.”

“Thanks Control” the driver responded “Echo Two Three out.”

With the engine now turned off, the steam began to die down and the driver and his colleague stretched their legs whilst they waited for the replacement vehicle to arrive.

Fortunately they did not have too long to wait as ten minutes later a second identical white Prison Service transport van arrived in the car park and pulled up alongside their own vehicle.

“Afternoon Terry” the driver of the second vehicle called as he got out of his vehicle “I see the curse of van Twenty Three has struck again then?”

“Yeah mate” the driver confirmed with a wry smile “Can you take my load and Geoff here?” he indicated his colleague.

“No problem” the other driver confirmed whereupon he too got out and joined the other two men before heading to the rear to unload the prisoners and transfer them to the fresh vehicle.

It took a few minutes to release the prisoners on board and transfer them to the second van but it was accomplished without any major fuss or complaint. Soon the driver of the stricken vehicle was waving off his colleagues as they drove away, leaving him alone with his apparently immovable van.

Once the second van was out of sight however, the driver looked around the car park to ensure no one was watching before proceeding to the rear of the van and entering the interior. He went directly to the first cell on the left at the back and opened it to reveal Devlin still sitting there waiting patiently.

“Mr Devlin” the driver declared “Perhaps you would care to sit up front?”

“Don't mind if I do” Devlin confirmed as the driver released his handcuffs and let him out.

They proceeded to the front of the vehicle and whilst Devlin got in the passenger seat of the cab, the driver reached deep inside the engine bay and removed a now discharged smoke canister from the interior and tossed it over the adjacent hedge into the river on the other side before closing the access flap.

“Ready?” the driver asked Devlin as he returned to the driver’s seat and started the engine which now sounded just fine.

“Drive on my good man” Devlin confirmed with a deep laugh.

“Well here we are” Jack declared as he and the Commander stood on the pavement in a nice rural suburb of Leytonstone, looking across the road at the former Thornton family home, partially hidden by tall hedgerows and with shuttered over windows and doors from where it had been sealed up since the demise of its occupants two years earlier.

“You know technically this is breaking and entering” the Commander remarked as they crossed the road and approached the ornate gate that guarded the driveway into the modest grounds of the impressive 1950's town house.

“And technically I live here so it isn't if you see what I mean” Jack responded.

“Ah but” the Commander pointed out “You are legally dead which means as the homeowner, you are not in a position to give consent to a search of the premises.”

“You don't strike me as the sort to let such legal niceties stand in the way of justice” Jack remarked.

“Absolutely” the Commander confirmed with a wry smile “Lets get in there.”

“Follow me” Jack requested as he led the way down the side of the premises until they reached a spot where an overhanging tree meant that he could climb up over the tall fence and inside.

“Wait here” Jack insisted “I'll be back in a minute.”

“If you insist” the Commander confirmed as he stood back and watched as Jack climbed up the tree, all be it with a few unsteady moments as it had been a long time

since he had last done this and had forgotten where some of the footholds he used to use where.

After reaching the top of the tree, Jack disappeared over the top of the fence leaving the Commander alone to look up and down the side alley with a slight apprehension until the side gate nearby suddenly opened and Jack reappeared.

“Come on” he called down the alley to the Commander who quickly joined him before proceeding inside into the garden, now heavily overgrown through two years of neglect.

“We should find it over there on that side of the garden” Jack indicated ahead through the long grass and brambles “Just watch out for the ornamental...”

There was a sudden splash as the Commander promptly put his foot in water which he had not seen because of the dense undergrowth.

“...pond” Jack finished now that it was too late.

“This place is like wild kingdom” the Commander remarked as they made their way carefully through the wilderness that was once an immaculately tended garden until they reached the dilapidated remains of the potting shed, alongside of which was a large stone ornament of a gargoyle which Jack proceeded to try and move.

“Here, let me give you a hand with that” the Commander stepped in and helped Jack move the rather ugly and lichen covered stone ornament until it shifted to reveal set into the base on which it usually sat a metal panel of some kind with a lock set into it.”

“Standard field issue to all Foreign Office diplomats of high ranking” Jack explained “My Father always thought I never knew about it but he still gave he a key to it anyway” he showed the key that he produced from his pocket “I never realised until it was way too late what it was for or why he gave it to me though.”

It took a bit of work to release the lock as it had rusted fairly badly with having been exposed to the elements for all this time but they soon got it released and opened the access flap to reveal an inner compartment with a metal box which the Commander helped Jack lift out before opening it.

“Let's see what we have here” the Commander declared as he looked into the box and retrieved a small black notebook and an envelope. Turning the envelope over revealed that its contents were addressed to Jack himself.

“I think this is for you” the Commander remarked as he passed the envelope unopened to Jack who took it and looked at his own name on the front.

“This is my Father's handwriting” Jack confirmed “I would recognise that anywhere.”

“Aren't you going to open it?” the Commander asked.

“In a minute” Jack confirmed “I need to have a few moments to prepare myself I think. Anyway, what do you have there?” he asked.

“Well looking though this” the Commander remarked as he flicked through the black notebook throughout which were numerous handwritten notes and tables “These look like code keys and algorithms, good old fashioned Trade Craft if ever I saw it.”

“If I am right” Jack remarked “That should unlock his journal notes and tell us what he knew” he confirmed.

“Right, lets get out of here” the Commander suggested.

“One thing more” Jack stopped the Commander from rising “I want to go inside” he nodded towards the house.

“Are you sure?” the Commander asked “Only I know well what stirring old memories up from the past can do to someone, trust me on this.”

“It's something I have to do” Jack admitted “Call it laying old ghosts to rest or something.”

“All right” the Commander reluctantly agreed “Five minutes and not a second more” he stated clearly to which Jack nodded in agreement.

Once again Jack led the way through the overgrown garden to the house, now looking sad and lifeless with its windows and doors shuttered and sealed.

“Back door is probably the best bet” Jack confirmed as they went around to the kitchen doorway, having to fight their way through the rose bushes that once were nicely tended to run over the door but had since gone wild and grown all over the place.

"I don't suppose you have the key to this as well do you?" the Commander asked as he looked at the lock on the back door.

"Not unless you are any good at picking locks" Jack admitted.

"That is the wife's speciality" the Commander admitted "I tend to resort to more err firmer methods."

"That would be kicking the door in then?" Jack asked.

"Aye" the Commander responded as he unceremoniously booted the door open with quite a crash "South London skeleton key, works every time."

They duly proceeded inside, the Commander leading with Jack following slightly apprehensively.

"No power" the Commander remarked as he tried the kitchen light switch to no effect as they looked into the dark ominous and musty smelling interior of the house.

Jack produced a wind up torch from his pocket and switched it on before passing it to the Commander who swung it around as they moved through the once grand house.

Two years had passed since anyone had set foot in there and this was reflected in the condition of the interior with some abandoned furnishings and peeling paint accompanied by a thick layer of dust, cobwebs and debris.

"I really must have words with the cleaning staff" Jack remarked in an attempt to lighten his heavy of heart mood at these proceedings.

"Looks like this place was pretty thoroughly searched by someone" the Commander remarked as the torch light shone on a cabinet whose drawers had been left all open at some point.

"Given the nature of whoever it was I saw here that night, it's not surprising" Jack commented as they reached the hallway and the stairs.

"Up?" the Commander asked, shining the torch up the stairs to the first floor landing above.

"Up" Jack agreed with clear apprehension before they proceeded up the stairs.

"This looks like the study" the Commander remarked as he shone the torch in one of the doors on the first floor landing to which Jack merely nodded in agreement before following him inside.

"Blimey" the Commander remarked as he shone the torch all around the interior of the study, noting the semi stripped and ransacked state of the place "Someone gave this a right going over."

"It would appear so" Jack agreed "We will find nothing here" he concluded with a tone of sadness as he thought back to the last time he had stood there two years earlier, imagining his late Father sat behind the desk.

"Move on?" the Commander suggested.

"Yes..." Jack agreed as he left the study before they proceeded down the hallway to what was Jack's old room.

"Hmmm" Jack mused as he entered his old room "A bit dusty but still recognisable" he admitted.

"Looks like not much was touched in here" the Commander remarked as he joined Jack in looking around.

"My birthday present" Jack looked down at the bedside table at a model railway locomotive, still in its Hornby red packaging.

"Oh very nice" the Commander remarked as he brushed the dust off the box and looked at the tender locomotive model nestling within "Lucky thing I have some track to run it on back home."

"The motor is probably seized by now" Jack remarked.

"Leave it to an expert" the Commander remarked casually as he duly picked up the model and put it under his arm.

"Nothing else here worth rescuing I reckon" Jack commented with a hint of sadness
"That just leaves this I suppose" he looked down at the envelope in his hand.

"It's addressed to you so it is your decision" the Commander informed him.

"All right" Jack reluctantly agreed as he sat on the rotten remains of his old bed and opened the envelope, extracting the contents and began to read by the light of the torch.

Hello Jack.

This is a message I hoped you would never have to read. I'm writing this on your tenth birthday, a couple of minutes before we leave for wherever it is we must flee to.

I do not know how much time has passed, maybe days or maybe years but one thing is certain. Unfortunately if you are reading this, I never made it and quite possibly you are now on your own.

The chances are that you do not fully understand what has been going suffice on to say that there is a dark sinister conspiracy and I wound up trying to fight it from within.

I said to you that if anything happened, the files in my briefcase were of vital importance. These files were just a sample of the kind of documentation that was being collated by those in positions of influence who should not have been anywhere near these papers.

My journal contains all my notes, recordings of key meetings, dates, times, names. The fact that you are reading this now means that you still have the case and you followed my request to hold on to it no matter what and when the time was right, place it into the care of someone you can trust and who has the power to do something about it.

The chances are that you are reading this with that person standing next to you, indeed I expect I can narrow down the identity of him quite easily.

There is a darkness coming. As I write this I cannot say when it will arrive but that arrival is inevitable. Your grandfather taught me when I was your age that knowledge is power so make use of what I have entrusted you with and take care.

Dad.

"Wise fellow" the Commander remarked once Jack had finished reading.

"He always did have a way with words" Jack admitted with a sigh of sadness.

"We best get out of here" the Commander suggested "I need to get this to Fuller for one thing."

"Aye, you are probably right Sir" Jack agreed as he stood up and took one final look around the room before following the Commander out of the door.

"It is so good to see the old town once more" Devlin remarked as he watched the streets of central London pass by the window as he relaxed in the back seat of the car that was taking him to his first meeting since he was released.

"Right, thank you" the driver of the car finished a conversation on the telephone before hanging up "The committee is assembling now" he informed Devlin "We should be there in a short while."

"And then the fun begins" Devlin commented with a satisfied smirk.

The car carried on into central London, passing Hyde Park Corner and heading up Park Lane before taking the Edgware Road from Marble Arch. Despite the usual traffic conditions of mid afternoon weekday central London, they managed to make brisk progress and soon the car was arriving outside the grand entrance of the former Great Eastern Hotel in Liverpool Street, immediately adjacent to the main line railway station of the same name.

Guarding the entrance into the former hotel, now luxurious offices were two heavily built private security guards in trademark black suits with sunglasses despite the fact the sky was overcast and gloomy. As the car drew to a halt outside the door, one of the guards stepped forward and opened the rear door allowing Devlin to step onto the pavement.

"Thank you" Devlin responded as he took a quick look around, up and down the street before being escorted into the building.

Travelling through a succession of modern glass panelled corridors and stairways revealed nothing to the casual observer about the purpose of this place or the nature or objectives of its occupants.

Only once Devlin had reached the board room on the fourth floor was the first signage of any kind seen, a carefully carved glass and stone modern stylised coat of arms with rampant lions holding aloft a shield resting on crossed swords with on the shield an omega symbol.

"Welcome home Number Seven" the man at the head of the large glass board table declared, a distinguished looking man who from his demeanour and attention to appearance was obviously the leader.

"Thank you Gerry, err sorry, Number Two" Devlin responded as he exchanged warm welcoming hand shakes with those present including the Justice Minister de Wente.

"Oh no need to apologise" Number Two reassured him "We don't stand on ceremony here."

"Well I can safely say it is nice to be back" Devlin admitted as he took his seat along with everyone else "Prison does give you plenty of time to think and be creative, hell I might even have written my memoirs if I had been in there much longer but its nice to be among like minded colleagues once again."

"Which brings us to the business in hand I feel if everyone is comfortable?" Number Two declared.

Looking around the board table revealed a unanimous response in agreement from those present.

"Very well" Number Two began "Matters arising from the last meeting. Item one, the liquidation of our friend the former Number Eighteen?"

"It's done" Number Eight confirmed "Simple operation carried out by a couple of our more discrete on street operatives with the usual 'accidental' failure of any CCTV systems to throw a proverbial spanner in the works of our friends at the Yard."

"Excellent" Number Two declared before moving on "Matters arising, item two" he declared "The return to the land of the living of young Mr Jack Thornton after two years."

Number Nine, the member of the group who the previous day had been charged with the duty of checking this situation out cleared his throat and consulted a red file in front of him before speaking.

"My team have done a cursory threat assessment as requested" Number Nine confirmed "As certain members of our group are aware, we never recovered Philip Thornton's files following his liquidation two years ago. His son was never found and the theory was that he either had the files or knew where they were."

"With Jack Thornton missing presumed dead" Number Three remarked "It was assumed that those files were lost and or destroyed."

"That all changed yesterday when our esteemed Justice Minister ran into the phoenix like young man yesterday" Number Nine confirmed "Since then we have carried out a threat assessment and I believe there is just cause to be concerned, more so with the young man in question making allies with the Commander no less."

"Now that is what I call moving in high circles" Devlin remarked.

"And we are all no doubt aware" Number Two concluded "of our past encounters with him, none more so than our newly returned colleague here" he indicated Devlin "And of course our esteemed Number One."

"He's shrewd, clever and well connected" Devlin agreed.

"The proposal I need to bring to the table is this" Number Two announced "In light of the potential danger this development presents to our objectives, I need to ask for a vote on whether we proceed now."

"Well everything we need is in place" Number Three confirmed "All we need is Mr Devlin to confirm his resources are available and at our disposal?"

"Just give the word, tell me where, when and how hard" Devlin confirmed.

"Very well" Number Two confirmed "We shall proceed."

At that point a set of sealed red document files were passed out to those present.

"You may open your briefing packs now" Number Two declared whereupon there was the business like rustling of papers all around the board room before he continued. "Operation Phoenix" he called "The plan to ensure the strength of our Government and its agencies through the removal of certain conflicting interests and the implementation of a sensible plan for power and strength once again."

"The last time some of our former associates tried something like this it ended rather badly if I recall" de Wente remarked as she surveyed the plans in detail laid out in her own briefing pack.

"It is a different world now" Number Three commented "Even though only a couple of years have passed, a lot has changed since then and people in the country are afraid. Something which makes an excellent foundation for the objectives of our little group."

"Not that little though" Number Two confirmed "We have been putting some of our people in the right place for over five years now and it's time to wake the sleepers."

"So how do we start this thing off?" Number Nine asked.

"At two thirty this afternoon" Number Two explained "In a little over an hour, there will be a cowardly terrorist attack against a member of Her Majesty's Government which will promote 'moral outrage' in the popular press."

"Just in time for the final edition of the Standard and the evening news bulletins, very nice" de Wente commented "So who is going to get the wake up call?" she asked.

"Sorry my dear" Number Two sheepishly admitted.

"Oh thanks..." de Wente responded.

"You won't be harmed, don't worry" Number Two reassured her "Just be prepared to look shattered and shocked at the impromptu press conference you will hold with the smouldering remains of your car in the background a few minutes later."

“In which case I had better get moving” de Wente realised as she rose from her seat “See you this evening, hopefully.”

“Until later” Number Three agreed whereupon the meeting paused until the Justice Minister had left.

“Tell me where, when and how spectacular and I can deliver as much chaos as you want” Devlin confirmed.

“Somewhere in Westminster or Whitehall” Number Two confirmed “Plenty of TV news crews and freelance press around to photograph the event.”

“A couple of appropriately dressed expendables from the appropriate racial economic group with AK47's and a couple of smoke grenades?” Devlin suggested.

“I like the smoke grenade idea” Number Three remarked “Nice added touch.”

“Consider it done” Devlin confirmed as he reached across to the telephone “How badly battered do you want the Justice Minister?” he asked.

“Extra crispy” Number Two confirmed “She won't be returning this evening.”

“So once our soon to be dearly departed friend has met her untimely end” Number Eight asked “That is when we move in with the special measures?”

“Correct” Number Two confirmed “At that point, upon the recommendation of our associates in key positions, the Prime Minister's Office will be recommended to put the National Security Status of the Nation into Standby Emergency Measures.”

“The Prime Minister will never go with that surely?” Devlin remarked.

“I said the Prime Minister's Office” Number Two “I didn't say anything about the Prime Minister. Oh no, he will be otherwise engaged shall we say” he confirmed looking across to Number Eight who nodded in agreement.

“That is one way of putting it” Number Eight agreed with a knowing smirk.

“At that point we will also have the opportunity to deal with the other major hurdle in our way” Number Three mentioned “I like the Commander, he is a good chap but there are things that must be done.”

“Indeed” Number Two confirmed “Once Number Eight's group have done their work later this evening with the assistance of Mr Devlin, his associates and his resources then it will be down to Number One to place the country on the correct footing for us to put in place our own special measures first thing in the morning.”

“I'll drink to that” Devlin agreed.

“I thought we were going back to New Scotland Yard?” Jack asked as he and the Commander alighted from the westbound District Line service at Monument Station.

“You are supposed to be at school” the Commander remarked.

“Yeah I know” Jack admitted with a hint of sadness “I should be having lunch around about now.”

“With Megan no doubt” the Commander commented knowingly.

“She is just a friend” Jack confirmed “What about lunch?” he asked trying to change the subject.

“I’ll see what I can sort out” the Commander agreed as they headed up through the station to the exit, passing through the ticket barriers and out into the busy street outside.

“Lima Alpha One to Control” the Commander called into his radio as they walked south towards London Bridge.

“Control, go ahead Sir” was the swift response.

“Can you pass apologies to my wife for being late and arrange for a patrol car to be left for me to collect from Monument Street in about twenty minutes?” he requested.

“Will do Sir” came the confirmation “Control out.”

“So where are we going?” Jack asked as they reached Monument Street with the tall column of the Monument to the Great Fire of London in 1666 towering overhead.

“A deep dark place of secrets” the Commander responded mysteriously as he produced a key from his pocket and proceeded to unlock and open a seemingly non-descript door in the side of a building on the corner of Monument Street and King William Street.

“Right...” Jack remarked as they headed inside what he could only describe as a dark narrow maintenance access corridor with banks of electrical equipment down one side humming away to themselves.

At the far end of the short corridor, set into the end wall was a rickety looking old lift gate which when the Commander opened it revealed a wooden panelled lift car that seemed to be from another era.

“After you” the Commander motioned to Jack who nervously stepped inside.

“Up or down?” Jack asked with some apprehension at the creepy old lift illuminated solely by a single dim bulb set in the ceiling.

“Down” the Commander confirmed as he closed the gate and activated the lift using the old mechanical handle that started the motor and sent the car creaking down into the depths.

“Is this thing safe?” Jack asked as the lift slowed for the bottom, creaking with obvious age all the way.

“I do admit its been a few years since it was last serviced” the Commander admitted “Trouble is you can't exactly thumb through the Yellow Pages in search of 'Discrete Lift Repair Services for Government Facilities That Do Not Exist' unfortunately.”

“Next time I'll take the stairs” Jack remarked as the lift reached the bottom and the Commander opened the gate to exit out into a tiled tube shaped corridor.

“Welcome to King William Street Station” the Commander declared as he escorted the young lad down the passageway to the former station platform tunnel area, now converted into two levels of office and control room accommodation.

“I guess you won't find this one on your Oyster Card” Jack remarked as the Commander led the way into the computer room within the complex where they found Fuller working away with Jennifer who had arrived earlier with a delivery of lunch and important people.

“How are you getting on?” the Commander asked as he approached the computer desk with its extensive monitors and controls which were being utilised to the maximum by Fuller.

“Not that good Sir” Fuller admitted.

“Well try this” the Commander duly produced the late Philip Thornton's note book and passed it to him.

“Code ciphers” Fuller remarked as he flicked through the small black notebook “Very classy. Your dad was a very clever man you know” he told Jack.

“He certainly had his moments” Jack agreed.

“Have my guests arrived?” the Commander enquired.

“Just brought them down about ten minutes ago” Jennifer confirmed “Conference Room.”

“Jack, you are with me” the Commander declared as he led the way through the doorway to the adjacent small but fully functional conference room where three uniformed officers of the specialist weapons unit were to be found under the command of Commander Elizabeth Baker.

“Good to see you again Commander” Baker declared as he entered “Just wish it was under more happy circumstances.”

“Agreed” the Commander confirmed.

“These are my colleagues, Lieutenant Commander's Fenton and Burton” Baker introduced her colleagues.

“Did you bring your close friend?” the Commander asked whereupon Baker bent down to pick up from the floor below the table her specialist long distance sniper rifle.

“Never leave home without it” Baker confirmed with a smile.

“And you two gentlemen” the Commander turned to Baker's colleagues “How good a shot are you two?”

“Scored joint second in the National Trials last month” Burton confirmed “You can guess who romped home with the trophy, again” he indicated his superior officer, in response Baker afforded a smile of satisfaction.

“The reason I called you down to the big smoke is that we have a potential problem that is about to blow up in our face, probably with little or no warning” the Commander explained as they all sat down.

“Nothing changes then” Baker remarked “Except for one thing, who is our little friend here?”

“This is Jack Thornton” the Commander explained “It's complicated.”

“You can say that again” Jack remarked.

“However his father was killed two years ago when he got way too close to the conspirators of a possible plot to take control of certain elements of the Government” the Commander explained “To cut a long story short, they assumed that Jack being the only survivor was holding onto his Fathers papers containing the only evidence of their activities and up until yesterday, both Jack here and the papers were thought to have long ceased to exist.”

“It's very restful being dead” Jack admitted wryly “No junk mail, no telephone calls trying to sell you double glazing.”

“Unfortunately it looks like whoever these people are” the Commander continued “It would appear that they are about to move. Sir Richard Crowthorne had a man on the inside who reported that their activities had increased significantly sometime yesterday morning, unfortunately before he could contact his control to tell Sir Richard about it, he was executed very professionally in Bond Street Station.”

“I take it” Baker remarked “We are way past a few over ambitious civil servants looking to take over their Department's stationery cupboard so they can get more than their official quota of paper clips here?”

“That would be my guess” the Commander agreed “Philip Thornton gathered quite a collection of the files that were being copied, collated and gathered by the group he infiltrated before his untimely demise and the level that these should be circulating is way beyond the level of even the National Administrator General let alone me.”

“So where do you want our talents?” Baker asked.

“You remember the trouble we had with that Omega Committee lot a couple of years back?” the Commander asked.

“How could I forget” Baker confirmed “I managed to pretty much bring Victoria Station to a complete standstill single handed.”

“Did you say Omega Committee?” Jack interrupted “Only that was something I remember my Father mentioning once just a couple of days before he was killed.”

“Well there goes one theory” the Commander responded as he casually tossed the pen he had in his hand onto the table “I thought this whole thing had their kind of style hanging over it.”

“But we eliminated them didn't we?” Baker asked.

“I have always found unwanted but determined groups are a bit like political bindweed” the Commander remarked “No matter how much of it you remove, there is always a tiny little bit left hidden somewhere to re-grow into something similar but yet subtly different.”

“What else do we know?” Baker asked “Principals, locations, etc?”

“Currently we know sweet Fanny Adams” the Commander admitted “All we have is Thornton's journal but that was encoded so until Fuller can break the code and analyse the contents we are in the dark unless something happens.”

“Ok” Baker confirmed “I'll work with my colleagues here to put together a package of measures ready to go at a moments notice. I'll also put a call into some friends I can trust in case we need to up the ante at all.”

“Use only the dedicated X-Ray Division emergency frequency with the usual scrambler routines” the Commander confirmed “We can't trust regular channels with anything that may tip them off that we have either the files or Jack here.”

“Is this the point where I duck under the table and kiss my ass goodbye?” Jack asked.

“Stick by my side and you will be fine” the Commander assured him.

“Where will you be?” Baker asked “Only I think you should be watched at all times in the light of circumstances.”

“That has already been taken care of” the Commander reassured her “It is Tracy I am most worried about. She is in the Yard but if this bunch is as well connected as they were last time she may not be safe.”

“Fenton” Baker called to her colleague to her left “Put a watch on Divisional Commander Caverner, usual drill and report anything suspicious around her to me or the Commander.”

“You got it” Fenton confirmed as he picked up his weapon case, got up and left the conference room.

“Whoever this bunch are” the Commander continued “They had access to amongst other material, the Andromeda Scenario files, plans, strategic emergency procedures, etc” he explained “That could mean at some point I get carted off along with my opposite numbers to Epsilon Three at a moments notice.”

“I’ll bear that in mind” Baker confirmed “Don’t worry Sir, I’ll have the situation locked down and ready for these beggars if they try anything.”

“Good to have you aboard” the Commander responded as he rose from his seat and they shook hands.

“Always a pleasure working with you Sir” Baker responded “And a pleasure to meet you too young man.”

In the adjacent computer control room Fuller was busy processing the scanned data from the notebook with Jennifer’s help as she fed the pages in as fast as she could into the reader.

“Control just called” Fuller confirmed as the Commander returned from the Conference Room with Jack alongside “The car you requested is parked up outside.”

“Any joy with this lot?” the Commander asked.

“There are eighteen pages of primary code ciphers alone” Fuller admitted “Its going to take a while, and yes I know we don’t have a while before you point it out Sir.”

“I have got to head back to the Yard” the Commander confirmed “Get Sir Richard Crowthorne to assemble a team of our usual friends and work with Commander Baker here” he requested “If you find out anything from these files, is there anyway you can get the information to me on the move?”

“You will need one of these” Fuller reached into his bag and produced a small palmtop computer “I know how you are with technology Sir but basically this is a small pocket computer with built in modem so that I can send you messages and files over a secure scrambled link.”

“Err right, thanks” the Commander responded as he took the palmtop computer and looked at it with some doubt before putting it in his inside uniform tunic pocket.

“I got to go” Jennifer remarked at that point “Escort job from Whitehall in twenty minutes” she confirmed.

“Hold the lift” the Commander responded “We are just coming.”

“Be careful out there” Fuller warned “All of you.”

“Would these people really resort to killing someone like me?” Jack asked as they headed back up to the surface in the old lift.

“I have dealt with people like this before” the Commander confirmed “They will stop at nothing to achieve their aims. Most of it is fed by the greed for power, influence and money usually.”

“Oh, that old chestnut” Jack remarked.

“You know you are very calm for a lad in your precarious position” Jennifer remarked as the lift stopped at the top and they got out.

“Two years ago I watched as a couple of professional knuckle heads calmly executed my entire family as simply as you would swat a fly. If I hadn't been able to get out of that car in time then I would have been dead too and that does rather put a different shine on your outlook on life” Jack explained.

“If you had been killed that night” the Commander added as they exited out into the daylight “your Father's files and evidence would now be in the hands of those who he was fighting against and none of us would have an inkling that anything was wrong until it blew up in our faces.”

“Why can't life be simple?” Jack remarked wryly.

“I ask that myself every day” the Commander admitted.

"Right that is the last one in" Fuller declared to himself as he called up the last scanned page of the notebook into the system and set the decryption program running.

He reached for his cup of coffee as the computer began to chew away, comparing the text of the original journal and applying different possible combinations of code ciphers against it.

"Oh very clever" Fuller marked as he sat back and watched the progress across three different large computer screens in front of him.

"You really enjoy this technical stuff don't you?" Commander Baker asked as she joined him.

"Second love only to the wife" Fuller admitted with a satisfied grin.

"Just to let you know" Baker informed him "Sir Richard Crowthorne and a few others will be here shortly."

"Sounds like the forming of a war council" Fuller remarked.

"Maybe" Baker admitted.

"That sounded ominous" Fuller commented.

"Encrypted journals of evidence, shadowy figures in positions of authority, professional murders of covert operatives and that's just for starters" Baker remarked "If that isn't ominous I don't know what is."

"Ah!" Fuller responded as a bleep from the computer heralded that some of the journal had been successfully decoded.

"Anything interesting?" Baker enquired.

"Err..." Fuller speed read the first three pages of the journal that had been decoded "Reports basic information, initial plan objectives and how the operation is to commence..." he tailed off.

"What?" Baker asked as the fourth page came through and Fuller was able to finish reading a crucial sentence which made him change his expression.

"How quickly can you get to Whitehall?" Fuller asked, indicating a section of text on the screen that Baker leaned forward and read.

"Bloody hell!" she exclaimed as she read the screen before quickly reacting by grabbing her weapon case and making a swift exit.

"So what does 'Regional Administrator General' actually mean?" Jack asked the Commander as they proceeded along The Strand approaching Charing Cross.

"Basically a Regional Administrator General runs the Service over a given area of the country" the Commander explained "In my case I oversee everything in Greater London and the south east."

"And I take it there are others as well?" Jack asked.

"Nine in total" the Commander confirmed "Wessex & South West, Wales, Thames Valley, Midlands, Eastern Region, Northern Region, Scotland and Northern Ireland."

"And who is your boss?" Jack asked.

"I report to the Home Office, the National Administrator General and the National Joint Intelligence Committee who in turn report direct to the Prime Minister" he explained as they reached the tail back of traffic on the approach roads to Trafalgar Square.

"What was that?" Jack wondered as an electronic beeping noise was heard from somewhere inside the car causing both of them to look around in an attempt to locate its source.

"I think it may be this contraption" the Commander confirmed as he pulled the palmtop computer Fuller had given him out of his pocket "See what you can do with it" he asked, passing it to Jack.

"Seems to be a message" Jack confirmed.

"Read it out" the Commander requested as he moved the car slowly amid the traffic going around Trafalgar Square.

"Journal partially decoded" Jack read Fuller's message "Initial serious incident in Whitehall possibly within the hour. Baker and co. are en route."

"Change of plan" the Commander declared as he switched on the lights and sirens and swerved out of the line of traffic.

"This is more like it" Jack remarked as they made swift progress through the traffic.

A couple of miles away, the Justice Minister was travelling along Whitehall in her official ministerial car, looking pensive at the imminent prospect of what she still believed would be a mock attack on her person due any moment.

Following her car at a discreet distance in amongst the traffic was a fairly anonymous green saloon car with two men inside who maintained a constant watch on the Justice Minister's car ahead as it reached the end of Parliament Street and moved into Parliament Square in the shadow of the Houses of Parliament.

De Wente braced herself as the traffic lights near the Westminster Bridge exit from the Square turned red just as they reached it.

Next thing she knew there was the sound of gunfire, firstly in the air and then striking the bodywork of her car as outside the sound of screaming filled the air.

"Oh hell" the Commander remarked as his patrol car arrived on the scene where he could see a pair of gunmen throwing smoke grenades around and firing AK47 automatic weapons randomly to create as much panic and confusion as possible.

"I think I'll stay in the car" Jack remarked as he too looked on in shock at the scene unfolding before him.

"Good idea" the Commander confirmed as he got out of the car and drew his own gun "and keep your head down."

As the Commander and other members of the Security Services closed in on their position, the two gunmen turned their gunfire upon them forcing many to seek cover behind vehicles or in nearby doorways.

"Lima Alpha One to Sierra Whiskey Uniform Zero One" the Commander called into his radio once he had changed the frequency "Commander Baker, are you in position?" he asked.

"Just give the word Sir" Baker confirmed from her position overlooking the scene as she eyed up one of the targets through her powerful sniper rifle scope.

"Make it look good" the Commander confirmed.

“That’s a roger” Baker responded as she took careful aim and fired one single shot that three hundred yards away sent the target dropping to the ground stone dead. As her shot was successful, the other gunman was also despatched with similar efficiency by one of her colleagues over the other side of the Square with the same successful result.

“Targets down” Baker confirmed to the Commander who looked around the front of the bus he had been using as cover.

“Sir Richard” the Commander called into his radio “You can send in your team now” he confirmed.

Within moments an Ambulance and Paramedic crew arrived and under the direction of a couple of Sir Richard Crowthorne’s men, ensured that the Justice Minister’s apparently lifeless body was very publicly removed from the damaged car and into the back of the ambulance.

“Lima Alpha One from the old man” Sir Richard called into a discreet ear piece type radio set as he observed the operation by his people from the pavement outside the main entrance of the Houses of Parliament “She is in the bag.”

“Take her to somewhere dark and unpleasant” the Commander requested “East Croydon should do and then put your best spin team to work and announce her unfortunate demise.”

“Consider it done old friend” Sir Richard confirmed before signing off.

“Bob!” the Commander called to the head of the Armed Support Unit as he and his team arrived having sped from New Scotland Yard in response to the first reports of the incident.

“Afternoon Sir” the large broad shouldered figure of ‘Big Bob’ responded “Looks like we have had uninvited guests in town.”

“In more ways than one” the Commander admitted as they surveyed the wreckage where the ambulance containing the Justice Minister was departing under heavy escort whilst members of Bob’s team checked the dead terrorists to make sure they were never going to trouble anyone again.

“I’m sorry Sir?” Bob asked in response to the Commander’s seeming odd remark.

“I’ll explain later” the Commander admitted “Meantime, make sure this whole area is sealed off and make it look media friendly if you know what I mean.”

“I think I understand” Bob confirmed.

“I may need to call upon your services at some point in the next thirty six hours strictly off the timesheets” the Commander advised “Can you have a team of your best and most trust worthy lads and lasses put on alert for me and me only?”

“Certainly” Bob readily agreed “I can assume that there is more to all this than just a couple of nutters randomly targeting the Justice Minister then?”

“Indeed” the Commander admitted “But you didn't hear that from me.”

“Got you Sir” Bob confirmed.

“Anyway I had better head back to the Yard” the Commander responded as he turned to leave only to suddenly turn back when something that Bob had just said struck him as odd “Bob, how did you know it was the Justice Minister?” he asked.

“Came through on the radio about three minutes ago” Bob confirmed “Bit quick off the mark I thought.”

“You can say that again” the Commander agreed “Her trip was an unlisted and unscheduled one. No one knew she was in that car.”

“Here we go again...” Bob admitted, realising the significance of this development “Be careful Sir” he advised.

“You too mate” the Commander agreed as he left, returning to the patrol car where he found Jack standing alongside it and surveying the scene which was now sealed off and becoming increasingly crowded with more and more emergency service vehicles arriving.

“I thought you were going to wait in the car?” the Commander remarked.

“Anyone who says that never does though do they?” Jack commented with a wry smile.

“Aye, I guess you are right” the Commander admitted as they both got back in the patrol car.

“Human nature isn't it” Jack remarked as the Commander started the car and they moved off “We learn this rubbish in school these days. What did you learn in school?” he asked.

“By the time I was your age” the Commander recalled “Spotting dodgy bank notes, how to avoid getting shot in diamond robberies and the sharp end of early 1970's law enforcement.”

A few minutes later they were pulling up outside the main entrance of New Scotland Yard where they were met by a concerned looking David Collins, Head of Operations at MI5.

“Afternoon Dave” the Commander called as he and Jack got out of the patrol car “You look like a worried man.”

“With good reason” Collins confirmed as they headed inside “Justice Minister attacked in an unscheduled trip, identity of said victim on the radio before the first

shot has barely been fired, terrorists taken out by long distance snipers who just happened to be there, Sir Richard's boys all over the scene, need I go on?"

"I think we have been rumbled" Jack commented aside as they entered the Reception area where as they passed the desk the Receptionist handed the Commander a small brown envelope.

"And then there are the political back channel whispers that have gone into overdrive in the last twenty four hours laden with bandwagon loads of bullshit political agendas" Collins added.

"Language" the Commander reminded Collins as the three of them entered the lift and ascended upwards.

"That's a point" Collins remarked "Who are you may I ask?"

"Jack Thornton, soon to be Jack Regent" the Commander declared "Meet David Collins, our man from MI5. Dave, this is Jack, a participant in this situation on which I am about to brief you."

"Hi" Collins responded "How did you wind up in the middle of all this?" he asked.

"Dead parents, hidden files, sinister conspiracies and little old me dropped right in the middle" Jack admitted "Oh and my new parents as well" he grinned knowingly.

"You are being adopted by the two most powerful law enforcement officers in the country?" Collins remarked with astonishment "Blimey..."

"That reminds me" the Commander passed across the envelope he had received in Reception to Jack "Happy birthday."

"Wow!" Jack exclaimed as he opened the envelope to reveal a plastic encased identity card with a black magnetic data strip on the reverse "A New Scotland Yard security pass?"

"Well as you are now part of this rather unusual family, it's time you had a membership card" the Commander explained "Show it to Megan when you see her, trust me she will be impressed."

"Who's Megan?" Collins asked as they left the lift on the top floor where they were met by a rather anxious looking Tracy.

"What's up love?" the Commander asked.

"I think the wheels are coming off" Tracy admitted as they went into the Commander's office.

"Why am I not surprised?" Collins remarked wryly.

"The news on the agencies is that the Deputy Prime Minister is pushing for emergency security measures in response to and I quote 'the moral outrage of the

carefully planned terrorist attack on the Justice Minister and further credible intelligence from the covert security services' apparently" Tracy confirmed.

"We don't have a Deputy Prime Minister" the Commander remarked. "The position was scrapped last year when the last one had a heart attack whilst screwing his secretary."

"We do now" Tracy confirmed as she grabbed the remote control from the desk and turned on the television, going straight to the live coverage of BBC News 24 "He was given the job just after lunchtime."

"Sir William Temple-Smythe?" the Commander asked around "Who the hell is this guy when he is at home?"

"Not on our radar that is for certain" Collins confirmed, equally as dumbfounded at the speed and nature of unfolding events "And as to what this 'credible new intelligence' is heaven only knows, the usual anarchists, terrorist outfits, loons and so on have been quiet for weeks."

"There is a bandwagon rolling here" the Commander declared as the telephone on the desk rang with the tone indicating a directly dialled call rather than one that had come via the main switchboard. "Hello?" he answered.

"Commander?" the voice of the Prime Minister called "We need to talk, urgently. Things are happening."

"So I see Sir" the Commander noted the continuing coverage from BBC News 24 on the screen with a live report from the scene of the attack on the Justice Minister "I see you have appointed a new Deputy Prime Minister" he asked.

"Yes, it was news to me as well" the Prime Minister admitted.

"So is this something that can be discussed over the telephone or are we thinking about a personal meeting here?" he asked.

"Definitely in person" the Prime Minister confirmed "and please bring your new friend along as well."

"Downing Street?" the Commander asked.

"Err no" the Prime Minister responded "Ask my driver, she will tell you where to meet me. Half an hour" he concluded with an obviously worried tone in his voice.

"Half an hour" the Commander confirmed before hanging up.

"How many people in the country have your direct dial office number?" Collins asked out of curiosity.

"Seven" the Commander confirmed "four of which are in this room. That was the Prime Minister who apparently is even more in the dark about our new Deputy Prime Minister than we are."

“Whatever my Father found about has started hasn't it?” Jack asked with a sense of foreboding.

“I think it has yes” the Commander agreed “Meantime you and I have an appointment, the question is where.”

“The one person to ask about the Prime Minister's schedule and whereabouts would be my Sister” Tracy confirmed as she reached for the telephone “I'll ask her.”

As Tracy made the call to her Sister, the Commander returned to Collins who was watching the television coverage and looking thoroughly perplexed.

“What's all this about?” he asked.

“A dark conspiracy that threatens to destabilise the political establishment from within if the combined evidence of the late Philip Thornton, Sir Richard's nosing around and a few other sources are to be believed” the Commander confirmed.

“Dentist surgery in Harley Street” Tracy confirmed as she finished on the telephone “Jennifer is on guard outside the door and confirms that both you, Jack and Sir Richard are expected in about twenty minutes.”

“Dave” the Commander turned to Collins “Return to your office and put as many resources as you can spare without raising any suspicions in key places according to the second draft of the Andromeda Exercise Plan.”

“How do you know about that?” Collins asked.

“From the papers Philip Thornton collected from the mysterious group that is organising this plot” the Commander explained as he opened his wall safe and extracted the battered briefcase containing the files “The level of information this group has access to is beyond frightening.”

“What do you want me to do?” Tracy asked.

“Keep things together here” the Commander assured her “There are likely to be a lot of frightened and worried people out there over the next twenty four hours as the media is fed this codswallop and things are likely to get jittery on the streets.”

“I'll try” Tracy confirmed as the Commander kissed her for support “Suppose they try some coup to take over the Service while they are at it?”

“Civil Servants taking over the Security Service?” the Commander asked “I doubt that somehow.”

