

St. James's Park

Security Novels Series Episode XXI
The Ixion Trilogy - Part II



John M Upton

The Episodes of the Security Novels Series:

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

Coming Soon:

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

Official Website:

<http://www.securitynovels.co.uk>



***Search ‘Security Novels Series’
on Facebook***

Alternatively, you can contact the author at:

jmupton2000@yahoo.co.uk

This novel is supplied free of charge to anyone who wishes to read it, however if you would like to make a donation to production and website costs, then please send them via PayPal to the email address shown above.

Thank you.

**© 2022 – John M Upton
All Rights Reserved.**

St. James's Park

As the train travelled over the River Thames and on towards South London, the heavy chuffing of the Bullied Light Pacific steam locomotive working hard at the front, Tracy looked out of the carriage window at the view passing outside and at her reflection just visible in the glass.

Sat opposite her was Sir Richard Crowthorne who was watching her carefully, a mixture of personal sadness and concern for her clearly portrayed in his expression and body language.

Tracy glanced away from the window for a moment and looked back at Sir Richard before returning to the outside view again.

“Nothing’s the same anymore...” she remarked mournfully.

Two Weeks Earlier

“Central Control Room, Duty Operations Commander Anderson” was the formal answer given to the ringing telephone on the main console of the Control Room at New Scotland Yard.

The demeanour of Anderson quickly changed from professional calm and collectiveness to one of urgency and deep concern as soon as the caller began to pass their message which saw him quickly grab a pen and begin to note down details.

“Got it” he then called before quickly pressing a red button on the desk in front of him.

“Code One” he then called out “Confirmed coded warning, device on platform level, Chancery Lane Underground Station, detonation time thirty minutes.”

“What have we got?” Divisional Chief Superintendent Tracy Caverner asked as she quickly entered the Control Room with her husband, the National Administrator General, better known as ‘The Commander’ alongside her.

“Coded warning phoned simultaneously to us, the BBC and The Times newspaper a couple of moments ago” Anderson confirmed.

“Where?” the Commander asked.

“Chancery Lane tube station, thirty minutes” Anderson passed the details over.

“Scramble the Bomb Squad” Tracy instructed “Alert the Transport Division lads and get everyone we have got in the area down there ASAP.”

“That’s the third bomb warning this month” the Commander remarked with a concerned look.

“The last two were duds” Tracy reminded him, “The trouble is our luck is going to run out sooner or later.”

“London Underground has confirmed all Central Line trains halted at Holborn and St. Paul’s and the station evacuation is well underway” Anderson then called.

“Anderson” the Commander called “Have the Transport Division assigned an Officer in Charge on site yet?” he asked.

“First officers are arriving on scene now, plus some of our lads who were in the area are cordoning off and assisting with the evacuation” Anderson confirmed “Assigned Transport Division lead officer showing on the system as Lima Tango Nine Nine Three.”

“Uh oh...” The Commander wryly responded whilst Tracy knowingly rolled her eyes upwards.

“Oh, for Christ’s sake!” Lieutenant Jack Regent of the Transport Division called as soon as he arrived in amidst the chaotic scene at the street level entrance to Chancery Lane Underground Station where the area was in the process of being evacuated and cordoned off.

“Well, this has degenerated into an absolute circus” Lieutenant Connor Shelby called as he joined Jack from the patrol car, having to raise his voice over the sound of numerous sirens in the immediate area.

“Control from Lima Tango Nine Nine Three” Jack called into his radio as he and Shelby approached the station entrance “We are on site at Chancery Lane and it is utter chaos” he called, “Can we get some Met Plod to sort out the traffic above ground and while you are about it, can someone confirm the trains have been stopped?” he then asked.

“Met Division are sending everything they got in the area in support and TfL have just confirmed all trains stopped eastbound and westbound” came the confirmation as Jack and Shelby ducked beneath the cordon tape that was stretched across the entrance and headed down the steps into the ticket hall located beneath the street.

“Thank you” Jack responded, “Anyone seen the Station Supervisor?” he then called as they passed through the open ticket barriers.

“Over here mate!” one of the station staff called.

“Lieutenant Jack Regent” Jack introduced himself, brandishing his warrant card “Have we confirmed the station is fully evacuated?” he asked.

“Just the staff left now Lieutenant” the Station Supervisor confirmed.

“Lovely, cheers” Jack responded, “You guys head out, we’ll take it from here.”

“It’s all yours mate” the Station Supervisor readily agreed before he and his staff departed.

“Right, where is this alleged device?” Jack then asked.

“Eastbound platform, underneath a bench at the far end apparently” Shelby confirmed “and the Bomb Squad are still at least twenty minutes away.”

“Let me guess, stuck in traffic?” Jack asked.

“Usual story...” Shelby responded.

“In which case, I guess it’s down to us then” Jack remarked “Come on” he then motioned towards the escalator before heading off with Shelby following a short distance behind.

Down on the eastbound platform, the two officers’ footsteps echoed loudly throughout the deserted tunnels and passageways as they proceeded to the far end where beneath the furthest bench, something could be seen underneath in the shadows.

“What do you reckon, device or someone forgotten their shopping?” Shelby asked.

“Two false alarms so far” Jack remarked as he knelt down and proceeded to look underneath the bench “and I haven’t had breakfast yet so the law of averages says this one could be the real deal.”

“Sir Richard warned me there would be moments like this...” Shelby wryly commented.

“Okay, let’s take a look at you” Jack declared as he took out a small screwdriver from his inside tunic pocket and proceeded to use the tip to probe the partially open top of the black plastic carrier bag.

“Please tell me it’s somebody’s shopping” Shelby called as he looked on apprehensively.

“Unless whoever this bag belongs to has visited the local electrical components wholesaler then I am afraid not” Jack confirmed “I can see wires, some sort of digital display and what looks like a mobile phone.”

“Uh-oh...” Shelby responded.

“Any word on the Bomb Squad?” Jack then asked as he shuffled back from underneath the bench and with Shelby's help, got back to his feet.

“Still stuck in traffic” Shelby confirmed.

“Great!” Jack responded as he looked up and saw the CCTV camera pointing down towards them “Well at least we got it on tape I suppose” he motioned towards it.

It was then that a bleeping suddenly began, echoing ominously all around the deserted platform.

“Ah...” Jack remarked “I think we had better run...”

Jack and Shelby made a swift dash for the far end of the platform just as the bleeping became louder before with a sudden soft green flash, the bag detonated sending out a big cloud of smoke.

“Is that it?” Shelby asked as the cloud of green smoke dissipated throughout the platform tunnel.

“I do hope so” Jack replied as he too watched the smoke dissipate “If this is one of Lord Chaos’ minions’ little jokes, let’s hope they don’t get any more serious than this.”

Shelby checked his radio at that moment when a faint message came through and he rolled his eyes upwards.

“Let me guess, the Bomb Squad has just turned up?” Jack asked with a hint of sarcasm.

“Pulling up outside now” Shelby confirmed as he and Jack began to head back up the stairs towards the exit.

“Ah well, better late than never” Jack responded as he checked his watch.

“Coming through!!” came the call from the station entrance as the Bomb Squad team entered the ticket office area and pushed through the barriers where, on their way down the escalators they met Jack and Shelby coming up the other way.

“What time do you call this?” Jack semi-jokingly called out “It’s already gone off!”

“Huh?” Georgie Lewis, the recently appointed Divisional Commander of the Bomb Squad called as she and her team came to a halt on the adjacent escalator directly opposite the two officers.

“It was a smoker” Jack confirmed “Green of course...”

“Great...” Lewis despondently replied, “Anything left for us?”

“Far end, eastbound platform, under the bench” Shelby called.

“Probably not much left of it by now but there may be some forensic evidence to scoop up and put in a very small plastic bag” Jack added.

“I’ll see what I can find” Lewis confirmed.

“In the meantime,” Jack then remarked as he checked his watch again “I have a driving test to do.”

The Commander looked up from his desk and smiled when he saw Tracy put her head around the connecting door from her office next door.

“Bomb Squad just called” Tracy confirmed with a smile “Device detonated at Chancery Lane was just a smoker, no chemical nasties, no damage, just green smoke.”

“So, I guess we can chalk another one up to that nut job Orbison then?” The Commander commented.

“It looks like it” Tracy agreed as she came over and gave her husband a hug “I just hope this doesn’t escalate beyond the Ixion Brotherhood’s idea of chaos causing practical jokes.”

The Commander leant forward to kiss Tracy but just as they were about to meet, the telephone on the desk rang.

“Ah...” Tracy responded as their moment of tenderness was lost.

“You couldn’t make it up” The Commander agreed as he reached for the telephone and picked up the handset “Administrator General” he then slightly tersely answered “What?”

“Lieutenant Jack Regent?” one of administrative officers at the Hendon Security & Police Service Training Centre in North London called across the busy canteen.

“Over here!” Jack responded from a table where he was sitting with several other officers.

“Inspector Stamp is ready for you outside the front entrance” the administrative officer confirmed.

“Thanks!” Jack confirmed before standing up, finishing his coffee as he did so.

“Good luck mate” one of the officers also sat at the table called “Inspector Stamp is the second-best driver in the Service you know.”

“Who’s the first?” Jack asked as he brushed down his uniform tunic.

“You have to ask?” one of the other officers at the table responded with a knowledgeable smirk.

A couple of minutes later Jack emerged from the main entrance into the sunshine where the imposing and uniformed figure of Chief Driving Inspector Stamp was waiting, standing alongside a fully marked patrol car.

“Well, well, well, if it isn’t young Jack” Stamp called, “Are you all ready for a little drive around town?” he then asked.

“Yes Sir” Jack confidently confirmed.

“All right then” Inspector Stamp confirmed “This will be your final Advance Pursuit Driving Test; it will last about an hour or so and we will be using this brand spanking new Ford Mondeo pursuit specification traffic car” he indicated the vehicle in front of them.

“Nice set of wheels” Jack responded as he went around to the driver’s side and opened the door before getting in and sitting behind the wheel.

“Okay then Lieutenant” Inspector Stamp called as he got in the front passenger seat “Start her up and let’s get going.”

“Here we go” Jack declared as he duly turned the key and started the car’s powerful engine.

“Drive off, straight to the main exit, out onto the public highway and then head south” Inspector Stamp instructed.

“Yes Sir” Jack confirmed as he proceeded to drive around to the main entrance where the barrier was raised as he approached and the officer on guard waved them through.

A few moments later Jack was driving south on the main road towards central London.

“All right Lieutenant” Inspector Stamp consulted his notes “This test will involve a simulated patrol on an assigned route through London which I will direct. At some point a target vehicle description will be radioed to us and we will go and find it, the driver of that car will attempt to evade us, and you will pursue the target for as long as it is safe to do so, giving a full commentary as you go. Any questions Lieutenant?”

“No Sir” Jack confirmed.

“Great, in which case let’s enjoy a nice cruise around town” Inspector Stamp declared “If you could please proceed towards Baker Street via Swiss Cottage and keep the speed nice and even.”

It was a typical residential street in a leafy and relatively well-off part of the suburb of Carshalton Beeches in the south western corner of Greater London with its 1930's town houses neatly sited along either side of an Avenue with some trees providing a nice peaceful bit of dappled shade for both residents and visitors alike.

Number thirty-four was situated almost at the far end of the Avenue, backing onto an oasis of wild woodland to the rear and was home to Stephen Edgars, a thirty three year old civil servant who was married with two young children.

The nature of his job meant he worked odd hours and would often be gone away on business for days at a time on occasion, so it was difficult for all bar a few who knew him personally to know when he was likely to be at home.

It was a bright sunny spring afternoon when Edgars turned off the main road and proceeded along the Avenue bound for home in his Ford Focus estate car, an unassuming vehicle which was a little the worse for wear but served its intended purpose of being a day-to-day runabout for him and his family.

Edgars had managed to make it back before what he called the mid-afternoon rush hour when the local schools finished for the day and thousands of children and their parents would begin to flood out into the streets bringing the local area into gridlock for at least three quarters of an hour if not longer.

Among those kids would be his own two children whom he had hoped to see for the first time in over a week as he had been away on business and as he drew up outside his home, he checked his watch and smiled at having been successful.

As Edgars got out of the car, he looked back to see his wife Julia and their two children appear in the distance which made him smile before heading up the small flight of stone and brick steps to the front door.

The house was secured with a highly sophisticated security system which needed to be deactivated by a code which had to be entered into a special device which Edgars duly took from his pocket.

Placing the device up against the door frame he then proceeded to enter his own personal six digit unlock code.

Pressing the enter button on the device resulted in a beep from the corresponding lock mechanism in the door frame but there was to be another effect too.

Suddenly there was a large explosion which in a bright blinding green flash, almost totally destroyed the whole front of the house, killing Edgars instantly and sending dust, smoke and burning debris out in all directions.

There were screams and shouts of panic from passers-by and neighbours as debris rained down across a wide area, striking people and parked vehicles, causing a cacophony of alarms to sound.

“Lima Tango Nine Nine Three from Hotel X-Ray Control” came the call over the patrol car’s radio from the Hendon Training Centre Control Room.

“Lima Tango Nine Nine Three receiving, over” Jack responded as he continued to drive the car, passing Marble Arch, and then turning right into Park Lane.

“Attention drawn to a suspect vehicle, metallic green Ford Focus, index number Lima X-Ray Six Nine Echo Delta Victor” the caller announced, “Last seen heading west on Piccadilly towards Knightsbridge.”

“Lima Tango Nine Nine Three, all received” Jack confirmed “Currently southbound on Park Lane, I’ll go and take a look, out.”

As soon as the conversation was over, Jack switched on the full set of sirens and blue flashing lights before accelerating sharply away towards Hyde Park Corner where, as he approached the traffic light controlled junction at which point Piccadilly crossed over, the green Ford Focus target car came towards him.

“There he is!” Inspector Stamp called as the target car cut across in front of them and headed off around the south side of the Hyde Park Corner roundabout before turning sharply left into Grosvenor Road with Jack in close pursuit.

“Target vehicle, green Ford Focus registration number Lima X-Ray Six Nine Echo Delta Victor now heading south on Grosvenor Road towards Victoria, speed seven five miles per hour” Jack called in commentary as the pursuit began in earnest.

Being a relatively quiet time of the day, the traffic was light and the target car with Jack in pursuit was making swift progress, quickly heading past Victoria Station, down Buckingham Palace Road and on towards the River Thames.

All the time Jack maintained his running commentary on the target vehicles direction and speed and the actions he was taking.

“Now, where are you going?” Jack generally asked.

“He went that-a-way...” Inspector Stamp wryly remarked as he looked on, making notes on the test with an impressed expression.

“Target vehicle now heading south on Chelsea Bridge approaching Battersea Park, speed still in excess of seventy-five, that is seven five miles an hour” Jack then called as he carefully drove around slower traffic on the bridge whilst still maintaining the high speed of the pursuit, heading on down Queenstown Road which runs alongside the Park.

“Watch the bus Jack, watch the bus...” Inspector Stamp cautioned as a red double deck bus whose driver was not really paying attention started to pull out ahead of him once the target vehicle had swerved around him, forcing Jack to take evasive action.

“Prat!!” Jack and Inspector Stamp both called out to their left in unison as they passed the bus before continuing south.

“Nicely handled Lieutenant” Inspector Stamp remarked as ahead, the target vehicle ducked across the petrol station forecourt on the left to head underneath the main London Victoria to Clapham Junction railway line and on past Battersea Park Station.

“Who is driving that thing?” Jack asked as the target vehicle then executed a sharp left turn and proceeded through an open gate onto a large area of waste ground in the shadow of the shell of the former Battersea Power Station.

“Whoa!!!” Inspector Stamp called out as Jack executed a perfect double handbrake turn and drove the car precisely through the centre of the gate.

“Target vehicle has now entered the grounds of Battersea Power Station” Jack continued the commentary “Pursuit continues.”

“Be careful Lieutenant” Inspector Stamp warned as the ride got somewhat bumpy over the rough ground “This is a brand-new motor.”

“Come on matey, let’s be having you” Jack called as he swerved to overtake the target vehicle, turning across and blocking it off whereupon, in a cloud of thrown up dust, both cars came to a halt.

“Right then” Inspector Stamp remarked as he wafted away some dust from in front of his face before blowing some of the dusty debris off of his clipboard “That is the test concluded, check your handbrake is on, gear in neutral and turn off the engine.”

“So...?” Jack tentatively ventured.

“Lieutenant” Inspector Stamp thoughtfully commented before pausing and exhibiting a very serious look “I have been an advanced driving instructor and tester for the last twelve years and a specialist pursuit driving qualified officer around the streets of South London for the thick end of twenty years before that and I can categorically say that your performance this afternoon...” he paused again which caused Jack to look on with concern “...was without doubt one of the best examples of high speed pursuit driving I have seen.”

“Really?” Jack responded, somewhat surprised “Does that mean I have passed?”

“With flying colours” Inspector Stamp confirmed as he signed off the paperwork in front of him before tearing off the top sheet and passing it across “Now, in my opinion you are the second-best driver in the Service.”

“Who’s the first?” Jack then asked.

Inspector Stamp smiled and pointed out of the window towards the green Ford Focus target car as its driver got out, revealing it to be The Commander himself.

“Ah, the penny drops...” Jack responded as he and Inspector Stamp duly got out of their car.

“That had better be a pass certificate I see there” The Commander called as they met in the middle “I drove my balls off trying to stay ahead.”

“Bit of a foregone conclusion really Sir” Inspector Stamp confirmed.

“Good” The Commander responded, “Well done Jack.”

“Thanks” Jack replied, still a little overwhelmed.