“Yes, but what if?” Tracy responded “If they are capable of setting up a hit on the Justice Minister and lay their hands on any restricted file they want, there is no telling how far they are willing to go to achieve their aims.”

“Sir Richard, Simon and Commander Baker are co-ordinating our counter intelligence over at King William Street” the Commander confirmed “If things get too dicey around here, we will meet up there and regroup. You have Collins' lads and lasses, Big Bob and his team and a number of other cards available on the table if you need them.”

“All right” Tracy confirmed “Let's just hope we don't need them.”

“Well with a bit of luck that cow de Wente will spill the beans and put some names and faces to whoever is behind this” the Commander remarked.

“I thought she was killed?” Collins asked, astonished.

“That's the public version that a spin team under Sir Richard are putting out to keep our plotters happy” the Commander confirmed “I managed to get the incident engineered to our advantage before she really was killed. Meanwhile she is enjoying the dubious comforts of a dark sound proof room downtown with a couple of Sir Richard's boys. Trust me, she'll talk sooner or later.”

“How did you know about the attack?” Tracy asked.

“Thornton's journal” the Commander explained “The first couple of pages that Fuller managed to translate contained the initial stages of the operation of the plotters. It was a close call though.”

“How long before we know anything more from it?” Collins asked.

“Could be hours yet” the Commander admitted “It's become the Rosetta Stone of this operation. Meantime I and Jack have an appointment at the dentist” he confirmed as he picked up the battered briefcase.

“Be careful” Tracy asked before she and the Commander kissed quite passionately “That goes for both of you” she added to Jack.

“I'll see you later” the Commander confirmed before he and Jack left the office.

“The dentist?” Jack asked as they entered the lift whereupon the Commander pressed the button for the ground floor.

“Don't worry” the Commander reassured him “Not what it seems. You and I have been invited to tea with the Prime Minister.”

“Megan is never going to believe this” Jack remarked wryly.

As Sir Richard drove through the streets of central London, the news reports on the radio from BBC Radio 4 were full of up to the minute reporting on the events that had occurred in Parliament Square a little over an hour earlier.

“A reminder of the top news story at three o'clock” the news presenter confirmed “A terrorist attack on a ministerial transport in Parliament Square, London has claimed the life of the Government Secretary of State for Justice, Baroness Jacqueline de Wente QC.”

“The two gunmen were quickly shot dead by anti-terrorist officers of the National Security & Police Service but not in time to save the life of the Minister who was pronounced dead on arrival at Guys & St Thomas' Hospital” the report continued. “In a statement from the newly appointed Deputy Prime Minister Sir William Temple-Smythe...”

“Who?” Sir Richard asked generally as he went through Piccadilly and up into Regent Street.

“...described the loss of the Justice Minister as 'a dark day for freedom, democracy and the British way of living' and confirmed he had initiated measures to increase the security alert for the nation to 'critical' with possible emergency measures on standby as a result of 'additional credible and substantiated evidence' of an imminent terror plot against key Government and Security Services figures.”

“Utter bollocks...” Sir Richard remarked as he approached Oxford Circus which was unusually quiet for a week day mid afternoon, the effect of the Parliament Square attack having sent many tourists and visitors home early amid any potential threat.

Sir Richard turned the radio down and reached for his car telephone on which he pressed a speed dial number that connected him to the personal mobile telephone of his successor at MI5, David Collins.

“Sir Richard, I thought you might be calling” Collins remarked.

“Tell me” Sir Richard asked “This 'credible and substantiated intelligence' that new idiot of a Deputy Prime Minister is babbling on about. Utter bollocks I take it?”

“Absofragginglutely” Collins confirmed “Whoever is feeding him this stuff, assuming he is not making it up himself is promoting a particularly unpleasant bandwagon somewhere.”

“That's what I figured” Sir Richard agreed “Where are you now?” he asked.

“The Commander's office at the Yard” Collins confirmed “I am co-ordinating our response with Divisional Commander Caverner and some other friends dotted about the place but I suspect you know quite a bit about that old friend?”

“I might know something...” Sir Richard jokingly admitted “Listen. I am putting you in charge of sweating that bitch until the pips squeak” he confirmed “I reckon she was expecting to survive but her paymasters had other ideas so if you work on that angle she may confess some names, anything to work on.”

“That was the angle I was thinking of trying” Collins confirmed “This is bad isn't it?” he asked.

“Yes” Sir Richard admitted “and I fear it is only the beginning” he confirmed “Its going to get a lot worse before it we are in a position to retaliate.”

“Ok” Collins confirmed “I'll keep the kettle warm and run the show from my office, Tracy has the Security Service pretty much in hand, I guess we just have to wait to see where we go from here.”

“I'll call again later” Sir Richard confirmed “Stay sharp and watch your back.”

“I will” Collins confirmed before hanging up.

Sir Richard turned into Harley Street and as he proceeded down this famous street with its plethora of private medical and dental surgeries, was met by the Commander's patrol car coming the other way until they both met outside the dental clinic at which Jennifer Caverner was standing guard in the ornate Edwardian doorway.

“I hate dentists” Jack remarked as he got out of the car and joined the Commander and Sir Richard on the pavement before they headed up the steps to the entrance where Jennifer duly opened the door for them and let them inside.

“So do I lad” Sir Richard admitted “So do I.”

Inside, Jennifer duly led them to a dentist's consulting room where they arrived to find the Prime Minister sitting behind the large doctor's desk leafing through papers with a very worried and concerned look.

“Prime Minister” the Commander declared as they met at the desk with a warm handshake.

“Thank you for coming, all three of you” the Prime Minister confirmed “Especially a pleasure to meet you young man” he addressed Jack who was a little over awed.

“Err thank you Sir” Jack confirmed as he sat down, looking a bit stunned by all this.

“Last time I saw you, you were still a baby” the Prime Minister remarked “I knew your late father, we were in the Foreign Office together for a time many years ago. I am sorry about your family.”

“Well it would appear I have acquired a new one since then” Jack admitted “The new mum and dad were obvious but it seemed I have also acquired an Uncle Richard and half the National Security Service as well!”

“Quite” the Prime Minister agreed with a smile, the first he had managed that day under the trying circumstances he had found himself thrust into “Now, would one of you mind telling me first, what the hell is going on around here and second, who is actually running my Government?”

“How much do you know of what is going on?” the Commander asked as he put the battered briefcase on the table and opened it.

“The first thing I knew was when the Attorney General walked into the Cabinet Office this morning with a report from the National Security Committee stating that we were about to be attacked” the Prime Minister admitted. “Before I could respond, he had used some little known, seldom used and hardly heard of emergency powers and appointed a Deputy Prime Minister who I have never heard of.”

“You know of the attack on de Wente I presume?” Sir Richard asked.

“Only what I heard on the radio on the way over here” the Prime Minister confirmed. “Major political decisions have been and continue to be taken at the highest level today yet I am being kept deliberately out of the loop.”

“Ok then” the Commander responded “From the top I take it?”

“If you would be so kind” the Prime Minister confirmed.

“Three years ago, a high ranking civil servant in the Foreign Office, the man we all now know to be Philip Thornton came to Sir Richard with a report of a clandestine group being formed within Government, the media and big business possibly centred on the Civil Service Internal Security Bureau” the Commander began. “Unfortunately after amassing a considerable amount of evidence, he was killed in an apparent hit and run RTA on the Marylebone Road exactly two years ago.”

“Let me guess” the Prime Minister asked “It was not as accidental as was claimed at the time.”

“According to the reports at the time” the Commander continued “Issued I point out a mere half an hour after all the evidence about the accident had been seized from the Traffic Division office by representatives of an unspecified agency, the accident was declared a tragic event that resulted in the death of Philip Thornton, his wife and his two children.”

“Which is complete and utter cobblers” Jack cut in “That the fact I am still here and still breathing is clear proof of that.”

“The crash was a deliberate set up and then they were shot dead just to make sure” the Commander confirmed. “One problem though, the evidence that Philip Thornton had accrued disappeared. It was never found at the crash scene or at his house which was thoroughly searched by that very same unspecified agency only a couple of hours after his death.”

“I had it” Jack indicated the badly battered briefcase “When I saw the two men execute my father and then read in the paper I was officially dead, I ran and hid, lived off the grid for two years until such a time as I met someone with whom I could trust my father's files.”

“Which brings us to this” the Commander confirmed as he opened the briefcase “We have Thornton's journal which is being decoded as we speak that contains names, places, dates, plotlines, the works. Then there is this little collection of files that according to our information is a mere sample of the high level intelligence files this

mysterious group have spent years collating and assessing in preparation for their plans.”

“Bloody hell...” the Prime Minister remarked as he was passed the files from the case and looked through them “You could take over the entire Government with this kind of information.”

“Which may well be what they are planning to do one way or the other” Sir Richard agreed “Until we can get the rest of the journal translated, we are pretty much in the dark unless de Wente gives us something.”

“She is alive?” the Prime Minister asked to which the Commander nodded in confirmation “I thought, I mean all the reports are saying she was killed.”

“That is what this organisation wanted so that is what we are happy for them to believe for the moment” the Commander explained “Meantime our friends at MI5 are working with Sir Richard's boys somewhere dark and sound proof. It's just a question of how far you are willing to authorise their efforts.”

“I never wanted that traitorous cow anywhere near the Government in the first place” the Prime Minister confirmed “She got in on a golden parachute. As far as I am concerned you can burn the bitch.”

At that moment the Commander's palmtop computer which was still in Jack's blazer pocket beeped which prompted him to retrieve it and read the latest message from Fuller.

“Well there goes the neighbourhood” Sir Richard remarked as he looked over Jack's shoulder and read the message for himself.

“Bloody hell...” the Commander remarked in agreement as he too saw the message with a look of shock “They wouldn't would they?”

“Well if you want to convince the public in the street that you need special measures, you need to think big and that would pretty much tip the balance” Sir Richard confirmed.

“Would someone mind telling me what the hell is going on?” the Prime Minister asked, fearing the worst.

“Fuller has managed to translate the pages of Thornton's journal relating to phase two of the plan” the Commander confirmed with apprehension “Phase one was the public hit on the Justice Minister, phase two racks things up considerably with an attempted assassination.”

“So who is the bunny?” the Prime Minister asked.

“Well actually you are” the Commander informed him with deep sincerity.

“And I just spent three grand on dental work” the Prime Minister wryly remarked in a vain attempt to hide the shock of this revelation.

“It looks from this” Sir Richard continued to read the message on the palmtop screen “The Deputy Prime Minister will initiate an Andromeda Directive following the receiving of further 'credible intelligence' which will force Alpha, err that would be you Prime Minister, to be taken by helicopter to the nearest Epsilon location only the helicopter is expected suffer some form of 'incident' on the way.”

“The obvious answer is not to go” the Commander remarked.

“If he doesn't go, won't this bunch realise we have the journal and know we are onto them?” Jack commented.

“You are right” the Prime Minister confirmed “If I don't go, there is no telling what they will do. They could even target key members of the Security Service if they suspect they have these files and the journal.”

“Tracy...” the Commander responded with a realisation of the serious and awkward situation they were now in.

“There is an alternative possibility we might consider” Sir Richard remarked as he got up and walked over to the window to look out on the street outside where it was starting to rain “We could kill the Prime Minister.”

“Oh thanks...” the Prime Minister responded.

“You don't follow” Sir Richard explained “The press are going to be all over the place, following key people, especially you so we use that media exposure to our advantage.”

“I think I see where you are coming from” the Commander agreed “It's risky but if we are careful, we could just pull it off.”

“I'm not going to like this am I?” the Prime Minister asked.

“Jack” the Commander turned to the little lad “Pop outside and ask Aunty Jennifer to pop in please.”

“No problem” Jack confirmed as he got up and went over to the door “Aunty Jenny?” he called into the corridor outside once he had opened the door “We need you for one of those barmy plans that I think the Commander specialises in.”

“That sounds ominous” Jennifer remarked as she joined them in the office, closing the door behind her “So what would you like me to do?” she asked.

“I need you to be complicit in and be a prominent witness to the assassination of the Prime Minister” Sir Richard explained.

“Two days ago” Jennifer responded looking understandably a little stunned “I would have laughed manically and called you all complete barm pots but after what has happened in the last day or two, strangely I am not in the least bit surprised.”

“How easy is it to exchange the Prime Minister for a dummy?” the Commander asked.

“That could have been phrased better...” Jack commented.

“As in real PM is seen getting into the car...” Jennifer asked.

“...or helicopter...” the Commander added.

...seen by all the media and then fake PM departs and meets his fate?” Jennifer concluded.

“Basically yes” Sir Richard confirmed.

“It could be done” Jennifer agreed “I organised something similar for that ambassador of wherever the hell it was some years back. Everyone saw him get in the car which then moved off and blew up only he had in fact got out the other side before it set off making it look like he had bought it.”

"Exchange helicopter for car and I think that may work" Sir Richard commented.

"When?" the Prime Minister asked.

"As soon as the Andromeda Directive is issued" the Commander confirmed as he passed the Prime Minister the appropriate file "When that happens, all of the regional Administrator General's, yourself and those on the Alpha List in front of you there will be found and escorted immediately to the Epsilon location nominated."

"Aylesbury Hills most likely" Sir Richard remarked "Epsilon III."

"That will fall to the responsibility of my Division" Jennifer confirmed "That gives us a window of opportunity to make good your escape from the fate planned for you" she informed the Prime Minister.

"In which case we will need alternative transport for the PM" the Commander confirmed as he thought for a moment "Jennifer, liaise with that mad yet resourceful husband of yours and rustle up some alternative transport ready to go at a moments notice from Marylebone."

"The less obvious the better" Sir Richard suggested.

"You've got it" Jennifer confirmed.

"In the meantime" the Commander suggested "I think we should return to our 'normal' schedules. To remain here together too long may raise suspicions."

"That means I go back to school" Jack pointed out as they all prepared to leave.

"All right, most of us return to normal routines" the Commander admitted "If you stick your head above the parapet at the moment it is likely to get blown off."

"Should I call my wife and tell her what is going on?" the Prime Minister asked as they all filed out of the office.

"Not advisable" Sir Richard cautioned "If anyone in Downing Street overhears the conversation, our little double bluff would be blown."

"I suppose you are right" the Prime Minister agreed "It's just that I don't like keeping her in the dark like this" he admitted as they exited the premises and Jennifer escorted him to the Ministerial Escort Car.

"We will meet later" the Commander assured him before closing the door of the car.

"Watch your backs guys" Jennifer warned as she got in the driver's seat "This is likely to turn very ugly very quickly."

"Be seeing you" the Commander called as Jennifer drove away.

"I best head back to King William Street and co-ordinate our efforts" Sir Richard confirmed as he returned to his car.

Jack and the Commander watched Sir Richard drive off before returning to the patrol car and getting in.

"You don't think they would target Megan to get to me would they?" Jack asked sincerely.

"Highly unlikely" the Commander confirmed "However I have asked Commander Cassini to put a couple of his undercover guys in the area just in case."

"You think of everything" Jack remarked.

"In my job, you have to" the Commander admitted as he drove off down the street.

"All right, let's have everyone's attention" Tracy called across the bustling chaos of the main briefing room at New Scotland Yard where she had called all the area and divisional supervising officers together.

There was a bit of commotion as officers found the nearest seat in response to Tracy's declaration.

"Right" Tracy carried on once she had everyone's attention "I have called you all here to brief you on the current situation" she declared "As you may be aware, our beloved Justice Minister was shot dead about two hours ago. Subsequent to that we have learned that our lords and masters are preparing emergency measures which will mean a lot of frightened people on the streets and no doubt some unpleasant surprises for us."

"What are these emergency measures?" one of the supervising divisional offices asked.

“The suspension of the usual things we take for granted, you know freedom of speech, due process, suspects rights, the stuff that makes the justice system run properly but politicians find politically inconvenient when it comes up against their bandwagons” Tracy confirmed with some dread “If we are not careful, we could wind up becoming a political wing of some agenda waving minister with axes to grind and money to make.”

“Only this time, the political masters have cooked up some nice legislation so that they can actually do it legally” another officer concluded.

“Well I know they have the judiciary sewn up tighter than a ducks backside” Tracy admitted “That means if anyone out there gets arrested and detained without trial, they can do sweet FA about it and that quite frankly scares me. This Service was built upon the principles of the United Nations, freedom of speech, human rights, fair justice to one and all but some people in dark corners of the world don't like that.”

“So where do we fit in?” another officer asked.

“If or judging by the whispers when this happens” Tracy confirmed “This service will be put under the direct control of the Deputy Prime Minister's office and certain legal rights of the public will be suspended for the duration of the 'emergency'. We will play along but keep to the spirit of the law even if the letter of it has been conveniently lost down the back of a political sofa for the duration.”

“Is this likely to be one of those occasions where doing the right thing isn't necessarily doing the right thing?” the first officer asked.

“Pretty much yes” Tracy agreed “I want this service to keep its nose clean. There are going to be a lot of very nervous people out there looking to us and asking what the hell is going on. Yes there will be political types spouting their usual double talk codswallop and spin on the TV and in the popular press but they are in their ivory towers in Whitehall, we are the ones down on the street.”

Tracy paused for a few moments to let her words sink in amongst her audience before she continued.

“I want you to pass on this message to all the officers and personnel under your command” Tracy continued “and to keep an eye open for anything unusual, odd occurrences, strangers floating around and whispers on the back channels. If you hear or see anything, pass it back to me here at the Yard.”

“Only by standing together and doing what we do best will we get through this” Tracy concluded “Now return to your posts, pass on what I have said and prepare for the darkness that is approaching.”

With those concluding words, the audience of senior officers rose to their feet once they all had taken a few moments to take in her words before beginning to file out of the room.

“Commander Greenway” Tracy called over to one officer who was about to get up and leave “Could you come up to my office in five minutes?” she asked.

“Certainly Maam” Greenway confirmed, slightly taken aback that of all the senior officers in the room, he was the one singled out for attention from the Divisional Chief Commander.

Tracy herself took a deep breath before gathering together her papers and walking briskly out of the room and then heading up to the top floor and the Control Room where she went directly to the despatch desk where was sat Gladys, one of the longest serving members of the Control Room staff and a lady upon whom she knew she could depend no matter what.

“Afternoon Gladys” Tracy remarked as to the surprise of the elderly member of the service, she sat down along side her “I need to ask a small favour of you.”

“Consider it done Maam” Gladys confirmed as they spoke in low almost whispered voices.

“I need you to be my eyes and ears on the City” Tracy confirmed “I know you can find your way into pretty much any communication system across this town so what I want you to do is keep an ear on the VIP Protection Division channels, the media news feeds, the raw ones not the filtered ones that is, anything else that seems relevant to what is really going on out there.”

“I can do that for you Maam” Gladys confirmed “The question if you don't mind me asking is why?”

“Because when this all kicks off which I fear it could be any minute” Tracy confirmed “We will be surrounded in a filtering blanket of political convenience and all I am going to get officially is what certain people want me to see.”

“So you want me to peek out from under the blanket and see what scary monsters are running around outside where you can't see them?” Gladys asked.

“There is a lady who has grandchildren” Tracy remarked “Yes” she confirmed “Feed anything you think is relevant no matter how trivial to me via the usual secured scrambled private line to my mobile.”

“I do love a bit of good old fashioned counter intelligence form and general sneakiness” Gladys remarked with a wry smile.

“Thanks” Tracy responded before discreetly leaving her to it, travelling as far as the main console where the duty Control Room Supervisor was surveying the current situation.

“How is it going out there?” Tracy asked as she joined him in surveying the status screens across the front wall of the large room.

“Well the attack on the Justice Minister pretty much sent most of the tourists home on the first train out of town which has cleared the streets a bit” the Supervisor confirmed

“That helps a bit but I can't help thinking this is just the beginning. Did you catch that crap the Deputy PM was running on News 24 Maam?”

“I did indeed” Tracy confirmed, happy that there appeared to be more of a disbelieving element in what was going on through the Service than she could ever have thought possible “Trouble is when this thing blows up, we are going to be surrounded by such types.”

“The streets will be running hot with political bandwagons and the usual suspects trying to get their mugs on the TV I expect” the Supervisor remarked “I don't like the way this is going.”

“Me neither” Tracy agreed “We are supposed to be a Service serving and protecting the people, not a political mouthpiece for a bunch of overpowered Whitehall muffins but they pay the wages so we have to play along. Anyway, got to go” she confirmed as she checked her watch.

“I'll keep things together here Maam” the Supervisor confirmed as Tracy departed with a nod of thanks.

Tracy walked out into the connecting corridor which was bustling with officers and personnel going back and forth although they all gave way for Tracy as she passed through during which she got lots of greetings of support from the officers she passed on the way to her office where she found a slightly nervous looking Commander Greenway standing by her door.

“Relax” Tracy reassured him as she passed “Come on in, I need to talk to you” she called.

“Commander Gregory Greenway reporting as ordered Maam” he declared as he stood to attention in front of Tracy's desk as she sat down behind it.

“Please take a seat” Tracy indicated the chair in front of the desk “and please at least try and relax. I'm not Attila the Hun you know?”

“Err yes Maam” Greenway agreed and sat down whilst Tracy extracted a personnel file from the desk drawer and placed it on the desk before opening it and without speaking for a few moments, leafed through its pages, studying them carefully.

“Commander Gregory Egor Greenway” Tracy read from the file “Egor?”

“Grand father's name” Greenway explained “He was Polish.”

“Oh right” Tracy understood before continuing “Joined the service as a cadet eleven years ago, currently acting Area Commander Operations for South Buckinghamshire out of Aylesbury. Five decorations, including two for extraordinary conduct above and beyond the call of duty.”

“Yes Maam” Greenway confirmed.

“I have been checking you out as you can probably gather” Tracy explained “You see I have a little problem and I need someone in the Service who I can trust beyond reproach with a little job that is shall we say a bit off message?”

“I think you've lost me Maam” Greenway admitted.

“If someone was to ask you to do something that was technically against the standing regulations of the Service but yet still in the spirit in which this Service was created and operates” Tracy asked “What would be your reaction?”

“It would depend who was doing the asking” Greenway confirmed with a little nervous hesitation “Certainly if this request came from someone outside of the Service, especially a politician or someone outside the chain of command, I would tell them where to stick it, Maam.”

“And if it was for the Regional Administrator General?” Tracy asked directly.

“Maam” Greenway responded positively “Everyone within and loyal to the Service and its principles would be willing to do anything for the Commander or yourself. Many of us would follow you two into fire if asked.”

“Well...” Tracy responded with a raised eyebrow “I think that will just about cover it.”

“Maam?” Greenway asked “If I may be so bold, what is this about?”

“I want you to do something for me” Tracy confirmed “It means bypassing your local chain of command and there is risk involved to all of us involved. How do you feel about that?”

“If it is for a cause that upholds the Service and justice then my response would be, what can I do for you Maam?” Greenway confirmed.

“Very well” Tracy agreed “What I am about to tell you does not leave this room. Indeed I am technically breaking the Official Secrets Act just by showing you this” she indicated a file on the desk.

“You can trust me Maam” Greenway reassured her.

“Yes, I think I can” Tracy agreed before picking up the file on her desk “Tell me, what do you know of a Government facility in the hills south of Aylesbury codenamed Epsilon?”

“Well” Greenway recalled “I know there are some old wartime facilities up in the hills. I don't know if they are still used for anything but the wife and I walk our dog up there sometimes and there is still plenty of heavily fenced off areas that certainly do not invite closer casual inspection.”

“Take a look at this” Tracy passed across the copy of the Andromeda Procedure File to Greenway “There are three locations, codenamed Epsilon to which certain senior

members of the Service plus a few other select people would be transported in the declaration of a major national security crisis.”

“And one of these is in the hills near Aylesbury?” Greenway concluded as he read through the file with some amazement at the high level and intricate nature of the detail contained therein.

“Epsilon One is in the Scottish Highlands just north of Aviemore” Tracy explained “Epsilon Two is located somewhere in the middle of Wales and as you have correctly surmised, Epsilon Three is your mysterious Government facility near Aylesbury.”

“Slap bang in the middle of my manor” Greenway remarked “I begin to see why you have asked me to this meeting Maam.”

“At some point, possibly later today the new Deputy Prime Minister is expected to issue a 'Declaration of Emergency' in response to the 'ongoing crisis' which was triggered by the attack on the Justice Minister a couple of hours ago” Tracy explained “An attack I point out that was carefully orchestrated by an organisation within the Civil Service and other connected agencies that both de Wente and we suspect our new mysterious Deputy PM are a member of.”

“So can I safely assume that the 'credible intelligence' of a further attack by Islamic Extremists is bogus as well?” Greenway asked.

“Oh there will be another attack on some unlucky senior politician” Tracy confirmed “It’s just that it won't be done by those who certain people want us to think it was done by, instead it will be used as an excuse to parachute in these 'emergency measures' and that is when the Andromeda Directive will come into effect.”

“Placing all the major players in the Security Services in one isolated place at the same time which gets them out of the way in case they try and get at the truth” Greenway concluded.

“My beloved husband” Tracy picked up the antique silver photograph frame with her wedding picture on it and briefly showed it to Greenway to emphasise her point “is quite rightly keeping me in the dark. He figures that the less I know when the loons take over the machine the better and he is probably right. The problem is I know that when he and the rest of the senior staff get to the Epsilon Three operations centre, that will be when they get taken out of the equation.”

“I think I can put a team together to do something about that” Greenway admitted “Looking at this file, it would appear that in the event of this Andromeda Directive being initialised, the VIP Protection Division will have sole responsibility of the transport?”

“That is pretty much sewn up” Tracy confirmed “My sister Jennifer is in charge of that. She cannot tell anyone outside of her own people what is going on no matter what but at least the transport of those affected by the order will be safe. It is when they get there that I am worried things will go wrong.”

“Well according to this, the facility would be staffed and guarded by local officers of the Service which means my lot” Greenway read from the document carefully “If you like I can position my officers so that at least some people we can rely on unconditionally are in the right place at the right time if you see what I mean.”

“That is exactly what I was hoping you would say” Tracy agreed with a wry smile.

“Thing is” Greenway warned “There have been a few rather odd transfers into my section in the last few weeks and months. Officers appearing on the roster from nowhere, that sort of thing. Nothing sinister on the outside but gut instinct at the time told me we were being infiltrated and now having seen this I am beginning to see why.”

“I have been doing some checking myself” Tracy admitted “There have been a few around this place who seem to have managed to float into key positions as if by magic of late as well. Needless to say they are being carefully watched.”

“And what of your own safety Maam may I ask?” Greenway asked.

“Oh don't worry about me” Tracy confirmed “If it comes to it, I can take care of myself in a fight, in fact I might wind up even enjoying it!”

The boardroom in the once grand Great Eastern Hotel in Liverpool Street were buzzing with activity as the various members of 'the committee' were now on full alert status, coordinating their respective efforts as if building up to a key moment in time, a moment that was clearly imminent.

“Congratulations Number One Sir” Number Two called as Sir William Temple-Smythe entered the room with a broad grin of happiness on his face “Sorry, Deputy Prime Minister.”

“Not for much longer I hope” Temple-Smythe confirmed “How goes Operation Whirlybird?” he asked.

“Well everything is in place” Number Eight confirmed as he finished on the telephone to his operatives out in the field “As soon as the Emergency Measures are declared, you can issue the Andromeda Directive. Then the Prime Minister will be escorted to his official helicopter which will land in St James's Park to collect him before heading north.”

“And the end?” Temple-Smythe asked.

“Will be nice and public” Number Eight confirmed with a broad smile “Initially we will have the news reports come through with a rumour that the PM's helicopter has suffered some kind of mechanical failure and been forced to make an emergency landing.”

“That should give the media something to chew on” Number Three remarked.

“And just in time for the teatime bulletins as well” Number Two agreed.

“Then we leak into the Press Association a witness, some farmer from Buckinghamshire who was tending to his cows when he saw a helicopter come down in one of his fields” Number Eight continued “Throw in some carefully put together 'amateur' footage which shows a helicopter apparently crashing in a fireball after something is seen to strike it in mid air, leave for an hour to ferment and then watch as the hyperactive media does the rest.”

“So by six o'clock there will be cries of 'The Prime Minister is dead!!' all over the nation” Number Two confirmed “and that is when the nation in its hour of grief will turn to you for guidance.”

“Whereupon I do my loyal subject piece to camera in Downing Street” Temple-Smythe concluded “Declare that we believe it was a terrorist attack, we shall never surrender, blah, blah, blah and then hit them with the Special Emergency Measures order.”

“Clockwork” Number Two remarked “Before you know it we will have full control over the Government, Civil Service, Security Services, the whole shooting match and the great British public will be so 'morally outraged' that they will accept any stringent measure we put on the table in front of them to get the bastards.”

“What about our little cluster of headaches?” Number Three asked.

“The Commander, Sir Richard Crowthorne and anyone else we care to name on the Andromeda Directive along with all the rest of the Regional Administrator Generals will be safely locked away in the Buckinghamshire countryside” Number Eight confirmed “And they won't be leaving there in a hurry, well not alive anyway.”

“One problem still remains though” Temple-Smythe commented “Divisional Commander Tracy Caverner will effectively become Administrator General as a result of all this.”

“That is where your political charm comes in” Number Two remarked “You go and see her and point out that she needs to be the calming influence throughout the service in this 'national crisis' of our own making.”

“And if she tells me to take a running jump?” Temple-Smythe asked.

“Then she will have to be removed from the equation” Number Two confirmed “If anyone asks, say she has gone on emotional leave following the death of her dear husband or something.”

“Even if he isn't dead” Number Eight added “Which is the beauty of this, because he and the others will be safely locked down in the Epsilon Facility, no one will be able to communicate anything to or from him, plus there is an added bonus as well.”

“Do tell” Temple-Smythe prompted.

“Jack Thornton” Number Eight confirmed “He is currently travelling with the Commander as the Prime Minister specifically asked to see him at the Dentists of all places about an hour ago.”

“So when the Andromeda Directive is initiated” Temple-Smythe concluded “We get the last remaining part of the Philip Thornton puzzle into the bargain?”

“Exactly” Number Eight confirmed “Then we find out exactly what the Commander knows about this little group, i.e. do Philip Thornton's records and most importantly his journal still exist and if so where?”

“Well I must say” Temple-Smythe responded in congratulatory mood “Thus far your efforts have been more than exemplary” he confirmed “What of Phase Three?” he asked.

“Our friend Mr Devlin is putting his people and resources into the stand by positions all around the Greater London area as we speak” Number Eight checked his records in front of him “The first wave will discreetly filter into the City when you declare the Emergency Crisis Status, the second wave will then move in first thing in the morning and the bulk of his people and equipment will be on standby to roll out if we need them.”

“In which case” Temple-Smythe remarked as he checked his watch “I must leave you people to your work. In the meantime I have to go and prepare for Government” he added with a deep throaty chuckle.

“Two minutes” the Commander warned Jack as they pulled into the driveway of his school and stopped outside the main entrance where despite the fact it was just gone four o'clock and normal school lessons had finished half an hour earlier, there will still numerous pupils and staff around.

“Four?” Jack asked in a bargaining move to get more time.

“Three” the Commander relented with a smile.

“Deal” Jack agreed as he got out of the patrol car and went inside the school entrance like a boy on a mission.

As the Commander got out of the car himself to stretch his legs for a few minutes, his mobile telephone began to ring which when he looked at the caller display revealed to be a call from 'The Old Man'.

“Sir Richard” the Commander responded as he answered the call “How go things in the land of anarchy?”

“We got a call through from Jennifer Caverner's office about two minutes ago” Sir Richard confirmed from the computer room at King William Street “The Prime Minister's secretary just called to confirm that she is to pick up the Prime Minister

from the Houses of Parliament and transfer him to his helicopter in St James's Park in fifteen minutes.”

“Allowing for say fifteen minutes flight time” the Commander did some quick arithmetic “That means something will happen to the PM about quarter to five, from then its about thirty minutes to allow the rumours that something has happened to feed into the news rooms and you have a nice big juicy story for the six o'clock bulletin.”

“Indeed” Sir Richard confirmed “Hell, with enough stoking from our mysterious friends, the BBC might even cancel East Enders for it!!”

“Oh come on, lets be realistic” the Commander joked “They will shift that to BBC2 surely?”

“Anyway I reckon we can expect a speech from the Deputy PM by say ten past six and then the wheels will be set in motion if the backchannel whispers from my Whitehall contacts are to be believed” Sir Richard concluded.

“Have you heard anything from Tracy?” the Commander asked with concern.

“She is organising the troops back at the Yard” Sir Richard confirmed “From what I have heard she has them all pretty well motivated so as long as whoever is behind all this leaves her alone...”

“And if they don't?” the Commander asked.

“Don't worry about that” Sir Richard reassured him “I and Dave Collins have been working on a emergency get out clause to remove her from harms way if it all goes pear shaped.”

“Anything more from the journal?” the Commander asked as he looked around to see Jack reappear from the main entrance of the school with a worried look on his face.

“Hang on” Sir Richard responded “I'll pass you on to Fuller.”

As the Commander waited for Fuller to receive the telephone at the other end, he looked across to Jack who was looking around still trying to locate Megan when he suddenly saw her coming out of a side entrance nearby.

“Megan?” Jack called which made her turn towards him upon hearing her name.

“Jack?” Megan responded as she saw him and went up to him “Where have you been all day?”

“It's a long story” Jack confirmed “It is just I heard you were worried about me enough to call New Scotland Yard and I thought I would let you know I was all right.”

“Well you were in rather a sombre mood this morning” Megan admitted “And when you took off before lunchtime, I was worried you were going to do something silly.”

The Commander watched the two continuing their conversation nearby when Fuller came on the line.

“Sir?” Fuller asked.

“Oh there you are” the Commander responded “Anything more from that Journal yet?” he asked.

“Lots of operational details” Fuller confirmed “Not a lot of it making a lot of sense at the moment admittedly although there is one thing that stands out.”

“Which is?” the Commander asked, feeling rather apprehensive at any potential answer he was about to receive.

“These emergency powers that they intend to introduce will utilise what is described as a 'specialist tactical force' funded from central donations” Fuller confirmed “and supplied by a man described only as Number Seven” he explained “Now there is reference to a Number Seven elsewhere in Thornton's notes which states he is a well connect arms and materials dealer of some international notability.”

“But no name I take it?” the Commander asked.

“None” Fuller confirmed “All of the individuals mentioned in the pages of the Journal that I have translated so far are all referred to by numbers although if I was a betting man, I would hazard a guess the Number One is that mysterious new Deputy PM and the description of the International Arms man Number Seven sounds ominously like our old friend Harold Devlin.”

“He's safely behind bars in Northolt Jail” the Commander responded.

“Did you say Northolt Sir?” Fuller responded as he recalled something Jennifer has said to him earlier that morning.

“Yes” the Commander confirmed “Why?”

“Justice Minister de Wente paid an unscheduled inspection visit to Northolt Prison just this morning” Fuller confirmed “Jennifer got the duty of driving her up there, apparently the Justice Minister went in place of the Home Secretary because he was ill or something.”

“Check it out” the Commander confirmed “If Devlin has returned to circulation I want to know about it. If he is loose and working with this bunch then we could be in a whole heap of trouble, meantime put Sir Richard back on.”

“Why do I get the feeling I should have just retired instead?” Sir Richard remarked wryly as he returned to the telephone.

“Because if you had you would have missed all of this fun and excitement” the Commander confirmed “Besides your wife would probably get fed up of you hanging around the house all day.”

“Good point” Sir Richard agreed with a smile.

“What have you found out about this Temple-Smythe character?” the Commander asked.

“Not much beyond the official biography that was printed in the Standard about an hour ago” Sir Richard confirmed “Wealthy family owns half of Yorkshire, law degree, member of the bar, knighted for services to British industry overseas...”

“...selling lucrative arms contracts to the middle east then...” the Commander interjected sarcastically.

“Pretty much yes” Sir Richard agreed “Then he worked his way up through the Civil Service pretty much unnoticed until this morning when he suddenly appeared out of nowhere. None of MI5's Political Monitoring Unit saw it coming at all.”

“Check the whereabouts of the Home Secretary will you?” the Commander asked “He seems to have been awfully quiet and he is a pretty good chap so I am wondering if he is being gagged somewhere.”

“I'll get my people on it” Sir Richard confirmed “Meanwhile, Jennifer has arranged for the PM to be whisked away unseen in a black cab once he has 'left' St James's Park in his helicopter. When the Andromeda Directive is issued, she has full control and sole knowledge of routing for the key personnel that will be recalled to the Epsilon Centre so she is going to have you taken to Marylebone Station where Fuller has managed to commandeer a train for special use. The PM will meet you on board.”

“Hello Sir” Megan called as she and Jack came up to the Commander and greeted him.

“Who was that?” Sir Richard asked, mystified at the young female voice he had heard calling in the background.

“On current betting, future daughter in law I think” the Commander admitted with a wry smile “I'll see you later, I just hope it's under good circumstances” he added before hanging up.

“Everything all right?” Jack asked seeing the rather worried look on the Commander's face.

“That is something philosophers, artisans and your average working thinkers will probably be debating for a thousand years” the Commander admitted “Anyway how are you two?” he asked.

“Fine” Jack confirmed with a smile, happy to have seen Megan again, a feeling reflected by Megan herself now that her worry over Jack had been allayed.

“Got to get going I am afraid” the Commander indicated “Will you be all right?” he asked Megan directly.

“As long as you promise that Jack will be all right and the dinner date is still on then yes” Megan confirmed with a broad smile.

“I invited her to dinner tomorrow night all being well” Jack explained “I hope you don't mind?”

“Not at all” the Commander confirmed rather surprised “We will make it a proper birthday party, a day late admittedly. How does that sound?”

“Great” Megan confirmed “I have to go too” she admitted before kissing Jack on the cheek which took him completely by surprise “See you tomorrow!” she called before running off to catch her bus which was about to leave without her.

“I think I am going to faint...” Jack remarked as he went around to the passenger side of the patrol car and sat down inside quick just in case he really did.

“Given the way today has gone” the Commander remarked as he started the car “Nothing would surprise me.”

“Echo Team” Jennifer called over the radio to her counterparts on standby near the main entrance to St James's Park “Are you in position?”

“That's an affirmative Alpha One” the team leader confirmed as he and his two colleagues looked around from the anonymous surroundings of an off duty black cab parked by the side of the road.

“Ok then” Jennifer declared “Let the RAF guys know that they can bring the bird in now” she confirmed as she got in the drivers seat of her ministerial patrol car and started the engine before moving off from the side of the road in Whitehall and proceeding with four motorcycle escorts to Downing Street where after a cursory check from the two officers on duty at the wrought iron gate guarding the entrance, she was allowed through without question.

Pulling up to the front door of Number Ten Downing Street, probably the most famous address in the country, Jennifer exuded her usual air of professionalism as she got out of the car and headed directly inside Number Ten before proceeding directly to the Prime Minister's office where he was gathering some papers and things into his briefcase.

“Prime Minister” Jennifer declared as she prepared to deliver her rehearsed lines “We have credible evidence of a threat to your security and need to move you immediately to a secret safe location.”

“There goes my evening” the Prime Minister admitted with a shrug of the shoulders before rising from the desk and with his body guard following Jennifer out of the office to the front door.

Emerging out into the daylight brought the attentions of the press as they fired a barrage of questions and the flashes of cameras went off while Jennifer and the body

guard, another member of her Department observed all around ever vigilant whilst the Prime Minister got in the back of the waiting car without offering any response or comment to the ever hungry media.

“This is a really bad idea” the Prime Minister remarked as Jennifer and the body guard got in the front and she prepared to drive off.

“Trust me” Jennifer responded “I may operate the best protected and over glorified taxi service in the country but I know how to take care of my passengers.”

“Do I have to pay a tip?” the Prime Minister joked.

“Alpha One to all units” Jennifer called over the radio “The package is aboard, ready for roll out.”

With that declaration and under the watchful eye of the media, the four escort motorcycles plus two further cars of officers, one in front and one behind the Prime Minister's car came into formation and moved off down the length of Downing Street towards the exit and out into Whitehall.

Watching from an upper window of Number Ten as the cavalcade disappeared from view, Temple-Smythe afforded a smile of satisfaction before letting the curtain drop back and returned to his desk to carefully plan his next few hours work.

With Parliament Square still partially closed because of the earlier incident, the convoy was able to pass through the closed off empty streets of the western end of Whitehall easily and quickly and it was only a few minutes before they were arriving at the emergency helicopter landing pad in St James's Park where the Royal Air Force Royal Flight helicopter was just coming into land.

Jennifer looked on carefully from the car as officers and RAF personnel gathered around the helicopter awaiting the arrival of their important passenger.

“Ok, lets do this” Jennifer called back to the Prime Minister as she released her seatbelt “You ready Sir” she asked.

“No!” the Prime Minister responded with a nervous laugh.