The Commander was forced to break off at that point as his mobile phone beeped which he immediately checked with the response being a look of shock.

“Well, there goes the neighbourhood” Jack remarked aside to Inspector Stamp “I’d know that look anywhere.”

“Oh dear...” The Commander remarked.

“Problem Sir?” Inspector Stamp asked, sensing something was seriously wrong.

“It looks like there has been a suspicious explosion in Carshalton Beeches” The Commander confirmed “Erm Tony, you take the decoy motor back to Hendon, Jack and I will take the patrol car.”

“Yes Sir” Inspector Stamp responded as The Commander tossed him the car keys.

“Doesn’t this have to go back to Hendon?” Jack asked, indicating the patrol car.

“No, it’s yours” The Commander indicated the Transport Division crest on the door and black 993 numerals across the rear flanks.

“Oh, in which case, I’ll take it” Jack responded, “Shall we?” he then suggested.

“Absolutely” The Commander confirmed “and you’re driving.”

“By the power of our almighty God of Ixion I pray for your divine intervention and your protection” Michael Orbison, the self-declared ‘Lord Chaos’ and spiritual leader of the Ixion Brotherhood proclaimed before holding his arm aloft in front of his personal black altar.

“To Life Immortal, amen” he then declared with a reverse genuflection before rising from the kneeling position and then leaving his personal chamber.

“My Lord!” one of the Brotherhood’s facilitators called as he approached along the corridor, bowing reverently “Our Brothers are on their way now; they should be crossing the Channel soon and landing within the hour.”

“Excellent” Orbison responded, “Thank you Brother, alert our followers in the area to prepare for their arrival.”

“Yes, My Lord” the Facilitator confirmed before once again bowing and then withdrawing back down the corridor out of sight.

“Come my Brothers unto thy chaos, let the games begin” Orbison then declared with a look of elation before heading away up the corridor, his deep laughter echoing all throughout the Citadel.

In the normally quiet rural streets of Carshalton Beeches there was a scene of chaos and confusion as numerous emergency service vehicles were crammed into the narrow space; people were being hastily evacuated from the area and cordons thrown up.

“Hello mate” Jack called from the driver’s seat of his patrol car having pulled up at the cordon “Got the Guv in here.”

“Oh, good afternoon Sir” the officer manning the cordon responded on seeing The Commander in the front passenger seat before lifting the tape and allowing Jack to drive through, bearing around to the left into the cul-de-sac where a scene of devastation lay before them.

“What are they calling this? Gas explosion, was it?” The Commander asked and he and Jack got out of the car and surveyed the scene where the rubble of the front half of the house involved in the explosion was strewn over a wide area and vehicles that were also caught in the blast were smashed, tipped over and smouldering whilst Fire & Rescue Service fire-fighters dealt with the remaining small pockets of burning debris.

“If this was a gas explosion then I am the Queen of bloody Sheba...” Jack remarked as they looked on at the scene of utter devastation before them.

“What do you reckon?” The Commander asked as they stood aside to allow the fire-fighters to retreat having finished damping down the wreckage.

“Bomb?” Jack tentatively suggested.

“Bomb...” The Commander regretfully agreed.

“Wait” Jack pointed out a couple of people surveying the scene over on the left-hand side “Isn’t that...?”

“Why, I do believe it is” The Commander confirmed as he led the way with Jack following closely behind.

“All right, I don’t want any excuses or whingeing about budgets, I want this whole mess nailed down ASAP” the man who they were approaching called into his mobile before realising that he had company.

“Well, well, well, if it isn’t no less a mortal than Christopher Dent” The Commander called, “What is MI5 doing poking around at the scene of what is being described as a common or garden domestic gas explosion?” he pointedly asked.

“Erm, I just happened to be in the neighbourhood?” Dent responded but realised that excuse stood no chance whatsoever of being accepted.

“Ding, ding, ding!” Jack sarcastically remarked.

“Bullshit-o-meter Lieutenant?” The Commander wryly suggested.

“Burying the needle Sir” Jack agreed.

“All right, all right” Dent quickly capitulated “It’s not confirmed yet but, well with a big green flash being witnessed and half the house getting blown out into the street, it does rather lead to the suspicion of an explosive device.”

“You don’t say?” The Commander mockingly replied, “What’s the story?” he then asked.

“At least two dead, half a dozen hospitalised and a dozen walking wounded” Dent confirmed “The premises you see scattered in pieces all around us was the home of a Mr Stephen Edgars and when he returned home about an hour ago, he put his key in the front door whereupon he triggered a device that detonated, killing him instantly.”

“Christ!” Jack exclaimed.

“His wife and two kids witnessed it happen” Dent continued.

“Oh, dear God...” The Commander responded.

“One of the kids and the wife were seriously injured by flying debris, the other kid died on her way to the hospital about ten minutes ago” Dent then added.

“I presume it is safe to say this Edgars was the intended target then” The Commander concluded, “So who was he?” he then asked.

“Official version, a double-glazing company director” Dent responded.

“Ding, ding, ding” Jack sarcastically remarked again “and unofficially?” he then prompted.

“One of my best agents, the top man in Section G, our best expert on domestic counter terrorism” Dent confirmed.

“So, a man with a triple level secure identity then” The Commander concluded “Which begs the question, was this a randomly targeted bomb or was he specifically the target, and if the latter, how the hell did someone find out who he really is?”

“A very good question that I have every intention of finding the answer to” Dent determinedly confirmed.

The Commander reached for his mobile and speed dialled a number “Tracy love” he then called “Flash call the entire Alpha List Team; I am convening a meeting of the Counter Terrorism Group in one hour.”

“Bomb?” Tracy asked as she nodded to Fuller sat nearby in the Control Room at New Scotland Yard who proceeded to send the requested alerts.

“Bomb, a big one” The Commander grimly confirmed “But until I say otherwise, we run with the fractured gas main bollocks.”

“The press won’t buy it you know?” Tracy suggested.

“Oh, tell me about it love” The Commander admitted, rolling his eyes upwards, “Don’t worry, I’ll deal with them.”

“Okay, all done” Tracy confirmed when Fuller gave her a thumbs up across the room “I’ll put the kettle on, break out the best biscuits and see you in an hour.”

Just a mile inland of the south coast of Sussex lies the small aerodrome airport at Shoreham by Sea.

A fairly unassuming location, it can trace its history back to before the Second World War with its distinctive 1930’s Art Deco terminal building and control tower.

Most of the time the small airport just sees the arrival and departure of small private aircraft, helicopters, and the occasional small commercial plane.

That afternoon was little different for the Duty Controller in the Control Tower until approximately half past two when, as he observed a train passing by on the adjacent main Portsmouth to Brighton railway line, an urgent call came over the radio.

“Echo Golf Kilo Alpha, urgent message, over?” the call was broadcast over the Duty Controller’s headset.

“This is Echo Golf Kilo Alpha receiving” the Duty Controller responded, “Identify yourself please, over.”

“Kilo Alpha, this is private flight November Delta One Five Five on route to Manchester from Paris” the pilot confirmed “Losing power on starboard engine and request permission to land, over.”

“Five Five from Kilo Alpha” the Duty Controller responded as he checked the radar and identified the incoming aircraft “Message understood, you are cleared to land at your discretion, over.”

“Kilo Alpha, all received and understood, out.”

The Duty Controller watched the radar screen as the aircraft began its approach over the English Channel before reaching for the telephone and making a call.

“Harry, give the Border Force guys a call, will you?” he called, “I’ve got an international private flight diverting here in a couple of minutes, best ensure the paperwork is clean.”

“No worries” came the confirmation before the Duty Controller hung up and picked up a pair of powerful binoculars which he proceeded to train in a southerly direction, towards the point from which the incoming aircraft was approaching.

Out on the taxiway, the Border Force officer on duty stood by the side of her official vehicle and watched out for the approaching aircraft.

“Tower, this is Bravo Foxtrot Eight Four Three” the Border Force officer called over her radio “Where did the pilot say he was booked to be flying from and to?”

“Paris to Manchester” the Duty Controller confirmed “although I haven’t managed to find them on the system yet.”

“All received, thanks” the Border Force officer responded, “Do me a favour will you?” she then asked, “Give the local Police & Security Service plod a call, just in case, you know, many hands and all that?”

“Will do” the Duty Controller confirmed.

A few moments later, the approaching aircraft appeared to the naked eye as it crossed the shoreline and headed ever descending towards the runway.

The aircraft’s landing gear duly deployed as it flew low over the railway line before landing perfectly on the tarmac runway and decelerated.

The Border Force officer duly got back in her official car and with the roof mounted orange flashing lights activated, proceeded to follow the aircraft up the runway towards the point where it turned off onto a taxiway and came to a halt.

As the Border Force officer brought her car to a stop adjacent to the front of the aircraft, the passenger side door opened, lowered down to form the steps and a tall dark-skinned man in a pilot’s uniform emerged.

“Welcome to the United Kingdom” the Border Force officer called as the pilot came down the steps “Can I see your identification, passports, travel documentation and passenger manifest please?” she then politely requested.

“Certainly” the pilot responded in a very distinctive central African accent as he reached inside the folder he was carrying and produced a passport which he duly handed across.

“Republic of Mobuto” the Border Force officer remarked as she looked at the dark green front cover of the passport “That’s a new one on me” she admitted.

“I think you will be seeing a lot more from there very soon” the pilot then curiously remarked.

That was the cue for one of the passengers who was hiding just inside the doorway of the aircraft to act.

The Border Force officer suddenly heard a click from the direction of the aircraft door which caused her to glance up where she saw an individual appear holding an automatic weapon.

Instinctively she dropped the passport and reached for her holstered weapon but was too late as the gunman coolly opened fire and she was shot three times in the chest and collapsed onto her back on the cold hard tarmac surface.

“Brothers!” the pilot then called back towards the aircraft door “The Promised Land awaits us, let’s go!”

Within moments a dozen individuals, all dressed identically in dark suits with automatic weapons slung on their shoulders emerged from the aircraft and made directly for the Border Force officer’s vehicle.

Quickly and efficiently, bags were unloaded and transferred over and within a matter of moments, they were off and away, leaving the aircraft and the badly injured Border Force officer abandoned in their wake.

“What the...?” the Duty Controller remarked as he saw through his binoculars the Border Force vehicle emerge from behind the aircraft which was when he saw the half dozen men riding on the outside whilst the rest and their bags were inside.

At the same time that the Duty Controller had first seen the hijacked vehicle and its heavily armed occupants, two local Security & Police Service officers had arrived in their patrol car.

“Who the hell are these jokers?” the officer driving the patrol car asked as they saw the hijacked vehicle approaching them at speed across the airfield.

“Whisky X-Ray One Six Five to Control, priority alert” the other officer in the patrol car called into his radio in immediate response to what they were both witnessing heading straight for them.

Before either of them could react however, two of the men on the approaching vehicle indiscriminately opened fire on their patrol car forcing the driver to swerve away and crash into the airport terminal building wall.

“Are you all right Dave?” the driver called across to his colleague as in the cracked rear-view mirror, he could see the Border Force vehicle career away out of sight.

“Yeah, I think so Steve” the other officer confirmed, opening the badly dented passenger side door and, amid the tinkling sound of broken glass falling, managed to extract himself from the car.

“This is Whiskey X-Ray One Six Five” the first officer then called over the radio once again “Armed suspects loose on Shoreham Airfield, eight or more with automatic weapons.”

Moments later the gunmen had reached the terminal building and proceeded to open fire indiscriminately, shattering windows and damaging vehicles before forcing through at speed onto the public highway.

Before anyone realised what had really happened, they were gone leaving a trail of injuries and wanton destruction behind them.

“Home Secretary!” Sir Richard called as he got out of a taxi outside the main entrance of New Scotland Yard and saw the Government Minister, Nigel Davis getting out of his official ministerial car which had parked up immediately behind.

“Sir Richard, you old rascal” the Home Secretary responded as they met and shook hands “I see you got dragged out of the office as well.”

“Well, I have to admit the Pyramid Inquiry hearings are getting unbelievably tedious” Sir Richard admitted as they proceeded inside “So any distraction has got to be welcome.”

“Do we know what this little party is all about?” the Home Secretary inquired as he and Sir Richard were waved through Reception without any checks, and they proceeded to the lifts.

“No idea” Sir Richard admitted “but I am willing to bet that so called gas explosion in Carshalton Beeches a couple of hours ago may have something to do with it, call it a hunch...”

As they emerged from the lift on the top floor, Christopher Dent was waiting for them, consulting a file that had just been handed to him by his deputy Gareth Pointer.

“Afternoon guys” Sir Richard remarked as they met up “Bomb or no bomb?” he then frankly asked.

“Bomb, big one” Dent confirmed “One of my best domestic terrorism experts blown away along with one of his kids while the rest of his family, and a couple of passers-by are in intensive care along with some of his neighbours.”

“Who bought it?” Sir Richard then asked as the four men proceeded down the corridor.

“Stephen Edgars” Dent responded, “Where his house used to be looks like 1980’s Beirut now.”

“Bloody hell!” the Home Secretary remarked in shock.

“What about the cover story?” Sir Richard then asked as they approached the double doors at the end of the corridor that marked the entrance to the New Scotland Yard Special Operations Briefing Room “The press will be going mad for this.”

As they proceeded through the doors, they came across The Commander on the telephone in mid conversation, his tone being direct and to the point.

“...because if you even so much as *think* about printing it” he abruptly informed the person he was calling “I will personally come down there and ram so many ‘D’ notices up your arse that you won’t need to purchase any more bog roll for years! Got it? Good!!” he then promptly slammed the phone down.

“Well, I think that’s the press taken care of...” the Home Secretary wryly responded.

“Sorry about that” The Commander apologised “I just get a bee in my bonnet whenever I have to deal with the press”.

“Along with politicians, civil servants, consultants and the Chief Executive of ITV on that fateful day they met just after they cancelled The Bill...” Tracy added with a wry smirk.

“Did I miss some excitement?” John Hewitt, the Operations Chief of MI6 remarked as he entered the room and joined the others around the table that also included Simon Fuller, the Foreign Secretary Adrian Wright, Georgie Lewis of the Bomb Squad and Alan Harding, the Divisional Commander of SO13 - the Anti-Terrorist Squad.

“Oh, just my husband threatening a newspaper editor with an enema if he doesn’t cooperate with the D Notice that we just slapped on him” Tracy wryly confirmed.

“Oh, business as usual then” Hewitt casually remarked as he sat down.

“All right ladies and gentlemen” The Commander then declared “If we are all here, let’s all take a seat, and we will get started.”

“So, who is going to kick off?” Tracy then asked.

“I think that should be me” Dent remarked as he stood up and took a sip from the glass of water on the table in front of him before clearing his throat.

The room fell silent as everyone watched Dent quickly look through his notes before putting them down and addressing his audience.

“As you are all aware” Dent began “There has been a number of comparatively minor incidents involving harmless but disruptive explosive devices at numerous locations across central London over the last six months.”

“The Chancery Lane Station incident this morning?” The Commander asked.

“Same codeword, same set-up, same green smoke explosion” Dent confirmed “The Ixion Brotherhood and The Hand with another of their little party surprises.”

“So far nobody had been hurt by any of these devices” The Commander confirmed “However...”

“Just over two hours ago an explosive device detonated at a house in the leafy suburb of Carshalton Beeches in South London” Dent then continued “The resident of the house was killed instantly; there were numerous serious injuries to many who were in the immediate vicinity of the blast.”

“Christ...” the Home Secretary responded, a sentiment echoed by all the others present.

“The primary target’s wife and eldest child are in intensive care on the critical list, three others who were in the area at the time of the explosion are in a similar condition and the target’s youngest child died on her way to the hospital a little over an hour ago” Dent then added.

“Bloody hell, it looks like a war zone” Hewitt remarked as on the big screen above and in front of them photographs of the devastation were shown.

“It’s early days” Georgie Lewis, the Bomb Squad Divisional Commander commented “But it looks like the explosion was triggered when the target opened his front door, the bomb was so powerful it basically destroyed the entire front of the house and sent debris out in all directions over a large area.”

“You are going to have trouble making the gas leak story stick I reckon” Hewitt remarked.

“Probably, but it will at least buy us some time” Tracy added.

“The target” the Foreign Secretary asked, “Who was it?”

“This man” Dent confirmed as the photographs being displayed changed to an official identification picture of his agent who had been killed “Stephen Edgars, my best expert on domestic terrorism.”

“So, if he wasn’t dead, he would be sitting in this very room then?” Tracy suggested.

“Exactly” Dent responded, “He was killed by the very thing he is the top expert on.”

“What connects this bomb with the Ixion and Hand incidents we have been seeing?” The Commander asked.

“Initial tests of the debris along with eyewitness accounts of the explosion point clearly to the green RS232 type explosive or a close variation thereof being used” Lewis explained “And as we all know, The Hand and their lunatic associates the Ixion Brotherhood are believed to have a lot of it in their possession.”

“Their silly little declaration of war six months ago stepping up a gear?” The Commander suggested.

“Quite possibly” Dent confirmed.

“Has anyone claimed responsibility yet?” the Home Secretary then asked.

“Half a dozen claims so far from the usual nutters, would be extremists, daydreamers and politicians” Fuller checked his notes “Mostly non-runners and chancers, one outside possibility but they have no history of anything like this.”

“This Stephen Edgars” The Foreign Secretary asked, “He is an MI5 officer I take it?”

“Level One, top secret and better” Dent confirmed.

“So, assuming that this was not just a random attack or an unfortunate co-incidence” the Foreign Secretary then continued “How did the bombers know who he really was and where to find him?”

“A not unintelligent question Adrian” Sir Richard complemented him.