“Neither am I” Jennifer admitted “But let’s go anyway” she declared as she opened the door and got out. Once standing outside the car she and the bodyguard along with some other officers looked all around carefully to see if there were any threats to the Prime Minister's security before opening the car door and allowing him to step out.

“This way Sir” Jennifer confirmed as she escorted the Prime Minister at close quarters to the helicopter in the full view of public onlookers and some members of the press who were being kept at a distance from the helicopter for their own protection as well as that of the Prime Minister.

Upon reaching the helicopter, one of the RAF crew opened the side door of the cabin to allow first the body guard, then the Prime Minister and finally Jennifer to get in whereupon the door was closed again behind them.

“Ok guys” Jennifer called to the RAF pilot up front “When this thing goes down, make it look good but don't take any unnecessary risks” she instructed as the door on the other side of the aircraft alongside her was opened and two of her officers proceeded to escort the three of them back out of the aircraft and away to a waiting black cab parked nearby.

As Jennifer and the Prime Minister got in the cab, the body guard and the other two officers carefully placed three dummies in the rear seats of the aircraft. They then closed the door and stepped well back to allow the helicopter to take off into the gradually darkening evening sky.

“Well it looks like you are on your way Sir” Jennifer remarked as she looked out of the cab window at the helicopter above them which was rising from the ground to a point just above tree level before in a cacophony of engine and rotor noise it began to head north and away.

“My wife is going to go spare when she hears about this” the Prime Minister remarked as Jennifer signalled to the driver of the cab, another of her own trusted officers to drive on.

“Marylebone Station please” she called.

An anonymous black four by four car parked in the middle of a rural lane miles away from civilisation raised no suspicions as there was no one anywhere near it or its two occupants to raise it.

The driver of the vehicle looked across at the satellite navigation system on the dashboard that was being fed live data not on traffic conditions but on the progress of an unlisted helicopter flight that was approaching their position.

“It's time” the driver confirmed to his colleague as he noted that the helicopter was soon to come into range and that it was time for them to put their small but crucial part of the overall plan into action.

“How spectacular do they want it?” the other man asked as he got out of the vehicle and with his associate, went around to the back and extracted a large case and some other equipment.

“Nice and pubic” the first man confirmed “Spectacular enough to look really effective on the national news at six o'clock thanks to the seemingly ever present 'amateur footage” he confirmed as he produced a small hand held domestic video camera.

“Such is the wonderful world of modern mass media” the second man remarked wryly as he opened the case to reveal a military issue portable ground to air missile rocket and its launcher which he took from the case and prepared with obviously well trained military efficiency.

With their equipment in hand and in the failing light of early evening, they moved quickly into the surrounding undergrowth to set up and prepare for their deadly mission.

Some miles away and approaching the position for the attack, the pilot of the helicopter looked out across the rural landscape over which they were passing with some nervousness. He and his co pilot, the only living souls on board the helicopter had been specially selected for this job by the Commander as part of the subterfuge. They volunteered for this assignment willingly, knowing full well the risks they were being asked to undertake.

“Can't be much further I would have thought” the co pilot remarked as he too looked around from the cabin windows at the dark countryside below.

“That is what I reckon too” the pilot reluctantly agreed, however before he could say another word, there was a sudden flash of light as something came towards them at high speed and then a massive jolt as it struck the engines and rotor blades before exploding.

“Ah hell here we go” the pilot declared as he struggled to control the aircraft as he lost most of the controls, the cabin began to fill with thick oily smoke and they started to descend rapidly.

“Mayday, mayday” the co pilot called over the radio “This is Alpha Flight, we have been hit by enemy fire and are going down approximately twenty miles south of Aylesbury.”

As the ground came up to meet them awfully fast, the pilot struggled to level out the air craft to try and make a reasonably level emergency landing to try and give him and his colleague a chance of survival.

“Hold on to your hat” he declared as the ground approached and they started to strike the top branches of trees “This is it!”

The two men watched through binoculars from their vehicle parked in the lane as the video camera captured the rapid descent of the helicopter until it disappeared below tree level. The next thing they saw was the flash of an explosion from behind the trees signifying that their mission was complete and very much successful.

“Boom...” the driver remarked as he and his colleague returned to their vehicle where he duly switched off the video camera and extracted the digital tape “Time to make some news headlines I think” he declared as he stated the engine and drove off.

“We are getting breaking news that there has been an incident involving the helicopter that was transporting the Prime Minister to a meeting at an undisclosed location” the presenter on BBC News 24 suddenly declared as a 'Breaking News' banner came across the bottom of the screen causing Tracy to look up from the Commander's desk where she had moved to so that she could have the television on while she worked.

“Oh my God...” Tracy responded as she reached across to the telephone and speed dialled Collins' mobile number “Collins? It's Caverner, are you seeing this? Turn on News 24 now!”

“That hit the headlines rather too quickly” Collins remarked as he turned on the television in his office back at MI5's headquarters, we only picked up the Mayday from Flight Alpha One five minutes ago.

“Looks like someone is feeding the press exactly what they want to hear” Tracy remarked “We need to act quickly. Are all yours and Sir Richard's people in place?” she asked.

“Throughout the City” Collins confirmed “If there is going to be a moral outrage fuelled declaration of an emergency, I would expect the fax machines of Whitehall to start whirring in the next few minutes.”

Sure enough as they spoke and the BBC News broadcast continued to speculate on the scant reports they had so far, to which was now added an imminent live statement by the Deputy Prime Minister, the fax machine near the desk began to receive an incoming call.

“Looks like someone read your mind” Tracy remarked as she watched the paper coming out of the fax machine.

“Same here” Collins confirmed as he too began to receive an identical fax transmission which he duly tore off the machine as soon as printing was complete. “Christ, if this isn't an agenda for bandwagon drivers anonymous then I don't know what is.”

“Declaration of Emergency Security Measures” Tracy read from the top of her own fax copy “With immediate effect all law enforcement and associated agencies are placed under the direct command of the Deputy Prime Minister in response to the growing threat of extremist terrorism, blah, blah, blah...” she gave up reading after that “Suspension of all legal rights for suspects both under investigation and in custody? This is a licence to do as they please and no one can touch them for it.”

“And there is your Andromeda Directive” Collins confirmed as he looked further down the transmission “Pretty much reads like a who's who of the law enforcement industry who are about to find themselves on a free mystery tour to darkest Buckinghamshire by the looks of it.”

“All the Regional Administrator Generals, the Home Secretary, Sir Richard Crowthorne, Rachel Black from the UK office of the CIA, Terry Godfrey from MI6” Tracy read the list “There will be no one left in this town except you and me at this rate.”

“Perhaps that is the plan” Collins agreed “Look I have to go, all hell is breaking loose down here and I have to cool some worried people.”

“Same here” Tracy agreed as she could hear the distant commotion filtering up through the building as the shock and stunned surprise of the nature of these developments was beginning to become clear “Good luck.”

As soon as she had hung up on the call to Collins, she took her mobile telephone out and speed dialled another number through to which she was directly connected after a brief pause during which the scrambler system on this line was activated.

“Commander Greenway” Tracy called, looking around to ensure she was not being overheard “The magic word is 'now'.”

“Roger that Maam” Greenway agreed before hanging up.

“Approximately twenty minutes ago” Temple-Smythe declared to the nation in a bold proud voice outside Number Ten Downing Street to an intensively attentive press scrum “The Prime Minister's helicopter was involved in a serious incident which we believe has resulted it in being forced to make an emergency landing somewhere south of Aylesbury.”

As his speech was being re-laid live to the world, millions were hanging on his every word.

“It is too early to speculate at this time as to the nature of the incident” Temple-Smythe continued “However at this time we are unable to rule out terrorism as a potential cause. In addition we have not yet been able to establish the current status of the Prime Minister, suffice to say we believe he may have been at least severely injured.”

“We had eye witness reports from the area of a helicopter seen going down and exploding upon impact” one of the press asked “Can you confirm or deny this report?”

“It is far too early to categorically confirm anything at this point” Temple-Smythe responded “However as of this moment in response to this latest incident which comes just hours after the cowardly assassination of the Justice Minister in Parliament Square and in the light of certain other intelligence received by my office” he carried on “It has been decided that I should assume command of this Government and initiate Emergency Security Powers as laid out in the Anti-Terrorist and Organised Crime Act of 2005, sub section fourteen.”

“Is this guy serious?” Jack asked as he and the Commander on their way back into central London listened to the BBC Radio 4 news bulletin.

“I am afraid so” the Commander confirmed as they headed along Holborn Viaduct only for two Security Service patrol motorbikes to appear from a side road and using their lights and sirens, flag them down.

“And here comes the next phase of their little scheme” the Commander remarked as he looked in the rear view mirror and in response to the motorcycles, pulled into the side of the road.

“Sorry to disturb you Commander” one of the motorcycle patrol officers informed him as she came to the driver’s window of the patrol car “We were asked to come and find you and tell you to remain where you are until a secure escort car can arrive to collect you.”

“Have you any idea what is going on Lieutenant...? the Commander asked.

“Lieutenant Solomon Sir” the officer confirmed her identity “No Sir, bar some report that the Prime Minister may have been hit, you are in the dark as much as us. We were about to clock off shift when the call came to come and find you.”

“Who did the call come from may I ask?” the Commander asked as he got out of the car and joined Lieutenant Solomon on the side of the street.

“That's the odd thing about it” Solomon admitted “Normally we get our transmissions routed through the City Police office in Snow Hill but these came from the Prime Minister's Office Control Centre which I have to admit I have never heard of Sir.”

“Neither have I” the Commander admitted “Sorry to ruin your evening.”

“The way I figure it Sir” Solomon admitted “There are going to be a lot of ruined evenings tonight by the looks of things.”

“You are not wrong” the Commander admitted as they both noticed one of the VIP Protection Division's dark coloured saloon cars approaching from the opposite direction before it crossed the carriageway to stop directly opposite them.

“Good evening Sir” the Deputy Divisional Commander of the VIP Protection Division declared “Sorry about this but you need to read this document” he handed the Commander a sealed envelope.

“Ah...” the Commander remarked as he read the document that was contained therein “I guess I am not going to see home tonight then?”

“Doesn't look like it no Sir” the driver confirmed with sincere regret as he opened the rear door of the car.

“What about me?” Jack asked as he got out of the patrol car and joined the Commander.

“It would appear we have both been summoned” the Commander showed him the Andromeda Directive Order signed by the Deputy Prime Minister as they got in the back of the car where the Commander noted with a smile that Jack had instinctively thought to bring the battered briefcase with him.

“Well goodnight Lieutenant” the Commander remarked to Solomon as he sat in the back of the car “It looks like your evening is going to be far better than mine.”

“Good night Sir” Solomon confirmed “and good luck” she added as the VIP Protection Officer closed the door before getting in the drivers seat and driving away leaving her alone with her motorcycle colleague.

“What the hell is going on Lisa?” the other officer asked as Solomon remounted her motorbike.

“I don't know Mike” Solomon admitted with a worried look “But whatever it is I don't like it one bit.”

“The Deputy Prime Minister is on his way up” the Receptionist at New Scotland Yard informed Tracy over the telephone as the large broad shouldered figure of Temple-Smythe and two of his associates breezed through towards the lifts as if they owned the place.

“Thanks” Tracy confirmed before getting up from her seat and going to the window where she pulled the blinds across to look out across the city skyline from her husband's office across towards Big Ben, the Houses of Parliament and the London Eye, all of which were brightly illuminated against the dark sky of early evening.

In the window she could also see her own reflection, the expression being one of controlled fear and apprehension at the darkness that up until now was theoretical but had now arrived. Its apparent leader and representative on his way to that very office and shortly to arrive.

“What would you do love?” Tracy asked the picture of the Commander and her together that was on the desk “Probably kneecap the bugger, encase him in concrete and turn him into an amusingly shaped sea defence boulder I guess” she joked.

“Perhaps I should just shoot him?” she pondered to herself, checking her weapon just in case but she quickly dismissed that as a bad idea. She was going to be no use to the fight against this madness if she was dead.

“Divisional Commander Caverner” Temple-Smythe declared as he came into the office like a battleship in full sail with his two associates in close tow.

“Didn't your mother ever teach you to knock?” Tracy asked abruptly as she sat back down behind the desk, tossing her gun discreetly into the top drawer so he didn't see that she had had it drawn when he came in.

“Benefit of being brought up with class” Temple-Smythe remarked “We had a servant to do the knocking for us.”

“That would be the goon squad you have in tow then?” Tracy wryly commented referring to the two associates he had brought with him.

“Ah, humour” Temple-Smythe remarked as he sat down in front of the desk and looked across at a distinctly unimpressed Tracy “An essential quality in this time of national crisis.”

“Well if you can't laugh at a politician then what has the world come to?” Tracy remarked with a subtle hint of sarcasm.

“You have received the Emergency Special Measures Order I take it?” Temple-Smythe enquired.

“Oh you mean this” Tracy picked up the fax she had received earlier and passed it across the table with abandon.

“These are perilous times Tracy” Temple-Smythe remarked, trying first name tactics to woo her which just made Tracy seethe even more inside.

“Divisional Commander Caverner to you matey” Tracy responded tersely “If you have a point I would appreciate it if you could get to it as I am rather busy trying to run the largest division of the National Security & Police Service in case you hadn't noticed?”

“And under the terms of the Emergency Special Powers” Temple-Smythe responded “The various security agencies are placed under my direct supervision for the duration of the 'National Emergency' declaration.”

“Here” Tracy got up and took off the wall a framed document which she passed to Temple-Smythe before pointedly sitting back down again “Read that. It's the official declaration of principles as set down by the United Nations Security Council that states that this service and its officers swear to uphold the law, maintain freedom and keep the peace.”

“All I ask” Temple-Smythe confirmed.

“Great” Tracy agreed “In which case would you mind if we got on with our jobs as when I last looked we were not a political thought police.”

“I simply wanted to introduce myself to you and hope that you will continue to run the Service in your usual efficient way but I must ask that you do consult with either myself or my associates here on all major operational decisions” Temple-Smythe reiterated.

“Fine, if it gets you out of my office so I can do my job, just fine” Tracy admitted.

“I feel we can work well together” Temple-Smythe continued, not picking up on Tracy's demeanour as she continued to work through her papers on the desk that she wanted him to just go away “You as the well known and respected head of the most efficient crime fighting organisation in the country and I as your political advisor and guide in these different and difficult times that we now find ourselves in.”

“In case you hadn't noticed” Tracy remarked, barely looking up from the desk “I am just the Divisional Commander for Greater London” she pointed out “If you want to

liaise with the service as a whole you need to speak to my husband amongst others and well lets put it this way, he is far less tolerant of political interference than me.”

“All in good time Divisional Commander” Temple-Smythe confirmed “Anyway, remember to consult with my office on any major issues and ensure we are copied in on all intelligence gathering your Service receives?”

“So your political thought police can censor our anything... provocative?” she asked.

“If you will excuse me” Temple-Smythe declared “I have a country to run” he got up and prepared to leave.

“Funny” Tracy remarked “I wasn't aware the Prime Minister had been confirmed dead or alive yet?”

“When you are in my position” Temple-Smythe explained evasively “It pays to have sources elsewhere than just the law enforcement agencies.”

“In other words you are concerned I won't play to your tune as set out in this bullshit political agenda of yours?” Tracy remarked with a wry smile as she indicated the fax transmission “A word of warning, work with me yes, allow me to do my job in accordance with due process by all means but what ever you do, don't ever go against me. I may be short in stature but let me assure you Mr Temple-Smythe that if you or any of your bottom feeding pond life associates go up against me, you will feel the full wrath with interest and by the time I have finished with you only your dentist will be able to identify what few parts of you still remain” she stated with clear determination staring Temple-Smythe direct in the face with a look of thunder.

“Good night” Temple-Smythe calmly responded as he left the office.

“Up yours” Tracy remarked once the door had been closed and she was alone before she reached across to the telephone and on speakerphone put a call into Collins.

“Collins” he responded fairly quickly.

“Guess who I just had in my office?” Tracy asked.

“Temple-Smythe?” Collins responded “He is doing an evening tour of all the heads of various services and departments to gauge their support for him.”

“Yeah well he stinks metaphorically to high heaven” Tracy remarked “I am going to have to get the place fumigated.”

“But he is leaving you alone to run the Service?” Collins asked.

“For now” Tracy confirmed “My guess is he doesn't want to rock the political boat too much otherwise he might be accused of trying to put his people in key positions too quickly which will blow his game wide open.”

“I best put the cheap whisky in the office decanter then” Collins confirmed “If I am right he will be calling at my door next.”

“Be sure to lock your gun in your desk drawer before he comes in or you might be tempted to use it” Tracy warned as she opened the desk drawer and retrieved her own weapon “I know I was.”

“Sorry about all this Sir” the driver of the VIP Protection Division car called back to the Commander as they sped through the streets of the City “It’s like all hell has broken loose back at the office and to top it all we got the job of finding all the senior officers from across the country.”

“Where are we heading?” the Commander asked.

“Official version or Jennifer Caverner version?” the driver asked knowingly.

“Lets go with the official version first” the Commander admitted.

“Fast car with full armed escort up the motorway to the location known as Epsilon Three” the driver confirmed, “The Jennifer Caverner version has us taking a detour via the main entrance into Marylebone Station which has just been evacuated due to a mysterious 'security alert' that Commander Fuller organised if you know what I mean Sir.”

“I do indeed” the Commander confirmed as he looked across at Jack who had fallen asleep, the battered briefcase still clasped tightly in his hand.

Ten minutes later the car was being allowed through the tape barrier that had been erected across the Marylebone Road either side of the side streets leading to the Station itself which had been evacuated under the pretence of a bomb alert, a highly believable scenario under the circumstances of that day's events.

“Wake up Jack” the Commander nudged the lad's arm “We are here.”

“Where is here exactly?” Jack asked as he opened his eyes and looked blearily out of the car window at the rain coming down outside. “Oh great, Marylebone again” he wryly remarked as his eyes focused on the original grand architecture of the former Great Central Railway terminus.

The driver duly pulled into the main entrance into the station and onto the concourse itself whereupon the Commander got out of the car along with Jack where they looked around the eerie deserted station.

“This way please gentlemen” the officer requested as he escorted them from the concourse through the ticket barriers and along the length of platform four to the newer bay platforms at the far end of the station where Jennifer Caverner and the Prime Minister were waiting.

“Well, looks like its official” the Prime Minister admitted as he passed across a copy of the extra late night special edition of the Evening Standard to the Commander where he read the headline 'Prime Minister feared dead in helicopter crash'.

“At least they bought it” the Commander admitted as they stood on the empty platform together, only the cover of the overhead canopy protecting them from the rain that was coming down hard onto the track bed in front of them.

“I dread to think what my wife is thinking at the moment” the Prime Minister remarked.

“She is being kept informed” the Commander confirmed “She is at her mother's place in Aberdeen, the two bodyguards on duty with her are two of Sir Richard's people and they have been instructed to brief her in full as soon as the news broke of your alleged demise.”

“Thank you” the Prime Minister responded with relief “You didn't have to do that.”

“Least I could do” the Commander admitted “There is every chance I may never see my wife again, at least by helping reassure yours I have some peace in my mind.”

“So where is this train Simon has commandeered then?” Jennifer asked.

“Good question” the Commander agreed as he looked around before reaching for his mobile telephone and dialling a direct number for Fuller who was continuing to co-ordinate things back at King William Street “Simon, we appear to be lacking a train here” he pointed out.

“I didn't want to risk it sitting around where it might be noticed so I have been having it held in the St John's Wood tunnel until you had all arrived” Fuller explained “I am afraid its not exactly inconspicuous but it is all I could lay my hands on at the time” he admitted.

“Oh subtle” Jack remarked as he noticed the train start its approach to platform six from the tunnel in the distance “The EWS executive management train?”

“Look at it this way” the Commander admitted as the luxurious three carriage train with its maroon cars sandwiched between a silver driving trailer at one end and the powerful Class 67 diesel locomotive at the other glided into the platform “At least we travel in style to our impending doom.”

“If anyone asks” Fuller added over the telephone “It has been registered on the Network Rail system as a routine track testing trip with no passengers aboard. It could have been worse, the other alternative was one of the weed killer sprayer trains.”

“All aboard” the Commander declared as they all boarded the train. As they settled down inside in the sumptuous lounge car the driver changed ends and once the signal controlling access from the platform cleared to a green aspect, opened up the throttle on the locomotive and accelerated away from the station into the night.

“Sir Richard just got scooped up by the Andromeda collection mob” Collins confirmed as he entered the computer control room at King William Street “and I just had a visit from our new leader Temple-Smythe.”

“Is he really as unpleasant as he looks on the television?” Fuller asked as Collins joined him at the console desk.

“Worse” Collins confirmed “Very slimy but yet a little uneasy, that latter bit could have something to do with Commander Caverner though.”

“Commander Baker reported in about an hour ago that he had been seen going inside the Yard” Fuller confirmed “Word is he left looking as though someone had jammed a whole cat full of fleas in his ear.”

“I wish I had been a fly on that particular wall” Collins admitted.

“Meantime” Fuller produced a report for Collins and passed it to him “Remember our old friend Harold Devlin?”

“Hardly likely to forget him” Collins admitted “The crème de la crème of arms pedalling scumbags.”

“Yeah, well he is out and about” Fuller confirmed “The Justice Minister visited him early this morning 'coincidentally' as part of a snap prison inspection visit at Northolt. This afternoon he was put on a prison transfer with all the authentic paperwork bound for Albany on the Isle of Wight.”

“Let me guess” Collins concluded “He never showed up at the other end?”

“Got it in one” Fuller confirmed “The van apparently suffered a break down just off the M25 so a replacement van was sent to carry on the transport. Trouble is when that second van got to Albany about two hours ago, all were present and correct except for Devlin who according to the authorities at Albany was never expected in the first place.”

“Clever” Collins remarked “Very clever. That sort of subterfuge takes a lot of money and some pretty heavy connections to pull off that convincingly.”

“And that means our old friend Mr Devlin is back in business” Fuller confirmed “Probably equipping this bunch of bozos with weapons, hardware, military personnel, you name it.”

“There is going to be blood on the streets before this is over” Collins admitted “Lets just hope we can minimise the damage.”

“Have we got anything out of that bitch de Wente yet?” Fuller asked.

“No” Collins confirmed “I just came from there, she has not said a dicky bird since we brought her in. She has definitely had some specialist anti interrogation training from somewhere.”

“So what happens now?” Fuller asked.

“We wait until the morning” Collins confirmed “No one is going to make any further moves tonight I would have thought except for at the Epsilon Centre.”

“Most of the key parties should be arriving about now” Fuller confirmed as he looked up at the clock on the wall that signalled it was now just passing eleven o'clock.

“Aye” Collins agreed “There won't be many people sleeping soundly tonight that is for sure.”

On the top floor of New Scotland Yard as the chimes of Big Ben could be heard striking in the eleventh hour of the evening, Tracy looked across the dark office into the shadows in the far corner, the only source of light in there being the desk lamp which she was still working by.

She had been in that office working for six straight hours now but finally decided as she stifled a long yawn that it was time to put the files away for the night whereupon she pushed them to one side and picked up the television remote control, switching on BBC News 24 just as it entered into the top of the hour news headlines.

“The nation is in a state of crisis” the news presenter declared “these were the words used by Deputy Prime Minister Sir William Temple-Smythe earlier today in the wake of the tragic loss of the Prime Minister when his helicopter crashed in the Buckinghamshire countryside earlier this evening, an incident that is now looking increasingly likely according to eyewitness accounts and amateur video footage to be a deliberate act of terrorism.”

“Against an unlisted flight?” Tracy remarked “Can anyone say inside job here?” she pondered at the television where the answers were obvious to her.

“Tonight the country is in the control of Emergency Security Measures initiated by the Deputy Prime Minister in direct response to today's events” the news presenter continued “and the perceived imminent threat of further attacks which many in Government believe to be the work of ultra extremist Islamic terrorist cells based in the UK.”

“Which part of unsubstantiated bollocks rings a bell here?” Tracy asked with a wry smile at the television.

“All across the country” the news broadcast continued backed up by appropriate footage “normally busy streets are eerily quiet whilst the public transport operators reported that many went home from work early as news of the ongoing crisis broke late this afternoon although there were substantial delays for commuters travelling from Marylebone at one point when the station and surrounding area were closed and evacuated for a time amid a reported bomb alert that later turned out to be a false alarm.”

“Who the hell would want to blow up Maryleb...” Tracy's thought tailed off as something occurred to her. Quickly she used the remote control to turn down the volume on the television and then turned to the computer terminal where she used her access code to enter the CCTV archive system.

It took her a few minutes to find the right camera's but she soon found the archived footage from the cameras both inside and around Marylebone Station from where she played the footage from the point where the evacuation of the area began.

“Ok the station is evacuated” Tracy remarked as she reached the point where the last members of the public had left and the area was sealed off “So where is the Bomb Squad then?” she asked herself as the footage continued to roll at four times normal speed yet no one was seen entering or leaving the evacuated station for a full twenty minutes of real time, yet if there had been a suspect device or package, the area would have been saturated with search teams looking for it.

“Oh, hello” Tracy suddenly remarked as a dark saloon car was seen to enter the picture, coming down the street approaching the Station entrance before driving onto the concourse whereupon she slowed the footage down to real time speed to see what had happened.

“Now there is a likely pair of lads” she remarked with a wry smile as she recognised Jack and her own husband get out of the car and then proceed under escort through the ticket barriers and up the length of platform four. Switching the view to one that overlooked the far end platforms five and six revealed not only Jack and the Commander but also the presence of her own sister and the Prime Minister, alive and well.

“Sneaky” Tracy responded with admiration as she allowed herself a chuckle at the outrageous double bluff that had been played before she input a new security access code and deleted all the archive in order to prevent the possibility of the footage falling into the wrong hands.

The two anonymous 4x4 vehicles that had brought the Commander, Jennifer Caverner, Jack and the Prime Minister from Aylesbury Railway Station proceeded through the dark and deserted countryside unnoticed. Only a owl looking down from a tree overlooking one rural road junction as they went by witnessed their passing and that of further similar vehicles all seemingly converging on the same point.

“You do know where you are going don't you?” the Commander asked up front to the driver.

“Yes Sir the driver confirmed as they pulled off the main road and into a long gravel track with high sided barb wire topped fencing either side, which after a minute led to an anonymous gate seemingly in the middle of nowhere and illuminated by a solitary tall street lamp shining down on the two uniformed Security Service officers on duty there.

“Is this it?” the Prime Minister asked looked out at the rusty gates as they reached them and the vehicles stopped for a standard check before they would be permitted entry.

“What were you expecting?” Jennifer asked across “A big sign saying 'Secret Government Security Installation'?” she asked.

“I guess not” the Prime Minister conceded “It's just that when the Government sinks millions into unseen defence projects, it would at least be nice if they could spare a few quid on a coat of paint for the gate once in a while.”

“I am willing to bet you won't find this place on Google Earth either” Jack remarked sleepily as he took the opportunity to look through the window at the outside world, what he could see of it that is in the sparse light and rain that was still coming down as it had been all evening.

“Administrator General, Divisional Commander, Prime Minister” the officer on duty at the gate greeted them “Welcome to Epsilon Three. I am Area Operations Commander Greenway from the Aylesbury Office, we are handling on site security in the interim until the Special Operations Units arrive.”

“The who?” the Commander asked.

“That's pretty much what I said when we got our marching orders two hours ago” Greenway agreed “Some special unit reporting directly to the Deputy Prime Minister's office apparently. They will be relieving us in about an hour as soon as they get here, then we are supposed to go home.”

“Supposed to...” the Commander picked up on Greenway's tone.

“A certain lady Divisional Chief Superintendent of your close acquaintance has asked me and my people to err 'hang around' discreetly if you know what I mean” Greenway explained slightly evasively.

“I do indeed” the Commander agreed with a smile “Well we have got work to do” he declared “Feel free to pop in and see us if you have the time?” he suggested.

“You know I might just do that Sir” Greenway agreed before signalling to his colleague to open the gate and let the vehicles through.

“Thank you Tracy” the Commander remarked as they drove on into the dark grounds of the site and along the gravel track until some two miles later they approached a complex of uninspiring 1950's built military style buildings.

“Well I am underwhelmed” Jennifer remarked wryly as they stopped outside the main entrance into the buildings where a military officer was waiting for them. He duly stepped forward and opened the doors for them before proceeding to escort the party inside.

“Welcome to the Epsilon Three emergency control centre facility” the officer declared as he escorted the party into the main hallway and reception area of the complex where the Commander looked down at his feet and smiled.

“Why is it everywhere has to have the company logo writ large in marble on the floor nowadays?” he asked pointing to the large round symbol on the floor which judging by the less than exciting décor all around was probably the most expensive part of the room to construct.

“And you've spelt Epsilon wrong” Jack remarked as he too looked down at the symbol.

“That is what happens when you have facilities built and converted under Government contract by the lowest possible bidder” the Commander confirmed with a wry smile in the direction of the Prime Minister before they were led off down the main corridor as the officer continued his briefing and introduction to the complex.

“Normally the surface buildings you saw outside plus this ground level are used by the military for special exercises” he explained “The Epsilon Control Centre is housed down in the lower basement encased in a bomb proof hardened concrete box approximately eight feet thick.”

“Let's hope we don't have to put that to the test” Jennifer remarked.

“Down here” the officer continued as they headed down a ramp into the bowels of the complex “you will find living quarters, supplies, the main Control & Command Room with data feeds from all over the country providing constant around the clock updates and enough supplies to keep you going for up to six months.”

“That is a lot of supplies” Jack remarked.

“Well in addition to its emergency operations centre role” the Commander explained “It is also the emergency Government base in the case of a nuclear war. If London were wiped out then this would become the new seat of Government.”

“Assuming of course the Government has not all been roasted to a crisp in the first blasts” the Prime Minister added ruefully “The original scenarios on which this place were based were written in the 1950's as the Cold War was getting underway.”

“Ah yes” Jack recalled “We are doing that in history class at the moment.”

“It was current affairs when I was your age” the Prime Minister remarked “I must be getting old!”

“Here we are ladies and gentlemen” the officer declared as they reached a large set of metal blast doors which opened as they approached “If there is anything you need, use the internal comm's system and ask for housekeeping.”

“Thank you” the Commander responded before he led the party with a nervous Jack by his side in through the blast doors and into the heart of the complex.

All of the rooms of the Control & Command Centre were lined up either side of a long central corridor at the far end of which past the living accommodation was the main briefing and control room which already had some people on site when they entered.

“Good God!” Henry Devizes the Regional Administrator General of the Wessex and West Division remarked as he saw the Commander come in with the Prime Minister alive and well “Aren't you supposed to be dead Sir?” he asked.

“And thereby hangs a tale” the Commander admitted as they all took a seat around the large briefing table which was surrounded on three sides by walls on which were screens and monitors providing updated information of the current status of events from across the country.

“We are still missing a few at the moment” Devizes confirmed as he passed across some status reports to the Commander “I guess they are on their way.”

“Are you aware of what is going on?” the Commander asked.

“A combination of the back channel rumour mill, a few friends in Scotland Yard and some discreet telephone calls from Sir Richard Crowthorne have filled in the blanks so to speak” Devizes confirmed.

“Where is the National Administrator General?” Jennifer asked “I thought he would be here by now?”

“He's on holiday” Devizes confirmed “Hiking up a mountain in the Canadian Rockies apparently.”

“Which means he is out of contact” the Commander confirmed “Nice convenient time to stage this little stunt of theirs indeed.”

“Ah there you are” Sir Richard Crowthorne declared as he arrived in the room “Do you know I think my official car managed to hit every single pot hole all the way here from London?” he remarked “Is there any whisky around here?”

“Drinks cabinet over on the side there” Devizes confirmed with a wry smile.

“Well that is one more for the party” the Commander declared “Where is everyone else?” he asked.

“Regional Administrator General's McClannon, Forrester and O'Flannagan are on their way to Epsilon II in Scotland” Sir Richard confirmed “No one can find Regional Administrator General Davies so it looks like he has taken his people and gone to ground somewhere in Wales.”

“Well that is Scotland, Northern Ireland, the North and Wales covered” the Commander ticked off his list “Which leaves Harris from Thames Valley & South Midlands, Allman from Central Midlands & West Coast and whoever is standing in for Linman on Yorkshire & East Coast while she is on maternity leave.”

“Would someone mind telling me what the hell is going on?” Regional Administrator General James Harris asked as he arrived in the room looking rather dishevelled as though he been forced to put his uniform on in a hurry “I was having a nice romantic evening with my wife, the first complete evening I have managed with her in weeks I may add, when two goons show up and drag me out here.”

“Evening Jim” the Commander responded as he got up and showed him to a seat whereupon Sir Richard passed him a drink to settle his mood “I take it that in the loving arms of your wife, you haven't been keeping up on world events then?”

“Well I heard about the Prime Minister getting kil...” he tailed off when he noticed the Prime Minister sitting opposite him with a wry smile before he turned back to the Commander “Do you want to take it from the top old friend?” he asked.

“Once everyone is here” the Commander confirmed.

“You can't do this to me, I am an American!!” came a call from the distance.

“Sounds like our friend from the CIA has arrived” Sir Richard remarked wryly as a rather flustered looking yet formidable lady was shown into the room.

“Special Agent Roberta Black” the Commander declared “Nice of you to join us.”

“I appreciate I am a guest in this country and just the CIA's London liaison but have you seen it out there?” she asked as she took a seat at the table “That idiot of a Deputy Prime Minister is putting a nice veneer on it and he has pretty much the entire press wrapped up around his little finger but underneath its like the fall of Rome out there.”

“And unfortunately sticking us all down here out of the way is part of their plans” the Commander confirmed “Anyway, how are you my dear?” he asked.

“Not too bad under the circumstances” Black admitted “Your guys managed to drag me out of an extremely tedious meeting with the French Ambassador so it's not a totally wasted evening” she remarked before noticing the Prime Minister alive and well sitting next to her.

“Aren't you dead?” she asked him.

“I've been getting that feeling a lot lately” the Prime Minister responded.

“Believe me I can sympathise” Jack added as he momentarily produced his death certificate from his pocket.

“Of course we do have one problem” Devizes confirmed “With no National Security Service Administrator General in the chair, who is going to take charge of this mess?” he asked.

“Under executive orders granted from the United Nations” the Prime Minister interceded “I hereby propose that Edward Regent GC, Regional Administrator General of the London & South East section of the Service be hereby appointed acting National Administrator General with immediate effect. Do I have a second?”

“Yep” Harris agreed.

“Then lets put it to a vote” the Prime Minister declared as the Commander looked on rather perplexed “All those in favour?” he asked.

In response everyone around the table raised their hands, even Jack. The only exception being the Commander.

“Those against?” the Prime Minister asked whereupon the Commander weakly raised his hand a bit.

“Motion carried” the Prime Minister declared.

“Well at least it means I can get a new uniform without complaint” the Commander wryly remarked “Very well, lets get to work” he declared.

Big Ben let out its solitary single chime to declare that as most of the city surrounding it was asleep, it was now one in the morning. One person who heard its chime and was not asleep despite her best efforts was Tracy who was on the couch in the Commander's office with a blanket wrapped around her continuing to watch events on BBC News 24.

There was no way she was going to be able to get to sleep, there was too much weighing heavily on her mind and a strong apprehension of what the next twenty fours might bring.

As the news presenter on the television continued to repeat pretty much the same news stories they had an hour earlier, Tracy closed her eyes and rested her head on a cushion, just listening to the broadcast.

Meanwhile out in the near deserted streets of London, in a scene being repeated in major population centres throughout the country, anonymous white vans were moving around, each carrying at least six professional looking men dressed in full security enforcement gear and well armed with powerful weaponry.

Unseen by most, these mysterious groups filtered through the streets clearly making their ways to specific targets in numerous locations. Some in the heart of the City, others in the affluent Docklands area and more in the ordinary everyday council estates that could be found all over the country.

Whatever was being planned was starting and it was with a look of satisfaction that Temple-Smythe watched from his official car as he travelled north out of the city at the various mini convoys of identical vans and support vehicles that were heading in the opposite direction getting in position to do his bidding when he called for it.

“Oh to hell with it” Tracy remarked to herself as she sat up again and pulled the blanket in tighter around herself as she felt cold. The heating was on throughout the

building as usual but there was a chill in the air, maybe physiological rather than physical but enough for her to feel it and for it to make her uncomfortable.

The ringing of the telephone on the desk brought Tracy back to her senses though. She looked across from the couch at the desk for a few moments as the ringing continued, wondering whether it was worth the effort to go and answer it. After a few moments of thought during which the ringing kept going, she threw off the blanket and got up before going over to the desk, sitting down behind it and as she stifled a yawn, answering it.

“Caverner...” she responded with a yawn.

“Tracy” the Commander declared “Why aren't you in bed love?” he asked gently.

“Because you are not here” Tracy admitted “Besides I can't sleep, I don't think anyone can. What is that noise?” she asked when she picked up on a sound in the background.

“Jack is snoring” the Commander admitted as he looked around at the young boy who was fast asleep in a chair at the end of the large briefing room table, the battered briefcase still firmly clasped in his hand “I guess not everyone is still awake.”

“Are you at this Epsilon Three place then?” Tracy asked as she rubbed her eyes, trying to stave off her weariness.

“Yeah” the Commander confirmed as he looked around at the others around the table discussing the situation “We got here about an hour ago. I bumped into one of our local boys, a Commander Greenway but then I guess you know something about that love?”

“I am not there to watch your back” Tracy admitted “So he and his team are going to try and keep things under control up there.”

“Yeah well, he may not be able to for long” the Commander admitted “Apparently he and his team are to be relieved by something called the Special Operations Unit under the direct command of the Deputy Prime Minister.”

“The who?” Tracy responded.

“I was always a Status Quo man myself” the Commander joked which raised a smile at both ends of the conversation before he quickly returned to the subject in hand “Yes, that was pretty much my reaction.”

“There is not one thing about this whole Emergency Crisis Measures thing that I like” Tracy admitted “I had that Temple-Smythe in here earlier. Slimy bastard doesn't even come close to describing him as far as I am concerned.”

“Don't worry” the Commander reassured her “He will get his just desserts before this is all over.”

“Well I gave him a piece of my mind before he left” Tracy confirmed as she recalled with some amusement the thorough talking too she had given the politician earlier in that very office “Told him that I and the Service will do its job as set out in the Declaration of Principles and that he should stay well out of my way if he knows what is good for him.”

“As long as that is all you said” the Commander responded with heavy concern “Anything more than that and he could have you removed or worse.”

“I can take care of myself” Tracy reassured him “Besides I have a bullet proof vest hanging in the wardrobe, a couple of thousand loyal officers under my direct command and Commander Baker and her sniper squad watching me around the clock.”

“You know about that?” the Commander asked.

“I didn't actually” Tracy confirmed with a chuckle “but if our roles were reversed, I would have done exactly the same so I assumed they were around.”

“Be careful” the Commander warned “I get the impression that whatever greater plans Temple-Smythe and his associates have will begin to roll in the morning and then all hell is going to break loose.”

“I will” Tracy confirmed “Oh and if for some reason I don't make it through this, make sure that what little is left of Temple-Smythe when you catch up with can only be identified with the help of his dentist and a microscope. I made a promise and I would hate to break it.”

“I will see what I can arrange” the Commander admitted “Tracy, I love you.”

“I love you too” Tracy confirmed with a tear in her eyes “Through fire and hell, I will always love you” she added but then realised that the telephone had gone dead at the other end.”

“Tracy? Hello?” the Commander called as if calling her name louder would actually make the telephone work.

“What happened?” Devizes asked as the Commander returned to the table with a worried look on his face.

“The telephone just went dead” the Commander confirmed as he pressed the hook button on the telephone base unit in a fruitless attempt to try and get it working.

“What the hell?” Black exclaimed as all around them the data screens shut off and went black swiftly followed by the main lights as well.

“Anyone got a shilling for the meter?” the Commander asked as they all looked around nervously, even Jack who had been startled from his sleep by this sudden and ominous turn of events.

Outside in the grounds of the complex, a large number of white vans were heading up the gravel track before spreading out and encircling the complex of buildings at the centre of the site. From them emerged a considerable number of armed men in black military style uniforms who after overpowering the small detachment of Security Service officers on duty, proceeded to seal off the site and then move inside.

As they went through the ground and upper floors of the complex, a line of guards stood to attention as a black saloon car approached up the driveway and came to a stop in front of the main entrance. From the rear of the car alighted the Deputy Prime Minister and Devlin whilst the two associates who Temple-Smythe always had in attendance joined them before with an armed escort, they headed inside the building.

As they disappeared from sight inside the building, some distance away Commander Greenway lowered the night vision equipped binoculars he had been using to survey the unfolding drama with and sat back.

“This is not good” his colleague remarked as he did a quick count up of how many armed men he had seen arriving and dispersing all around the site.

“You can say that again” Greenway agreed “We are going to need a hell of a lot more than just our local lads for this job.”

“This one is dead too” Black confirmed as she gave up trying another telephone in the main briefing and control room.

“Either someone forgot to pay the bill or we are about to have unwelcome guests” Sir Richard commented, a theory that was proved correct almost immediately when the doors opened and in walked under armed escort the Deputy Prime Minister with his two mean looking associates and Devlin.

“Good morning ladies and gentlemen” Temple-Smythe greeted them sarcastically “I do hope we are unwell and in extreme discomfort?”

“Nice of you to ask” the Commander remarked “I see you have been hiring from the lower end of the gene pool again” he indicated Devlin who glowered at him in response.

“Actually Mr Devlin here is a very honourable man” Temple-Smythe confirmed with a wry smile as he indicated to Devlin not to get involved “In exchange for three million in cash and his legitimate release from his unjustified prison sentence, he has provided us with personnel and hardware more than capable of achieving our aims and objectives with.”

“That would be the three million that happened to disappear into thin air in Bethnal Green the other night I assume?” the Commander asked.

“Legitimately acquired to fund our cause” Temple-Smythe confirmed “and just in time too as since this young man reappeared from the dead, we had to bring forward our timetable just a tad” he indicated Jack who was looking at Temple-Smythe's two associates carefully and with intensity.

“This is an illegal take over of the Government” the Prime Minister declared “You cannot do this!”

“Well, well, well” Temple-Smythe remarked as he saw the Prime Minister alive and well “It would appear that reports of your death have been a little bit premature. A situation that will have rectified itself before morning.”

“So you just plan to roll on into town with your new agenda and throttle everything that this country has fought for over a thousand years then?” the Commander asked.

“For too long” Temple-Smythe explained “I, my associates and certain other sympathetic parties have watched as this country and its Government has been constantly sand bagged by do gooders and other parties.”

“So you are going to do what?” Sir Richard asked “Arrest anyone that doesn't agree with you and your friends.”

“Yes” Temple-Smythe admitted frankly “Starting at six a.m. my specialist people are going to round up all the troublemakers, the human rights protestors, suspected terrorist cells, anarchists, freedom of speech groups, civil liberties organisers, everyone who has criticised this Government over the last twenty years be it in person, by vote or over the Internet. We are taking out the trash so that I can run this country unimpeded as it should be.”

“And to hell with those quaint old fashioned values such as freedom of speech, the right to walk the streets without fear or worry?” the Commander retorted “What about democracy?” he asked.

“Oh we will still have democracy” Temple-Smythe confirmed “Just as long as the public understand who they must vote for.”

“And if they don't understand?” Sir Richard asked “You and your thought police are going to make them see the error of their ways I assume?”

“Education can be a powerful tool” Temple-Smythe remarked “So can carefully applied good old fashioned brute force for that matter.”

“I know you two” Jack remarked as he continued to observe closely the two associates of Temple-Smythe, going up to them until the Commander stepped forward and pulled him back before he did something stupid.

“You know these gorillas?” the Commander asked him.

“That night” Jack explained “two years ago when my family was murdered, when I officially died, these two brought the car for my Father, they were the two in the van that intercepted us in Marylebone and they were the two who I saw execute my Father in cold blood” Jack declared as he stared the one he was certain was the main gunman from that night firmly in the eyes.

“Which means you must have authorised the murders” the Commander concluded, staring directly at Temple-Smythe “Husband and wife, their two kids in cold blood?”

“A necessary liquidation of certain threats to our organisation” Temple-Smythe calmly responded as if it was as significant to him as signing a cheque for a paltry amount.

“When all this over” Jack warned, trying to make the best of his small stature to back up his threat “You and I am going to have a little chat.”

“Oh really?” Temple-Smythe responded, dismissing the threat casually “Take a number and get in line. I have already had one threat to rearrange my dental work in the last evening as it is.”

“So” the Commander concluded as he escorted Jack out of the way where Jennifer took charge of him to one side “You have most of the senior Security Service staff sealed off from the world down here but you don't have all of us and we have a nasty habit of upsetting the plans of unsavoury agenda waving loonies such as you and your colleagues.”

“You refer perhaps to the National Administrator General?” Temple-Smythe responded “He is under house arrest in his log cabin in the Canadian Rockies with two of my best overseas operatives for company, and as for the one absent member of this little gathering, well lets just say that as far as the Regional Administrator General for Wales is concerned, mountain climbing is a very dangerous pastime.”

“Can I kick him the nuts now?” Jack asked.

“Later” the Commander wryly responded.

“Oh I nearly forgot” Temple-Smythe added “One more guest for the party” he indicated to the men to bring in the bound and gagged figure of the Home Secretary who had been missing for almost twenty four hours now and this was the reason why.

“Are you all right?” the Prime Minister asked as he and Jennifer took charge of the Home Secretary, releasing him from his bonds whereupon Sir Richard provided him with a much needed stiff drink.

“I've haven't felt this rough since the morning after that party with the Italian Prime Minister” the Home Secretary confirmed “Anyway who is this loony?” he asked, indicating Temple-Smythe.

“He is the Deputy Prime Minister” Devizes remarked with some regret.

“We have one?” the Home Secretary asked, oblivious to the developments of the last day or so.

“We do now” the Commander confirmed apologetically.

“So here we are” Temple-Smythe concluded “all safe and snug underground and cut off from the world. When I leave here in a few minutes the blast doors will be sealed

and the air circulation system will suffer a mysterious mechanical malfunction. By my workings out you will have about two, maybe three hours to make your peace with whoever you believe in.”

“No one is going to believe we all died in an accident of some kind” Special Agent Black protested “Especially not the loyal members of the Security Service nor my associates either.”

“We live in a media driven society my dear” Temple-Smythe explained “It is amazing how a second hand report of a terrorist atrocity against the very top level of the law enforcement authorities can become believed as gospel in a matter of hours.”

“And what of our people” the Commander asked “There is no way they will go along with this coup of yours.”

“You forget” Temple-Smythe responded “Under the Emergency Crisis Legislation condition, I am now directly in charge of the National Security & Police Service, the Intelligence Agencies and pretty much everything else. I am happy for the Services to continue their role according to their mandate but if they step away from our party line, people can disappear and be easily replaced with more sympathetic colleagues in a blink of an eye.”

“You are quite mad you know that?” the Prime Minister stated.

“No” Temple-Smythe responded “I’m just eccentric, driven by the need to serve my people but not afraid to squash a few hypothetical ants along the way. If you will excuse me ladies and gentlemen, I have to be going as I have a country to run.”

“One more thing” the Commander called after Temple-Smythe as he turned to leave “Call it a parting word of advice.”

“By all means” Temple-Smythe agreed.

“There are plenty of loyal people who you don’t control, who are still out there in the free world you seek to come down hard on that you will never know about so know this” the Commander warned “If you or any of your goons so much as touch my wife let alone kill her I can assure you that anywhere from thirty seconds to two minutes later, you will be dead and when you get to the pearly gates, she is going to kick your ass all the way to hell.”

“I’ll bear it in mind” Temple-Smythe confirmed as he left.

“And you...” the Commander directed his attention to Devlin “The next time we meet, you will not be around long enough to have the luxury of a trial and a cosy jail cell.”

“In the next life I presume” Devlin responded with a confident evil smirk before leaving the room whereupon the door was closed and locked.

“Jack” Jennifer remarked aside to him “When you have finished kicking Temple-Smythe’s nuts into oblivion, can I have him next?”

“Absolutely” Jack agreed.

The rapid knocking on the office door at two thirty in the morning quickly woke Tracy up and brought her to her senses.

“What?” she called as she sat up and looked across at the clock on the wall.

“Sorry to disturb you Maam” Gladys from the Control Room called as she came in “I thought you should see this.”

“Lovely timing” Tracy remarked as she yawned and rubbed her eyes before getting up of the couch and heading back to the desk “I was just finally getting off to sleep at last.”

“Well you did ask me to keep an eye on the back channels Maam” Gladys confirmed “Report anything unusual or odd.”

“The way things have been going lately” Tracy admitted “The ordinary is becoming the unusual.”

“Well try this for odd” Gladys remarked “Twenty minutes ago a call came through the Control Room that apparently the first edition of the National Herald was being recalled to be pulped.”

“Yep, that is odd” Tracy agreed.

“Well here are the first editions of all the other nationals” Gladys placed the pile of news papers on the desk in front of Tracy “They all pretty much toe the Government line, reporting the Deputy PM's speech in near identical prose, almost as if they have had the story dictated to them by the Downing Street press office.”

“So they control the media as well” Tracy admitted as she looked through the front pages which ranged from the staid and official in the broadsheets to the sensationalist style of the tabloids.

“Now take a look at the first edition of the Herald” Gladys placed the paper on the desk.

“Bloody hell!” Tracy exclaimed “Democracy, Freedom of Speech, Civilisation, all died with the Prime Minister at six o'clock” she read from the provocative front page “Temple-Smythe will go ballistic when he sees this.”

“I haven't managed to secure a copy of the second edition” Gladys admitted “I was lucky to get hold of this, the newsagent down the road kept a couple of copies with instructions to make sure you saw it, however I gather the second edition is back on message and even the Herald's website was pulled off the air twenty minutes ago.”

“I guess the editor of the Herald doesn't believe what is going on either” Tracy admitted as she read on “So who ordered the recall of the first edition.”

“My guess would be the paper's owners” Gladys admitted “Whoever it was, I would guess the Herald's editor will be seeking alternative employment in the morning.”

“There is one news organisation that can't be got at though” Tracy admitted “Do me a favour, see if you can get a call through to the head of news at the BBC” she asked “I want to talk to him away from prying eyes and ears.”

“I'll go and wake him up now” Gladys confirmed before leaving the office.

Three miles away in Fleet Street, outside the offices of the National Herald newspaper, four of the mysterious white vans pulled up and immediately a contingent of armed officers from the Special Operations Group of the Deputy Prime Minister's office deployed and proceeded directly into the building.

There was chaos and confusion in the reception area as the internal security tried to stop the forces from entering but they were soon overpowered and the men proceeded directly to the editorial news room.

As the last of the armed men disappeared upstairs, the security guard on duty at the desk picked up the telephone and made a discreet call.

Gladys came bursting back into the office where Tracy was still reading the potentially explosive first edition of the Herald.

“Maam” Gladys called, almost out of breath having run all the way from the Control Room “Four van loads of armed goons waving some Government Security Directive just turned up en masse at the offices of the Herald.”

“Dear God” Tracy exclaimed as she got to her feet and grabbed her uniform tunic “Do we know who they are?”

“No idea” Gladys confirmed as she followed Tracy out of the office “They just turned up about two minutes ago and started storming through the place like they owned it.

“Right” Tracy declared as she checked her gun “I am going down there, have Bob and his boys meet me down there as soon as possible and find me a BBC News crew as well” she requested as she entered the lift and the doors closed.

Less than two minutes later Tracy was racing through the city streets on a patrol bike with full lights and sirens and as she headed through Piccadilly was joined by Bob and his Armed Support Unit team in their van who were responding to the same call.

Arriving in Fleet Street, Tracy came across a scene of utter chaos and confusion where most of the staff from the Herald were out in the street looking back at their building which was now being guarded at the entrance by a team of the black

uniformed special operations men who ignored all the protests that were being thrown at them by the journalists and other staff.

“All right” Tracy declared as she got off her motorbike and made her way through the crowd to the front doors “What the hell is going on here and who the hell are you lot?” she demanded.

“You can't come in” the leader of the armed men informed her firmly, continuing with his colleagues to block off access to the building behind him.

“These loonies turned up waving guns around the place about fifteen minutes ago” one of the newspaper staff stepped forward and informed Tracy “They have arrested the editor and much of the senior staff and shut the whole paper down.”

“You can't do this” Tracy confronted the leader of the men “You have no jurisdiction and no authority whatsoever.”

“Cease and desist order from the office of the Deputy Prime Minister” the leader produced a very official document “in connection with a plot by certain employees of this newspaper to incite terrorist acts and publish anti Government propaganda.”

At that point there was a commotion as some of the newspaper staff saw the editor and some of his colleagues being led from a side entrance in handcuffs by a large body of heavily armed men who showed them direct to a waiting van.

“This is censorship of the press” Tracy admonished the leader “It goes against pretty much every principle in the book” she angrily informed him.

“Step away” the leader ordered her “This building and its contents have been seized under a legal order and are now under the jurisdiction of myself and my officers.”

“Oh no you don't” Tracy responded as she pushed forward trying to enter the building “Let me in there.”

In response, the men like a wall pushed Tracy sharply back into the crowd behind her only for them to face Bob and his team of Armed Support Unit officers who appeared behind her and aimed their weapons directly at the men.

“Don't even think about it mate” Bob strongly but politely advised “I and my men have sworn to fight and die at her command and assaulting a senior officer of the Security Service is a very serious offence which kind of makes me mad, and trust me my friend, you don't want to see me when I get mad.”

“It's all right Bob” Tracy responded “I think he only has the brain development to handle real short words in books with big pictures” she remarked wryly but the men remained unmoved as she stepped forward and looked directly into the leader's eyes.

“I want you to think about two things” Tracy warned him with a menacing presence despite her short stature “Firstly I will be taking this matter up with Heir Gruppen Fuehrer Temple-Smythe your extremely unpleasant boss as soon as he has awoken from under his rock at sunrise. Secondly, I am instructing all of the officers under my

command and loyal to the declaration of principles by which it runs to keep you and your associates under a very careful watch.”

“You have no authority over us” the leader warned, appearing unmoved at least on the outside.

“Here is what you are going to do” Tracy informed him “You are going to go back to that rock from under which you came out of to do your thought police dirty work tonight and you are going to tell all your little buddies that if I or any of my officers see ANY of you so much as fracture a parking regulation let alone anything else, they will be immediately arrested, charged and jailed, ok?”

“Hmmp” the leader responded seeming not to care one jot as Tracy signalled to Bob and his men to stand down which they did slowly.

“Be seeing you” Tracy remarked before she turned and left escorted by Bob and his team away from the scene.

“Finished Maam?” Bob asked as they returned to his team's vehicle.

“Finished?” Tracy responded with determination “I haven't even started yet. Anyway 'sworn to fight and die at my command?’” she asked incredulously.

“Well it sounded good at the time” Bob admitted “and it worked, one of his goons was about to go for a weapon when we did our little party piece back there.”

“I guess they win this one” Tracy looked back at the scene as the crowds began to break up, many shaking their heads in disbelief at what was going on “With a bit of luck it will give them a false sense of security because by heck I am going to kick some ass in the morning.”

“But will they have understood the message?” Bob asked.

“I doubt it” Tracy admitted “Come on, lets get back and get some shut eye, I have this nasty feeling we are going to need it in the morning.”

“Anything?” Devizes called up to the Commander as he examined the ceiling panels whilst standing on the table.

“Looks like all the wiring is sealed in welded metal trunking” the Commander called down “If there are any useable live systems up there we can't get at them.”

“So we are stuck in here then?” Black asked.

“Well short of digging a tunnel...” Sir Richard remarked wryly.

“And we haven't even got a shovel” the Commander added ruefully as he jumped down off the table before catching something, a noise in the background that he then proceeded to look around trying to locate the source.

“Can you hear that?” he asked as he looked around.

“Hear what?” the Prime Minister asked looking as equally perplexed as the others.

“Yes” Devizes confirmed after a moment of listening intensely “It’s a bleeping noise of some kind. Over there I think” he indicated the far side of the room where Jack and Jennifer were both asleep in comfy chairs.

As the Commander went over to them he listened more carefully and was able to identify that whatever was making the noise was on Jack’s person to which he carefully reached inside the boy’s tunic pocket and extracted the pocket computer.

“What was that?” Jack suddenly asked a little blearily as he awoke.

“Well I will be dammed” Sir Richard remarked “They searched and took all of our phones etc but they never thought to search the boy.”

“Did I miss something?” Jack asked, unaware of what was happening.

“I do believe you may have just saved our lives” the Commander informed him with a smile.

“Wonderful” Jack responded before rolling over and falling back to sleep.

“Ok” the Commander called “Who is the technical wizard here?” he asked.

“Let me take a look” Harris responded as he took the pocket computer from the Commander and brought it to the table to look at it closely “This appears to be a secure text link to somewhere. There is a message here from a Commander Fuller asking where the hell are we.”

“Can you make this work with speech?” the Commander asked.

“Yeah sure” Harris confirmed “My kids have a couple of these, cost a fortune in batteries mind.”

In the depths of the former King William Street station complex, Collins looked up from where he had dozed off at the computer console in response to a familiar voice coming from it that in theory at least he should not have been able to hear under the current circumstances.

“Is there anybody there?” the Commander was heard to call.

“Bloody hell!” Collins exclaimed as he realised who it was that was calling “Simon!” he shouted through to the next room where Fuller was making some fresh coffee “Get you backside in here, we got contact.”

“Thank God for that” Fuller remarked as he returned to his desk and grabbed the telephone hand set “Hello, we read you” he confirmed.

“Simon?” the Commander called “We are trapped in the secure area in the basement of the Epsilon Three facility” he confirmed “That toe rag Temple-Smythe locked us in and he has that two faced little gob shite Devlin providing the hardware and personnel to add to the misery.”

“All right Sir” Fuller confirmed “Divisional Commander Caverner put some trusted officers in the area on standby but they called in about an hour ago and confirmed that they are hopelessly outnumbered unless you can provide some sort of distraction that they can use.”

“Not happening until we get out of this room” the Commander confirmed looking around “There must be some way out of here, see if you can find some plans, architect's drawings, blue prints, anything that may show a way out of here.”

“Give me a minute Sir” Fuller responded as he turned to a computer and began a search for anything useful “I am going to pass you over to Mr Collins whilst I search for the plans.”

“Commander?” Collins called “Are you all right there?” he asked.

“I have had more entertaining evenings” the Commander admitted “We seem to be all right here although the Home Secretary is looking a bit fed up with life in general.”

“So that is where he wound up” Collins remarked “I have had half of MI5's Political Division looking for him for over thirty hours.”

“Listen” the Commander called “When that piece of work Temple-Smythe was here, he mentioned something about specialist operations units making key arrests in the morning?”

“They have already started” Collins confirmed ruefully “They raided the editorial offices of the National Herald about half an hour ago and arrested the editor and a few others. I don't have the full details as they are being very careful to bypass both my Department and all my usual sources but apparently the first edition was going to criticise the whole Temple-Smythe affair and Emergency Security Order however it was pulled from the streets and pulped before too many people saw it which is when the heavies went in armed and mob handed.”

“And from what I gather” the Commander remarked “Anyone else who disagrees, argues or protests can probably expect the same kind of treatment.”

“It looks that way yes” Collins confirmed “He has managed to leave the National Security Service and MI5 alone for the moment as long as we stick to our mandate and don't obstruct his armour plated bandwagon but sooner or later this is going to go bang big time.”

“I got it” Fuller called taking over the call again “I've got the plans, ducting layout, the whole works.”

“How did you find that so fast?” the Commander wondered.

“I just Googled 'Secret Government Installation Epsilon Three Plans' and up it came” Fuller admitted although it was probably a little more difficult than that “Anyway, where exactly are you in the complex” he asked.

“Basement level two” the Commander confirmed “Main Command & Control room at the far end of the main corridor.”

“Ok” Fuller confirmed as he read the information on his screen “The doors on that level are designed in such a way that if there was an attack, they would seal tight which I guess is what Temple-Smythe's boys have done. There is a manual release for the doors of the room you are in located beneath a floor panel on the other side but to get to it, you will need to crawl through the air duct over in the far corner.”

“Air duct...” the Commander directed Harris and Devizes over to the far corner of the room where they quickly located a grille in the bottom of the far wall.

“Got it” Harris confirmed as he, Devizes and Sir Richard proceeded to pull the grille off the wall to reveal the air duct behind it.

“Well there is no way we are going to fit in there” the Commander remarked as he joined them and under the light of a torch examined the air duct all around.

“It should be three metres square according to this” Fuller read from the plans displayed on his screen.

“More like three feet” the Commander responded “Looks like the accuracy of Government records is as spot on as ever.”

“Oh dear” Jennifer remarked having been awoken by the sudden increase in activity and joined them in looking at the duct “I know I am slim but even I would struggle with that.”

“In which case we are stuck here” the Prime Minister concluded.

“When will you lot ever learn” Jack remarked as he joined the discussion and looked at the duct “Never leave home without a twelve year old” he declared as he proceeded to climb into the duct with a little room to spare “You never know when one of me may come in useful for those tricky situations.”

“Ok Simon” the Commander called to Fuller “Jack has volunteered to do his John McClane impression, now what?”

“Climb along the duct about ten metres until you reach a junction where you turn right and then that should lead you out into the office next door” Fuller explained “From there you can go out into the corridor and the door release mechanism is under the floor panel by the right hand pillar.”

“You get all that Jack?” the Commander called into the duct.

“To the end” Jack repeated “Turn right, office, corridor, right hand pillar, floor panel, got it” he confirmed.

“Good luck” the Prime Minister called after him as Jack disappeared from view.

“Ok” the Commander called to Fuller “He is on his way. How is my wife?” he asked.

“Doing well according to reports” Fuller confirmed “She is on the verge of declaring war against these guys apparently. There was what was described as a heated exchange of ideas and principles earlier outside the Herald's offices, her and Bob's boys on one side and a wall of goons on the other.”

“That's my girl” the Commander admitted.

As he continued to receive updates, Jack reached the end of the air duct and another grille blocking his exit into the empty office on the other side.

“And these were new shoes this morning” he remarked to himself as he braced up against the side of the duct and proceeded to kick at the grille until it fell away and crashed to the floor before climbing out into the empty office.

“Good grief” Jack remarked as he looked down at the discarded grille “That trick really works.”

With understandable caution he opened the office door just enough to check that the corridor outside was clear before stepping out and going directly to the large doors where after a bit of scrabbling around on the floor he found the panel under which was the release switch for the door.

“And open sesame” Jack declared as he pulled the lever and in response the heavy locking mechanism of the door released with a loud clunk and the door opened.

“Well done Jack” the Commander declared as he and the others exited and joined him in the corridor.

“It's all in the wrist” Jack admitted wryly “and for that you all owe me lunch” he added.

“I think we can arrange that” the Prime Minister agreed as they proceeded down the corridor to the far end where they encountered the main blast doors still firmly shut.

“Ok Simon” the Commander called to Fuller “We are at the main blast doors, now what?”

“To release them, open the panel in the wall to the left” Fuller explained to which in response Sir Richard opened the panel and put his hand on the big red lever inside.

He was about to pull it when Fuller stopped him “Don't pull that lever just yet though” he called causing Sir Richard to stop dead in his tracks “If you open that door now, all the goons on the other side will know you are escaping and shoot you all.”

“Well that is a bit of a bummer” Jack remarked, accurately reflecting the feelings of the others just in fewer more direct words.

“In which case” the Commander responded “I think its time we called upon the services of our colleagues. Patch me through to Commander Greenway” he requested.

“This is Greenway” came a call a few moments later “How may I be of service Sir?”

“We are at the blast doors that lead from the basement complex” the Commander explained “Somehow I need to get all of us out of the building and off the site without any of the guards realising that we are escaping or that we have even left the premises.”

“Oh, is that all Sir?” Greenway wryly remarked “Give me a minute or two whilst I have some of my lads and lasses create a diversion that will attract their attention for a while. I will give you the go ahead when you are clear.”

“Much appreciated” the Commander confirmed.

Outside, Commander Greenway had managed to move a significant number of trusted officers into position all around the complex unseen by numerous armed guards on constant roving patrol.

“Tweety Bird from Mother Goose” Greenway called into his radio using a special secure channel “The fledglings are ready to leave the nest but we need to take the heat off them first.”

“Mother Goose, this is Tweety Bird” one of Greenway's officers called from the west side of the grounds within the perimeter of the site “We are all set here, just give the word.”

“Standby” Greenway confirmed “Mother Goose to Road Runner, standby to have wheels ready to roll at the east entrance in two minutes.”

“Road Runner acknowledges” came the response.

“Commander from Greenway” he called “Diversion in place and ready to go. When we begin there will be an alarm sounded. When that happens, come out of the basement and head for the east exit where there will be a vehicle waiting and I will meet you there.”

“Thank you” the Commander confirmed before turning to those with him “All right everyone, get ready to run when I say. Jennifer, you stick to the PM and the Home Secretary like glue and Black look after Jack, if he can't keep up then we will carry him if necessary.”

Outside, the guards on duty who were providing the roving patrol of the perimeter of the buildings were suddenly startled by an explosion a short distance away towards the western perimeter fence.

“Control this is Unit Five” one of the men called “Alert on the west side, move in, move in.”

The alarm duly sounded throughout the complex and within seconds the guards moved towards the source of the explosion which some of Greenway's people had cleverly set up to look like a stolen car had been deliberately set alight and therefore provide no danger to them.

“Ok, lets go” the Commander declared whereupon Sir Richard pulled the red lever and the blast doors duly opened. As soon as the two halves of the door were open wide enough to pass through, they all made their way quickly out before Sir Richard closed the door again behind them to make it look like they had never left.

Reaching the end of one passageway, the Commander was about to lead them out when he heard footsteps approaching.

"Back" he whispered behind him and ushered everyone back into the shadows as a guard came running past.

When he was out of sight, the Commander once again signalled the all clear and they moved off.

A few moments later they reached the east exit where as promised a white van was waiting with Greenway and one of his colleagues sat in the front.

"In the back quickly" Greenway whispered whereupon everyone duly followed the instruction and got in, the Commander being last aboard shutting the sliding side door.

"Let's get the hell out of here" the Commander called up front whereupon Greenway duly drove off heading away from the buildings complex as behind them the guards began to return to their assigned duty stations blissfully unaware of what had just happened.

"Sorry about the less than luxurious transportation Sir" Greenway called back "It's all my colleague could find that would hold all you lot yet not raise any suspicion when we reach the main gate, I hope."

"Define I hope please" the Commander asked.

"You will see in a minute Sir" Greenway explained as the main gate appeared in the distance "Keep your heads down and don't say a thing until we are clear" he advised.

As their vehicle approached the main gate, one of the two guards on duty stepped forward and raised his hand in a request for them to stop.

"Hello again" Greenway called from the drivers side window as the guard came up.

"Got what you needed then?" the guard asked.

"Turns out I wasn't needed in the end mate" Greenway confirmed "Looks like I got roused out of bed for nothing."

"Well look on the bright side" the guard remarked "At least you can go and get some sleep" he remarked as he indicated to his colleague to open the gate.

"There is that" Greenway agreed as he released the handbrake "Goodnight" he called as he calmly drove off through the gate and away.

"Phew..." Sir Richard breathed a sigh of relief, a feeling echoed by all the others.

"Remind me to recommend you two for a promotion" the Commander called up to the front "Assuming there is still a Service to promote you within when all this is over that is."

"Where to Sir?" Greenway called as the van reached the main road and they turned out onto it.

"First somewhere we can find us some more fitting transport" the Commander declared "What time is it?" he asked.

"Just gone four in the morning." Greenway confirmed.

"In which case head for the nearest railway station" the Commander advised "and mind the pot holes, there aren't any comforts back here."

"There is confusion this morning following a reported incident at the head office of the National Herald newspaper overnight" the BBC News Presenter announced as part of the five o'clock headlines on the television in the Commander's office.

"That's putting it mildly" Tracy remarked from the shower in the adjacent executive bathroom.

As the BBC continued to provide a rather vague version of the events overnight the telephone rang causing Tracy to curse to herself before reaching for a towel and then emerging to answer it.

"This had better be good" Tracy responded on answering the telephone whilst at the same time struggling with the towel to protect her modesty.

"It depends on how you define good" the Commander remarked with delight at hearing her voice once again "Did I catch you at a bad time love?" he asked.

"I was just in the shower" Tracy admitted sheepishly "Besides its five in the morning. Where the hell are you?"

"In a phone box in a small village just outside Aylesbury" the Commander admitted "Thanks to the assistance of Commander Greenway, we managed to play a little double bluff and sneak out while the guards were otherwise distracted."

"Is everyone with you?" Tracy asked "More importantly are you ok?"

“All present and correct” the Commander looked towards their commandeered van parked nearby in which the rest of his group were resting “Jack, Sir Richard, the PM, Jennifer, Black, a few others are all ok although the Home Secretary is looking a little shaken up mind” he admitted.

“I don't know how much you know of what has been going on down here” Tracy admitted “but we are about one hour away from total anarchy” she reported “Temple-Smythe's thought police goon squads of gorillas are deploying all over the place according to the latest reports and according to Collins' office a lot of people who are not toeing the party message are going to get a rude awakening.”

“I heard something about the editor of the National Herald getting a visit” the Commander admitted “What angle are you using on these goon squads?” he asked.

“Sticking to the official declaration of principles of the service with a stern warning that if any of Temple-Smythe's goons break so much as a parking restriction we arrest them” Tracy confirmed “This is likely to kick off big time as soon as the goons go in and when that happens...”

“We effectively have a civil war between Temple-Smythe's lot and us” the Commander concluded.

“I am running out of ideas” Tracy admitted “They seem to have every angle from counter intelligence, the judiciary, the media and legislative support wrapped up very tightly.”

“All right my love” the Commander reassured her “we are heading back to the City now.”

“Just don't use any public transport” Tracy warned “There are reports of goon squads guarding all the main line railway stations and if they see you and the Prime Minister roll past they will go nuts.”

“I want you to do something for me” the Commander asked her “It won't be easy but it needs to be done.”

“For you anything” Tracy confirmed.

“When the morning shift clocks on at 6.00, gather as many of the Service as you can find either in person or by that video link stuff we spent so much money on and tell them everything” he instructed “Temple-Smythe, the illegal coup plot, the Prime Minister's death, the incident at the Herald offices, everything.”

“From the whispers I have heard I gather that many of our lads and lasses already know” Tracy admitted “and a lot of them are very angry about it but with the kind of legal and personnel support they have, I don't know if we can do any good.”

“Well when they start harassing ordinary members of the public in the street” the Commander remarked “Feel free to explain the rules of democracy and free speech to them in your usual inimitable way” he suggested.

“I feel like I am about to put the entire service on a war footing” Tracy remarked “When that point is passed there will be no going back until this is over one way or the other.”

“Just make sure you have plenty of support” the Commander suggested “Also make sure that everything you and the Service does to tackle these bozos on the streets is strictly within the letter of the law.”

“I have already asked our man at the BBC to send over a couple of roving news camera crews to follow us around” Tracy confirmed “If Temple-Smythe wants to manipulate the media then as far as I am concerned two can play at that game.”

“Only our cards won't be marked” the Commander confirmed. “Listen love, I have no idea when I will see you again but I and the others are going to try and head back to London somehow and try and find a way out of this. I need you to hold things together as best you can until then.”

“You can count on me” Tracy confirmed as the pips of the telephone began, indicating they had just moments left before being cut off “I love you” she called.

“I love you too” the Commander responded just as the line went dead as his money ran out and with a slow reluctance he hung up the receiver back on the hook.

Tracy returned to the bathroom and looked at herself in the mirror as she dressed in her full best dress uniform to which she added her ceremonial sword as a finishing touch.

“If you are going to go down fighting” Tracy remarked to herself in the mirror “You may as well go down in full style.”

A knock on the office door brought Tracy back out of the bathroom and after removing the soggy towel from the seat behind the desk, sat down and called for the knocker to come in.

“Good morning” Collins declared as he came in “Well perhaps just morning” he remarked as he reflected on his words in the light of ongoing events “I don't think there is much good about it now I come to think of it.”

“Thugs on the streets with legal documentation that gives them carte blanche to do what they like to whoever the Deputy PM decides is 'acting against the national interest', censorship of the press, bypassing of the Intelligence Services, arrests without trial or charge, legally approved murder and kidnap to enforce their own agendas” Tracy remarked “Where the hell is this going to stop before someone says enough?” she asked.

“That is half the problem though” Collins admitted “If anyone shows any descent or criticism, they get their door kicked in by the black shirts and dragged off to somewhere dark and mysterious. You only have to look at what happened to the editor of the Herald to see that.”

“I don't suppose anyone knows where they are holding him I suppose?” Tracy asked.

“Certainly none of the recognised detention centres” Collins confirmed “Mind you there is plenty of space now, Temple-Smythe ordered all illegal immigrants in our deportation centres to be removed from the country before the day is up.”

“I bet that has the far right parties reaching for the champagne” Tracy remarked.

“Word has it virtually every right wing extremist is apparently falling over themselves to nail their flags to Temple-Smythe's mast.”

“Personally the only nailing I want to see is Temple-Smythe's testicles to Nelson's Column before I let Bob's lot use him for target practice” Tracy admitted with clear anger.

“Ouch...” Collins remarked.

“Well there is one bit of good news” Tracy declared “My husband is out and about and is heading back to the City as we speak although heaven only knows how long it will take him to get here. In the meantime I need every loyal and dedicated Security Service officer, MI5 operative, traffic warden and librarian I can find to try and keep the wolves at bay long enough until we can fight back both legally and physically.”

“Well in that case you will like this report I have for you” Collins confirmed “Fuller monitored the internet traffic throughout the night and there is a lot of chatter on the newsgroups, online forums, etc and the word is a lot of people are seeing right through Temple-Smythe's bullshit spin and quite frankly they're pissed about it.”

“Which is fine except what use will it be if the first person to show their head above the parapet and shout is likely to get it shot off or worse?” Tracy remarked.

“My grandmother always said there was safety in numbers” Collins remarked “I just checked in with my office, every single one of my people, including those off long term sick and on leave called into the personnel office in the last two hours stating their intention to come into work.”

“Really?” Tracy remarked with amazement.

“Temple-Smythe and his cronies are expecting the agencies such as mine and yours to roll over, play dead, toe the party line and keep quiet” Collins explained “Looks like he may be in for a bit of a surprise.”

“Get me the personnel desk please” Tracy asked over the telephone of the switchboard operator. A few moments later the duty personnel officer came on the line “It's Divisional Commander Caverner” she declared “Have we had any requests from off duty personnel to work extra time yet?” she asked.

Collins looked on as he saw Tracy's expression as she was informed of the status of things in the personnel and duty roster sections change from one of casual inquiry to one of sheer astonishment.

“Thank you...” Tracy responded before hanging up.

“So any extra officers volunteered to do some overtime today then?” Collins asked.

“You could say that” Tracy admitted with a slight disbelief “All of them.”

“What?” Collins was flabbergasted.

“The Greater London area has roughly 3,500 full time officers on duty per shift” Tracy explained “But when the day shift clocks on at six thirty, we will have over 10,000 on duty. Barring a few in hospital and some on holiday abroad and even a few of those have called in to offer their moral support at least that is the entire Security Service.”

“Looks like the odds on the home team just went up” Collins responded “I just hope you have enough tea bags and coffee to keep them all going.”

“I think I am going to get some air for a few minutes” Tracy remarked, still rather stunned by the measure of support the officers under her command were prepared to show in what was becoming the nation's darkest hour as by way of contrast the sun rose and daylight began to break.”

“In which case I will return to my offices and rouse my troops” Collins confirmed as he turned to leave “If you should ever need some chaos created somewhere at the drop of a hat, you know the number.”

“Thank you” Tracy confirmed as Collins left whereupon Tracy stood up and went over to the large window overlooking the city skyline where she watched the sun rise and the first rays of light beginning to reflect off of the surrounding buildings.

A few minutes later having used the back stairs, Tracy stepped out of the rear fire exit into the near deserted Victoria Street where above her the sky was lightening and the streetlamps were going out one by one as the day dawned bright and clear if a little chilly as evidenced by her breath visible as clouds of vapour.

“A beautiful morning Maam” called a voice from behind Tracy causing her to turn around and see an elderly man she knew well, Abdul, a long time committed peace protestor who for many years now had maintained a peaceful protest on a pitch opposite the gates to the Houses of Parliament.

“It is that Abdul” Tracy admitted “Just a pity there are those who don't appreciate it.”

“There are dark deeds being set in motion I fear” Abdul remarked “I have over the last seventy years lived in countries from Asia to the Middle East and darkest Africa but until today I always felt that despite its failings, here was a place where democracy played a crucial part in life but now...”

“I wish I knew what to do” Tracy admitted “The National Herald called yesterday at 18:00 the moment when freedom and democracy died, trouble is those who have throttled it have the power to keep it that way.”

“Let me tell you something” Abdul remarked, as philosophical as ever “I am but one man, a single voice who keeps alive a single message. Maybe it will be the last thing I ever do but even though I know it will probably make very little difference in the long run, there is always the hope that I can make a difference. You on the other hand are also one person but you have the power to speak with many voices of all those who look up to you and your husband not just in this place” he indicated up at the edifice of New Scotland Yard towering above them “but also all those who know right from wrong, who want the freedom and comfort of knowing that when they wake up this morning like every other morning, the world is a safer place for them and their children to move about in. Today is the day that the hopes and dreams of that free majority will either triumph or die fighting.”

“Well if the voices need to be brought together” Tracy remarked “I had better go and get my choir together and tune up the orchestra.”

“And I will go and maintain my little part of the world” Abdul confirmed “Take care and may God go with you” he declared before raising his hat and continuing on up the road towards his pitch in Parliament Square.

“I wonder if he fancies a job as our press officer?” Tracy remarked wryly to herself only to have her thoughts interrupted as two white vans sped up Victoria Street past her and then stopped either side of Abdul who looked around with shock as a number of the armed men appeared and proceeded to arrest.

“What the hell?” Tracy responded as she ran up the road where she was joined by two patrol officers who had also witnessed the incident unfolding.

“You are being placed in detention for treason against the state and promotion of anti-government propaganda” the leader of the team of heavily armed men informed Abdul as he was violently man handled, handcuffed and bundled into the back of one of the vans just as Tracy and her two officers reached the scene.

“What the hell are you doing?” she demanded to know.

“This is a Special Operations Unit matter” the leader of the men informed Tracy with no regard for her position or office “This man has been a persistent trouble maker, spreader of anti-government literature and an inciter of illegal protest against the interest of the state and its officials.”

“He is an old man legally exercising his right to free speech within a democracy” Tracy responded “and if you don't let him go right now, I will place you and your colleagues under arrest.”

“Section twenty two, paragraph nineteen of the Emergency Security Powers Act” the leader responded abruptly “Any attempt to interfere in the operations undertaken by myself or any of my colleagues can and will be repelled with the use of deadly force. This man will be taken to the processing centre for immediate deportation where applicable or permanent detention for the greater good.”

“Ok, if that is the way you want to play it” Tracy responded as she, along with the two officers with her, drew her gun and aimed directly at the leader of the men who along

with his colleagues responded by drawing their own weapons and aiming them back in return.

“Looks like we have a bit of a stand off lady” the rough talking leader of the men remarked, clearly not in any mood to back down.

“Ah but” Tracy responded “I know the magic word that will give me you complete and undivided attention.”

“And that would be?” the leader asked.

“Now” Tracy replied whereupon from three overlooking positions on the rooftops above Commander Baker and her two colleagues fired, sending the leader of the men and his two nearest associates to the ground claspng their legs in agony.

“See, told you” Tracy confirmed before looking up at the other men present who wisely chose to back down and re-holster their weapons “Now the only reason why three of the best sniper shots in the business shot you in the leg and not drop all of you dead to the floor is because this is just a warning for now. Call it professional courtesy if you like.”

“Bitch..” the leader responded, still in agony on the floor.

“You two” Tracy called to two of the men at the van “Release him, NOW!”

Seeing the look of determined anger in Tracy’s expression, the men did not argue and immediately released Abdul from his bonds whereupon one of Tracy's officers took charge of him.

“Get him inside” Tracy requested “Make sure he gets a full check up from the duty medical officer plus a full breakfast on the company.”

“Yes Maam” the officer confirmed as he helped Abdul away.

“And you” Tracy called to the men “Clear up this trash off of my street and then do yourselves a big favour by getting the hell out of my city before I lose my temper.”

Without hesitation, the three shot men were bundled by their colleagues into the vans before they all got aboard and then drove off leaving Tracy and the one remaining officer to watch as they disappeared from view down the street clearly in a great hurry to put as much distance between them and her as possible.

“That could have turned very unpleasant Maam” the officer remarked to Tracy as she turned smartly on her heels and headed back down Victoria Street to the back door of New Scotland Yard.

“What you just saw there was only the opening skirmish” Tracy admitted as they reached the door and went inside “As far as I am concerned if that bastard Temple-Smythe and his fascist death worshipping friends want a war, then I am bloody well going to give them one.”

Once inside, Tracy paused for a few moments before heading down the fire escape stairs to the basement where the armoury and shooting range were to be found.

“Good morning Maam” the duty armourer called from behind his wire caged window
“What can I get you?”

“A back up one of these” Tracy indicated her Glock pistol “and as much ammunition as I can carry.”