“Well, I do try...” the Foreign Secretary admitted.

“Simon?” Dent passed the question across to Fuller.

“For obvious reasons, the personnel lists of the secret security agencies, some sectors of the National Security & Police Service and other agencies, Government departments, etc. are kept securely locked away” Fuller explained, “Access to, for example Stephen Edgars personnel jacket would require a triple signed release form, level one clearance and a couple of broad-shouldered lads from Special Branch camped out in a company Transit van parked immediately outside.”

“We must still actively consider the possibility that we may have a leak somewhere though” the Home Secretary suggested with obvious and understandable concern.

“I agree” The Commander confirmed.

“Oh, here we go” Fuller remarked “GCHQ just sent this over, an excerpt of a video posted online from that whacko Adebisi, looks like he is taking the credit for the Carshalton Beeches bomb.”

“So, despite being effectively entombed inside the Mobuto Embassy, he is still spouting his poisonous ramblings to all and sundry” Tracy remarked.

“Oh, he is into preaching from the balcony overlooking the street now as well” Pointer added as he pressed a button that played some surveillance footage of one of Adebisi’s pronouncements.

“I take it we still have round the clock observation running from the building directly opposite?” The Commander asked.

“It’s costing us a fortune in rent to the landlord, we have been there six months already” Dent remarked.

“Is there anything we can do to shut him up? Legally of course.” The Commander demanded to know, clearly frustrated.

“Take off and nuke the entire site from orbit?” Sir Richard wryly suggested.

“Unfortunately, he is being protected under diplomatic immunity granted by the Mobuto Government” the Foreign Secretary confirmed, “As long as he doesn’t physically set foot out of the embassy building, we can’t touch him.”

“The only other possibility being a regime change in Mobuto itself” Sir Richard Crowthorne.

“I’m sure we could arrange something...” Hewitt subtly suggested.

“No!” the Foreign Secretary quickly responded.

“It wouldn’t do you any good anyway” Tracy added “The Mobuto Ambassador to the UK is their President’s cousin or brother-in-law, something like that, you know, blood is thicker than water and all that...”

“Still favour the nuking from orbit option myself” Sir Richard remarked.

“Might make a bit of dent in the Kensington property market” The Commander added.

“We have got to do SOMETHING surely?” Tracy urged “He is laughing at us!”

“What about Orbison and his motley mob?” the Home Secretary asked.

“Orbison and his Ixion Brotherhood are the monkeys to Adebisi and The Hand’s organ grinders” Dent commented “Whilst the Ixion Brotherhood have their so called ‘Soldiers of Ixion’, it is The Hand who are really running that particular outfit.”

At that moment, the telephone on the desk in front of The Commander began to ring and he reached forward to pick it up, “This had better be good” he then answered.

As The Commander took the call, Sir Richard and the Foreign Secretary consulted each other discreetly, something which Tracy noticed but said nothing.

“Simon” The Commander then called over to Fuller “Find out who the senior officer is on their way right now to Shoreham Airport in Sussex, apparently there has been a serious incident.”

“Bloody hell, somebody had fun, didn’t they?” Divisional Commander (Operations) Al Longton remarked in disbelief as he brought his car to a stop at the tape cordon just short of the main terminal building and got out whereupon he surveyed the damage and trail of destruction readily evident before him.

“Sir!” the first officer from the shot at car earlier, Lieutenant Commander Steven Grant, called as he saw his commanding officer arrive.

“Are you all right Steve?” Longton asked with obvious genuine concern as he was allowed to duck beneath the cordon tape, and they met amid the ongoing frenzied activity.

“Bumps and bruises, car is a wreck” Grant confirmed “Could have been a lot worse though.”

“Cars we can replace although our crack team of accountants may disagree, lives we can’t” Longton remarked.

“Yes Sir” Grant quickly agreed.

“All right then, what have we got?” Longton then asked as they weaved their way past numerous emergency service personnel and headed towards the airfield.

“Private jet on an inbound flight asked to land here supposedly due to engine problems” Grant explained, “The Border Force officer on call meets it on the runway and she winds up being shot by either the pilot or possibly one of the passengers, still not sure yet.”

“Nasty...” Longton remarked “What’s her condition?”

“Critical” Grant confirmed “She took three hits to the chest, only the vest she was wearing and the fact the air ambulance is actually based here has so far kept her alive.”

Both officers were forced to shield themselves from dust and turbulence at that point as the air ambulance helicopter took off from a short distance away and then flew low overhead.

“Sir!” came a shout once the noise of the helicopter had abated enough to be heard which caused Longton to turn around and see another officer approaching, “the Administrator General on the line for you.”

“Thank you, Lieutenant,” Longton responded as he took the mobile and put it to his ear “Hello old friend” he then called.

“Al” The Commander called from the Special Operations Control Room at New Scotland Yard “Rumours are reaching me that you have gun waving nutters loose on your manor?”

“Indeed, I have” Longton confirmed “They landed here at Shoreham Airport about thirty minutes ago and then blasted their way off the premises with automatic weapons.”

“We are in the middle of a Counter Terrorism Group conference here at the moment, so I am going to put you on speaker” The Commander then informed Longton.

“Divisional Commander Longton, this is MI5 Operations Chief Christopher Dent” the senior MI5 man called “Do we know how many of them there were and any possible descriptions please?”

“Hi Chris” Longton replied “I only just got here so I will let my newly appointed Deputy, Lieutenant Commander Steven Grant fill you all in.”

“Erm, good afternoon everyone” Grant called “At the moment we think there were between ten and sixteen of them, all males of African appearance, all equipped with automatic weapons and displaying clear indications of specialist military training.”

“What did they use to get away?” Tracy asked.

“They took off in a Border Force section Toyota four-wheel drive pickup which has just been found abandoned about three miles from here” Grant continued “according to the fire brigade, it is well alight.”

“Looks like they are covering their tracks” Dent commented.

“They want us to know they are here though” Sir Richard ominously pointed out “Just not where they might be going.”

“What’s the damage?” The Commander then asked.

“Dozen or so walking wounded” Grant replied, “Two off to hospital with more serious injuries plus the Border Force officer who was shot, she’s in the Air Ambulance on her way to intensive care right now, she doesn’t look too good though.”

“What do we know about the plane they came in on?” MI6 Operations Commander Hewitt asked.

“The Control Tower here was told that it was a private flight from Paris to Manchester that had to make an emergency landing due to engine problems” Grant confirmed.

“Simon?” Tracy looked across to Fuller who had already anticipated the question and was checking the flight details.

“Looks like a straight banana” Fuller confirmed a few moments later “Nothing registered on the system either here with the Civil Aviation Authority or their French counterparts.”

“Simon” the Commander called towards Fuller “Scramble the Air Incident Investigation guys and the best forensic boffins we have, I want that airplane gone over with a fine-tooth comb.”

“Yes Sir” Fuller confirmed as he reached for the telephone in front of him and began to dial a number.

“Al” the Commander then called “Seal that plane off and make sure nobody touches it until the forensic team arrives.”

“You got it” Longton responded as he and Grant began to walk towards it only to be then stopped in their tracks when the aircraft suddenly exploded in a huge green fireball, sending them both to the ground for cover as burning debris was thrown in all directions.

“What the hell was that?” the Home Secretary exclaimed as the sound of the explosion came over the speakers in the room.

“Al? Grant?” the Commander called with clear concern “Are you okay?”

“Ah hell, I am getting too old for this shit...” Longton was then heard to mutter over the telephone as he picked himself up and then helped Grant to his feet also, before looking back at the burning wreckage of the aircraft in the distance.

“He’s okay” Tracy confirmed with a knowing smirk.

“I am going to hazard a guess that was bad news?” Sir Richard asked.

“Looks like someone planted a little surprise package aboard the plane before they left” Longton confirmed “There isn’t much isn’t going to be much left of it I am afraid.”

“In which case, get the fire brigade to douse the wreckage and then have the forensics guys dig out their finest tooth comb and run it through whatever is left” The Commander suggested.

“I’ll get them down here right away” Longton agreed as another officer came over with something in her hand which she passed to him.

“What’s this?” he then asked.

“Paramedics found it underneath the Border Force officer when they lifted her onto the stretcher” the officer explained “It may be of importance.”

“A passport” Longton remarked as he looked at the document in his hand.

“Passport?” Tracy asked over the link, her interest piqued.

“It’s from some place that I have never heard of” Longton admitted “Erm, the Democratic Republic of Mobuto by the looks of it.”

“Whoa...” Hewitt exclaimed as he dropped his pen on the table.

“What’s the name inside the passport?” Dent asked with some urgency in his voice.

“Olivier Torore” Longton confirmed from the information page inside the passport “Born in Lagos, thirteenth of June 1976.”

“Oh, dear God...” Hewitt responded with a despondent look.

“I take it from that reaction you know the guy?” Sir Richard asked.

“If it is the same man” Hewitt admitted “Is there any chance of seeing the passport photo please?”