“Coming up” the armourer confirmed as he headed into the depths of his secure storeroom where there were to be found rows upon rows of neatly organised racks containing weapons of numerous different types, enough probably to start a war if needed.

“Do we have any smoke grenades?” Tracy asked as a possibility occurred to her.

“I think so” the armourer responded as he came back to the counter and placed a box containing Tracy's requested fresh weapon along with a couple of boxes on ammunition in front of her “Don't get much call for them mind, they tend to be more military exercise use these days.”

“Military exercise...” Tracy remarked to herself as the armourer disappeared from view again in search of the smoke grenades she had requested “I wonder...”

“Here you go” the Armourer remarked as he put four green canister like objects on the counter “All I have I am afraid but I have a delivery due on Thursday if that is any help?”

“Thanks” Tracy responded as she took the weapon, ammunition and grenades before heading to the firing range where she found a few officers were practicing their shooting as all officers were required to do half an hour on a firing range per fortnight to keep their weapons skills up to scratch.

Tracy duly found an empty firing lane, put on a pair of ear defenders and put up a paper target before sending it by way of the electric winch apparatus out some considerable distance onto the range. Once she had it far enough away, she took her weapon, loaded it with a fresh clip of ammunition, took aim and fired a volley of nine shots in quick succession.

"Nicely done" a voice was heard to comment behind her as the echoes of the final shot died away whereupon she turned to see big Bob from the Armed Support Unit there "If this Divisional Commander thing doesn't work out you can always join my guys."

"Thanks for the offer" Tracy replied as she reloaded her weapon and placed it firmly back in its holster.

"One of my lads on his way in this morning say he saw more of those white vans and other vehicles heading into town about half an hour ago" Bob commented.

"Count at the moment is estimated to be over a thousand and rising in the City alone" Tracy confirmed "All seemingly very well trained in military techniques and civil unrest procedures."

"Their P.R. Skills could use some work though" Bob remarked "From what I have seen of these knuckle draggers, the only word most of them know is ugh and they can't spell it."

"They don't need to have language skills when they have that spin spouting nut case heading them up" Tracy confirmed as she placed her second weapon in her uniform tunic pocket along with the spare ammunition.

"Oooh, smoke grenades" Bob saw the four green canisters Tracy had with her "Planning a little party are we Maam?"

"Let's call them something for a rainy day" Tracy admitted "Which reminds me, do you remember that Major we worked with a few months back?"

"Major Ford if I recall" Bob recalled.

"You know all the people in this town who are good with urban combat and armed situations?" Tracy asked.

"If they make big bangs then I usually know them" Bob admitted "We are quite a close unofficial little community."

"On the QT see if you can get a hold of Major Ford and ask him and any friends he trusts to bring to the party to be on stand by somewhere fairly close at hand in case we should require their services" Tracy requested.

"I'll go and make some phone calls" Bob confirmed as Tracy checked her watch.

"Meanwhile I guess it is speech time" she declared as she left.

"Well there goes plan 'B'" Sir Richard commented as he and the others observed the team of black suited armed men who were positioned at the entrance junction onto the main road towards London.

"Ever get the feeling someone doesn't like you?" the Commander remarked.

"All the time of late" Sir Richard admitted.

"Back to plan 'A' then I take it Sir?" Greenway asked.

"Yep" the Commander admitted "Looks like we are going to have to get the train after all."

"What about the potentially unpleasant reception committee when we get to London?" Jennifer asked.

"Leave it to me" Greenway confirmed "I am sure we can arrange a diversion of some kind."

"Good grief" Tracy exclaimed as she entered the main corridor to see it crowded with many more officers than would usually be found on site at that time.

"Excuse me please!" Tracy called as she squeezed through the crowds to reach the main briefing room which was full and standing from front to back.

Despite the tightly packed conditions in the room, a path cleared for Tracy to make her way through to the front during which she met some officers from the outlying areas of the service she had not seen for years including a few who had even come out of retirement to lend a hand in the growing crisis.

Just as she reached the front podium, Tracy was handed a report file by Gladys which she took a good look at with some obvious concern before tapping the microphone to test it was on and get everyone's attention.

"Well I guess everyone is here" Tracy wryly remarked as she addressed the packed room where they would have stood on each others shoulders were it to become necessary "There goes the overtime budget" she joked before settling down to the matter in hand.

"At six o'clock last night this provocative little document arrived from the office of the newly appointed Deputy Prime Minister" Tracy held up at arms length the Emergency Measures Order with the disdain of someone who had just found a very dirty handkerchief and was trying to locate its owner "This load of legal claptrap gives special powers to a new Special Operations Force under the direct command of the Deputy PM which basically does away with all the usual niceties such as legal rights, free speech, legal representation, etc and gives what I can only describe as a bunch of obnoxious but well trained and armed thugs carte blanche to arrest anyone the Deputy PM or his 'associates' don't like."

"Already at three this morning a large group of these individuals raided the head office of the National Herald newspaper after its Editor took the decision not to toe the official line from the Deputy PM's office and say what they really thought" she held up the now extremely rare copy of the first edition with its inflammatory but true coverage of events "The cover story you may have heard that the Editor was arrested on suspicion of sedition, aiding and abetting as well as inciting acts of terrorism is a cover story. I will make copies of the story they actually printed available after this briefing so you can see for yourself."

There were murmurs of concern amongst those present as many of them had heard the rumours of a different version of the Herald having been issued and then hastily withdrawn but until now were uncertain if these Internet rumours had been true or not.

"At the current time we have two key problems" Tracy declared "On the one side a group of highly placed well financed people led by Temple-Smythe who through

bluster, bluff and legal loopholes has seized control of this country's legal, legislative and security bodies and on the other side their army of unrestricted goons who are as we speak spreading out across the City and the country violently picking up and carting away anyone who may get in the way of their plans including according to this report member of Civil Liberties groups, some members of the press and numerous others.”

“All this has been achieved” Tracy continued “through manipulation of the media and direct violent action including assassination of the Justice Minister and the Prime Minister, acts which have been disguised as having been carried out by non existent terrorists.”

“Maam” one officer asked “Are we not also under the direct control of the Deputy PM now?” he asked.

“Unfortunately yes” Tracy confirmed “I had a conversation with Temple-Smythe last night during which I made it crystal clear that we are not a political thought police, we have a charter and a declaration of principles by which we serve the people of this nation and as far as I am concerned that takes precedence over any and all political interference legal or illegal.”

“He wants this service and our cousins over at MI5 to roll over and play nice” Tracy's anger was building up and she was ready to lay it on the line “Well I have some bad news for him, for I have no intention whatsoever of dancing to the tune of that obnoxious bastard and his murderous cronies as long as I am still alive!”

“Maam” one of the officers in the room slightly nervously called with his hand raised “I think I speak for all of us when we say that we are loyal to this service and to you and your husband. We will follow you into hell and back if necessary to get rid of this load of morons off our street and proper justice restored.”

“And I am going to need the undying dedication of each and every one of you” Tracy responded with admiring gratitude “These ‘people’ are hiding behind legal documentation which they are using as a smokescreen to enforce their illegal political agenda and run roughshod over the very principles of freedom and democracy that this country was built upon and if anyone gets in there way, they get thumped.”

“Well I have news for Temple-Smythe and his associates” Tracy declared angrily “I am not standing for it, he wants a war then we are bloody well going to give him one!”

This raised cheers from her audience as Tracy paused before continuing.

“We are going to go out there and do what we all do best” Tracy continued like a four star General rallying the troops before leading them into battle “We protect the innocent, serve the public trust, defend the nation. Any one of these so called Special Operations Operatives so much as sneezes in an offensive tone, they are to be arrested and detained immediately. I want every last one of these scum bags off the streets of my city before the sun sets.”

“Aren't Temple-Smythe and his people going to start targeting us if we go against them?” one officer asked nervously.

“Probably” Tracy admitted “Us in general and more than likely me in particular, however unlike him and his co-conspirators, we have the rule of law on our side and we will enforce it to the last letter. Whilst Temple-Smythe whinges to the press about us being a political inconvenience we will be taking back what he has stolen from the people of this country.”

“Do we know how many of their people there are out there?” another officer asked “Only I saw a lot of their vehicles around on the way over here this morning.”

“At least a thousand, maybe more in the Greater London area according to our friends at MI5” Tracy confirmed “Maybe more in reserve but who knows” she admitted “One thing is for certain, they are well trained and well armed and have no compunctions about dishing out violence to whoever gets in their way, take my word for it.”

“What about the Commander?” came a question from the floor.

“When the Emergency Crisis Measures was declared, under an executive order, a special procedure called the Andromeda Directive came into force” Tracy explained “This gave the conspirators an opportunity to take out of the equation several key members of the Security Services who may oppose their plans but don't worry, he will be back soon and then we start the fight back through the legal channels as well as on the streets but we need to buy him and the others the time to come up with a solution.”

“Any further questions?” Tracy asked generally to which there as no response “In that case lets get out there and get to work” she declared.

Like a massed army, the officers began to file out of the briefing room as Tracy went over to the BBC News crew who were filming the briefing both for the next news bulletin and also broadcasting it live to other Security Service offices elsewhere in Greater London and beyond.

“The Deputy Prime Minister is going to freak when he see this” the news reporter remarked as his camera crew finished filming and started to dismantle their equipment.

“Let him protest all he wants” Tracy confirmed with a determined look “We have the rule of law and the support of the public on our side and you cannot defeat that.”

“Can I quote you on that Maam?” the reporter asked.

“Absolutely” Tracy confirmed.

"Do we have that transcript of the Herald?" one of the senior staff of the National Civil Rights Campaign group called as she organised their protest and response to the dramatic events of the last twenty four hours.

"Just came through from MI5" one of the several volunteers of the group confirmed.

"Rather ironic admittedly" the leader of the group, Alison Bertram remarked "We have been campaigning against secret service intrusion into peoples lives for years, now we find ourselves on the same side and they need our help to get the truth out there."

"Just got off the telephone with my contact at the BBC" another volunteer called across the office "Divisional Commander Caverner just declared the emergency crisis order illegal and unconstitutional, she has ordered the arrest and detainment of Temple-Smythe and his cronies immediately."

"What line are the BBC running with on this?" Bertram asked.

"They are going for balanced with a definite subtle slant towards the light side of the force" the volunteer confirmed "That's one of Temple-Smythe's outlets for his bollocks shut off."

"Excellent" Bertram responded "Let's keep going and get as much of the right information out there as possible."

"Alison?" a man called as he rushed into the office with a look of horror and dread "You need to take a look at this" he informed them as he went over to the window and lifted the Venetian blind to show them the street below outside.

"Oh hell..." Bertram remarked as she and the others looked down at Charing Cross Road outside where a number of white vans were parked in the street with more approaching from both directions and coming out of them were a large number of black outfitted armed men who proceeded to the main entrance of the tall office building some eight floors below them.

"Looks like we are about to have visitors" one of the volunteers remarked.

"Yep" Bertram confirmed "Temple-Smythe's storm troopers and I don't think they are here for a quiet chat over a cup of coffee."

"What do we do?" one of the volunteers asked with apprehension.

"Operation Lock Down!" Bertram declared "Get the doors locked off and make sure we keep all outgoing data lines open."

"I know this is going to sound like a rather odd question" one of the volunteers asked as everyone else prepared for a siege "Should we give the Security Service a call and ask for help?"

At ground level, the team of heavily armed men stormed the building with grim determination and military efficiency.

Within moments there was the echo of many hard soled boots coming up the stairwells and it was not long before they reached the offices of the National Civil Rights Campaign which in response were now firmly barred and bolted.

"You in there!" the leader of the armed men called using a loud hailer "Open these doors immediately, we have an official warrant to search and seize these premises and detain indefinitely any and all present."

"This is an illegal order" Bertram responded through the door in defiance and fully aware of her legal rights "Execution of that order is a breach of human and civil rights legislation, breaking and entering, assault and a number of other crimes."

"None of which applies under the conditions of the Emergency Crisis Order" the leader informed her "You have five seconds to open this door, surrender and hand over all material or we will use potentially deadly force."

"You are insane" Bertram declared in disbelief at the situation and the attitude of her opponent.

"Right" the leader turned to his men, stepped aside and indicated the door "Do it!" he ordered.

Outside, the sound of sirens approaching filled the air as some half dozen Security Service vehicles raced to the scene.

Arriving in the shadow of the building, Tracy was just getting out of the patrol car when the distinctive slightly muffled thump of a small explosion from inside the building was heard.

"What the hell was that?" Tracy asked as she and a number of officers proceeded towards the cordon of men surrounding the building.

As she and her officers approached she noticed the senior man present make a discreet telephone call presumably to his superior to get instructions on how to deal with them.

"Keep away" the man called abruptly as he got off the telephone "This area is under the control of the Emergency Special Measures committee, leave immediately or you will be removed by force."

"All right" Tracy responded "You want to make an issue of it, that is fine by me. You are under arrest."

"Prepare to open fire if they attempt to arrest any of our people" the man called to his associates who immediately responded by aiming their semi-automatic weapons at the approaching officers with firmly implied menace.

"Oh come on, don't be stupid" Tracy called as she stood in the middle of the street with a large line of her officers just behind her who themselves drew their weapons now leading to a tense and deadly stand off.

"Someone wants to speak to you" the leader responded and stepped forward to pass her the telephone.

"Hello?" Tracy answered, not knowing who she was going to be speaking to but was able to make an educated guess.

"Divisional Commander" Temple-Smythe responded "I must say I am very disappointed by your lack of co-operation with myself and those under my command."

"Your 'associates' are nothing more than a bunch of knuckle dragging rent a thugs who are using violence and intimidation against innocent people to support your little illegal power trip" Tracy responded without any hesitation.

"As a direct result" she added loudly so that everyone around was in no doubt whatsoever "and in accordance with this Service's mandate I am declaring your Emergency Order an illegal and unconstitutional act Accordingly I have issued a warrant for the immediate arrest of you, your associates and your goon squads so I strongly suggest that you make this easier and immediately stand down."

"I'm sorry" Temple-Smythe replied smoothly "I can't do that. "With immediate effect I am declaring the Security Service, its officers and personnel as acting contrary to the common good You have two minutes to stand down, after that point any officer of your Service who resists the direct order of any of my representatives will be dealt with by the use of deadly force."

"You've finally flipped" Tracy angrily responded "There is no way I, my officers or the decent honest citizens of this country are going to let you on your little power trip get away with this."

"One minute thirty" Temple-Smythe stated "I suggest you find cover quickly."

"You actually want a war don't you?" Tracy remarked as she silently indicated to her officers to move back to the far side of the street.

"Anarchy on the streets, the citizens trembling in fear" Temple-Smythe remarked basking in his own glory like an emerging demi-god "The perfect foundation for a new stronger style of Government."

"Sounds suspiciously like a dictatorship to me" Tracy responded "See you around asshole" she declared before hanging up and tossing the telephone back to its owner.

"Don't do this" Tracy appealed to the leader "Once you start, there will be hell and innocent people will die all so that your crack pot boss can bathe in the glory."

"Sod off" the leader abruptly responded "Corporal" he called to one of his men "Show the lady a demonstration of how seriously we take our work."

"With pleasure Sir" the Corral confirmed, bringing his weapon to bear on a nearby parked Security Service patrol car and promptly opening fire.

For a full five seconds, the Corporal emptied an entire magazine from his weapon, wrecking the car and setting it alight.

"Guess you will have to take the Tube" the leader suggested wryly "Now do us a favour and get lost."

"This isn't over" Tracy warned him face to face "Not by a long shot."

As she turned her back on the men and headed back across the road, the leader received a brief telephone call to which he responded by drawing coldly his hand gun and proceeded to aim directly at Tracy.

"Look out!" a couple of officers who saw the man's intentions called out causing Tracy to look around in time to see the man bring his weapon to bear straight at her and about to open fire.

Everyone feared the worse when a shot rang out only for the man to collapse to the ground before he had got the chance to pull the trigger.

"Target down" Commander Baker confirmed from her overlooking rooftop position having fired the shot "Get her out of there, we will cover you."

No further prompting was needed as Bob and three of his Armed Support Unit officers moved in quickly and bundled Tracy out of harms way just moments before the men opened fire randomly towards them.

Bob reacted by literally picking Tracy up and throwing her over the bonnet of a car before scrambling over himself to take cover behind the vehicle as stray gunfire began to impact all around.

"Thanks Bob" Tracy responded "That's a drink I owe you."

"Anytime Maam" Bob confirmed "If you can get whoever you have on sniper duty to take out some of the principals I can have my boys move in and seize this lot."

"You got it" Tracy confirmed as she nursed a bashed arm where she had landed awkwardly following her rather hasty removal from the scene "Lima Mike One to Angel Unit" she called up to Commander Baker who was watching the continuing gunfire from the armed men through the scope of her snipers rifle with horror.

"Angel One" Baker confirmed "These guys are nuts" she commented.

"Yeah we had kind of come to the same conclusion down here" Tracy admitted as she ducked down as a couple of shots came whizzing over them "Co-ordinate with Bob here, he wants the principles taken out so he can send in the cavalry."

"Doing it now" Baker confirmed as she and her two colleagues duly took aim and within moments several of the offenders were taken out dropping down dead which had the desired effect of stopping the offensive gunfire and making their colleagues rather nervous.

"Ok lads, lets go" Bob called to his team whereupon he and some two dozen fellow body armoured specialist firearms officers moved in guns drawn.

“Don't move!” Bob barked his orders clearly and concisely to make sure they understood “Place your weapons on the ground and take two steps back with your hands on your head.”

With their senior officers lying dead around them and worried that they might be next if they did not co-operate, the remaining men quickly surrendered their weapons and did as requested whereupon they were quickly restrained, searched and led away.

“Very nicely done” Tracy commented as she joined Bob in front of the main entrance to the building “Now we just have to get them out of there.”

“Normally I would say ladies first” Bob remarked “But in this case perhaps it would be better if I led the way Maam?” he suggested.

“After you” Tracy agreed before Bob proceeded inside the building with Tracy and several other officers in close formation.

Up on the ninth floor, the occupants of the offices were just about managing to hold off the invaders despite the fact that their main door had already been blown apart by a small access explosive charge.

“We have been authorised to use deadly force to detain you” the leader of the group of armed men informed the occupants of the office loudly and with clear menace.

“Excuse me” Bob called from behind them causing the men to spin around and see that whilst they were busy, the Security Service forces had managed to creep up behind them and they were now cut off.

“What do you want?” the leader gruffly asked.

“World peace, universal love, a very stiff drink, Temple-Smythe's arse on a plate and your immediate and unconditional surrender” Tracy confirmed wryly as she stepped forward.

“You will have to kill us first and somehow I don't think you have the bottle” the man defiantly remarked “So if you excuse me we have some traitors to arrest.”

“Have it your way” Tracy remarked as she calmly drew her gun and shot the leader in the kneecaps causing him to fall to the floor in agony.

“Don't” Bob advised one of the other men who for a moment was about to bring his weapon to bear on him and his fellow officers.

“Right” Tracy declared “Unless anyone else has any objections, lets see those weapons on the floor and you all walking out of here with your hands on your heads... NOW!!” she barked.

“I don't think he looks like walking very far” Bob remarked to Tracy as they looked down at the crippled leader on the floor as his fellow colleagues were being led away.

“Get him out of here, patched up and charged” Tracy confirmed but just before he was led away she tapped him on the shoulder “A little reminder for future reference, call it a rule of the Security Service, Tracy is always right ok?”

With the leader taken away, Tracy proceeded to the inner door of the office and knocked on it to see if there was still anyone in there.

“Security Service, Divisional Commander Caverner” she called “Is there anyone in there?”

There was the sound of objects being moved away from the door and a lock being released before it opened and a relieved looking Bertram stepped out.

“Bet you never thought you would be glad to see my lot coming down the road to the rescue?” Tracy remarked wryly.

“I am glad you did though” Bertram admitted “Come inside” she suggested.

“Everyone all right in here?” Tracy asked around as she entered the office and saw the volunteers looking mightily relieved.

“BBC just ran the whole thing down in the street live on News 24 and BBC 1” Bertram indicated the television in the corner of the office “Looks like you just declared war for the good side.”

“Well I didn't start this fight” Tracy admitted “but you can be assured I am damm well going to finish it.”

“We started hearing wild rumours late last night that something was seriously wrong” Bertram admitted “Then when the copy of the Herald's first edition along with some other interesting snippets of information landed in our inbox, we decided to put it out there on the web.”

“That was when Temple-Smythe sent along his gorillas to silence you I take it?” Tracy remarked.

“If it hadn't been for you and your people” Bertram replied “by now we would have been dragged away or executed.”

“Did you manage to get the information on the net before they turned up?” Tracy asked.

“Just about” Bertram confirmed showing her the computer screen “The news is spreading across the net like wildfire, apparently even the Secretary General of the United Nations is reported to be about to make a statement condemning the actions of Temple-Smythe and supporting you.”

“Glad I sent you the files then” Tracy remarked with a knowing grin but was interrupted when her pager went off. Consulting it she saw the simple message 'Red Call 101'.

“Can I use your telephone?” she asked.

“By all means” Bertram agreed “It’s been bugged by MI5 though.”

“That’s all right” Tracy admitted “That is who I am calling.”

In the depths of King William Street, the news filtering through via the BBC and other sources was causing a lot of concerned looks amongst Collins and his people who he had brought there as his usual offices were now unusable due to the large number of Temple-Smythe's people in and around it.

“To summarise the latest in the growing crisis” the news presenter announced on the television as Collins, his people and Fuller watched “A warrant has been issued by the National Security & Police Service for the arrest and detention of the Deputy Prime Minister Sir William Temple-Smythe and anyone working for him after evidence came to light that the Emergency Crisis Order was found to have been initiated and acted upon illegally. This follows overnight incidents in which special forces brought in by the Deputy Prime Minister's Security Office to apprehend key suspects and individuals described as 'subversive' have used deadly force and illegal tactics.

“The BBC understands that the most recent incident at the head office of the National Civil Liberties Council in Tottenham Court Road, London has now come to a conclusion after the armed men sent there to apprehend its leader Dr Alison Bertram and others were overcome by National Security Service personnel led by Divisional Commander Tracy Caverner”

Collins stepped back from the television screen at that point to take a call on his mobile.

“Collins” he confirmed as he answered the call.

“Where are you?” Tracy asked.

“Location CSLR1” Collins responded “My offices have got a little overcrowded with unfriendlies so we have retreated to alternative accommodation. I see you have been busy?” he remarked looking back at the television screen.

“These lunatics have effectively gone feral as far as I am concerned” Tracy confirmed “Any word on my husband and the others?” she asked.

“That is why I red called you” Collins confirmed “We got a report from a friend on the inside that Temple-Smythe's bunch know that they are heading in on a train into Marylebone.”

“I thought they were going to avoid public transport?” Tracy responded with concern.

“Road blocks have been set up at ten mile intervals on every road into London” Collins confirmed “They are cutting off this city and when they have it sealed up, God only knows what is going to happen.”

“When are they due to arrive?” Tracy asked looking at her watch which showed it was now approaching half seven in the morning.

“In about forty five minutes” Collins confirmed “The Commander commandeered the first class section of a service train from Aylesbury but there is a problem.”

“Well there's something different” Tracy remarked sarcastically.

“A report came through on the intelligence wires about ten minutes ago saying that there is a suicide bomber on that very train” Collins explained “We think Temple-Smythe is going to order his gun toting goons to wait for the train at Marylebone and then execute anyone they find on it.”

“Jesus Christ...” Tracy responded “And of course I suppose if anyone queries it, they just say it was a legitimate target to neutralise a terrorist?”

“That's the theory we are working on” Collins admitted “Trouble is it rather too comfortably fits the facts.”

At that point Fuller started waving at Collins to attract his attention back to the television where a breaking news story was coming through.

“Oh my God...” Collins remarked as he saw the story unfolding “Tracy, if you have a television within range, turn on the BBC now!”

“We have just received these pictures from a viewer in west London” the BBC News presenter declared with that slight hesitation they always use when a story is breaking at that moment but they are uncertain as to exactly what it is about “This is reported to have happened about ten or fifteen minutes ago near Earl's Court.”

“Are you watching this?” Collins asked.

“Yes” Tracy confirmed as the report continued.

“It appears to show a Security Service patrol car being rammed off the road by a white van” the BBC News presenter commented “Then as you can see four armed men of similar description to those that have been seen so far across the city get out of their vehicle and proceed to open fire on the car before driving off again.”

“Oh dear God” Tracy responded as she saw the news report with dramatic live footage

“There are also unconfirmed reports of at least two similar attacks on Security Service personnel elsewhere in London but at the moments details are sketchy” the presenter continued “For more developments we go over to our reporter at New Scotland Yard David Halcroft.”

“I am reporting live from the Control Room here at New Scotland Yard” Halcroft confirmed, a man Tracy recognised easily as on her request she had one of the BBC's news crews allowed into the Yard to provide coverage of their side of events to counter Temple-Smythe's biased and wildly inaccurate propaganda “In the last couple

of minutes the radio frequencies for the Security Service operations in Central London were cut off and if you come with me” he indicated across the corridor to a window looking down into the street outside “You can see there are now present a number of Army units under the leadership of Major Ronald Ford who have now formed a secure perimeter around the building. The Major is with me now.”

At that point the camera panned back to show Major Ford in his full officers uniform and handlebar moustache “Major Ford, why have you and your forces arrived here?” Halcroft asked.

“We are providing security and logistical support for the National Security & Police Service” Major Ford confirmed “Our mandate is to make sure the Service can go about their duty without hindrance during this crisis. I have placed the services of my men and equipment at the disposal of Divisional Commander Tracy Caverner and her people to use at their discretion.”

“What about the radio frequency problem that seems to have crippled communications here in the last few minutes?” Halcroft asked.

“I believe from reports that some of this dubious and illegal group have just taken control of the power supply to the area radio transmitters” the Major confirmed “However I have a logistics team from the Royal Engineers on site who are rigging a backup power supply for the system as we speak.”

“Nice one Major” Tracy confirmed.

“What do you want me to do about the Marylebone problem?” Collins asked.

“Get a message through to the train” Tracy confirmed “Tell them exactly what is going on and try and find some way of getting them and the passengers off before they get to Marylebone itself.”

“We could just stop the train” Collins suggested “Except...” he then realised the flaw in his suggestion “They would then know we have a source inside their organisation.”

“Don't worry” Tracy responded “I have an idea” she confirmed.

The Commander decided to stretch his legs and got up from the first class seat where he and the others were seated as the train approached Amersham and went for a walk up the carriage through the standard section which was packed with commuters heading into London, many unaware of the growing crisis in central London that awaited them.

“Blimey” the Commander remarked as he caught sight of a laptop on a table “You can get the Internet on trains now?” he asked the owner of the laptop who looked up with surprise when he saw the Commander standing there.

“Err yes” the commuter confirmed “I don't suppose you have seen this breaking news have you?” he turned the laptop towards the Commander who proceeded to read the BBC News webpage which was reporting events as they happened.

“Well there goes my plans for a quiet morning” the Commander joked nervously. He was about to read further down the web page when the train's conductor came up to him and whispered in his ear.

“Sorry to disturb but there is an urgent message for you Sir on the train radio” the conductor confirmed.

“Can I take it in the rear cab?” the Commander asked.

“Yes Sir” the conductor confirmed before leading the way to the back of the train and through the first class compartment into the rear driving cab where the radio handset was already off the hook waiting to be picked up.

“Hello?” the Commander answered.

“Commander?” Collins called “I am afraid we have a bit of a problem.”

“We now go over live to Tottenham Court Road where Divisional Commander Tracy Caverner of the National Security & Police Service is about to make a live statement” the BBC News presenter confirmed whereupon the camera view moved from the studio to a shot of Tracy standing in the entrance to Tottenham Court Road Underground Station with Bob and one of his colleagues standing guard either side of her and the press gathered around in front of her.

“Effective immediately and in the interests of public safety” Tracy declared “I am placing the central area of London in a ten mile radius from Oxford Circus in a state of emergency situation in accordance with article fourteen of the civil unrest legislation. All Zone one and two bus services, Underground lines and services to main line National Railway stations are being suspended and no vehicles will be allowed to enter the Congestion Charging Zone.”

“This is a highly dangerous and lethal situation and the last thing anyone wants certainly on my side at any rate are any innocent members of the public getting caught in the crossfire” she continued with authority “If you were heading into London today, don't. Stay at home and do not attempt to enter Central London until this situation has been resolved. If you are already in Central London right now, stay indoors, go home if you can as main line National Rail stations are still running for departures out of the City only but stay off the streets.”

“I appeal to anyone in Central London to take in anyone who has nowhere to shelter during the current crisis” she appealed “Keep a radio or television on for constant updates and unless your life is in immediate danger stay indoors.”

“Key areas to avoid as a matter of prime importance are the political centre of Whitehall and Westminster, the area around New Scotland Yard including Victoria

Street and Tottenham Court Road” Tracy confirmed “Finally, I want to thank everyone, including members of the Services and the general public who in the last few hours have shown their support both physically and verbally in the media, on the Internet and in person. I promise the people of this city and this country who I and my officers humbly serve and vow to protect, we will get through this or die trying but it won't be easy. Your support and co-operation is appreciated, thank you for listening.”

With that Tracy stepped down off the small packing crate she was using to make her more visible during her statement and with Bob headed down into the Underground station entrance. The ticket hall was deserted as they passed through the ticket barriers as the station has already been evacuated due to the earlier incident above ground.

“We have forty minutes to get to Marylebone and spring the trap” Tracy declared as she, Bob and a dozen officers headed with purpose in their stride down the escalator and through the lower passageways to the Central Line westbound platform “Do you think you can have enough of your guys secreted in and around the place by then?” she asked.

“Oh definitely” Bob confirmed “They know if they aren't in place on time they will get a thick ear when I catch up with them.

“Now there is something you don't find everyday” Tracy remarked as the eight car train of 1992 type tube stock opened its doors as they arrived on the platform and they boarded the lead car.

“A Central Line train on time or a seat in rush hour?” Bob asked wryly as they sat down in the empty car and Tracy signalled up ahead to the driver to proceed.

“All right” Tracy admitted “Two things you don't find everyday.”

Upon reaching the next stop of Oxford Circus, Tracy and the others alighted with a call of thanks to the driver before proceeding through the lower passageways of the eerily quiet station to the northbound Bakerloo Line platform where a pre-arranged empty train of 1972 tube stock was waiting for them.

Soon they were continuing their journey north on the Bakerloo Line passing non-stop through Regent's Park until stopping at Baker Street.

“Why not go all the way to Marylebone?” one of Bob's officers asked as they alighted onto the platform with its distinctive Sherlock Holmes silhouette motif tiling.

“Because Baker Street is a short walk from Marylebone” Tracy explained as they headed to the escalators and then up to the surface “Where as Marylebone exits right in the middle of the concourse and if the goons are there already we walk straight into them. This way we can sneak up on them real quiet like.”

"Makes sense" Bob agreed as they passed up through the station to reach the ticket hall where just a few members of station staff were present to witness the officers pass

through now that the entire central London Underground network had been shut down and evacuated.

Outside the imposing frontage of the station, it appeared that Tracy's appeal earlier for members of the public to stay off the streets for the duration had had the desired effect as the roads were eerily quiet, more so considering that normally at that time of the morning it would be the height of the morning peak.

"Marylebone is that way guys" Tracy indicated down the Marylebone Road in a westerly direction before setting off at a pace "Try and keep up guys" she called back cheekily.

The echoes of vehicle doors slamming outside Marylebone Station preceded the arrival of a significantly sized team of the Special Operations Officers who flooded onto the concourse, barking orders to anyone still in the station to leave immediately.

"Platform four in two minutes" the leader of the group confirmed as he checked the arrivals board whereupon they charged en masse through the ticket barriers and deployed all up the length of platform four, forming a line along its length.

"Stand by!" the leader called as in the distance the headlights of an approaching train could be seen heading for the station.

The train snaked through the point work of the station throat and came into the shadow of the overall roof at a slow but constant speed until it suddenly braked to a halt in the platform.

"Open fire!" the leader ordered whereupon the men commenced firing, riddling the two car train with hundreds of rounds and reducing it to a bullet hole riddled wreck within the space of thirty seconds.

"Cease fire!" he then called as they began to run out of ammunition and as the last echoes of gunfire and tinkling smashed glass died away, the leader stepped forward and pulled open the badly wrecked door to reveal the train was completely empty.

"Better luck next time guys" Tracy called as she and her officers flooded onto the platform, cutting off their only escape route.

"Gentlemen if you please?" the leader called whereupon they turned and opened fire making Tracy and the others duck for whatever cover they could find.

In the ensuing brief fire fight, numbers were on Tracy's side as after a minute or two of exchanging gunfire, the enemy ranks were reduced significantly.

"Come on" Tracy called "You are cut off, low on ammunition and rapidly running out of time and options."

"All right" came the response of an exasperated voice "We are coming out."

"Lima Mike One to Control" Tracy called into her radio as the officers proceeded to seize those of the enemy who were still mobile and lead them away "You can tell them to come in now."

"I'll let them know" came the confirmation whereupon Tracy turned her attention to the three of her officers who had been injured, one quite badly but all still able to at least walk.

"You guys get yourselves to hospital and then rest" she instructed them "You have done your bit for today I think."

As she stood on the platform and watched whilst the three injured officers were helped away, the sound of a train horn was heard from the opposite direction and a train emerged from the distant tunnel to arrive in the adjacent platform five.

"Thank you for travelling with Chiltern Railways" the Commander declared as the train came to a halt and the doors opened whereupon his group alighted.

"Hello stranger" Tracy called as she met them on the platform "You got my message then?"

"I did indeed" the Commander confirmed as they met up and embraced each other before kissing "I dumped the passengers off at Harrow on the Hill and then we rigged the front unit to run in empty until the TPWS system stopped it and judging by the mess" he remarked as arm in arm with Tracy they went around back to platform four and surveyed the bullet ridden train "it was just as well I did."

"I am afraid they made a bit of a mess" Tracy confirmed "Anyway, is everyone present and correct?" she asked.

"Looks like it" the Commander confirmed as Jennifer and a team of her VIP Protection Team who had been waiting for her passed providing full escort to the Prime Minister and the other dignitaries as well as Jack who was somewhat overawed by all this attention but still managed a wave to Tracy as he passed.

"I don't know how much you know" Tracy confirmed as they started to walk down towards the ticket barriers following the others "but basically all hell is being let loose down here."

"I got some of it" the Commander confirmed "The random attacks on officers in the field are disturbing in the extreme."

"Temple-Smythe won't back down" Tracy explained "He is on the full power trip, so much so he has completely failed to notice that he has lost all support in the media. It started with the BBC this morning and now the Standard and most of the networks are running with it as well."

"I also gather you gave our old friend Major Ford a call?" the Commander asked as they passed through the ticket barriers onto the concourse where two VIP Protection Division saloon cars with full marked escort were waiting to take him and the others to King William Street.

“Actually he called me before I could get the chance to call him” Tracy admitted “Ever since the story broke on the Internet overnight, the support that we have been receiving has been overwhelming.”

“Boss, we got to move!” Jennifer called with a concerned look from the drivers seat of the lead car “Bob just called in, there are four vehicles of rather pissed off goons heading down the Marylebone road straight for us!”

“Get out of here” Tracy immediately reacted all but dragging her reluctant husband to the car and pushing him inside “We will cover you.”

“I should be out here on the front line with you” the Commander protested.

“With your lousy aiming love, you will just get yourself shot” Tracy responded “I love you, now go!” she insisted before slamming shut the door and then banging on the roof to signal to Jennifer to depart.

“They are coming up the road now” Bob called as he and a couple of his officers came running in just as the convoy was leaving at high speed.

“Right” Tracy declared “We have got to keep them busy until that lot are well clear. Team's one and three take up positions throughout the concourse, teams two and five, try and enclose us and box them in when they arrive, everyone else is with me.”

“Pay attention everyone, we are going right at the end of Rossmore Road and head directly south along Gloucester Place before heading east along Oxford Street” Jennifer declared over her head set radio as the convoy moved at an exceptional speed through the back streets of Marylebone.

Overhead a Security Service helicopter was following their progress and keeping an eye out ahead for any potential problems they may encounter that would require a rapid change of course to avoid coming into contact with unwanted guests.

“Hold on to your hats everyone, this is a one way street and we are going the wrong way” Jennifer called back as she swerved the car at over eighty miles per hour around the corner and into Gloucester Place, ignoring traffic light signals all the way as the escort of several marked Security Service cars and motorcycles meant what little traffic there was still about got out of the way very quickly.

“I knew we should have taken the bus” the Commander wryly remarked.

“Your wife stopped them all an hour ago” Sir Richard casually reminded him.

“She always did have a knack for stopping traffic” the Commander admitted.

“Get out of the bloody way!” Jennifer called ahead as the convoy was forced to slow a little and swerve around stationary traffic that seemed oblivious to them bearing down on them. Using all her advanced driving skills she managed to maintain the high speed all the way down Gloucester Place and around the wrong side of Portman

Square before executing a perfect handbrake turn to swing the vehicle around to the left and into the deserted Oxford Street.

“Oh dear” Sir Richard suddenly commented with a foreboding tone.

“What's wrong?” the Prime Minister asked sensing his worry.

“Selfridges just started a sale” Sir Richard confirmed as they sped past the famous Department Store “That means my wife will be down there draining the account dry at the earliest opportunity.”

“Oh hell” the Prime Minister responded “Mine will be the same.”

“Eagle Nine Nine from Victor Pappa One” Jennifer called up to the helicopter following their progress from above “What's up ahead?”

“Our boys have cleared and secured everything through Tottenham Court Road and Holborn at least as far as Chancery Lane” the helicopter pilot confirmed as his co pilot scanned the distant road network with a powerful set of binoculars “From what we can see up here, most of the bad guys are concentrating their resources on Marylebone Station and circulating around Westminster.”

Now they were well clear of Marylebone Station, the job of providing cover for their escape should have been over for Tracy and her officers but the enemy had other ideas and now both sides were pinned down exchanging momentary bursts of gunfire in an uneasy stand off.

“These guys are seriously pissed off” Bob remarked to Tracy as they and several other officers took cover behind an ornamental planter on the concourse of Marylebone Station that was being rapidly reduced to rubble by a constant barrage of gunfire from the other side.

“I guess they don't like to lose” Tracy responded as she reloaded her gun with her last spare magazine before reaching for the pocket of her badly torn and battered uniform tunic and producing a smoke grenade “Let's try something a little different” she suggested.

As Bob and the others prepared to move on her signal, Tracy pulled the pins on two smoke grenades and then calmly tossed them in the direction of the enemy position.

With a small explosion of sparks, the two canisters detonated, quickly sending a cloud of smoke up which reduced visibility in the immediate area to almost zero whereupon the gunmen looked on, unable to see where the officers had gone to.

Amid coughing from the effects of the smoke, the gunmen were unaware of the approach of Tracy and her officers until their leader was suddenly grabbed unceremoniously by the scruff of the neck along with some of the others and a hand to hand fight duly ensued.

"You are under arrest" Tracy duly declared as she punched one of the men, a significantly larger person than herself, sending him to the ground amid shock and bewilderment.

"You have the right to legal counsel" she added as the man she was tackling tried, despite being on the ground to fight back.

"You have the right to a telephone call" Tracy added as she was forced to stomp on the man's hand "assuming you have any fingers left to dial with that is."

"Get the hell off me bitch" the man responded gruffly.

"And you have the right to remain silent" Tracy confirmed with angry determination as she kicked the man and rendered him unconscious "So shut the hell up!"

Unlike this man, the rest of the gunmen had surrendered relatively easily and by the time Tracy had finished and the smoke had begun to dissipate, the fighting was over.

"Well he won't be going anywhere for a while" Bob remarked.

"What's the damage?" Tracy asked looking around.

"A few of our guys have been injured" Bob confirmed "Fortunately nothing too serious."

"The Station Master is going to have a fit when he sees the state of this place" Tracy remarked as she looked around at the station concourse which amid the haze of the remaining smoke could be seen to be littered with broken glass and looked considerably the worst for the ordeal the place had been put through in the last half an hour.

It took three trips in the rather elderly compact lift to get everyone down to the lower level of the King William Street centre with Jack, the Commander and the Prime Minister being the last ones down.

"How come I don't know about this little hidey hole?" the Prime Minister asked as the lift car creaked down the shaft.

"Plausible deniability" the Commander confirmed "plus on occasions such as today it is useful to have a well connected address that is very much ex directory."

"So no one outside of our little party know of its existence I take it?" the Prime Minister asked as the lift juddered to a halt at the bottom and they exited out into the tiled passageway.

"Tracy knows about it" the Commander confirmed "apart from that this is very much our secret" he led the way to the main part of the centre "and I would appreciate it that you keep it that way as I reckon this won't be the last time a delicate situation such as this will arise."