“Erm, yes” Longton confirmed “Hang on a minute” he prompted Grant to get out his own mobile and take a photograph of the passport details that a few moments later he forwarded to the Special Operations Control Room whereupon it appeared on the big screen.

“Yeah, that’s him” Hewitt then confirmed “Shit!” he took out a file from his briefcase and slammed it on the desk in front of him.

“Well go on then, don’t leave us in suspense, who is he?” The Commander demanded to know.

“Adebesi’s Number Two” Hewitt then picked up the file again and passed it around “A General in the Peoples Armed Forces of Mobuto and probably one of the most vicious blood thirsty bastards that godforsaken shit hole of a continent has ever produced.”

“Oh lovely” Tracy exclaimed “and his travelling companions?”

“The Hand’s best foot soldiers I would wager” Dent responded, “I was wondering when they would turn up at our front door.”

“You mean you were expecting these assholes?” Tracy exclaimed incredulously.

“Adebesi’s various spouting’s have been indicating that The Hand has ambitious plans to up their war of chaos” Hewitt explained, “An ‘international element’ is a phrase he has been using a lot.”

“And now their armed rent-a-thugs have arrived” Sir Richard added, “Oh deep joy...”

“Where does that snivelling little shit Orbison come into all this?” Harding asked.

“Adebesi has been very clever” Dent explained “He made friends with the Ixion Brotherhood, shared their ideals and beliefs, then effectively he used the Brotherhood’s network to move on in.”

“Supported by his old mercenary pals Reaper and his merry men under the flag of the so-called Soldiers of Ixion” The Commander concluded.

“This is a real nightmare...” Hewitt remarked.

“Al!” The Commander then called over the communications link “I am going to send reinforcements down your way” he explained “The chances are these boys are long gone by now but just in case, be careful, throw money at it.”

“On my budget Sir?” Longton suggested.

“Don’t worry about the cost” The Commander reassured him “Just send the paperwork up here to The Yard and I will give the Home Secretary my best intense Paddington Bear stare until he opens the coffers” whereupon the Home Secretary mockingly retreated a little below the desk in response.

“Roger that Sir, I’d best get to work” Longton confirmed.

“Take care old friend” The Commander responded whereupon the call was concluded.

There were a few moments of near silence in the room as everyone got together their thoughts on the rapidly unfolding developments.

“All right” The Commander declared as he stood up “I don’t want any jurisdictional nonsense or treading on each other’s toes, we work on this as a team, we communicate and we keep each other in the loop with whatever we find” he clearly instructed “Anyone here with relevant skeletons hidden in their cupboards, drag them out now because if I come across them later, I will get very pissed off!”

There were nods of agreement all around the room at that point.

“Commander Harding, Mr Dent” The Commander then issued his instructions “Put all your teams on full alert, full surveillance on everyone on the Terrorist Watch List and anyone associated with them, The Hand and anyone that lunatic Orbison has anything to do with, wire taps, shadow teams, the whole nine yards, no expense spared.”

“Oh dear...” The Home Secretary responded, “There goes my budget for the next eighteen months, the Treasury won’t be happy.”

“Bugger the Treasury!” Tracy commented which prompted some much-needed light relief in the room.

“What about the trial of Adam Reaper?” Dent asked, “That is supposed to start the day after tomorrow, it could promote trouble from the more lunatic or devoted parts of the Ixion Brotherhood.”

“Oh, I think we have got that well and truly covered” Tracy confidently confirmed “Fully armed escort from Pentonville Prison to the Central Criminal Court, two helicopters and snipers shadowing the armed convoy over the whole route, it would take an army just to get close.”

“I hope you are right” Dent responded, “because we desperately need a scalp from the Ixion Brotherhood prosecuted to clip Lord Chaos’ wings as soon as possible.”

“This is our time; this is our destiny my Brothers!” Orbison called loudly to the gathered followers before him in the main Citadel Worship Chamber who responded by cheering loudly and going mad.

If there was one thing Orbison was good at, it was working a room like this, especially as his followers before him were all under the heavy influence of K200, his own personally designed hallucinogenic narcotic, sales of which were rising both to his followers and many more worldwide, netting him millions in revenue in addition to the continued generous donations he received daily from his many followers and devotees.

As the evening session which was also being broadcast live on his personal encrypted streaming channel came to a conclusion, Orbison looked up which was the cue for the lighting to be lowered and everyone to bow their heads for the final surmise.

“By the power of our almighty God Ixion, his divine inspiration and strength” Orbison then declared as the chanting and cheering died down, “I call upon you to prepare yourselves for the rise of chaos that is at hand for the day of deliverance is near.”

More cheering greeted this declaration which Orbison allowed to carry on for a few moments before raising his hands for silence again which he immediately got.

“Your souls must be cleansed of thoughts of obedience and humbleness” he then carried on “Bring your darkest thoughts of anarchy that you have been trained to suppress to the fore over the coming few days and we will see a brave new world, all ours.”

More cheering erupted at this further declaration which Orbison observed with a look of pure delight as he was whipping his followers up into a frenzy.

“To Life Immortal!” he then shouted out which the crowd repeated back with equal enthusiasm before the lights on the stage altar went out and Orbison disappeared into darkness.

Amid scenes of excited jubilation, the followers began to file out of the Citadel and disappear away into the cold darkness of the frosty November evening outside.

Orbison merely watched from the side-lines as they left before taking off his elaborate ceremonial robes, handing them to a waiting Facilitator and then heading to his personal chamber where he had visitors waiting to receive him.

“Nice performance” a man sat in the shadows remarked as Orbison arrived.

“If there is one thing I consider to be good at, it’s working a crowd” Orbison admitted with a pleased smile as he helped himself to a drink of brandy from the decanter on the table.

“Do you think they will be ready?” the man then asked as he rose to his feet and stepped into the light, revealing himself to be very different from everyone else, a smart tailored suit and tie, none of the trappings or over the top decoration of the Ixion Brotherhood, signalling that he was an outsider here.

“Mr Taylor” Orbison reassured his guest “Let me put it this way, as long as you keep providing the information and the technical support for our little Crusade, I will make sure that bunch of lunatics out there do whatever we want of them without question.”

“Of course, there could still be problems” another man called as he entered the room whereupon they both turned around to see the Mayor of London arrive.

“Alfred - sorry - Mr Mayor” Taylor called.

“Revered Brother” Orbison called, signifying that the Mayor was most definitely one of the Ixion Brotherhood, a secret he had managed to keep largely secret for obvious reasons.

“Good evening gentlemen” the Mayor replied before continuing to express his concerns, “As I was saying, there could still be problems with the authorities.”

“I would not worry too much my dear friend” Taylor reassured him “Our good and respected legal friend Mr Bermann has them tied up in so many legal knots that they don’t not know what has hit them.”

“Just look at the fiasco they created trying to ban my darling little drug, sorry, mood influencer” Orbison reminded him, “Seven court hearings in six months and it is even less illegal now than before they started.”

“Gentlemen, my friends” Taylor then declared “The future is ours, my part as head of the Group is very much long term but the part you two have to play is here and now, the foundation on which our Movement will build and rise to achieve our ultimate goals.”

“When do our friends from Mobuto arrive?” the Mayor then asked.

“Tomorrow evening” Taylor confirmed “They are already in the country as we know with that spectacular little show at the airport which means the Security Services know this which will throw them a bit off the scent for a while.”

“Nice work” Orbison complimented.

“They are holed up at a secure location for the night, my people will ensure their safe passage here tomorrow all being well” Taylor then explained.

“Meanwhile, do we continue our opening gambits?” Orbison then asked.

“Of course” Taylor confirmed as he picked up his leather briefcase and opened it, extracting some files which he then passed across “These are the details your Soldiers of Ixion will need for the next couple of jobs.”

“Nice” Orbison briefly flicked through the files with interest “and the nosy neighbours too.”

“There are also a couple of special jobs here that your revered Brother requested further information for” Taylor then produced a few more files “See that he gets them with the compliments of my Group.”

“I shall” Orbison agreed with an almost evil smirk before raising his glass, “To Life Immortal...”

Fifteen minutes later Taylor and the Mayor left in a black Mercedes saloon car that was waiting for them at the rear entrance to the Citadel complex before being driven away down the rough dirt track that led across some fields to the main road in the distance.

As the Mercedes reached the tarmac surface of the main highway and turned right towards the glow of Greater London visible on the far horizon, a blue Ford Transit van that had been parked in a lay-by on the opposite side of the road, invisible to the occupants of the car in the darkness, started up and moved off, following the car.

Proceeding undetected behind the car, the driver of the van picked up a small tape recorder device that he switched on which revealed it to be Divisional Commander Appleby of the Transport Division.

“Eleven thirty eight p.m.” Appleby then spoke into the microphone “Black Mercedes with diplomatic plates leaves Citadel, Saracen and Taylor believed to be inside” he confirmed before pausing the recording and continuing to drive along.