"Sir" Fuller greeted them as they arrived in the computer centre.

"Oh there is no need to call me Sir" Jack joked, "I like informality."

"Ready for you in the briefing room" Fuller confirmed "We are hooked up to pretty much everyone you could possibly want to talk to."

"Thank you Simon" the Commander responded "Look after Jack will you?"

"No problem" Fuller responded before the Commander escorted the Prime Minister to the adjacent briefing and conference room where sat around the large table were an impressive array of the senior representatives of the Security and Intelligence services along with the Home Secretary.

"Ok ladies and gentlemen" the Commander declared as he took his seat at the head of the table "Let's get this party started shall we?"

"To bring you all up to speed on events" Collins declared "There have been a number of incidents, many involving excessive violence with firearms which have been instigated by groups of well trained operatives of what is officially described as the 'Emergency Operations Units' a special measure force introduced by and under the direct control of the office of the Deputy Prime Minister."

"Their mandate is to arrest and detain anyone who is seen under the terms and conditions of this *document* here" the Commander held up the Emergency Special Measures order with clear disdain "as being subversive or acting contrary to the good of the nation. The person who draws up the lists of course is the Deputy Prime Minister Sir William traitorous bastard Temple-Smythe and his mysterious associates."

"So far he has targeted civil liberties groups, protestors, anyone who dares speak up, political opponents, certain elements of the media, etc, etc" the Commander confirmed "He has become a power hungry machine that shows no sign of stopping and is hiding behind political spin and rhetoric to get away with it."

"How come he hasn't been made full Prime Minister yet then?" Jennifer asked out of curiosity.

"Sir Richard" the Commander turned to the senior man to his left "I think you can fill that one in can't you?"

"Certainly" Sir Richard confirmed "Only a limited few people have been let in by myself and my colleagues at MI5 on the true nature of what exactly has occurred" he explained "One of these is Her Majesty who is responsible for appointing the Prime Minister of her Government and after receiving detailed reports from my people, she has made herself 'unavailable' and will refuse to recognise Temple-Smythe as Prime Minister for the foreseeable future."

"Let's talk response" the Prime Minister declared "What are our options?"

“Well from the front line point of view” the Commander confirmed “my illustrious wife has organised the Security Service with some logistical backup from the Army and with the carefully placed leaks of certain key facts to the media providing support, she is sorting out the problem of the loonies on the streets.”

“Impressive piece on the BBC earlier” Collins remarked “Pretty much all the news organisations have rejected Temple-Smythe's bully boy tactics and are siding with the good side. Have you seen the latest Standard?” he passed the latest edition of the Evening Standard across to the Commander.

“Blimey” the Commander remarked with a chuckle “She will want a framed copy of that” he commented as he looked at the front page headed with a red banner declaring 'Battle for London Special' and alongside the latest news a wonderfully atmospheric picture of Tracy in full battle, bloodied and battered uniform standing in the middle of the street with her ceremonial sword drawn in one hand and her gun in the other with a determined look.

“She has become the poster girl of the media in this affair” Collins confirmed “There will probably be calls for her statue to be put in Trafalgar Square by the morning” he joked.

“Unfortunately” the Commander responded as he passed the paper on around the table for the others to see “now that Tracy has publicly declared the Emergency Powers act illegal along with these Special Goon Units, Temple-Smythe has now ordered them to consider the Security Service an enemy of the state as well.”

“Which the public is not believing if the BBC News Online poll is anything to go by” Jennifer remarked as she consulted a laptop computer “98% backing Tracy, 1% probably rounded up backing Temple-Smythe and 1% evidently not paying attention.”

“Well so far major incidents at Tottenham Court Road, Fleet Street and Marylebone Station have been won by our side but there have been a number of other incidents across the City where arrests by these Special Units have been made and then there is the direct ramming off the road and shooting of at least three mobile Security Service units at various locations since eight o'clock this morning” Collins summarised.

“Where are most of these forces concentrated?” the Commander asked.

“There is a huge contingent encircling the Houses of Parliament, Whitehall, Downing Street, the usual political locations” Jennifer confirmed “All my people in the area where basically thrown out last night and since the Security Service are now persona non grata with Temple-Smythe's power trip band wagon it is highly unlikely we will be back on escort duty anytime soon except for the Prime Minister here and anyone else who is outside their inner circle.”

“Home Secretary” the Commander called “You were a QC specialising in constitutional law if I recall correctly?” he asked.

“Err yes Sir” the Home Secretary confirmed still in a slightly bewildered state about the whole thing.

“There must be something in law dating back to the stone age or something we can use to draw up a legal injunction against Temple-Smythe” the Commander remarked “Can you track something down. It will give you a task to focus on and you look like you could use it.”

“Providing I can have access to an online legal library of some kind” the Home Secretary confirmed “I should be able to put something together but we will need a High Court Judge to approve any order we come up with.”

“Leave that to me” Sir Richard confirmed as he extracted his mobile telephone and his little black notebook “I am sure I can rustle up someone in the judiciary who isn't under Temple-Smythe's influence.”

“Work with Commander Fuller through there” the Commander indicated the computer centre next door whereupon the Home Secretary got up, acknowledged the others and then proceeded out of the room.

“We also need to work on Temple-Smythe's road show from the inside” Jennifer remarked “Shake a few of the trees and see who amongst his inner circle gets nervous and drops out.”

“Judging by the increasing flow of snippets of information we have been able to lay our hands on” Collins remarked “I think it is safe to say that not everyone on the inside is comfortable with the situation and others are wavering.”

“So what they need to overthrow Temple-Smythe apart from a nice big fat legal injunction if we can find one” the Commander remarked “is some sort of major persuader of some kind” he thought for a moment before turning to look directly at the Prime Minister who looked back with a worried frown.

“What?” the Prime Minister asked sensing that something was heading his way just by the look on the Commander's face.

“You're dead” the Commander remarked “Well at least in the gospel according to Temple-Smythe that is. Killed by Islamic Extremists in a helicopter crash last night.”

“The Lazarus manoeuvre?” Sir Richard remarked.

“Exactly” the Commander confirmed with a knowing grin.

“I'm sorry you've lost me” the Prime Minister responded with a confused look.

“Jennifer” the Commander asked “How secure is the BBC News Centre if we wanted to spring a little surprise?”

“The place is pretty tight for general security give the nature and importance of the various bods that go through there on a regular basis” Jennifer recalled “If we can get additional armed officers to surround the place in case Temple-Smythe's boys come a calling then I think we can manage what you have in mind, assuming that is you are thinking the same thing as me?”

“Prime Minister” the Commander declared “How do you fancy making the biggest comeback since Aldiniti?” he asked.

“What?” the Prime Minister responded “Suddenly turn up on the BBC alive and well to tell the entire world 'Hi guys, sorry for the mistake, I'm not dead after all' that sort of thing?”

“Pretty much” the Commander confirmed “If we can get you live on the BBC at say five o'clock, worldwide and exclusive then you tell the whole story, warts and all.”

“Making sure of course that the duplicity and treasonous efforts of Temple-Smythe are prominent in the list of facts” Sir Richard added.

“What makes you think anyone will take any notice?” the Prime Minister asked “Usually my speeches are met with the deafening silence of the tumbleweed of indifference.”

“Thanks to my wife” the Commander explained “Everyone is tucked up indoors glued to the telly and the Internet, hell apparently you can even get live news coverage on trains now.”

“And buses” Collins added “Although the screens on the Route 8 ones seem to have broken down lately, must be made by the same company that does the Underground chocolate machines that seem to have packed up recently.”

“Now there *is* a conspiracy that needs investigating” the Commander joked.

“So I speak to the nation and tell the whole story” the Prime Minister concluded “Then what?”

“You appeal to those who you know in the inner circle to reject Temple-Smythe, his agenda and his methods” the Commander confirmed “Get them to either walk away or overthrow him.”

“Probably the former” Collins remarked “The latter means going up against Devlin and the Special Services goons and I don't think they will be in any mood to negotiate an amicable departure somehow.”

“The more we can isolate Temple-Smythe the weaker he becomes” the Commander explained “Then at say six o'clock when your magical reappearance from the dead has had the time to settle in and go around the news agencies we go in, legal order in hand and seize Downing Street, Temple-Smythe and any of his associates we can find.”

“That won't be the end of it though” Sir Richard commented “There is still the group behind all this to find, Temple-Smythe is just the public face, the front man, we need the brains behind it as well.”

“We could offer that bitch de Wente a deal I suppose?” Collins tentatively suggested “If we are successful in taking back the control and repealing the Emergency Measures then we turn up the heat on her, threaten to make her the big public prosecution if she doesn't start talking.”

“Hasn't she been declared legally dead?” the Prime Minister asked.

“As a dodo” the Commander confirmed “Why?”

“Then we can do pretty much what we like with her” the Prime Minister declared “and I would like to be there in person when that happens.”

“I have to admit there is a certain appeal to that idea” the Commander admitted with a wry smile “It would be worth it to see the look on her face when you walk in.”

“Call it my condition” the Prime Minister confirmed “I give you the full performance on the BBC at five and you give me ten minutes in a sound proof room with that traitorous bitch, show her what I really mean by hands on Government.”

“Deal” the Commander agreed “All we have to do now is get you to the BBC and on the air without spoiling the surprise.”

“I think I can arrange that” Jennifer confirmed “We can use my best close protection guys and travel by the Underground system to Wood Lane, its right outside the BBC Centre and no one will know what is happening.”

“Anything else before we set about changing the world?” the Commander asked to which there was mostly shakes of the head from those present.

“In which case” the Commander declared as he rose from his seat “Lets get to work.”

A rather battered and tired looking but still grimly determined Tracy looked on as a number of officers bundled a group of arrested Special Operations men into the back of secure vans before they were taken away for questioning and detention.

In the shadow of Nelson's Column, below which a few minutes earlier there had been a brief but violent skirmish between the two sides as the clearing off the streets of as many of the enemy as possible had continued, Tracy looked around her at the near deserted Trafalgar Square where the usual hustle and bustle of tourists and traffic that would normally be seen at that time of the day was strangely absent.

After a few rare moments of quiet contemplation, Tracy sheathed her ceremonial sword which had seen several fights that day and headed up to the north side of the Square where a Security Service patrol car was parked in front of the National Gallery building.

“Can I have your autograph?” a familiar voice called as she reached the car causing her to turn to her left to see the Commander and Jack walking towards her.

“Where did you two pop from?” Tracy asked as she and the Commander met and embraced warmly and kissed.

“Oh around” the Commander admitted “Skeleton service on the tube means its easier to sneak around town without anyone noticing” he explained “I checked in with Gladys and she said you were out clearing up the trash, her words.”

“I have been running hit teams all around the City” Tracy confirmed “Confronting and scooping up any of these goon squads that are outside of fortress Whitehall” she nodded towards the Westminster area half a mile distant “I think we have got most of them now but not all of them came quietly” she admitted indicating her badly battered uniform which complimented the streak of blood running down the side of her face.

“Well you have made the front page of the Standard” the Commander confirmed as he showed her the front page “Sir Richard thought you looked like Joan of Arc in full cry!”

“Oh very nice” Tracy remarked with a chuckle as Bob approached with his team, looking almost as battle scarred but still as determined as Tracy herself.

“Have you seen this?” Tracy asked as they joined them.

“Where have the press gone then?” the Commander asked looking around “I thought you were cultivating an image as the new media darling of the press?”

“The BBC guy has gone back to the Yard” Tracy explained “Apparently he is sufficiently fed up of being shot at for one day so he has booked himself on the first flight to Afghanistan in the morning where he reckons it will be safer.”

“How are you doing Bob?” the Commander asked.

“Not too bad Sir” Bob confirmed “Casualties have mostly been walking wounded on our side bar those three ambushes on our people earlier” he remarked “Some are going to be in hospital for a while but the bad guys are severely dented in numbers.”

“They just don't know when to quit” Tracy agreed “Even when we have heavily outnumbered them it has taken smoke grenades, sneaky tactics and good old fashioned brute force to subdue many of them.”

“Which does not bode well for later on” the Commander remarked with concern.

“Meaning?” Tracy asked.

“Let's head back to the office” the Commander confirmed as he and Tracy got in the front of the patrol car with Jack climbing in the back “I'll explain on the way.”

“You and your lads get some rest and refreshment” Tracy called to Bob and his team from the passenger window of the patrol car as the Commander started the engine “Embankment Café just down there is supplying free refreshments for all our people.”

“Sounds like a good idea” Bob agreed readily, never one to pass up the opportunity of encountering his second favourite thing, food “See you later Maam, Sir.”

“Oh there is Hamley's” Jack remarked as they headed up Regent Street towards Oxford Circus and passed the famous toy shop that like most stores in the centre of London that afternoon were closed because of the crisis.

“That reminds me” the Commander called back “What do you want for your birthday?”

“Tea in Downing Street” Jack responded after some careful thought.

“Oddly enough” the Commander admitted “I might be able to arrange that” he confirmed “The question is why?”

“I told Megan yesterday about you becoming my parents and she remarked that at the rate I was going I would wind up having tea with the Prime Minister sooner or later” Jack explained.

“Whose Megan?” Tracy asked as they turned at Oxford Circus left into Oxford Street.

“The young lady in Jack's picture” the Commander confirmed.

“Ah, girlfriend huh?” Tracy teased Jack.

“It's nothing like that” Jack protested rather unconvincingly “She is just a friend that is all.”

“Right...” the Commander confirmed as he and Tracy exchanged knowing looks.

“I know I am going to sound a little odd” Jack asked as he looked out at the scene outside where they passed another team of Security Service officers on patrol down at the Marble Arch end of Oxford Street who acknowledged them as they passed “But if we are going to New Scotland Yard, why the scenic tour?”

“Our old friend Temple-Smythe has the Westminster area buttoned up pretty tight” the Commander explained “And as all three of us are kind of crossed off his Christmas card list at the moment, we need to give the Whitehall area a wide berth otherwise we are likely to wind up running into his goon squads and they are not likely to be pleased to see us.”

“Good point” Jack remarked “I just hope Megan is all right in all this.”

“Have you got her telephone number?” the Commander asked as they headed down Park Lane at high speed towards Hyde Park Corner.

“Maybe...” Jack responded.

“In which case when we get to the Yard, I will see what I can do” the Commander confirmed.

Thanks to the empty streets, progress was extremely swift and within five minutes the Commander was turning the car into Terminus Place opposite Victoria Station which

was under guard by a large contingent of armed Transport Division officers who all waved as they passed through.

“Well Victoria looks secure” the Commander remarked as they passed through.

“We managed to get the main line stations secured fairly early on” Tracy confirmed “barring the slight err hiccup at Marylebone mind” she admitted.

“Oh hell, what's this?” the Commander asked as they turned into Victoria Street where he was forced to brake to a sharp halt when they were flagged down by a group of army officers standing guard at the entrance to the street in front of Cardinal Place.

“Afternoon lads” Tracy called as she and the Commander got out of the car “What's occurring?” she asked.

“Sorry to stop you” the Corporal responded apologetically “But I am afraid a contingent of enemy forces are attempting to take control of New Scotland Yard. They arrived about ten minutes ago.”

“What have we got in place defending it?” the Commander asked as he stepped across to the middle of Victoria Street and looked down its empty length into the distance from where the echoes of exchanging gunfire could be made out.

“The Major is dug in at both ends of Broadway and across the back of the premises with most of the regiment” the Corporal confirmed “He is keeping them at bay for the moment but the enemy are packing some extremely exquisite hardware not to mention some impressive determination.”

“Red troop move down twenty metres and keep that attacking group behind the second row of barriers!” Major Ford called loudly in his distinctive authoritative officers voice as the sound of gunfire being exchanged between the two sides filled the air.

"Sir" one of the corporals called as he arrived from the other side of the building to meet the Major beneath the famous three sided rotating sign that was still going valiantly despite the battle unfolding around it.

"Yes Corporal" the Major responded "Give me good news lad."

"We are holding our own on all fronts but we will need reinforcements before too long" the Corporal reported "The Security Service guys are helping out as well but most of them are spread across the city."

"Right" the Major responded "Time to call in the backup plan" he declared as he reached for his field radio.

"Eagle Troop" the Major called over the field radio as the sporadic exchanges of gunfire continued all around him "Get you arses out of Green Park and down here on the double."

A little over a mile away at the other end of Victoria Street, the Commander was rounding up as many officers as could be spared from the group watching Victoria Station whilst Tracy continued to monitor events in the distance with the aid of both radio communications and what she and the soldiers could make out through powerful binoculars.

The Commander found a large A to Z of Central London which he laid out on the bonnet of the patrol car so they could devise a plan.

"Anyone have any suggestions?" the Commander asked as they studied the street map of the area looking for some sort of advantage.

"From what we have seen" one of the Major's men indicated on the map "They are trying to get into New Scotland Yard on two opposite fronts, the main group is attempting to enter the front in Broadway whilst a smaller group have sealed off this section of Victoria Street running past the back at both ends."

"Someone's coming" Tracy called indicating up the road where a group of four uniformed officers could be seen walking quickly towards them.

As they drew nearer, the tallest one of the group became recognisable as Commander Baker, her ever present large snipers rifle slung across her.

"Well fancy meeting you here" the Commander remarked as Baker, two of her officers and one of the Transport Division they had rescued along the way joined them.

"Thought it would be a nice day for a walk" Baker jokily remarked clearly exhausted and out of breath "Besides I am out of ammunition which is something that doesn't happen to me all that often" she admitted.

"What's it like down there?" Tracy asked as she stepped down from the army armoured personnel carrier and joined the discussion.

"Well if it hadn't been for the Major's guys, we would have had new owners in the Yard by now" she admitted "They are starting to wear down now though."

"Corporal" the Commander turned to the senior most military man present "How long before those reinforcements get here?" he asked.

"Should be here any minute Sir" the Corporal confirmed "In fact that sounds like them coming now" he remarked as the sound of heavy vehicles approaching began to echo through the otherwise deserted streets and get progressively louder as they drew nearer.

"Oh my God..." Tracy exclaimed as she looked up to see a convoy of armoured personnel carriers, Land Rovers and even a couple of Challenger II type tanks coming up the road towards them.

"That should stack the odds back in our favour" the Commander wryly remarked as the convoy reached their position and came to a stop.

"Need a lift Sir?" the officer riding atop the lead tank asked.

"If you are heading my way" the Commander responded "I would appreciate it."

"Does a tank require payment of the Congestion Charge?" Jack asked as he looked on.

"Do you know I have no idea" Tracy admitted.

"Commander Baker" the Commander called as he prepared to board the tank "Stay here and look after Jack until I let you know it is safe to bring him to the Yard."

"Yes Sir" Baker confirmed as she was passed some fresh ammunition from one of the Army officers.

"Jack" the Commander instructed "Stay by Baker's side at all times. She is the best marksperson in the service if not the country and she will look after you."

"Yes Sir" Jack agreed taking his place by Baker's side where she with her tall six foot two frame and her weapon towered over the small lad.

"Right" the Commander declared as he helped Tracy aboard "Saddle up everyone, wagons roll!"

Jack and Baker stood back by the side of the road as amid a roar of powerful engines, the convoy moved off down the road towards Westminster.

"Are you really a good shot?" Jack asked Baker for the purposes of his own reassurance.

"I've got a drawer full of medals that say so including a couple of Olympic ones" she admitted.

"What is that thing?" Jack looked at the rifle which if stood end up would have been as tall as he was.

"This is the on of the most powerful and sophisticated rifles ever made in the history of firearms" Baker explained "Whenever you feel the need to take out nutters from four hundred metres away, accept no substitute" she proudly showed Jack the weapon.

"Looks heavy" Jack remarked.

"It's been custom made with some additional modifications by myself to allow for me being left handed" Baker explained "Adds a bit of weight on but its good to have the assurance so don't worry, you are going to be perfectly safe."

"Right..." Jack remarked still not entirely convinced.

The sporadic exchanges of gunfire between the two firmly entrenched sides at the north end of the New Scotland Yard building where Broadway met Victoria Street

was so intense that the enemy failed to realise they were being crept up upon from behind until there was a sudden loud bang and one of their vans parked across the middle of the street exploded before it and the vehicle next to it were promptly and unceremoniously flattened by a tank.

"That is what you get for not paying your Congestion Charge" the Commander called from the turret of the tank as its formidable main gun plus the weaponry of the brigade of soldiers falling in behind were brought to bear upon them.

Faced with overwhelming and superior forces suddenly descending on them, the enemy lines quickly and wisely surrendered whereupon they were quickly taken into custody.

"What a bunch of sissies" Tracy remarked in response to the ease with which they had surrendered.

"There is still the lot around the front to deal with yet" the Commander warned her "They are not likely to be so easy."

At the front of the building on two fronts as they encroached from each end and as of yet unaware of the surrender of their colleagues, the armed men continued to advance on the Major and his officers who were beginning to feel the pressure of being up against a larger and well trained force.

"This is not good" the Major declared as he surveyed the situation and seeing that things were not improving, took a few moments to come up with a retaliatory plan.

He was about to reach for his field radio when a loud explosion and a large cloud of smoke went up from the north end of the street, completely disorientating the enemy positions. Within moments the same occurred at the other end and before anyone was fully aware of what was happening, troops invaded from both ends and were able to subdue the confused and disorientated enemy forces with relative ease.

"What took you so long?" Major Ford asked sarcastically as Tracy and the Commander came through the clouds of smoke and joined him by the main entrance as the enemy forces, now firmly restrained and under arrest were led away.

"Traffic" the Commander joked in response "I see you have been having fun whilst I was away?" he looked around at the general wreckage that was littering the place.

"It has been an interesting afternoon I grant you" the Major agreed "However it would appear our would be party crashers have been told where to unceremoniously go by the looks of things" he remarked as two large Security Service officers went by dragging one of the enemy men.

"Thank you for your assistance" Tracy remarked "We would have been well and truly stuffed without it."

"My pleasure" the Major confirmed "If you will excuse me, I will confirm the area clear for you."

“When you are free” the Commander replied “Pop up and see me in my office in about half an hour?”

“I’ll be there” the Major confirmed before leaving them “What are you doing Private?” he was then heard to call which made Tracy and the Commander laugh as they headed inside arm in arm where they found the Receptionist still at her post through all this although now wearing a steel helmet she had borrowed from one of the Army officers for the duration.

“Afternoon Sir, Maam” she called as the two officers past.

“You know I’m not sure that hat really suits you” the Commander remarked wryly.

“And since when did you know anything about fashion?” Tracy responded with a giggle before they headed to the lifts which took them up to the top floor.

“Oh dear God” Tracy remarked as she saw the time on the clock in the Commander's office as they entered whereupon she promptly collapsed onto the couch with exhaustion “Best part of ten hours I have been out there.”

“Don't take this the wrong way my love” the Commander remarked seeing the state of her badly torn and battered uniform “but you are a mess.”

“It makes a change from it being you I suppose” Tracy admitted as she gingerly got up and took off her uniform tunic that after giving what was left of it a cursory inspection, she casually tossed onto the couch.

“Come here” the Commander took her arms in his “Let's have a look at you” he insisted as he conducted an inspection of her wounds, the most serious of which was a badly congealed cut to her forehead just above her hair line.

“Ouch!” Tracy responded as the Commander touched a sore point on the top of her head “That was were some goon mistook my head for a plank of wood.”

“I ought to get you to a medic really” the Commander remarked as he noted that she had further injuries, marked by blood spots on her blouse and also rather badly down her left trouser leg.

“I will be all right” Tracy reassured him “All I need is a hot shower and someone to kiss my injuries better.”

“Well it's a difficult job but someone has to do it” the Commander joked “I volunteer!”

“You could always join me in the shower if you want?” Tracy offered suggestively.

“Tracy love” the Commander responded with a hint of sarcasm “The nation is falling apart, several very unpleasant people want me, you and the British way of life dead so they can make a quick profit, the Prime Minister is about to return from the dead, on the BBC I may add and all you can think of is sex?”

“Yep” Tracy admitted wryly with a cheeky grin and a wink “Come on we may be both dead in two hours, besides you need a rub down just as much as I do” she led the way as the Commander surrendered easily to her charms as per usual.

“Prime Minister” Jennifer declared with reverence as she came into the King William Street conference room “We will be leaving for the BBC Television Centre very shortly.”

“Do they know I am coming?” the Prime Minister asked.

“No Sir” Jennifer confirmed “All they know is that there will be a visit to their news centre by a significant political dignitary who is there to discuss the current crisis and that it is all to be kept exceedingly quiet.

“And if this little trip of mine should provoke shall we say a nasty reaction?” the Prime Minister enquired.

“Then now that Major Ford and his boys have finished mopping up around New Scotland Yard” Jennifer explained “They will be on standby in the vicinity of Wood Lane just in case we have uninvited guests once the broadcast starts although I reckon Temple-Smythe will be so dumbfounded and glued to his TV set that he won't even have the mind to give the order.”

“You hope” the Prime Minister added with a note of caution.

“Best get prepared Sir” Jennifer confirmed before returning back through the door to the adjacent computer centre where in the first quiet moment he had had for what seemed like a week but was really only a couple of days, Fuller was just casually monitoring the computer screens.

“Hello love” Jennifer sat alongside Fuller and gave him a much need supporting peck on the cheek “How go things in the big wide world?”

“Reports are confirming that the smaller number of enemy loons in other areas of the country are being rounded up and dragged off the streets pretty easily” Fuller confirmed “It would appear that Temple-Smythe got Devlin to put the best and most determined ones into the London operation in the hope that this would be the only area where there was a chance of a fight back.”

“Looks like there are a few holes in the paintwork at Scotland Yard though” Jennifer remarked as she observed a CCTV Traffic Camera live feed where she could see the road outside the main entrance to the building where in addition to a guard of heavily armed Security Service officers on patrol, clean up operations to remove the debris created by the earlier incidents was well underway.

“However” Fuller confirmed as he change the camera angle “The sign is still rotating, the British way of life goes on and across the land the people of this country are settling back in front of their television to watch Countdown whilst the kettle is boiling for a nice fresh cup of tea.”

“You should be a politician” Jennifer joked.

“Wouldn't work” Fuller confirmed “Too honest.”

“Well at least if all goes well by six o'clock they will have something worth watching for a change” Jennifer remarked “Are our routes clear all the way there?”

“You are getting the scenic tour I am afraid on the account of some unfriendlies watching the platforms at Embankment and Westminster” Fuller responded “Probably too close to Downing Street for comfort for those guys I expect.”

“Monument to Mile End, cross over then Mile End via the Central Line all the way to White City?” Jennifer asked.

“Empty stock trains with volunteer drivers who are on MI5's approved list at both Monument and Mile End and discrete security patrols on each platform along the way plus a team of Bob's Armed Support Guys shadowing you on the surface all the way.”

“Nice and tight” Jennifer agreed “And when we get there?” she asked.

“Once you are on the platform at White City, you will be met by a full armed escort team which is when you call this number” Fuller handed across a slip of paper “It is the direct dial line for the News Editor at the BBC. He is expecting you and 'one other' but naturally he is not as of yet aware who that other person is.”

“We have a clear path from the station to the BBC?” Jennifer asked.

“Being sorted out now” Fuller confirmed as he changed the view on one of the screens to a CCTV link showing the road passing outside the BBC Television Centre where a number of Security Service patrol cars and their personnel could be seen clearing the area in preparation “If anyone enquires we are going to put out a story about a bomb alert or something, in the current climate there isn't much that people will believe.”

“So then the PM goes on the air, tells the world the whole story” Jennifer concluded “bake in the media circus for thirty minutes at gas mark five and see what gets served up.”

“PM goes live at five” Fuller checked his notes to confirm “By five thirty the Commander should have the legal injunction our friend over there is working on to hand” he indicated the Home Secretary over on the other side of the room who was working with Sir Richard on the legal order “and then who knows. One thing is for certain, some of those on the inside will jump off the good ship Temple-Smythe pretty damn quick the moment they see their political careers veering violently towards the toilet but the man himself and his inner circle are not going to give up without a fight.”

“Well trust me” Jennifer confirmed “after what these gits have done in the last few days, I don't think there will be very many who will care how they go as long as it's spectacular, painful and rapid.”

“Well I had better get going” she confirmed as she checked her watch “Keep the home fires burning love” she requested “I am going to want something to roast Temple-Smythe on if I catch him first.”

“Be careful love” Fuller advised.

“Always” Jennifer reassured him “Hey, it's in the job description!”

“Ok” Fuller declared as he put on a radio headset and prepared to run the operation “Wakey wakey sports fans, this is your man in the chair for this afternoon's entertainment. Monument Team stand by, Albatross will be emerging top side in approximately two minutes.”

“Albatross?” the Prime Minister asked as he passed through on his way out.

“I didn't write the official code book Sir” Fuller admitted “You need to speak to Sir Richard over there.”

“Well maybe later” the Prime Minister remarked “My public awaits, I just hope they don't want to see me just long enough to see my head get blown off.”

“This way Sir” Jennifer duly guided the Prime Minister through the King William Street complex to the elderly lift. A few moments later they were emerging at ground level where a six strong force of Jennifer's close protection specialists were waiting to escort the Prime Minister along the evacuated King William Street and into the heavily guarded entrance to Monument Station.

“Well that is the first tricky bit done” Jennifer remarked as they headed down through the station complex to the eastbound sub surface platform of the Circle and District Line where a six car train of 'C' type stock along with a dozen armed Security Service officers and a couple of trusted but understandably slightly confused Underground staff were waiting to receive them.

The station staff's confusion turned to utter bewilderment when they saw who this whole operation was in aid of as the Prime Minister with Jennifer in close proximity throughout and constantly on her guard swept past them and onto the lead carriage of the train.”

“Control this is Angel One” Jennifer called into her radio “Albatross is in the box, ready to roll.”

“Roger that” Fuller confirmed “Control to Whitechapel Signalling Control” he called “Gerry, its Simon. The magic word is now.”

“No worries mate” came the response from the only on duty signal line controller at Whitechapel who with a click of his computer controlled signalling system, cleared the way for the train to proceed.

“All aboard!” Jennifer called as she looked out of the door of the train down towards the front where she could see the starting signal change to green accompanied by the hiss of air as the train stop device lowered allowing them to proceed.

Once everyone was on board and the platform was empty, Jennifer moved up to the front drivers cab whereupon the driver knew it was time to close the doors before releasing the brake and moving the train off into the twin track running tunnel heading east.

Having no other trains in service at that time meant swift progress was made despite having to slow for the rough point work of the junctions at Aldgate. It was not long however before the train was pulling into the platform of Mile End where another small detachment of armed Security Service personnel were waiting.

“There is our ride west” Jennifer remarked as she looked across to the far westbound platform where an empty Central Line train of 1992 type tube stock was waiting patiently for them “Thanks mate” she responded to the driver before returning to the Prime Minister in the passenger saloon.

“Ready?” Jennifer asked the Prime Minister as they prepared to disembark and change trains.

“As I will ever be” the Prime Minister confirmed as he put down the discarded newspaper he had found on the train and had been reading and got up.

“Angel One to Control” Jennifer called into her radio as she stepped out onto the platform with the Prime Minister “Up and over.”

“Confirmed” Fuller responded as he watched via the CCTV feed the party of officers with Jennifer and the Prime Minister in the centre head up the stairs off of the eastbound platforms, across the top and then back down again the other side to the westbound platforms before boarding the Central Line train that was waiting for them.

“Ok” Jennifer confirmed as she gave one final look around the station “Everyone is in, lets get moving.”

“There, that's better” Tracy declared as she looked at herself and her husband standing alongside in the mirror inspecting their fresh full dress uniforms.

“It's been a while since I wore this one” the Commander admitted “I think its shrunk a bit.”

“Of course dear” Tracy responded sarcastically.

Any further discussion of the Commander's clothing problems were going to have to wait however as there was a polite knock at the office door.

“Come in!” the Commander called loudly whereupon Major Ford entered with Jack by his side, the tall and imposing figure of the Major towering over the little lad by a considerable margin.

“I know they say Security Service officers are getting younger but isn't this little fellow just a little too young?” the Major joked.

“It's a long story” the Commander responded as he sat down behind his desk with Tracy alongside him whilst at his invitation, the Major took a seat as well.

“Commander Baker had to return to over watch duty or some such thing” Jack explained “She dropped me off here and then I found the Major who was looking for this office so decided to try some escorting duties of my own.”

“We are going to have to put you on the payroll at this rate” Tracy joked.

“Oh dear” Jack remarked “That means paying tax.”

“Tracy love” the Commander asked of his wife “Take Jack through to your office and see if you can sort him out with a telephone as we agreed?”

“This way Jack” Tracy confirmed whereupon she escorted the young boy out of the office.

“Well I must say” the Major commented once they had left and the door was closed leaving the two men alone to discuss the situation in private “You are certainly full of surprises.”

“As are you Major” the Commander returned the compliment “We couldn't have managed without your help. Thank you.”

“All part of the friendly service” the Major confirmed “Sir Richard Crowthorne has been keeping me copied in on certain intelligence he had been receiving in case of just such an emergency. As soon as the word about the Emergency Security Directive or whatever it is that Temple-Smythe bastard called it cropped up, it was obvious where this was all heading.”

“Hence how you wound up calling Tracy offering your services to our side before she got to call you” the Commander remarked.

“Indeed” the Major confirmed “Very brave girl your wife, courageous under fire and a good rousing public speaker too. She practically had the entire nation easting out of her hand after her speech on the BBC this morning.”

“Believe me there is no end to her talents” the Commander admitted with a wry smile “Well maybe except when it comes to driving.”

“So I heard” the Major admitted in a lowered tone of voice “I was a bit worried for a few minutes that she would wind up driving one of my tanks.”

“Oh the damage doesn't even bear thinking about” the Commander responded with a giggle.

“And so here we are” the Major declared “May I?” he indicated the decanter on the side.

“Please” the Commander confirmed as the Major got up to fix himself a well earned drink.

“We are approaching the end game” the Commander declared as the Major returned to his seat with his drink “In about an hour the Prime Minister will rise very unexpectedly from the dead live on the BBC” he explained “When that happens we expect there to be some interesting reactions.”

“Given recent performances” the Major remarked “I would not be at all surprised if Temple-Smythe's first reaction would be to send a lorry load of his goons around to the BBC and try and cut him off, permanently.”

“Can you spare any of your people?” the Commander asked “I have as many of mine I can spare plus reinforcements from other areas outside the city around White City area now but some more powerful back-up on call just in case wouldn't go amiss.”

“I will see what I can arrange” the Major confirmed “Of course that leaves the Whitehall problem still to be resolved.”

“Indeed” the Commander confirmed “According to intelligence feeds from MI5 and some other sources, we reckon there are about a thousand highly trained and very well armed not to mention highly motivated men guarding Downing Street and the surrounding areas of Whitehall keeping Temple-Smythe and his cronies nicely guarded.”

“Close combat, narrow streets” Major Ford commented “Not going to be easy.”

“Yes well it gets worse” the Commander added “These men were trained by and supplied through the services of a certain Mr Harold Devlin.”

“Now there is a blast from the past” the Major agreed “He only deals in the best of the best, this is going to require something a little less subtle than the usual Security Service methods.”

“Well the primary target will be to get into Downing Street and grab Temple-Smythe and any of his associates we find there” the Commander confirmed “In theory once we cut off the head of the snake, the body will die and once the Prime Minister is safely reinstated where he belongs, he can make a speech live from outside Number Ten, declare the Emergency Order rescinded and then what is left of Temple-Smythe's forces that don't make a run for it, well it will be open season.”

“These are essentially mercenaries we are dealing with” the Major remarked “Once they realise that whatever official support they had is gone, you can be assured they will melt away and head abroad on the first available ferry, plane, canoe, anything they can lay their hands on.”

“So you think it can be done?” the Commander asked.

“With a little bit of luck” the Major agreed “Yes I think we stand a good chance. The only thing that would blow the operation apart and probably see all of us go down in flames was if the Prime Minister was to be killed for real this time before he was reinstated.”

“The thought had occurred to me as well” the Commander admitted “The Prime Minister is the only one who can legally rescind the Emergency Order, without him, Temple-Smythe will probably have the lot of us hunted down and wiped out and there will not be a damn thing anyone can do about it.”

“Let's just make sure it doesn't come to that” the Major remarked.

“But if it does” the Commander leaned forward to emphasise the importance of his next request “If all that we believe in falls and the darkness descends, I want you personally to do something for me.”

“Name it” the Major confirmed already sensing the seriousness of the impending request.

“If it all goes wrong, the purge will start at the top” the Commander admitted “It won't be pretty and it won't be painless either. I want you to promise me that should it get to that stage, you will personally see to it that Tracy and Jack are taken out of here by unregistered flight out of the country to somewhere where you can guarantee their safety.”

“That I can arrange” the Major confirmed “I could also get you out of the country inside of four hours as well if you want.”

“No” the Commander confirmed “My place is to be here until the end, go down fighting in flames if necessary. Besides, I hate flying!”

“It will be done” the Major confirmed with due reverence “Even if I have to knock her out and personally bundle her onto the chopper as the city burns down around us, she and Jack will be safe.”

“Thank you” the Commander responded.

“Well if you will excuse me Commander” the Major declared “I have to go and prepare my troops for some more good old fashioned nutter shooting. See you on the battlefield” he remarked before putting on his officers hat and departing.

Once the Major had left, the Commander thought for a few moments to himself before getting up and going over to the connecting door to Tracy's office next door which when he opened it gently he saw Jack sitting at Tracy's desk on the telephone as Tracy watched on from nearby.

“How goes the great romance?” the Commander whispered aside to Tracy.

“If Megan is just his friend then I am a china man” Tracy confirmed “Look at his face, the last time I saw someone as happy as that, it was you whenever we see each other again.”

“Real deal then” the Commander remarked “Better get a book started on it then” he joked.

“Oh and by the way” Tracy remarked “Thanks for the caring thought but the thought of being bundled, unconscious if necessary into a helicopter as the city disintegrates around us before being hauled off to the Falkland Islands or wherever doesn't exactly appeal, especially if it means leaving you behind to your death.”

“Ah, I take it the soundproofing isn't what it should be then” the Commander responded as he realised that his plan had been rumbled by Tracy.

“Look love” Tracy responded “Let's just make sure it never comes to that all right?” she suggested as Jack finished on the telephone and hung up before looking across at them with a definite beaming smile across his face.

“Megan all right then?” the Commander asked.

“Couldn't be better” Jack admitted happy almost to the point of delirium “She is a bit concerned about me being in Central London what with all this going on but apart from that she is fine.”

The telephone ringing in the Commanders office saw him step back through and proceed to his desk to answer it.

“Hello” he responded after which there was a pause as information was re-laid “Right, tell them they have the green light and try not to get their heads blown off” he confirmed before hanging up.

“Are we on?” Tracy asked as she returned to the office.

“The Prime Minister and Jennifer along with her escort team are on final approach to White City station now” the Commander confirmed “The dice are rolling.”

“We are now approaching White City” the tinny sounding automated announcement system declared as the train approached the distant daylight of the open air station.

“There it is” the driver of the train confirmed to Jennifer who responded by standing up.

“Best get ready then” she declared “Thanks driver.”

“You are welcome” the driver confirmed as Jennifer headed back into the saloon of the lead car where the visibly nervous looking Prime Minister was already on his feet and brushing down his suit in preparation to disembark.

“Ok guys” Jennifer declared “This is where it gets tricky” she announced as the train emerged into the sunlight and slowed on approach to the platforms “There is quite a gap of otherwise public street between White City Station and the BBC and although the area has been evacuated of any onlookers, we still need to get the Prime Minister completely unseen to the BBC News Room.”

“What if I were disguised as one of your people?” the Prime Minister suggested.

“It might work” Jennifer agreed “Jenkins” she called to one of her officers “What size are you?” she asked.

“Thirty eight inches across the chest” Jenkins confirmed “Why?”

“Get your clothes off” Jennifer responded “Nothing personal by the way” she added wryly.

The train came to halt in the platform and the doors opened whereupon Jennifer duly led out her team of armed officers in amongst which was the Prime Minister who was now dressed in full Security Service issue body armour complete with MP7 weapon and Kevlar hat so that now he was indistinguishable from the rest of the group.

“Hello Garry” Jennifer called to one of her officers on the platform who were waiting for her arrival “Could you take care of Jenkins” she asked “He's the one on board with not many clothes on.”

“Err yes Maam” the officer confirmed before heading on board the train as requested.

“Right” Jennifer declared “Control from Angel One, are we clear to proceed?” she asked.”

“Angel One, this is control” Fuller responded “Streets are clear and secure all the way to the BBC and once you have made the call you are clear to proceed.”

“Thank you” Jennifer confirmed before reaching for the slip of paper Fuller had given her earlier and her mobile telephone whereupon she proceeded to dial the number.