The 08:20 a.m. Great Northern Railway service from Cambridge to King’s Cross was just passing Finsbury Park in North London when the mobile on the table in front of one of the passengers began to ring.

It being a rush hour commuter train, this was not an unusual event, the newspapers of a few other passengers sat nearby rustled slightly as if to signal a sort of quiet disapproval.

The owner of the mobile reacted by putting down his newspaper, the crossword almost complete and reaching across to answer it.

“Francis Plowman” the young man answered “Yes, I should be in King’s Cross in about ten minutes.”

Plowman was then quickly forced to sign off as the train plunged into the network of tunnels that form the south end of the East Coast Main Line and the final approach to King’s Cross station.

As the clock on the concourse ticked over to 09:09, the train pulled into platform six precisely on time and with the usual squealing of the brakes, came to a perfect stop whereupon the doors were unlocked, and its passengers proceeded to disembark.

Plowman was just another commuter in among all the other passengers who proceeded down the platform and through the ticket barriers before they dispersed in different directions through and out of the station.

He followed the majority of the crowd who headed for the nearest entrance down into the Underground by way of a flight of steps into the busy sub-surface main ticket hall.

Plowman was considerably taller than average, his six foot three inch tall slender frame meant he could see over many of his fellow travellers as they filed towards the ticket barriers.

Tapping the Oyster Card on the reader saw the barrier duly open and permitted Plowman to proceed to the escalator which leads down to the low-level tube lines.

It was as he stood dutifully on the right of the descending escalator however that a tall Asian man approached him, travelling in the opposite direction on the adjacent up escalator.

Plowman did not notice the man however until suddenly he heard his name being called.

Looking across at the man who had called out his name, he only saw the gun which he was carrying.

Screams and panic rang out as the Asian man opened fire, striking Plowman in the chest and head and hitting a couple of other people either side of the intended target.

Plowman fell forwards and tumbled uncontrollably down the escalator until he crashed onto the floor at the bottom.

With people screaming and running away from the scene, the attacker calmly slung his weapon over his shoulder and walked up the escalator.

The response of the Security Service to the incident was swift as he found himself confronted with armed officers at the top of the escalator but appeared to be completely unfazed by this.

“Drop the gun and put your hands in the air!” Lieutenant Shelby ordered.

“I am a messenger sent by the gods of chaos!” the attacker called out.

“Yeah, whatever” Shelby responded dismissively “You are still nicked!”

“To Life Immortal!” the attacker declared before pulling out a handgun and before anyone could stop him, shooting himself in the mouth, killing him instantly and prompting more screams from the few members of the public who had yet to be evacuated from the area.

Shelby still maintained his aim as he moved towards the attacker even though he was now slumped in a heap on the floor, blood splattered all over the wall.

Quickly checking the body, Shelby confirmed life extinct and that there were no explosive devices or other unpleasant surprises waiting for them.

“All right, better notify The Yard” he then suggested as he stood over the dead body and holstered his weapon “and find out who chummy boy here was targeting as well, I’ve got a bad feeling about this...”

Tracy and The Commander were looking through some files in the Special Operations Control Room when Hewitt came rushing in, unusually for such a senior man of MI6, in some considerable distress.

“What’s wrong John?” Tracy asked, clearly concerned.

“My Deputy, Francis Plowman was shot dead in King’s Cross Underground Station about five minutes ago” Hewitt confirmed, clearly upset and angry.

“Oh my God...” The Commander responded in shock.

“The shooter identified himself to the Transport Division plod who stopped him at the top of the escalator as a ‘messenger sent by the gods of chaos’ before shouting ‘To Life Immortal’ and then blowing his head off” Hewitt added.

“That’s two high ranking members of secret security service personnel deliberately targeted and assassinated in less than twenty-four hours” Dent remarked “We’ve got a leak somewhere, a big one.”

“Put out a coded alert to all of your people” The Commander requested of both Dent and Hewitt “They need to double and treble check their personal security, stay in pairs, don’t stray anywhere off where they can’t get help.”

“Already in hand” Hewitt confirmed.

“Same here” Dent added whilst on the phone.

Tracy also picked up the telephone and pressed a button “I need to speak to the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister, urgent level one priority” she then ominously called.

Sir Richard was walking through the streets of Westminster, heading towards his Section Fourteen office when his mobile rang which caused him to pause before he promptly answered.

“Ah, Lieutenant Commander Barrett” Sir Richard called “How was Egypt?” he asked.

“Sunny and sandy” Lieutenant Commander Eloise Barrett confirmed as she drove through the streets of South London heading towards the city centre “Have I missed any excitement?”

“Someone blew up one of MI5’s finest yesterday” Sir Richard confirmed “and then someone else went and shot one of MI6’s best in the middle of King’s Cross Station about an hour ago so all in all things are starting to get a bit tense around here.”

“That would be the gas explosion and the mugging gone wrong cover stories that the press has been fed I presume?” Barrett asked as she slowed for traffic lights approaching Victoria Station.

“Well, we don’t want to spread any panic” Sir Richard admitted “Where are you now?” he then asked.

“Just driving into the office” Barrett confirmed “Out of interest, are the two incidents coincidence or connected?” she asked, “Call it my suspicious mind playing up.”

“The betting is most definitely on connected and deliberately targeted” Sir Richard grimly confirmed “The running theory at the moment is we have a leak somewhere and in response, The Commander has activated the Counter Terrorism Group.”

“Anyone made any claims yet?” Barrett then asked as the traffic lights changed and she moved off, turning into Victoria Street.

“Adebesi’s Hand bunch and the Ixion Brotherhood minions by the looks of it” Sir Richard confirmed “Our embassy inhabiting lunatic seems to be coordinating the heavy stuff, the Brotherhood meanwhile are doing the light fluffy jobs.”

“Prat!” Barrett then called out causing Sir Richard to stop walking and look on at his mobile momentarily with a slightly surprised look.

“Are you all right?” Sir Richard then asked.

“Yeah!” Barrett then confirmed “Some wally on a motorbike just cut me up at the junction” she explained but was then suddenly forced to brake sharply, the sound of which Sir Richard picked up on over the phone.

Moments later Sir Richard began to run when he heard gunshots ring out in the near distance and the phone line went dead.

Further gunshots and the screams of passers-by in the area were heard as Sir Richard ran into Victoria Street to see Security Service officers all converging on the same location where a car with its side windows and windscreen peppered with gunshot holes was rammed against the side of a bus whilst a motorbike lay on its side on fire in the street nearby.

“You picked on the wrong girl this time, didn’t you?!?” came the familiar voice of Barrett as she appeared, battered and bloodied from the other side of the street with a barely conscious male in motorbike leathers which she then proceeded to unceremoniously slam face first into the bonnet of a patrol car where he was quickly handcuffed by other officers.

“Having fun are we Lieutenant Commander?” Sir Richard asked as he joined her.

“Oh, yes boss” a slightly out of breath Barrett confirmed as she let the other officers take control of the suspect before reloading her empty automatic firearm and holstering it.

“What happened?” Sir Richard then asked as further emergency service vehicles and personnel arrived on the scene.

“Chummy there” Barrett indicated the man being taken away “tried to force me off the road and then shoot me” she explained.

“Naughty boy...” Sir Richard casually responded.

“The car is full of holes; my Dad is going to nuts” Barrett admitted “It’s his motor!”

“He’ll get over it” Sir Richard reassured her before noticing something else “I think your car is not the only thing around here with a hole in it though” he pointed at Barrett’s bloodied shoulder.

“Oh hell...” Barrett responded as she looked at her shoulder where a bullet had passed through during the fire fight “I didn’t even notice!”

“That will be the adrenalin” Sir Richard reassured her “Trust me; you will feel it in the morning.”

“What the hell is going on?” another familiar voice called which caused Barrett and Sir Richard to look up and see Tracy approaching having walked briskly from New Scotland Yard nearby when the alert was raised.

“Someone tried to take a pot shot at my esteemed Deputy here” Sir Richard explained “He missed...”

“Well, I wouldn’t say missed exactly” Barrett indicated the wound in her shoulder.

“You’re still alive, aren’t you?” Sir Richard pointed out.

“Well, yeah...” Barrett admitted as a paramedic arrived to tend to her injuries.

“I’ll leave you in their capable hands” Sir Richard informed Barrett whereupon she left with the paramedic towards a waiting ambulance nearby.

“Targeted attack?” Tracy asked, clearly concerned at this latest development as she and Sir Richard began to walk back towards New Scotland Yard.

“It sure as hell looks like it” Sir Richard admitted “By my workings out that is one each for MI5, MI6 and my Section Fourteen team in the last twenty-four hours.

“Good grief!” Tracy exclaimed “Well at least this time we actually have a live suspect to interview” she pointed out the attacker who, under heavy guard was being bundled into the back of a Security Service prisoner van “Would you like to be the quizmaster?” she then asked.