“Hello?” Jennifer called as soon as she was answered “This is Divisional Commander Jennifer Caverner of the VIP Protection Branch of the Security Service” she declared “I believe we are expected?”

“Yes indeed” Peter Forsyth, the News Editor at the BBC confirmed almost leaping out of his seat as he had not realised the time for this mysterious arrival was upon him what with everything else that had been going on “Come in the east entrance to the News Centre, I have arranged for it to be completely evacuated so no one will see you arrive. I will meet you there and escort you and your party to the news room myself.”

“Thank you” Jennifer responded “See you in five minutes” she confirmed before hanging up and turning to her officers “Ok guys, lets make this trip a good one” she encouraged them before they set off up the platform towards the exit.

As they emerged from the entrance to the station, the group were escorted by further armed officers as they proceeded at a brisk walking pace down the street. With out any apparent incident they soon reached the familiar BBC Television Centre building and proceeded directly as Jennifer had been instructed to the east entrance to the News Centre where in the reception area they found no one except the understandably nervous looking News Editor himself.

“Good afternoon Divisional Commander” Forsyth declared as he was confronted by a large team of heavily armed and suited officers “If you would care to follow me please?” he duly led the way down a corridor and up the stairs to the third floor with Jennifer and three officers, one of which was in fact the Prime Minister duly following.”

“Could I ask something” Forsyth requested as they headed up from the second to the third floor, the sound of hard soled boots clanking on the stairs and echoing all around “Are you any relation to the other Divisional Commander Caverner?”

“Twin sister” Jennifer confirmed “Actually I am the oldest, by about ten minutes I think.”

“You wouldn't think of the National Security & Police Service as a family business” Forsyth remarked as they reached the door for the fourth floor which he duly opened to allow them through into the main news room itself which was a busy hustle of correspondents and other personnel rushing around gathering news stories from around the world.

“My office is this way” Forsyth led the way through the newsroom until they reached his office and entered it.

“We made it” Jennifer declared with a subtle hint of satisfaction once they were inside the office and the door was closed so they could talk alone.

“Much as I appreciate the theatrics” Forsyth remarked as he sat down behind his desk “but would you possibly like to share with me exactly what this is all about?” he asked.

“How about the biggest news exclusive since the Profumo scandal?” Jennifer asked nodding behind her towards the Prime Minister who in response removed his helmet and jacket to reveal who he really was.

“Boo!” the Prime Minister joked as Forsyth's jaw almost dropped through the floor to the office below if it could.

“Jesus Christ...” Forsyth responded.

“Not quite” the Prime Minister responded as he took a seat opposite him “However reports of my untimely death at the hands of so called 'Islamic Extremist Terrorists' have as you can see been rather exaggerated by my so called successor.”

“Temple-Smythe is going to have a heart attack if he knows you are still alive Sir” Forsyth remarked.

“Save us the trouble of killing him then” Jennifer remarked wryly in jest even though she would love to end the traitor's days in a method that involved lots of prolonged pain anyway.

“I, sorry that is not the right wording” the Prime Minister explained “This country needs you to put me on the news at five o'clock. Face to face in the main news studio with your best interviewer, someone the public really trusts.”

“I can arrange that” Forsyth agreed still rather in a state of shock.

“And it has to be world wide, TV and radio, Internet too” Jennifer added “Widest possible coverage to get the message across to as many people as possible.”

“This is the BBC” Forsyth responded “We practically are the entire world. Have you seen the number of comments we have received via the telephone, the website, e-mail since this whole thing kicked off?”

“So I gather” the Prime Minister confirmed “Word is there is even an online petition to get Divisional Commander Tracy Caverner a knighthood when all this over.”

“If she or the rest of use live long enough to collect it” Forsyth replied ominously “Word from one of our usually reliable sources is that Temple-Smythe's Special Operations Units have approximately a thousand specialist forces on around the clock standby at an unknown location outside of London ready to move in and seal the deal if anyone on our side starts getting clever.”

“Ah but we have an ace up a sleeve and it's a pretty big one” Jennifer remarked indicating the Prime Minister.

“Oh blimey” Forsyth looked at the clock on his desk “If we are going to do this, we have just fifteen minutes to put this together before we go on air” he declared as he got up and went over to the office door.

“Brian!” he called from the door across the editorial office “Get the Director General on the phone, I need an all channels half hour news bulletin ready to go for a major interview at precisely five o'clock.”

“In fourteen minutes?” Brian called back across the office “Are you crazy?”

“They will just have to cancel Blue Peter for the day” Forsyth remarked “This is serious.”

“I had better get attired in something more suitable” the Prime Minister remarked.

“No don't do that” Jennifer responded “The state you are in now will appeal to those out there, it will show you have been through the same level of hell as the rest of us, make the public relate better to you when you are on screen.”

“If you say so” the Prime Minister agreed “My mother is still going to give me hell for appearing in public without a tie though” he remarked.

“Right, lets get you into make up” Forsyth declared “We have less than ten minutes to get this thing set up and ready to go. If you will follow me please.”

“Where he goes I go” Jennifer confirmed.

“All right” Forsyth agreed as he led the Prime Minister with Jennifer close alongside continuing to provide close protection out of the office and across the editorial office where many people looked up and were forced to do a double take when they saw who it was who had just passed them.

“Helen” Forsyth called to the duty studio make up artist as they found her near the main news studio “Get some slap on the Prime Minister here and get him on set, you have two minutes.”

“Right away” she confirmed before looking up at the Prime Minister with a rather stunned look “Excuse me Sir, but aren’t you supposed to be dead?” she asked.

“I have been getting that feeling a lot lately” the Prime Minister wryly admitted before sitting down whereupon Helen began to apply studio make up.

“Well you are looking extremely well for a dead man” Helen remarked doing her usual cheerful banter that she had for everyone that she treated with her make up brushes and powders.

“Why thank you” the Prime Minister responded “That’s the nicest thing anyone has said to me since I died.”

Suddenly there was a loud bang which shook the building, caused the lights to flicker momentarily and then came the ominous sound of breaking glass.

“This is Angel One, what the hell was that?” Jennifer asked into her radio as everyone looked around with concern.

“Angel One, this is Team Three” one of the officers outside in the street reported amidst the sound of gunfire in the background “We got visitors!”

“No kidding” Jennifer remarked as another bang shook the building and everyone instinctively ducked down in response “I take it they are not here to read the meter or protest about Blue Peter being cancelled?”

“No Maam” the officer on the ground confirmed “This looks like an advanced team of those Special Operations goons, they just broke through our perimeter with a trio of armoured personnel carriers and are firing randomly at the building, us and anything else that moves.”

“Forsyth!” Jennifer called across the editorial office “What sort of power backup do you have here?”

“Independent generators, dedicated power feeds, the works” Forsyth confirmed “If they cut us off from the outside, apart from maybe the coffee machine no longer working, we can keep going for up to twelve hours if necessary.”

“Right” Jennifer declared “Get the PM on the air right now whilst we still have a building to broadcast from” she instructed as the building shook with another impact “and make sure you get what is happening outside made public as well.”

“Already on it” Forsyth confirmed “This way please Sir” he instructed the Prime Minister who leapt out of the make up chair and followed him to the nearby news studio where despite the unusual circumstances, they were ready for him.

“Angel One to Control” Jennifer called “Where are the Major's lads?” she enquired.

“Just coming up the road now” came the confirmation from outside “Give us ten minutes and we should have this under control.”

“Fine” Jennifer responded “But whatever you do make sure that none of the enemy get in to the building no matter what.”

“We interrupt our normal scheduled programming for a news report” the calm soothing voice of a BBC continuity announcer declared on televisions across the nation before the titles for the BBC News Service flashed up followed by the studio where despite what was going on, the presenter appeared maintaining an air of calm and reassurance.

“Good afternoon” she declared “We are interrupting normal programming across the BBC to bring you an exclusive interview, first however in breaking news, in the last couple of minutes a number of heavily armed personnel from the Deputy Prime Minister's outlawed Emergency Operations Group have arrived outside the BBC Television Centre in White City and are attempting to seize the building by force.”

At this point the view on screen cut to a view from a camera that was being pointed out of a window of Television Centre that showed live the battle going on below in the street with the Security Service personnel holding their own against the onslaught from the enemy as in the distance the Army troops could be seen to be moving in to cut them off.

“Already the building has been struck by three...” the news presenter was momentarily interrupted as another bang was heard and the camera shook “...make that four rocket propelled grenades which appear to be targeted at the News Centre. We will however continue to broadcast the news as it happens despite these difficulties.”

“That brings us to the original story for which we have interrupted normal programming” the presenter continued “In what may very well be a related development I am joined in the studio by the Prime Minister who yesterday evening was reported to have been killed when his helicopter was shot down by Islamic Extremist Terrorists.”

The camera turned to the slightly bedraggled looking Prime Minister, alive and very much eager to tell the story.

“Prime Minister” the presenter began “The nation was told yesterday that you were killed, this death leading to the implementation of what has now been declared illegal powers by the Deputy Prime Minister Sir William Temple-Smythe yet you appear to be alive and well. Care to explain?”

“What has occurred in the last couple of days is the culmination of the sinister plotting of a small group of power hungry influential people who it is believed have been plotting for over three years to initiate a false national crisis and use that to take over the Government” the Prime Minister explained.

“Until a few days ago” he continued “They have used violence and intimidation only where necessary and behind closed doors hidden away from the prying eyes of the law and the people. Anyone who got close to them to potentially threaten their plans was dealt with in cold blood, including Foreign Office Official Philip Thornton who along with his entire family was murdered by representatives of these people and then the truth covered up.”

“These are serious accusations Prime Minister” the presenter responded “Do you have any evidence to back up these claims.”

“Before he died” the Prime Minister continued “Philip Thornton acquired a vast array of information and documentation on this secretive group and for the last two years since his murder, these files and information were thought lost until they were recovered by loyal members of the National Security Service in the last week. It would appear that the appearance of this damning evidence forced the hand of the conspirators and made them move up their timetable, inciting certain apparently terrorist derived events including my assassination and using that as a basis to create a state of emergency through which they then seized power.”

“We have seen over the last twenty four hours numerous incidences where these so called Special Operations Units under the direct command of the Deputy Prime Minister have used excessive force against anyone that is declared to be either an 'enemy of the state' or 'acting contrary to the common good’” the presenter stated.

“Yes” the Prime Minister agreed “Of course if you are the one who not only wrote the Emergency Crisis Legislation but also decides who goes on the list of 'threats' then that give someone with ambitions for power a carte blanche to pretty much remove from circulation anyone they don't want.”

“Peaceful protestors, members of the press, civil liberties campaign groups, human rights lawyers, some members of the legal profession, half a dozen Members of Parliament, the entire National Security & Police Service and now it would appear the BBC as well” the presenter summarised “Where does it all end?”

“If a stop is not put to this soon” the Prime Minister admitted “in fire most likely. You have seen in the last few minutes that even the independent voice of the BBC, a broadcaster trusted world wide is now not safe from the power hungry ambitions of a single mad man and his sinister associates and the 'Special Operations Unit's' he has

brought in are little more than mercenaries, hired vicious thugs who are only interested in the money and the chance for a fight without the possibility of legal comeback or arrest.”

“The Greater London area of the National Security & Police Service despite being placed under the direct command of the Deputy Prime Minister's office under the terms of the order have under the leadership of its Divisional Commander declared the moves of Temple-Smythe illegal and have been defending the city and its citizens against these Special Operations Units all day, indeed we believe there is even a warrant out for Sir William Temple-Smythe's arrest?” the presenter asked.

“That is correct” the Prime Minister confirmed as another loud bang shook the building but they continued on regardless “In fact if it wasn't for the brave decision by the Security Service as a whole to stick to the rule of law and their declaration of principles and fight these so called special measures, by now this country would be under the control of what amounts to little more than a military junta dictatorship funded and influenced by certain extremist business interests and other shadowy groups.”

“Prime Minister” the presenter remarked “At this time Sir William Temple-Smythe holds the power and he has ruthless forces in place throughout the country and particularly this City ready to defend and fight for his dubious power trip fuelled principles. What can you possibly hope to achieve against that kind of oppressive force?” she asked.

“My very appearance here tonight is just the first step” the Prime Minister confirmed “Already those in this country and world wide can clearly see that the man who is currently illegally leading this country today is a bare faced liar, he stated publicly that I was dead and used that as the basis to seize power, denying everyone the rights of law and justice as that would be for him politically inconvenient. More over I can now categorically confirm that operatives from and under the direct personal command of the Deputy Prime Minister were ordered to and carried out the assassinations of myself and the Justice Minister yesterday. It was only by pure luck that we discovered the structure of their plans as set out in the files that Philip Thornton had collected which meant that it was possible for my death to be convincingly faked, that alone has given us a fighting chance to put things right.”

“I make an appeal to those within Government who right now are watching this and wondering where their true loyalty lies” the Prime Minister appealed directly to the camera “I know many of you and understand that despite your doubts, you have gone along with this plan so far but now I am sure you can see that this will lead nowhere but fire, destruction and potentially terrible loss of life. Walk away now, leave Temple-Smythe and his shadowy associates isolated and together we can weaken his position and take back this country for its freedom and its people.”

“Oi!” Temple-Smythe called as he came storming out of his office in Downing Street “Dumb and dumber” he addressed his two associates “You two did the job on the Prime Minister correct?” he checked.

“Yes Sir” one of the two men confirmed “Went up with a very pretty bang.”

“So if the Prime Minister roasted his nuts in his helicopter last night” Temple-Smythe asked “who in hell is that currently spilling the beans on the BBC?” he asked pointing back into his office where the television in there was continuing with the news coverage.

“Erm” one of the men responded rather unsure what to offer as an answer.

“Well get on the telephone” Temple-Smythe insisted “Get your people out there and make sure by the time I go to bed tonight, the Prime Minister and anyone else on his side are in a body bag, got it?”

“Can we do this legally?” the other man asked “I mean what about the law?”

“I am the damm law!” Temple-Smythe angrily pointed out “I have an official signed document in there that says I can do what I damm well please as long as it is in the long term interests of the security of this country and most importantly its Government, that would be me lame brain in case you had not already worked it out.”

“Yes Sir” they both confirmed in unison.

“Well go on, get on with it!” Temple-Smythe ordered them out before returning to his office, angrily shutting the door loudly behind him and returning to his desk where he used the remote control to turn down the volume on the television before making a telephone call.

“It's Number One” Temple-Smythe confirmed as soon as he was connected “Call Devlin, tell him the final phase begins immediately” he declared before abruptly hanging up.

“Right, thank you” the Commander concluded before hanging up the telephone and sitting back “Well Jack, that was the Foreign Secretary which makes how many?”

“Nine” Jack confirmed looking at a clipboard on the desk in front of him”

“Nine Government Ministers to publicly condemn Temple-Smythe for his actions in the last fifteen minutes” the Commander concluded.

"Is it normal for those political types to jump ship so rapidly whenever they see bad news on the BBC?" Jack asked innocently.

"If it means their gravy train expense account is threatened and there is the real danger they might have to go out and find themselves a proper job" the Commander remarked "Usually they cannot move fast enough."

Some rather rapid knocking at the office door only just preceded the arrival of Sir Richard Crowthorne and the Home Secretary bearing an official looking document

which was placed with all due serenity and respect to its importance on the desk in front of the Commander.

"One legally binding, signed, sealed and delivered cease and desist order with an official annulment of powers directive on top" Sir Richard declared with a satisfied grin.

"Ok gentlemen" the Commander remarked "You may consider me officially impressed. How did you do it?"

"I managed to find a little known never repealed parliamentary power act from 1485" the Home Secretary explained "As far as I can work out the last time it was used in anger was nigh on three hundred and fifty years ago."

"And signed off by a genuine bona-fide High Court Judge as well" the Commander commented as he examined the document in detail.

"Judge Sir John de Courcey QC" Sir Richard explained "Bit of a renegade and an old friend."

"I know him" the Commander confirmed "Once threatened to give someone life for parking on a double yellow."

"Also outside of the inner circle clique which means he is not under the influence of a certain Temple-Smythe" Sir Richard added.

"Time to go then" the Commander declared as he stood up and took possession of the document which he carefully placed in his inside uniform tunic pocket.

"Oh" Sir Richard remembered and handed over a parcel he was carrying to Jack "You will be wanting this."

"Isn't this...?" Jack remarked as he opened the parcel to reveal the model train locomotive he originally received on his tenth birthday and had never got to play with.

"Yep" Sir Richard confirmed "I had a couple of my technical boffins give it a working over so it works now. Happy birthday from MI5."

"Birthday greetings from MI5" the Commander remarked "Now that really will impress Megan" he suggested.

"Ah" Sir Richard remarked "The femme fatale eh?"

"Oh please..." Jack rolled his eyes upwards in response "She is..."

"...just a friend" Sir Richard, the Commander and even the Home Secretary finished in unison.

"Well anyway, it's time to get things moving" the Commander declared "If I were you, I suggest that you three remain here where it is safe."

"So by that I can safely assume that you are going out there to probably get your head blown off?" Sir Richard asked.

"Would you expect anything less?" the Commander confirmed.

"Sir?" Jack called with clear seriousness as the Commander was just leaving.

"Yes Jack?" the Commander replied.

"Two years ago I lost my parents to these people" Jack stated "Now I have new parents but please don't let me lose them again."

"You won't" the Commander attempted to reassure him even though deep down he had no idea of what was going to happen in the next couple of hours "I'll be back before you know it."

The Commander left the office closing the door behind him whereupon he paused for a few moments silent reflection in the empty outer office.

It occurred to the Commander as he stood there that after all these years, now his survival was more personal than ever before with Jack now being his responsibility whereas before there was just him and Tracy who both shared and knew the risks they took on in this job.

"Oh dear..." the Commander remarked quietly to himself with a heavy sigh before moving off down the corridor and entering the main Control Room where he found Tracy at the main console overseeing developments from across the city.

"Hello love" the Commander quietly greeted Tracy with a kiss.

"Hi" she responded with a sweet smile that cheered up the Commander's low mood no end.

"Is the BBC still under siege?" the Commander asked.

"Not any more" Tracy confirmed "Major Ford explained the error of their ways to them in a style that you would approve of. It could take days to work out where all the bits are supposed to go."

"I will enquire no further" the Commander remarked "We are about to set off and hopefully end this."

"I'll just get my tunic" Tracy began to get up but the Commander stopped her.

"Oh no you don't" the Commander insisted "I need you here co-ordinating things and also I need to know you are safe."

"So that I can be bundled unceremoniously into a chopper as the city burns around me and smuggled out of here if this all goes wrong?" Tracy asked.

"I don't ask much of you" the Commander admitted looking Tracy in the eyes with deep sincerity "But please, do this one thing for me, stay here. You've done your bit for Service, Queen and country."

"All right" Tracy agreed "If the proverbial brown smelly stuff hits the fan then I will take Jack and get out of here but lets make sure it doesn't come to that OK?"

"Thank you my love" the Commander softly responded kissing her on the cheek "I'll see you later."

With a long look at her before he left, the Commander departed with a heavy heart but a determined pace down through the building until he exited from main reception and out into the street where a large number of Security Service vehicles and personnel were awaiting departure.

"OK everyone" the Commander declared loudly "This is it, so lets make this count as we won't get a second chance at this."

With that declaration there was a crescendo of slamming doors and engines starting as everyone got into their vehicles and prepared to move off.

"Convoy Alpha" the Commander called into the radio as he sat in the front passenger seat of the leading patrol car "We are as ready as we will ever be" he confirmed.

"Convoy Alpha, this is Control" Tracy responded as she watched events about to commence through the live feed to the large screens across the front of the Control Room "You have a green light, let's be careful out there."

"Roger that" the Commander agreed before amid the sound of numerous sirens, the convoy moved off.

Picking up a military escort of the Major's men and further Security Service vehicles as they emerged into Victoria Street, they proceeded south towards Parliament Square where in the shadow of Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament, they turned into Parliament Street that leads into Whitehall itself.

"Well I could have walked that" the Commander joked as the convoy came to a halt short of what was effectively a military security barricade of the Special Operations Officers who responded to their arrival by bringing more men to the line and readying weapons.

"Whose idea was this again?" the Commander asked apprehensively as he opened the car door.

"Yours I believe Sir" the equally apprehensive officer alongside him remarked.

"Ah well" the Commander declared "Here we go..." he confirmed as he got out of the car, produced the official injunction document from his pocket and proceeded to walk alone up Parliament Street the two hundred metres or so towards the barricade.

"That's far enough!" came the call via a loudhailer as the Commander reached the half way point between the two lines where he looked isolated and alone with the entire world looking on.

"I have a legal injunction that declares the actions of the Deputy Prime Minister and your forces an illegal and unconstitutional act contrary to common law" the Commander declared "You are hereby ordered to immediately stand down or you will be placed under arrest."

"Not today thank you" a voice responded before opening fire at the ground just in front of the Commander to emphasise their point.

"Right..." the Commander calmly responded before turning sharply on his heels and returning back to his line across the end of Parliament Street.

"That would be a no then I take it?" Major Ford remarked as the Commander returned to Parliament Square.

"It would appear so" the Commander confirmed "Ah well, never mind."

"Plan B then?" the Major asked.

"Plan B" the Commander agreed.

For the next quarter of an hour there was an uneasy stand off as both lines held their ground.

As darkness began to fall however, the sound of approaching heavy machinery of some kind grew heralding the arrival of the Major's main force.

"I think it is time to make a discreet exit Sir" one of Temple-Smythe's associates informed him "At least withdraw you to a safe location until we can get the rest of our people in place to eliminate this problem."

"I duly concur" Temple-Smythe agreed as he rose from his well appointed seat, grabbed a fresh cigar from the box on the desk and his long overcoat from the coat hook.

"What do you want us to do about the Security Services?" the man asked.

"Stick to the plan" Temple-Smythe confirmed as he readied to leave "Wait until the Commander and the rest of his officers make their final move then call Mr Devlin to do his bit."

"How far do you want to take this?" the associate asked, hiding a strong feeling of apprehension in marked contrast to Temple-Smythe's continuing confidence in his eventual victory.

"Wipe them out" Temple-Smythe confirmed with grim determination "Every last one of them and anyone who is still living under the disillusionment that they are the side of right. Then and only then by making an example will we show the people of this country that we are in charge and we are going to do things right."

"Yes Sir" the associate confirmed as Temple-Smythe departed with a determined stride.

"Good evening gentlemen, this is your courtesy wake up call" the Commander declared from the traffic island in the centre of Parliament Street looking down Whitehall towards the gated and well guarded entrance to Downing Street in the distance.

"Fire!" the Commander called out bringing down sharply his raised hand in which he was holding his ceremonial sword.

Upon his command, one of the tanks fired a shell down the street that on impact just short of the ring of men guarding Downing Street, exploded revealing it to be a smoke shell that quickly created a dense cloud that threw the enemy into a state of shock and confusion.

"That should get their attention" Major Ford up on the tank remarked "All groups move in!" he called which was the cue for the forward movement on all fronts where at least three hundred Security Service officers and military personnel were waiting for the word.

Disorientated by the smoke shell explosions, the enemy were slow to react to the initial advance and the first exchange of gunfire made significant inroads into their ranks. The Major's men led the way being the experts at urban warfare with the Commander and his Security Service officers following close behind.

"The next time a senior member of the Security Service addresses you brandishing an official order" the Commander instructed one of the men who was on the ground clasping a broken leg "Remember it is an awful lot less painful just to do what I tell you?"

"Yeah whatever" the demoralised man agreed "Just slap the cuffs on and get me the hell out of here before my mates turn up?"

This last comment made the Commander do a double take as the man and a number of his now detained associates were about to be dragged away "Sorry, run that one by me again?"

"Heh, you'll see" the man responded with a knowing look.

"I thought they were giving up too easily" Bob remarked as he joined the Commander in a look of serious concern.

“Oh hell...” the Commander responded as he realised at the same time the significance of the comment before turning and running down the street towards the gated entrance to Downing Street where Major Ford and his men were dealing with the last of the defences in Whitehall itself.

“Ford!!” the Commander shouted down the road as over head the sound of approaching helicopters began to be heard “Get to cover, we are about to have company!”

“Cover!!” the Major called as the first of three black helicopters zoomed in from across the City emerging over the roof tops of Whitehall and immediately opening fire down into the street sending everyone scattering for cover.

“Oh my God!” Tracy exclaimed as she watched this development on the screens in the control room where the CCTV traffic cameras were now the only source of visual information as the live BBC coverage from the scene was abruptly interrupted when they had come under intense gunfire. In addition there was the sound of helicopters and gunfire perfectly audible from the scene itself just under a mile away as well.

“Maam” one of the dispatch officers called “Air Traffic at Drayton confirms there are six unregistered military helicopters in the centre of the City or on final approach.”

“Get me someone with influence from the Royal Air Force” Tracy demanded but at that moment the building shook as one of the helicopters on its way into the Whitehall siege took the opportunity to take a pot shot at New Scotland Yard shattering some windows on the Victoria Street side.

“When Temple-Smythe said he wanted to eliminate all opponents” Major Ford remarked as he, the Commander and several others took shelter behind an armoured personnel carrier which was being raked with gunfire as nearby one of the helicopters was landing in Whitehall and discharging a team led by Devlin himself of specialist looking armed men “He wasn't kidding was he?”

“We are penned in here” the Commander confirmed “Bob?” he called over to the nearby entrance to the Foreign Office building where Bob and his team were operating in a defensive position in the doorway “Can you get through to Scotland Yard?” he called.

“Radio's are down” Bob called back amid the noise “One of those choppers took a pot shot at the transmitter on the Yard's roof on its way in!”

“Ceasefire!!” Devlin called to his men as he reached the defensive line outside of Downing Street before being passed a loud hailer and raising it towards the Security Service and Army officers ahead “Commander” he called “You and your people are in a hopeless situation, come out and we will talk.”

“Could be a trap” the Major suggested.

“And it could be an opportunity to get out of this mess” the Commander responded “Either way it's a pocket pair of deuces against a potential ace high flush.”

As the Commander considered the options, his mobile telephone rang which he quickly answered. The look on his face as he received the message without a verbal response indicated he had received at least some good news.

“Two minutes” the Commander confirmed “I have to go and have a little chat with an old friend” he confirmed before hanging up and tossing the telephone to the Major.

“No tricks, no gunfire” Devlin was heard to call over the loudhailer “Just two men of distinction having a chat, what do you say Commander?”

“I'm coming out” the Commander called “Keep your lunatics on a leash will you?”

It seemed as if the entire nation, maybe even the entire world was holding its breath as with only the sound of hovering helicopters in the air, the Commander stepped out from behind the vehicle he had been sheltering behind, calmly brushed down and adjusted his uniform and then proceeded to walk up the centre of Whitehall, a single individual in the large open debris littered space between the two sides.

Devlin did the same, walking forward alone until the two met in the middle isolated and alone yet being watched by thousands knowing that the next few minutes would be the crucial deciding factor between victory and defeat.

“I must say Eddie I do find your attitude to my men very disappointing” Devlin remarked “My men are professionally trained, dedicated and highly motivated professionals.”

“We will beg to differ I think” the Commander calmly responded “and one more thing, there are only two people in the world that I care about enough to the point where they call me Eddie, you are neither. To you I am Commander or Administrator General, I will even accept Sir but never ever think that you and I are on first name terms or anywhere remotely near it” the Commander warned sternly.

“Very well” Devlin agreed “Commander” he emphasised “Time is short I am sure you will agree, I have a lot to do for our new Government and you, well...”

“If you have a point to make” the Commander suggested “Make it and then we can all be on our way home in time for supper.”

“At this moment I have an elite squad of men poised to take out key installations currently occupied by key groups opposed to the righteous new regime that will restore this country” Devlin explained.

“Oh spare me the twaddle” the Commander responded dismissively “I know you Devlin, the only person or group you are loyal to is the one holding the largest pocket book. Lets be honest here, I know that maybe a difficult concept for you admittedly but when you lift off the shiny spin driven veneer from this plot of yours its all about a group of saddoes on a power trip in order to make a lot of money that they don't deserve.”

“Such cynicism in one so young” Devlin joked.

“You think I am bad, you wait until my wife catches up with you” the Commander advised “Tell me are you fond of your kneecaps?”

The exchange between the two men was being picked up and broadcast live by the BBC and this last quip in particular brought some amusement to the many who were watching including Tracy herself.

“It is quite simple Commander” Devlin continued undeterred “I am happy to declare a permanent ceasefire as long as the Security Service and all other groups, individuals and organisations on your side stand down and cease all opposition to the current Emergency Administration.”

“And if I should refuse and tell you to go to hell?” the Commander asked “or East Croydon, depending on which is the more convenient.”

“Then under this” Devlin produced an official looking document from his pocket “Under executive order 1615 I am authorised as head of the Central Security Defence Bureau to take down and execute on sight all traitors and those acting contrary to the common good. A copy for your reference” he added as he passed the document to the Commander.

The Commander gave the document a cursory look before casually disregarding it by screwing it up and tossing it over his shoulder.

“Ah...” Devlin remarked “That would be a no I take it then?”

“In so many words yes” the Commander confirmed “You do this and there will be a blood bath” he warned “and there is no way the public of this country will allow your lunatic puppet masters or you and your goons to remain in power for long. Other countries will isolate you, the people will rise up, resistance will be everywhere and sooner or later you will fall and believe me it won't be pretty.”

“I give you two minutes to consult with your associates” Devlin instructed “Then if you do not surrender my men will move in to the key targets indicated and its lights out for the Security Service, you, your charming wife, even little Jack who I believe was the key to this whole thing kicking off.”

“Three things” the Commander stated firmly in response “One, the National Security Service is a body that is under the direct jurisdiction of the United Nations Security Council and they will come back at you with everything they have. Two, Jack Thornton is under the guarantee of my personal protection, any attempt to harm him by you or any of your associates will be met with severe penalties and most importantly of all number three, you or any of your knuckle dragging goons so much as even think of touching my wife and I will kill you right here where you stand.”

“One minute thirty seconds” Devlin responded seemingly unmoved.

“Maam” one of the Major's men declared as he entered the New Scotland Yard Control Room and came up to Tracy's side “Time to go, now” he insisted.

“This place is not going to fall” Tracy responded with determination as the sound of additional helicopters approaching grew louder with every passing second.

“With respect Maam, we cannot afford to take the chance” the officer informed her “There are more enemy forces approaching and your window of escape is closing fast.

“Just give it thirty seconds” Tracy responded knowingly “Trust me.”

“Time is an interesting concept isn't it?” the Commander commented.

“I'm sorry?” Devlin responded, not quite expecting the Commander's sudden change of context.

“I mean take us two here for example” the Commander gestured around the empty surrounding street with the two forces watching from either end and the large black helicopter on the ground still with its rotors beating like a drum of war “You give me two minutes and yet all I needed was just the one.”

“I'm sorry Commander” Devlin responded “Not being from south London, I do not possess the same sense of humour.”

“Pity” the Commander responded “If you had been given the same surroundings and upbringing as me, you might just have been a better person, instead you are just a guy without a helicopter.”

“Eh?” Devlin replied but at that moment there was a loud roar as a squadron of Royal Air Force Harrier fighters came in low down the River Thames before two of them peeled off over the Houses of Parliament, slowed and promptly opened fire on Devlin's helicopter, destroying it instantly.

“Whoops...” the Commander remarked wryly “Hope it was paid for.”

“This is Royal Air Force Strategic Defence Squadron Alpha to all forces and operatives operating under the illegal Emergency Operations Order” came the call over all radios from the Royal Air Force Squadron Leader “Under executive order from the Prime Minister and the United Nations, all illegal forces who do not stand down and surrender their weapons in the next thirty seconds will be fired upon and destroyed.”

“I think you had better do as the Squadron Leader says” the Commander advised “I've been up against some of the toughest people and groups known to man but even I would not go up against the massed forces of the world's best Air Force.”

Devlin did not have to give the order for many as a lot of the men who were not injured by the helicopter explosion wreckage quickly dropped their weapons and surrendered whereupon Security Service and Army officers quickly moved in to detain them.

“Ah ah!” the Commander called as Devlin tried to turn to make a run for it only to be brought up short when he found the Commander's ceremonial sword across his throat “Wouldn't want you to leave the party early, I am only just warming up.”

“You can't keep me in prison” Devlin remarked “You already tried that once and look what happened.”

“The one and only reason you were released from prison was because you had the backing of an organisation that needed you, your dubious talents and your resources to further their aims and ambitions” the Commander informed him “After today I promise you they won't be around to get you out again, I am going to find them and put them out of business permanently and after that you will be on your own in a stinking jail cell at one of our more obscure facility free prison facilities, the kind that don't appear on the schedule of the Prison Inspection Service department.

“Oh hello again” Sir Richard Crowthorne remarked as he came up and joined the Commander who released his sword from Devlin's throat as a detachment of four large broad shouldered and heavily armed Security Service officers took him into custody “Fancy meeting you here.”

“You haven't heard the last of me” Devlin warned as he was led away along with the rest of his forces “I will be back and next time it will be personal.”

“Blah, blah blah...” the Commander dismissed Devlin's pathetic threats.

“Well the good news is that the RAF guys showing up and knocking a few loons out of the sky seems to have persuaded them all to surrender” Sir Richard declared as he looked around at the smouldering wreckage of the battle lying all around Whitehall which was now being attended to by the Fire Brigade.

“The bad news is of course the Specialist Protection teams inside Downing Street” the Commander concluded before looking around and finding amidst the chaos Bob and his team approaching from the far side of Whitehall.

“Bob!” the Commander called across “Get your boys together and someone call the Prime Minister and tell him in can move back shortly.”

“Ok everyone” Tracy declared to a relieved Control Room “That's the worse bit over” she confirmed “Told you” she remarked to the Army officer who smiled, saluted and departed.

“Maam” one of the Despatch Officers called “The Commander is on line three.”

“Hello love” Tracy answered after grabbing the telephone on her desk and pressing the line button in double quick time “Nice speech.”

“All I could think of on the spur of the moment my dear” the Commander confirmed “Don't tell me...?”

“... the BBC caught the entire conversation” Tracy confirmed as she looked across at the screen continuing to broadcast the BBC News 24 channel “In fact they just re-ran it again for good measure.”

“Typical BBC” the Commander remarked “Always repeats.”

“Anyway it looks like we are all clear here at last” Tracy confirmed “What was left of the enemy goons outside the Yard gave up after the Major's Men moved in and apparently the rest have discreetly scarpered.”

“Good” the Commander confirmed “If you can spare any, I could do with some extra bodies down at Downing Street, I have a little squatter problem to deal with.”

“On the way” Tracy confirmed before hanging up and grabbing her uniform tunic “Gladys, get anyone spare to haul ass down to Whitehall right now” she requested “I have to go and kick Temple-Smythe's backside” she declared with determination before leaving.

“You do know those gates were designed to prevent people from breaking into Downing Street?” Sir Richard remarked as he, the Commander, Bob and his team and about a hundred officers observed the ornate but strong defensive wrought iron gates that guarded the entrance to Downing Street.

“Excuse me” Major Ford called as he calmly came through the crowd and passed to the front carrying something shaped like a large drain pipe on his shoulder which at the last moment everyone realised was a rocket launcher.

“Fire in the hole!!” Sir Richard called out whereupon everyone ducked just as the Major fired the rocket at the gates. In an instant the impact and explosion wrecked the gates and sent debris flying all around.

“Well that made a hole” Tracy remarked as she joined them and observed the large smouldering gap now created.

“Hello love” the Commander responded with a kiss between them “What are you doing here?”

“Felt like popping out for a walk” Tracy joked “Besides I am due to issue a major arse kicking to a certain Deputy Prime Minister.”

“All right” the Commander conceded “but please be careful?”

“I will” Tracy promised as she drew her weapon and checked it.

“OK everyone” the Commander called to the officers behind him with a news crew from the BBC watching from the side lines “Watch yourselves, there may be unfriendlies lurking within, lets go!”

With the Commander at the head, the officers marched into Downing Street and immediately came under fire from a lone gunman high up in one of the overlooking

buildings however he did not last long as Commander Baker who was with them calmly brought her snipers rifle around to bear on the source of the gunfire and fired a single shot rendering the problem neutralised in an instant.

“Nice shooting” the Commander remarked before they moved on and approached the area immediately outside Number Ten which was deserted and eerily quiet.

“Bob” the Commander called back “Take a team into Number Eleven, two more guys guard the door of Number Ten as we go in.”

“You, you and you” Bob indicated three of his men “With me” he confirmed before they headed off further along the street and into Number Eleven to conduct their search.

“One small problem” Tracy remarked to her husband “If I remember from what Jennifer told me, the door to Number Ten only opens from the inside.”

“Now you tell me” the Commander responded but as they approached the famous black door, it opened and a visibly nervous member of Downing Street staff appeared with his hands up in surrender.

“Come on” the Commander gestured to the man who in response ran forward out of the door whereupon he was bundled to safety out of harms way.

“Well I guess that is one problem solved” Tracy commented.

“Indeed” the Commandeer agreed “Right, follow me, speak only when necessary” he called back before he led them into the main entrance hall of Number Ten where after checking all around for potential trouble, the Commander silently indicated to the officers to split into groups of two and three before proceeding all through the building in a standard thorough search pattern.

Tracy and the Commander proceeded together to the right and headed towards the Cabinet and Prime Minister's offices but as they approached the double door of the Cabinet Office, a noise was heard coming from within that made them stop before entering.

“You left, me right” the Commander whispered to Tracy before they both in unison went through the door and brought their weapons to bear on one of Temple-Smythe's associates who was in the process of burning papers in the fire place.

“Don't move!” Tracy called directly.

“It's all right, don't shoot” the man instantly surrendered where despite his dedication to the cause earlier, it was clear he was now happy it was over for him and was willing to surrender.

“Where is that bastard Temple-Smythe?” the Commander asked directly.

“He made a swift escape out the back way about half an hour ago along with a couple of others” the man confirmed nervously “His group have some secret headquarters

building somewhere in the City, I don't know where. The rest of the cabinet defected to your side after the Prime Minister turned up on the BBC.”

“You always go around with your other sidekick” the Commander remarked “Where is he?” he asked.

“Around here somewhere” the man confirmed “But he is way too dedicated to the cause to surrender easily.”

“Tracy escort this gentlemen to a place of safety” the Commander requested.

“With pleasure” Tracy agreed as she stepped forward and took the man into custody before leaving the Cabinet Office with him.

The Commander proceeded on alone towards the doors that led to the Prime Minister's office which he proceeded to kick open before entering to find the room empty but on the desk was a note leaning against the desk lamp which the Commander went over to and picked up.

“Better luck next time” the Commander read from the note “Cute...” he remarked but before he could do anything else, the other missing associate appeared from the shadows behind him and hit the Commander over the head with a piece of wood, sending him to the floor.

“Traitor to the nation!” the man declared manically as he raised his impromptu weapon above his head only for the Commander to draw his sword and swing around to impact on the man's legs forcing him to drop the piece of wood.

“Now that wasn't very nice” the Commander remarked as he got back on his feet “Come on then” he encouraged as he confronted the man with his sword “Let's see what you are made of?”

Outside in Downing Street where Bob and his team had now secured the area, the BBC reporter who had been covering events live from the Whitehall area for much of the afternoon was just beginning a piece live to camera with Number Ten in the background when there was a loud crash and the man who the Commander had been fighting came flying backwards from a first floor window and landed with a loud thump amid a shower of broken glass onto the surface of the street below.

“Never mess with me son” the Commander called wryly from the now open aperture of the first floor window as he looked down to the street below “It ain't worth it.”

“And as you can see” the reporter continued after looking behind her for a moment as she and the viewers watching her saw the concluding incident in the siege of Whitehall “the Security Services now have Downing Street back under their control for the first time in almost thirty hours.”

“What happened to him?” Tracy asked as she joined the Commander in the Prime Minister's office and looked out of the window at the body below.

“I think he decided to fly economy” the Commander remarked dryly “Shall we?” he suggested taking her arm in his before proceeding out of the office.

In the main hallway downstairs Tracy and the Commander met up with Bob and a couple of his team who had completed securing the area.

“Looks like the rest of them legged it” Bob remarked “I guess they used the fire fight in Whitehall as a cover for their escape.”

“Yes, but to where?” the Commander asked with a concerned look.

“Anyway Sir” Bob confirmed “We are all secure here, the Prime Minister can come back anytime he wants to.”

“Thank you Bob” the Commander responded “Good work, all of you.”

“Couldn't have done it without you two” he responded.

“Lima Mike Zero One to Victor Papa X-Ray One” Tracy called into her radio as she and the Commander stepped outside onto the front doorstep of Number Ten “You can bring him in now Sis.”

“Roger that” Jennifer responded over the radio “Coming in now.”

“Do you realise that until the PM gets here we are in charge of the country?” Tracy remarked as together they looked across Downing Street at the assembling press on the other side of the road.

“That's scary” the Commander remarked “Just think of the damage we could do together?”

“Ah here he comes” Tracy confirmed.

“You are joining us here live in Downing Street” the BBC Reporter confirmed to the world “where as I speak the Prime Minister is about to arrive to retake official control of the Government and the nation.”

As she spoke, the ministerial escort car containing the Prime Minister approached with a heavy escort of Security Service patrol cars and motorcycle outriders which came to a stop outside Number Ten. A few moments of tense silence passed as Jennifer got out of the drivers seat before she opened the rear passenger door and out stepped the Prime Minister, still dressed in the same now rather battered suit he was wearing when the affair began the previous day.

“According to Security Service sources” the reporter continued as in the background the Prime Minister could be seen going up to Tracy and the Commander outside the door of Number Ten and greeting them both with warm handshakes “The vast majority of the illegal forces surrendered a short time ago when a counter strike of armed officers, army units and the Royal Air Force struck back and forced them to cease all hostilities.”

“Good evening” the Prime Minister declared as with Jennifer and another officer in close protection escort he proceeded across the road and stood before the press to deliver his speech, one which at several points during the last twenty four hours he thought he would never get the opportunity to make.

“In the last day and a half” he began with a clear authoritative but soothing tone “this country has been held to ransom, our system of justice and freedom trampled upon and disregarded as if it were a mere passing inconvenience by people who sought to abuse the law to gain power and influence. They did this through a cynical campaign of legal manipulation, coercion, threats and so called legal defensive violence.”

“It's over” the Prime Minister confirmed “Effective immediately all legislation and orders imposed by the illegal temporary administration is rendered null and void as are all loopholes and secret clauses in existing legislation that they had put in place over a period of years in order to facilitate their revolution.”

“This nation owes a debt of thanks to those brave men and women of the Security Services, Army, Air Force, Intelligence Services and the many individuals who took a stand against this tyranny and dedicated their lives and futures over the last two days to defend this nation and its people no matter what the cost” the Prime Minister confirmed.

“That should get him re-elected with a landslide” Tracy remarked aside to the Commander as they watched from the doorway of Number Ten as the Prime Minister continued to speak to the nation.

"Oh I shouldn't worry" the Commander responded "The voting population of this country are a fickle bunch, a few months time all this will be forgotten and it will be back to the usual arguing about one penny on the basic rate of tax and what colour to dye the grass on the House of Commons lawn."

"Hello, looks like he has finished" Tracy remarked as they observed the Prime Minister conclude his speech, thank the press and then head back across the street towards them.

"Nice speech" the Commander remarked as he joined them in the door way.

"Thanks" the Prime Minister responded "Actually nice for a change to make a heart felt announcement that hasn't been scripted a week in advance by the damn Press Office."

"A democracy based on free speech working from pre-prepared announcements written by faceless minions" Tracy commented "There is irony for you."

"I believe we had an agreement?" the Prime Minister asked.

"We do" the Commander confirmed "And I think it is time someone got a very unpleasant surprise."

"De Wente?" Tracy asked.

"Exactly" the Commander confirmed "Prime Minister, do what you need to do here then Jennifer will collect you in half an hour from the back door."

"Until later then" the Prime Minister concluded "Good evening." With that he proceeded inside Number Ten whilst Tracy and the Commander set off arm in arm up Downing Street back towards Whitehall where despite the wreckage still lying around, there was the beginnings of some semblance of normality as people were returning to the streets to see for themselves the aftermath of what up until now they had only witnessed through the broadcast media.

"Strange" Tracy remarked as they emerged into Whitehall and looked around "Anyone would think the last twenty four hours had not happened."

"The status quo is restored" the Commander confirmed "The people are snuggled up safe and sound with their cups of tea and the cricket will go ahead uninterrupted and nine times out of ten that is all they want."

"Come on love" Tracy prompted "Lets get back."

"Indeed" the Commander agreed "There is still some pieces of housework to do before we can all retire to our beds."

The former Justice Minister de Wente remained just as she had since the previous evening, alone sitting in a simple metal chair in front of a small table on which was a plastic cup of water.

She had been in that room, isolated and alone for all this time and yet despite several sessions of interviews had not said anything beyond her name. At the same time she continued to remain totally unaware of what was happening in the world outside which meant she was soon in for something of a shock.

"Good evening Ms de Wente" the Commander declared as he entered the room carrying a newspaper "I understand you are not feeling very talkative?"

"Get stuffed" de Wente responded.

"Ah well never mind" the Commander responded "Perhaps you would care to talk to someone else?" he suggested.

"There is nothing you can do or say that will make me talk" de Wente responded with determination.

"Oh of course" the Commander remarked "You have been stuck in doors all day, perhaps you would care to read up on current events" he suggested as he put the first edition of the National Herald on the table in front of her.

"You have a good read and I will go and get someone who really wants to have a nice one to one with you" the Commander marked "Don't go away" he advised wryly before leaving the room.

Alone once again, de Wente's curiosity got the better of her and she leaned forward to read the front page of the newspaper which detailed the monumental events of the last twenty four hours.

As she became more engrossed in reading the story of events, de Wente was startled when she heard a familiar voice from the doorway.

"Hello" the Prime Minister called, silhouetted in the doorway before he calmly stepped forward into the light "Remember me?"

"Err..." de Wente responded in a suddenly imposed state of shock and confusion.

"Oh come now" the Prime Minister continued as the Commander came into the room and placed a chair in front of the table.

"You must remember me" the Prime Minister remarked as he sat down facing de Wente and leaned forward with a smile of implied menace "I'm the Prime Minister, you know the guy you and your traitorous colleagues tried to kill so they could have a ball on their little power trip."

"I don't know what you are talking about" de Wente responded calmly yet defiantly.

"Bollocks" the Prime Minister sharply responded "Take a look at the evidence, we have the files, we have the plans and we have that arms dealing git Devlin who at this very moment is helping us with our enquiries."

"Which roughly translated" the Commander remarked "means that at this moment he is somewhere around here with two hefty colleagues who are going to work on him with a pair of pliers and a hacksaw."

"You can't touch me" de Wente accused.

"You forget something" the Prime Minister remarked "Well two actually, first thanks to the efforts of your puppet masters you are officially and legally dead which means we can do what we damn well please with you and secondly I am the Prime Minister and my powers are limitless."

"Your bosses left you for dead" the Commander informed her "The way I see it you have nothing to owe them, so do yourself a favour and tell us where we will find them, otherwise I turn you over to the PM here and believe me he has even more scores to settle than me on this matter."

"Hmmp" de Wente responded "Your threats do not impress me gentlemen."

The Prime Minister simply looked across at the Commander who merely shrugged his shoulders, then suddenly and without warning de Wente found herself being grabbed roughly by the scruff of the neck by the Prime Minister, brought to her feet and slammed against the wall.

"I do not make threats Ms de Wente" the Prime Minister informed her directly.

“Is that what they call hands on Government?” the Commander pondered.

“So” the Prime Minister continued, releasing his grip just a little now that the main thrust of his point was made “This is what you are going to do, you are going to tell us everything you know about this sinister little group who you worked for, names, places, financial backers, don't leave anything out.”

At this point the Prime Minister brought de Wente back over to the chair whereupon she dropped back down onto it and snarled up back at him.

“Then when you have finished telling your story, I will personally decide whether to throw you to the wolves or hand you over to the Commander here who given the amount of danger you and your group have put him and most especially his wife in over the last couple of days will probably want to encase you in concrete and recycle you as an amusingly shaped sea defence boulder” the Prime Minister calmly informed her.

“Tough choice isn't it?” the Commander remarked with a sarcastic smile.

“All right” de Wente finally relented even though she did not like her choices one bit “It is a bitch being dead I will give you that much.”

“I know the feeling” the Commander agreed.

“Sir William Temple-Smythe was the front man” de Wente began “He did the up front public stuff, the real masters behind this are the central Phoenix Committee led by a man I only know as Brentwood.”

“And who else might I find on this 'committee' of which you speak?” the Commander asked.

“I don't know all the names” de Wente admitted “we were usually identified by membership numbers for reasons of internal security, however there are representatives and contacts from the Judiciary, House of Lords, several big business who provide the finance for the group in exchange for certain beneficial arrangements, even a couple of members of the media business.”

“Where might I find these people” the Commander asked “I would dearly love a little chat with them.”

“If I tell you, I want you to do something for me” de Wente responded “It is my only condition.”

“Let's hear it” the Commander called.

“When you find them, make sure their experience is deeply unpleasant” de Wente requested “In fact I would appreciate it if they died really slowly and painfully, after all it's the least they deserve after all the support and care they have shown me.”

The Commander looked across at the Prime Minister who nodded in agreement. “All right, you have a deal” the Commander agreed “Now where can I find them?”

“Their main headquarters are located in the old Great Eastern Hotel in Liverpool Street” de Wente informed him “In addition they have access to the facility you know as Epsilon III near Aylesbury which was to become their central operations centre if their plans had been successful.”

“Let me guess” the Commander remarked “They would have let the city burn down, blamed it on insurgents or whatever is the word of the week and then started building their new empire elsewhere?”

“Something like that” de Wente confirmed with a weak smile “However if you don't weed them all out and quickly before they go to ground, they will be back, maybe not in the same form or with the same plans but the aims will be the same even if the faces are different. You can never stop someone's thirst for power when it is so tantalisingly within reach, I know, I was there for a while.”

“Guard!” the Commander called back towards the door whereupon the duty officer in the interrogation block duly appeared “See that Ms de Wente is taken care of, made comfortable, food and drink, whatever she wants within reason.”

“Thank you” de Wente responded.

“Good night” the Commander declared before he and the Prime Minister left the room much to her relief.

“So you think she was telling the truth?” the Prime Minister asked as he and the Commander headed down the dark corridor towards the exit.

“I think so” the Commander responded “I can usually tell when someone is lying pretty easily, years of practice and being around politicians too much” he joked.

“Oh thanks...” the Prime Minister retorted.

“Anyway” the Commander looked at his old pocket watch “It is gone eleven o'clock and there is still much to do before we can all sleep absolutely sound in our beds tonight.”

“I won't be sleeping believe me” the Prime Minister admitted “My wife is planning to give me merry hell for what I have managed to put her through in the last day or two.”

“In which case I will leave you to prepare yourself for the onslaught” the Commander remarked “I have to go and find my wife, give her a huge hug and then insist she goes home and gets some sleep, believe me that won't be easy. Good night.”

“Oh this is merely a set back” Number Two declared from the top of the board room meeting table as his associates forming the Phoenix Committee group met in closed session at their Liverpool Street offices “We simply underestimated the support that

the National Security & Police Service could muster, we lost the battle for hearts and minds and that ladies and gentlemen was our only major slip up.”

“So you are saying we can try again?” Number Eight remarked.

“Our predecessors in the Omega Committee never gave up and they managed to secretly control elements of the Government successfully and largely undetected for almost fifteen years” Number Two confirmed as the door opened and in walked Temple-Smythe.

“Sorry I am late gentlemen” he apologised “Took the scenic route as for some bizarre reason I don’t seem to be too popular at the moment” he joked which raised a response of iconic laughter from his associates.

“We were just saying that whilst we were not totally successful this time around” Number Two confirmed “We overlooked the battle for the hearts and minds of the people, the iron fist in the velvet glove routine didn’t wash as sufficiently well as our best spin teams had predicted.”

“And where is our chief spin strategist at the moment?” Temple-Smythe asked looking around.

“Let us say he retired shortly before suffering a most unfortunate accident involving a large lorry and a twenty foot deep ditch about an hour ago” Number Two calmly confirmed.

“Ouch...” Temple-Smythe remarked as he took a seat at the table.

“Next time we play it differently” Number Two declared “We remove from play those key players who could go up against us in advance, clear the field for an unobstructed and direct approach without any unplanned hindrance.”

“Sounds good to me” Temple-Smythe agreed as he was passed a drink which he readily accepted and took a swig of.

“Of course our organisation in its various forms has always relied upon our members being able to go about the world with a certain air of anonymity about them” Number Two calmly continued as two of the large broad shouldered security guards walked calmly into the room and proceeded to stand behind Temple-Smythe.

“We must be one of the few organisations to not have a website these days” Temple-Smythe commented “I guess there are times when it pays not to advertise.”

“Indeed” Number Two agreed “Unfortunately we cannot afford to have our members, even the longest serving and most esteemed ones to be wandering around in the public gaze once they have been identified by the authorities.”

“I guess that means I am on the first flight to Cuba in the morning?” Temple-Smythe asked however before he could say anything more, one of the two men standing behind him leaned forward and restrained him in his seat before the other produced a silenced weapon and shot him in the side of the head.

“Not exactly” Number Two calmly responded as the lifeless figure of Temple-Smythe was released and fell forward onto the table “However you haven't exactly ceased to become useful just yet.”

With that, the rest of the committee calmly started to rise from their seats whilst Number Two reached into his jacket pocket and produced an envelope which he handed to one of the two guards.

“See this is found on the body when our friends from the Security Services arrive” Number Two informed them “The cars leave in two minutes from the back door, I trust you will not be late?”

“Yes Sir” the lead guard confirmed before Number Two followed his colleagues out of the board room.

“Tracy?” the Commander called as he opened his office door only to find her fast asleep on the couch and Jack sitting in the chair behind the Commander's desk equally as sound asleep as his adopted mother nearby.

“Ah...” the Commander realised and crept quietly in, walking softly so as not to wake either of them up as he went over to his desk and trying very hard not to make too much noise, unlocked the desk drawer in order to extract from it his spare gun, the old six shot service revolver he still kept plus the ammunition for it which he proceeded to put in his uniform tunic pocket before quietly closing the drawer again.

“Is that you love?” Tracy wearily asked as she rolled over and looked across at the Commander who came over to her and kissed her on the forehead.

“Yes its me” the Commander confirmed “You go back to sleep, I have to take care of a few loose ends.”

“Do you want me to come with you?” Tracy asked.

“No” the Commander responded quietly “You go back to sleep, I think you have done enough for today, this is something I alone have to take care of and I think it would be best if you knew as little about it as possible.”

“I don't have to tell you to be careful do I?” Tracy enquired.

“Of course not” the Commander confirmed before kissing her again “Rest now, I'll see you in a while, I love you.”

“I love you too” Tracy responded as the Commander left, giving her a wink before quietly closing the door behind him.

“I spy with my little eye something beginning with D” Bob declared to his colleagues as they rested in the staff canteen after what had seemed a day and a half of non stop operation.

“Digestives” one of his colleagues responded, pointing towards the fairly heavily raided packet of biscuits on the table where collectively they had been drinking coffee and eating for the last half an hour.

“Divorce” Bob joked “At least I reckon that is what my wife will be filing for since I have been out on duty for forty eight hours non stop.”

“At least your wife is waiting at home for you” Fuller responded having returned from his long stint at King William Street mainly to find something to eat “Jennifer is working through the night transporting scared ministers of state around the country.”

“Welcome to the National Security Service” Bob remarked “It's murder on relationships” he commented just as the Commander came in to the canteen “Well with one notable exception I suppose” he added.

“Evening ladies and gentlemen” the Commander declared as he got a tea from the machine before joining them at their table “Bob, as a friend I want you to know, you look like hell.”

“Why thank you very much Sir” Bob responded with a chuckle and raised his cup of coffee to his superior officer.

“So why don't you go home?” the Commander asked.

“Well we were just filling in young Mr Fuller here on our war stories” Bob confirmed “You missed all the action laddie.”

“Let's just say I had a constant feed of the unedited highlights” Fuller admitted “And it sure as hell didn't look pretty.”

“You can say that again” Bob agreed “but we did our duty, our bit for Queen, Country and the Service.”

“Still” the Commander remarked mournfully “we lost some good people as well.”

“Aye we did that” Bob agreed “Is there any chance we could do something about that I wonder?”

“Maybe” the Commander confirmed “I am just waiting on one piece of news and then if you are interested in a little unofficial overtime?”

“Possibly...” Bob confirmed, a feeling that looking around the Commander could see was reflected by the others present.

“Ah, this looks like what I was waiting for” the Commander remarked as Commander Cassini of the specialist plain clothes surveillance squad appeared through the canteen entrance and came directly over to them.

“Good evening Sir” Cassini announced “As you suspected, three mini vans containing approximately two dozen individuals departed from the back door of the former Great Eastern Hotel building about two minutes ago.”

“Right on time” the Commander declared as he checked his old pocket watch “If I had to credit these nasty pieces of work with one thing, they are nothing if not exceedingly punctual.”

“Sound's like you have something special planned Sir” Bob commented.

“Call it a surprise leaving party” the Commander responded “Care for an invite, it is going to be a hell of a show.”

“Ok boys” Bob called to his officers “Saddle up, we have a party to gate crash.”

“Commander Cassini” the Commander called up to the tall black plain clothes officer “Have Sir Richard Crowthorne and David Collins meet us outside the Broad Street entrance of Liverpool Street Station in twenty minutes.”

“Yes Sir” Cassini confirmed before leaving.

“Ever had one of those days when you think that at last you can go home and get some sleep and the next thing you know the telephone rings just as you are about to leave the office” Collins remarked “You waiver for a few moments wondering do I or don't I answer it, then you decide that duty calls, you answer it and the next thing you know you are freezing your arse off in the pouring rain for no readily explainable reason when you should be asleep in bed snuggled up to the wife?”

“What can I say” Sir Richard remarked knowingly as they looked out from beneath the entrance canopy of the Broad Street entrance to Liverpool Street Underground Station “Welcome to the world of MI5.”

“I am sure it was supposed to more glamorous than this” Collins remarked “At least that is what it claims on the website.”

“I don't suppose you know what this is about by any chance?” Sir Richard asked.

“No idea” Collins admitted “However given what has occurred so far this week, nothing surprises me anymore.”

“Maybe we are about to find out” Sir Richard motioned ahead as four Security Service vans pulled in to a stop in front of them, from the lead one of which alighted the Commander who went over and met them.

“Evening” the Commander called “Nice weather for it.”

“It's almost morning” Sir Richard pointed out “Don't you ever sleep Commander?” he asked.

“Not when there is unfinished business to be seen to” the Commander confirmed “Follow me gentlemen” he duly led the way with Bob and his team along with some additional officers they had managed to round up on the way over heading along the length of Liverpool Street to the main entrance of the former Great Eastern Hotel.

“What do you want us to do with anyone we find?” Bob asked as he and his team prepared to enter the building.

“Anyone you find is to be detained alive if possible” the Commander confirmed as he too drew his own weapon “I can't say I am too worried about how damaged they are as long as their mouth still works.”

“Got it” Bob confirmed.

“You lead and work your way through the building” the Commander instructed “I will follow you with these gentlemen when you have found what I think you will find.”

“Sounds intriguing” Sir Richard remarked “Do you know something we don't?” he asked.

“Call it a hunch” the Commander confirmed as they stood back and watched as Bob led his officers into the building “an educated one mind but still just a hunch.”

For the next five minutes there were various noises and calls over the Commander's radio as Bob's officers made their way systematically through the building, searching floor by floor and room by room.

"Armed officers, nobody move!" Bob called as he and his team entered the board room on the top floor.

Just as per the rest of the building, it was unoccupied but unlike everywhere else there was something there of interest.

"All units report" Bob requested of the rest of his officers.

"Nobody home boss" came the response.

"Ok then, make sure the building is secure" Bob confirmed "Err Commander, whatever happened it looks like we missed it but we do have something you ought to see in the top floor board room."

"I'm on my way up" the Commander confirmed whereupon he, Collins and Sir Richard proceeded inside and headed up to the top floor.

"Sorry Sir" Bob apologised as he met the Commander and the others in the corridor "I am afraid whoever was here has flown."

"No apologies necessary" the Commander confirmed "on the contrary I was expecting it."

"But were you expecting this?" Bob asked as he opened the board room door and showed them inside.

"Ah..." the Commander remarked as they came across Temple-Smythe's lifeless body, gunshot wound clearly visible to the side of his head, a gun lying on the table and an envelope sitting near his left hand.

"Well, well, well" Sir Richard remarked as he leaned forward and examined the body "Couldn't have happened to a more deserving fellow."

"And he had the courtesy to leave a note as well" Collins took out a handkerchief and used it to protect his fingers whilst he picked it up "and personally addressed as well" he added showing the others the wording on the front.

"For the attention of the Regional Administrator General" the Commander read the neatly handwritten addressing on the front "Guess I had better open it."

"It is probably a law suit for being politically inconvenient" Sir Richard joked.

"I hereby state I acted alone" the Commander summarised the contents of the letter "There was no others involved in my actions, blah, blah, blah..."

"And thus is provided a neat and tidy ending" Collins remarked "They assume that with the apparent suicide of the public face of this little coup it will be case closed and we all walk away as happy as Larry."

"Hence the reason I went through with little charade" the Commander declared "Gives the late Sir Temple-Smythe's former colleagues a nice cosy false sense of security, more so if as I suspect one of their minions reported the arrival of myself and you two on the premises."

"I had better go and prepare one of my special bullshit press releases" Collins remarked.

"Make it dazzling" the Commander suggested "The more 'it's all over' it contains from 'credible' sources the better."

"Lies are my business" Collins confirmed with a wry smile.

"In the meantime gentlemen if you will excuse me" the Commander declared "I have another appointment. Goodnight."

The three minivans were signalled straight through the main gates of the Epsilon Three facility by the guard on duty without question before they proceeded up the gravel driveway to the main entrance into the complex.

"I do hope someone has put the kettle on" Number Two commented as he alighted from the front of the lead vehicle and led the others numbering over two dozen individuals inside.

Quickly they proceeded down to the underground Emergency Operations Centre and once inside, distributed themselves around the large table with as was customary Number Two at the head.

"Well firstly I must apologise for the impromptu accommodation" Number Two declared as everyone found their seats "Unfortunately our City offices needed to be sacrificed for our esteemed former colleague's farewell."

"Pity" Number Eight remarked "It was rather nice, certainly more handy for the trains than this dingy hole."

"It may be a dingy hole" Number Two admitted "However it does have a couple of unique advantages, safety and security for one plus the rent is cheap, we will need to make use of this to regroup and redefine our efforts for the future."

"There is that I suppose" Number Eight agreed.

Outside and above ground, the heavy guard of private security guards on the gate and patrolling the surrounding perimeter were struggling against the heavy rain that was lashing down which also had the secondary effect of luring them into a false sense of security as they thought that there was no way that even if anyone knew about the place and those within it that they would try something in this foul weather at that time of night.

They were soon to be proved wrong.

The guards patrolling the perimeter fences were the first to be intercepted as silently and without warning, heavily camouflaged men appeared from deep in the undergrowth and swiftly despatched them without raising so much as a whisper that may have alerted the others.

Unaware of the fate that had just befallen their colleagues, the guards on the gate continued to remain on station at the only vehicular access to the site and looked up when they saw vehicle headlights approaching them down the long rough track that led to the site from the main road.

"Are we expecting anyone else?" the leader of the guards asked his colleagues.

"Possibly" one of them responded as he used a torch, swung from side to side and a raised hand to indicate to the approaching vehicle to slow and stop at the gate "This has all been rather ad-hoc to be honest."

"Stop right there please" the leader of the guards called whereupon the white van came to a halt.

"Sorry we are late mate" the driver called after lowering the window "Traffic has been murder what with the weather and all."

“You should try standing around out in it” the guard remarked but before he or his colleagues could say any more they were overpowered by camouflaged military men who emerged from the dark shadows and rendered them unconscious in an instant.

“Nighty night” the driver remarked as he removed the black jacket to reveal a Security Service uniform beneath, the individual in question being Commander Greenway who then reached for a radio that was on the dashboard.

“Gatecrasher to Alpha One” he called “The front door is open.”

“We still have an extensive network of well placed contacts and sympathisers” Number Two remarked as the committee's discussion continued “Obviously in the recent crisis some have had a few confidence problems which is understandable for those who I would fairly describe as weak of heart and spirit for the true fight ahead but as we regenerate and refine our ideals over the next few months, I am confident that they will come back to us and bring more like minded and resourceful individuals into the fold.”

As Number Two paused for a moment during his rousing declaration to his associates, they all became aware of the sound of approaching footsteps, just one individual whose solid soled shoes were making an ominous stepping noise on the hard surface of the main corridor leading to the board room where they were.

There were looks of curiosity and concern from the group as the footsteps drew nearer and the mystery of who it was approaching deepened until the shadow of a figure could be seen projecting into the room through the open doors and then the silhouette of an individual as he stopped on the threshold.

“Good evening” the Commander announced formally as he stepped into the room making for quite a dramatic entrance “Well morning really” he admitted as he checked his antique pocket watch “It is a pleasure to finally meet you all at last.”

“Well, Regional Administrator General or may I call you Commander?” Number Two responded with a raised eyebrow of surprise “This is an unexpected honour.”

“Oh the honour is all mine I think” the Commander remarked as he proceeded to pace around the perimeter of the table looking at each person seated at it in turn “Somehow I get the distinct impression I was not expected and certainly not welcome unlike the charade you arranged for us back at Liverpool Street, attended by the late Sir William Temple-Smythe?”

“Either you managed to make an incredibly lucky guess” Number Two commented “Or someone has been peeking through keyholes and slipping you our mail.”

“A little birdie told me where to find you” the Commander explained “I guessed correctly as it turned out that you would have an exit and foreclosure strategy that would involve the demise of Temple-Smythe and I can't say I am not happy to see the back of him but what you failed to take into account was I had an ace up my sleeve.”

“Ms de Wente isn't dead” Number Two concluded with a slightly resigned sigh.

“Give the man a gold star” the Commander confirmed as his pacing in a business like manner had now brought him full circle back to the head of the table where Number Two was about to get up.

“Ah, I don't think so laddie” the Commander warned the man, producing his ceremonial sword and bringing it to bear across Number Two's throat whereupon he relented and sat back down.

“Can't blame a man for trying” Number Two remarked “Anyway, you seem to have taken a very great risk to be here tonight so from that I can assume that there is at least some conversation involved?”

“Just popped in for a chat” the Commander confirmed as he resumed his pacing around the table keeping a constant eye on those around it some of whom were displaying some noticeable nervousness at his presence.

“You know that we are both on the same side when you boil our objectives down to bare facts” Number Two remarked “We both want what is best for our country, you could work with us.”

“Sit back and do nothing whilst you and your money laden influential friends turn this country from a free democracy into little more than a corporate monster issuing endless mission statements and moral directives whilst secretly using this as a cover whilst you and your friends sit back and count the money you have squandered from the taxpayer?” the Commander responded “All under the cloud of carefully stage managed false terrorist intelligence designed to scare the British public into accepting your way and beating down any and all forms of objection by hook, crook or the rule of the gun?”

“You misunderstand us completely” Number Two responded “Corporate and big money influence is going to take over democracy sooner or later anyway, we are just merely organising the process into a publicly digestible form so that the changeover of power control is as smooth and effective as possible.”

“Netting you and your friends a tidy profit in the process” the Commander added.

“No one believes in politicians or their parties let alone their policies anymore” Number Two confirmed “Money talks Commander and more money speaks louder than less, it makes the world go around and gets far more attention from the man in the street than any political no neck on a soap box bleating on about the impoverished voters of his constituency whilst he is secretly fiddling his expense accounts.”

“So you put your money where your mouth is and force your way into power by the usage of a bunch of rent-a-thugs supplied by one of the biggest and most ruthless arms dealers in the northern hemisphere” the Commander concluded.

“I think you will find that our supplier Mr Devlin is a clever and sympathetic entrepreneur who through well connected contacts has the ability to supply legitimate resources for the defence of our ideals and our goals” Number Two corrected the Commander but he was having none of it.

“Bollocks” the Commander retorted “Devlin is only interested in whoever has the biggest cheque book, if my lot offered him three million in cash tomorrow to supply us arms and men, illegal or otherwise he would ditch you lot and jump aboard in an instant but then again as you say money talks.”

“Unfortunately due to the interference of you and your associates who failed to believe in our true and proper cause” Number Two responded “Our contract with the unfortunate Mr Devlin appears to have been cancelled, never mind I am sure I will be able to find someone else to provide the necessary resources for us to continue our legitimate campaign.”

“I came here tonight for three reasons” the Commander declared “One, to formally tell you all and any of your scum bag associates that may still be out there that as of this minute you are out of business, I am closing you down for good. Two, I have a personal rule that anyone who threatens my country, my Service and worst of all as far as you are concerned any member of my family, in particular my wife get the really special treatment and three, I have a message from your old pal de Wente” he leaned forward to Number Two's ear so that he got the message clearly and precisely “You are going to die.”

“In which case you had better bring her here and we can discuss this amicably” Number Two responded.

“Sorry” the Commander responded “I am beyond amicable now, indeed I think it is fairly safe to say that much like an awful lot of people who you have affected with your bone head power trip in the last few days, I am actually very thoroughly pissed off with you.”

“I am sorry you feel that way” Number Two responded not that he really cared though.

“It stops, here, tonight, right now” the Commander confirmed “Now I know that much like the proverbial bindweed, greedy morons such as yourselves will pop up again one day and try something once more but as far as your little clique is concerned it is game over and I need to issue a warning to anyone else who may try something like this in future, I'm watching and so are a lot of my associates. Two can play at the simple game of under hand back channel manipulation.”

“An ideology as large and powerful as the one that we support can't be simply buried and forgotten about” Number Two remarked “We have been and will always be here.”

“Then I shall always know where to find you” the Commander responded “I'll leave you to think about that for a little while as I attend to another pressing matter, oh and if you have any notions about making an escape, don't bother as I have my people and some friends from other agencies spread all around the complex with orders to shoot to kill anyone who exits this building that isn't me.”

“You can't kill our dreams Commander” Number Two warned “It may not be me or any of my friends here next time but make no mistake we will return, bigger, better and anyone who gets in our way won't have the time to strike back.”

“Good night” the Commander declared, closing the door on his way out.

Once the board room door was closed, the Commander calmly proceeded back up the dimly lit corridor, the footsteps from his solid soled shoes echoing all around until he reached the large metal blast doors that separated the lower part of the complex from the outside world.

Once through the blast doors, he turned and pulled the lever which closed them behind him with a firm clunk as the two halves of the door met in the middle and sealed tight. Then without further consideration he pulled his faithful old revolver from its holster and fired all six shots into the control panel for the door.

“Whoops...” the Commander mocked as he emptied the spent cartridges onto the floor before reloading and then holstering his weapon and calmly walking away, proceeding through to the main entrance area where he picked up an umbrella that was lying on the side before heading out into the rain outside.

With the calmness of a man going for a walk, the Commander proceeded across the parking area in front of the main entrance to the building complex and down the driveway until some four hundred metres away he came to and got inside the front passenger seat of an Army Land Rover.

“Morning Major” the Commander greeted the military man “Fancy meeting you here” he remarked knowingly.

“Prime Minister reckoned I should take the boys on some night time exercises” the Major calmly explained as they looked ahead toward the distant complex “Apparently he is worried we have all these old decommissioned Defence Ministry buildings lying around and we are not doing anything with them.”

“What did he suggest?” the Commander asked “Target practice?”

“Actually now you come to mention it” the Major confirmed as he calmly produced a remote control detonator from his pocket, primed the switch and then pressed the button whereupon a sizeable quantity of demolition charges were detonated, largely destroying the complex in an explosion that would be heard and seen for miles around.

“Nice work” the Commander remarked as they watched the debris from the explosion rain down with the dying away of the final echoes.

“Thank you” the Major responded “I understand that the Phoenix Committee were fond of making big statements of warning not to mess with them, I guess two can play at that game.”

“Indeed” the Commander agreed “But they will be back one day, nothing stays buried forever.”

“That's odd” Jack remarked as he read the late afternoon edition of the Evening Standard on his way back from school on the westbound District Line service.

“What's odd?” Megan sat alongside him asked as the train left Embankment.

“Apparently the new Joint Chief of Defence Staff, Major Ronald Ford has as his first duty in the post been forced to humbly apologise after a night firing exercise in the hills south of Aylesbury during which a disused military facility was decommissioned by use of explosives woke up half of Buckinghamshire at two o'clock in the morning” Jack read from the paper.

“That must have been a hell of a bang” Megan remarked.

“I'll say” Jack agreed. Of course he realised the significance of the report which had been carefully managed somewhere along the line to legitimately explain the deliberate destruction of the Epsilon Three facility but chose not to divulge anything further for fear of giving the real game away.

“So where are we going then?” Megan asked “You said it would be a surprise.”

“If I told you, it wouldn't be a surprise though would it?” Jack responded.

“Well no, I suppose not” Megan admitted as the train slowed for its next stop at Westminster.

“This is us” Jack indicated and rose to his feet with Megan duly following still not knowing where he was taking her or why.

They alighted from the six car train of recently refurbished 'D' type stock as soon as the doors opened upon the westbound District and Circle Line platforms of Westminster Underground Station before Jack led Megan up via the staircase to the ticket hall located beneath Portcullis House and to the ticket barriers where as they passed through with their concessionary Oyster Cards, Megan noticed something.

“What's that?” she asked Jack seeing a identity card with his picture on it tucked into the opposite side of his Oyster Card wallet.

“Oh this?” Jack passed it to her “That's is my security pass for New Scotland Yard, I was told actually I ought to show it to you as apparently you would be impressed.”

“I am” Megan confirmed before handing it back to him. They headed across the ticket hall to the main exit where waiting for them was Tracy.

“Ah there you are” Tracy remarked knowingly as she saw the two approach “I was beginning to wonder if you were coming. You must be Megan?” she asked.

“Yes” Megan duly confirmed “It is an honour to meet you Divisional Commander Caverner.”

“Oh really?” Tracy responded as they duly headed out of the main entrance of the station and down into Parliament Square.

“We were doing positive female role models in Citizenship Class this afternoon” Megan explained to Tracy's slight bemusement as they never had anything like that in her school days.

“Don't ask me” Jack admitted “I was in woodwork class at the time trying to hammer a bit of four by two into a door wedge and failing miserably.”

“Well anyway” Megan continued to explain “We had a bit of a discussion and thought that after your performance yesterday with all that was going on and how you presented yourself to the public through the media, you are positive role model to young girls looking to achieve better standards in life.”

“Thank you” Tracy responded “Wow...”

“Don't tell me you want to be a Security Officer when you grow up?” Jack asked with a slight hint of concern.

“No I think I will be a lawyer” Megan thought for a moment “The pay is better and you are far less likely to get shot at.”

“You haven't seen my husband's attitude towards lawyers” Tracy remarked as they turned right and proceeded into Parliament Street, now largely back to its normal traffic jammed self only twenty four hours after the extraordinary events of the previous day with pedestrian and vehicular traffic passing along it as if nothing had happened.

They carried on down Parliament Street and on into Whitehall until they reached the entrance to Downing Street where the wrought iron security gates, badly damaged in yesterday's incidents were in the process of being demolished and the remains loaded into the back of a skip to be taken away.

“Downing Street?” Megan asked as she peered around the corner into the most famous street in the City.

“You said you wanted to have tea in Ten Downing Street” Jack confirmed “I know you were joking but it just happens I bumped into this chap that lives here yesterday.”

“Wow...” Megan remarked with a slightly stunned look.

“Shall we?” Tracy asked the two kids “We shouldn't keep our guests waiting.”

“By all means” Jack agreed allowing Tracy to lead them past the wrecked remains of the gates and the Security Service officers on routine guard duty who acknowledged them as they passed on through and then headed along the street to the entrance to Number Ten itself where the Commander was waiting for them on the doorstep.

“Happy birthday Jack” the Commander declared “All right it's a couple of days late but it's the thought that counts” he remarked before pushing open the door of Number Ten to allow Jack to escort Megan inside, both of them rather stunned.

“Well I have to say” Tracy admitted as she and the Commander proceeded arm in arm inside “This is the most unusual birthday party I have ever been to.”

“Especially with this guest list” the Commander remarked as they followed the two youngsters through to the gardens out the back where the opportunity of much improved weather was used to hold this little celebratory gathering outside.

“Commander, Maam” Sir Richard Crowthorne greeted them as they arrived where at the table the Prime Minister himself was in charge of pouring the tea.

“Sir Richard” the Commander responded “You will be delighted to know that the National Administrator General is still on holiday in Canada but passes on his thanks for your assistance in removing his two gate crashers.”

“Does he know anything of what has occurred around here the last couple of days?” Sir Richard asked as Tracy left the two men to talk and joined the little tea party.

“My opposite number from Ontario filled him in over a particularly intense wine tasting session this morning” the Commander confirmed “I don't think it has fully settled in yet though.”

“There you go” the Prime Minister declared as he brought over his cup of tea already saturated with the Commander's usual four sugars.

“Thanks” the Commander responded “Tell me” he asked taking the Prime Minister off to one side “Can I safely assume that little firework display in deepest darkest Buckinghamshire early this morning was your little contribution to the recent crisis?”

“It seemed the least I could do after all the kindness Temple-Smythe and his loony committee friend showed us and the good people of this country” the Prime Minister agreed.

“Yes well” the Commander confirmed “I for one will certainly not be shedding any tears at their departure that is for certain.”

“Do you think someone will try something like this again one day?” the Prime Minister asked with clear concern.

“As long as the corridors of power continue to foster the old human traits of greed and the hunger for power, money and influence then yes” the Commander confirmed with regret “One day someone will try again, probably a different approach, certainly different faces but we will be here again.”

“I want you to promise me” the Prime Minister requested with sincerity “that you and those who you trust implicitly will keep watch and make sure that if such a darkness ever threatens again, you will do what is right and necessary.”

"When I joined this service at the tender age of eighteen" the Commander informed him "I like my colleagues took an oath to protect this nation and its people from evil no matter what the cost. Rest assured Prime Minister, I will do my duty for as long as I am alive."

Sir Richard then joined the two men and could instantly tell from the serious looks that the Prime Minister also wanted to speak to him on a serious matter as well.

"Why do I get the feeling there is something heading in my direction?" Sir Richard asked candidly.

"Sir Richard" the Prime Minister addressed him directly "I am aware that without the unofficial services of your good self and your network of contacts, this crisis may never have been resolved."

"Just doing my bit" Sir Richard confirmed "Unofficially of course."

"I wanted to ask" the Prime Minister inquired "Would you consider making it official?"

"Keep talking" Sir Richard prompted, intrigued by what the Prime Minister seemed to be suggesting.

"If I could get you the finance and some suitable accommodation" the Prime Minister explained "I would like you to put together a clandestine official investigation team, responsible for keeping tabs on those who choose to operate from within, behind or even above the law."

"Autonomous operation outside the normal chains of command?" Sir Richard asked.

"Completely independent" the Prime Minister confirmed "You only report to myself or the Commander and then only if you should find something that needs to be nipped in the bud before it develops into something nasty like what we have just dealt with, anything else you and those under your command who you select will have a free reign."

"Sounds like it could be fun" Sir Richard remarked after a few moments thought.

"Don't forget to get a large emblem etched in marble on the floor in main reception" the Commander joked.

"All right" Sir Richard agreed "You have a deal" he duly shook hands with the Prime Minister to seal the agreement as the Commander played the witness.

"Very well" the Prime Minister confirmed "Put your team together, pick a nice office somewhere in Docklands and I'll quietly push through the financial paperwork."

"Ah you never wanted to retire anyway did you old friend" the Commander remarked with a knowing grin.

"No I guess I didn't" Sir Richard agreed with a chuckle.

"Thank you, both of you" the Prime Minister responded with sincere gratitude "Come on, we are missing the party."

"That we are" the Commander confirmed "Come on, let's get in there before someone snaffles all the cake."

"Absolutely" the Prime Minister agreed as the three men returned to the tea party where Tracy was duly providing the impromptu entertainment.

"Whilst I have the three of you together" the Prime Minister informed Tracy, Jack and the Commander "I am issuing an executive order, as of now the three of you are on holiday for the next week."

"But..." the Commander was about to protest.

"It is a direct order" the Prime Minister insisted "Jointly signed by myself, the head of the United Nation's Security Council and several other notable individuals who all feel as I do that you have done your bit for Queen and country well above and beyond the call of duty and it is time you three had your first proper weekend together as a family."

"Well..." the Commander commented, clearly wavering "The thing is the last time I had some time off all hell broke loose and I wound up having to come straight back to the office again."

"Sir Richard can sit in whilst you three are away" the Prime Minister confirmed "At least take the weekend off?" he suggested.

"I think it is a great idea" Tracy declared "and if something does break, I can always come back on the Monday."

"All right" the Commander agreed.

"Lovely" Jack remarked "So what are we going to do this weekend then?" he asked.

"Oh don't worry" the Commander reassured him and Tracy "I am sure I can come up with something you will enjoy. I was your age too once you know."

"Enjoy your weekend then" Sir Richard confirmed "Don't worry, I am sure everything will be nice and quiet for a bit."

"Hmmm" Tracy mused with a wry smile "I don't suppose I could have that in writing could I?"

To Be Continued.....

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