“Try stopping me” Sir Richard relished the prospect “Aren’t you interested in doing the honours though?” he then asked out of curiosity.

“I would love to but regrettably I have my hands full” Tracy confirmed.

“Welcome to New Scotland Yard” The Commander sarcastically remarked as he held the door open and watched as four armed officers unceremoniously dragged the shooter, one holding each limb, into the custody suite located in the lower ground level “We hope you enjoy your stay...”

“I am the voice of my own God!” the shooter called out “My God is my protector!”

“You would be better off with a lawyer” The Commander wittily advised as the shooter was brought up to the Custody Supervisor’s desk and put back up on his feet.

“I am a prisoner of war!” the shooter shouted, his voice booming all around the room.

“...and I’m Arnold Palmer” Sir Richard dismissively replied as he entered the room.

“What happened?” The Commander asked as Sir Richard joined him.

“This guy tried to kill Lizzie Barrett, one of my best operatives in broad daylight in the middle of Victoria Street” Sir Richard explained, a sense of anger readily apparent in his voice.

“Is she okay?” the Commander inquired, understandably concerned.

“She took a bullet in the shoulder but gave as good as she got” Sir Richard confirmed “I’ve sent her to hospital to get patched up.”

“Tough little lady” The Commander remarked.

“That she is” Sir Richard agreed.

“Name?” the Custody Supervisor asked of the shooter.

“I have been and always will be a Brother of Ixion, the divine God, the one and only” the shooter declared.

“Oh, do shut up!” Sir Richard called as he stepped up to the shooter and stood really close behind him.

“You do not frighten me Mr Government Man” the shooter then defiantly responded back over his shoulder towards Sir Richard.

“Ah...” Sir Richard coolly informed the shooter, leaning closer to his ear, “That is because we haven’t got to know each other yet.”

“Are you going to tell us your name Sir?” the Custody Supervisor politely but firmly asked once again.

“My defiance is the strength sent to me by my God” the shooter then declared “You will soon know what chaos really means.”

“Been there, done that, experienced the evening rush hour out of Victoria Station” The Commander dismissively remarked, “I am going to hazard a wild guess here that you are not going to tell us your name then?” he then asked.

“My soul is prepared” the Shooter responded, “What about yours Mr Policeman?”

“All right, in which case, let’s skip the formalities shall we?” The Commander then suggested “Get him to an interrogation room” he then ordered whereupon the four heavily armed escort officers duly grabbed the shooter again and proceeded to drag him away, still protesting.

“Charming fellow” Sir Richard remarked “Can’t wait to get started, I haven’t done a good old-fashioned interrogation for quite a while.”

“He’s all yours my old friend” The Commander confirmed “Give him my regards and call me straight away if he says anything useful.”

“I’ve always wanted to rush into a room and say this” Tracy remarked as she entered the Specialist Operations Control Room in a commanding manner, “Get me the Prime Minister on a secure line!” she then called out.

“Dare I ask, Divisional Commander?” the Home Secretary asked as Tracy sat down alongside him at the head of the conference table.

“Another attack on an unlisted member of the Security Services about twenty minutes ago” Tracy confirmed.

“Oh dear...” the Home Secretary dejectedly responded.

“Fortunately, she spotted the attacker coming and tackled him” Tracy confirmed “He’s downstairs enjoying the hospitality of our finest interrogation cell whilst the brave Lieutenant Commander Barrett is on her way to hospital to get the hole in her shoulder patched up.”

“Divisional Commander!” Fuller called over, pointing at the telephone in front of her which prompted Tracy to immediately pick it up.

“Prime Minister” Tracy then called with business like urgency.

“Divisional Commander” the Prime Minister responded from her office in Number Ten Downing Street “I am hearing whispers that there are some nasty people about.”

“Indeed, there are” Tracy grimly confirmed “I want to raise the national terrorist threat level from Substantial to Severe with immediate effect” she informed her.

“Are you serious Divisional Commander?” the Prime Minister responded, “The sun is shining and it’s such a lovely day!”

“Oh, I am very serious Prime Minister” Tracy replied, “I have a number of very unhappy dead people on my watch and another alive but seriously pissed off one on her way to hospital right now who would dearly like almost as much as me to find whoever it is that is targeting members of the security services.”

“I thought they were supposed to be secret?” the Prime Minister asked.

“Well, yes they are” Tracy confirmed “That’s the problem; someone seems to know who our secret service personnel are and where to find them which means we have a very big leak somewhere.”

“All right, I’ll green light it” the Prime Minister duly confirmed with a little reluctance, “although I strongly suspect if I hadn’t either your illustrious husband or your good self will probably just go ahead and do it anyway.”

“Us? Surely not?” Tracy mockingly responded with a knowing smirk.

“I want to be kept informed immediately of any developments” the Prime Minister then insisted “Do we have any idea who is behind these attacks?” she then asked.

“Top of the betting is The Hand with their lunatic fringe mates from the Ixion Brotherhood doing the donkey work” Tracy confirmed “and someone somewhere has been slipping them highly classified information.”

“The military leader of The Hand, what is his name again?” the Prime Minister asked.

“Adebesi” Tracy confirmed.

“Is that asshole still holed up in the embassy of, err wherever it was?” the Prime Minister then enquired.

“The Mobuto Embassy in Delabole Street, Kensington” Tracy responded, “We can’t get him out of there, we can’t touch him, we can’t do shit, physically or diplomatically.”

“Then I suggest you prioritise finding and plugging the leak and neutralising that little shit Adebesi as soon as possible” the Prime Minister strongly suggested.

“Oh, don’t you worry Prime Minister” Tracy determinedly responded, “I fully intend to.”

“You know my old man always said to me when I was a child, if you don’t know someone’s name, just call them Fred” Sir Richard remarked as he entered the interrogation room where, sat in a chair was the shooter who had been arrested earlier with an armed guard standing over him.

The shooter looked on silently before reaching for the glass of water on the table in front of him and taking a drink and then smiling.

“So, erm ‘Fred’ it is” Sir Richard formally declared.

‘Fred’ sat back in the chair which creaked slightly as he moved and smirked once again but still said nothing.

“What shall we talk about then?” Sir Richard then asked “The weather? The state of the global economy? Last night’s episode of Coronation Street? The attempt on the life of my officer?”

“Oh, that?” ‘Fred’ responded, looking on almost with a sense of pride.

“Yes” Sir Richard confirmed with a profoundly serious look, “That...”

“I am but a simple soldier in the fight against law and order” ‘Fred’ then announced, “Chaos will rise, and I will be judged before my Lord.”

“The only judging you will see will be in the High Court in the presence of a jury of twelve good men and women” Sir Richard responded, “You are looking at charges ranging from attempted murder to conspiracy to commit terrorist acts.”

“It will never come to court and you know it Mr Secret Agent Man” ‘Fred’ coolly responded “My freedom is guaranteed by my one true God.”

“Unless your so-called God is the Attorney General or the Fairy Godmother you won’t be seeing the outside world for a *very* long time” Sir Richard explained “So why don’t you do yourself a favour, maybe garner a little leverage with the judge, cut your inevitable sentence down a couple of years and tell me how you know who your targets are?”

“I know nothing, I am saying nothing, you can’t do shit...” ‘Fred’ defiantly confirmed.

“Hmm...” Sir Richard mused for a few moments before pushing his chair back and standing up, “One thing about a man in my position is that, not being a public figure, I don’t have certain restrictions, overseers, regulators, even the press watching over me which gives me a certain freedom of operation when it comes to situations like these.”

“Oh really?” ‘Fred’ remarked with distinct disinterest as Sir Richard walked around him.

“Indeed” Sir Richard confirmed before suddenly lunging forward and seizing the man’s head and slamming it hard into the surface of the table before holding it down.

The armed guard merely looked on as Sir Richard ramped up the intensity of the interrogation considerably.

“It means my friend I can do things like this” Sir Richard calmly explained as he further pressed the man’s head into the table “Names, your sources, who is your controller, I want everything, and you are going to give it to me” he demanded before pulling the man’s head up again.

“Ixion is my God, To Life Immortal” ‘Fred’ continued to be defiant.

“Very well” Sir Richard let go of his head and stepped back before moving towards the door “I am going to give you some time to think about your situation” he informed ‘Fred’ “In the meantime I will leave you in the capable hands of Barry here” he indicated the broad-shouldered guard who smiled menacingly at that point.

“Hi!” ‘Fred’ remarked to which Barry the Guard merely nodded in polite acknowledgement.

“Oh, by the way” Sir Richard remarked “I told Barry here what you said about his dear sweet old mother.”

‘Fred’ looked on with concern at that point as he heard Barry the Guard approach him slowly, yet with distinct menace.

“See you in about thirty minutes” Sir Richard then confirmed with a little mocking wave of his fingers before leaving the room, the door being discreetly closed behind him.

“Do I want to know?” The Commander asked as Sir Richard re-joined him whereupon a muffled thump immediately followed by a scream was heard coming from down the hall.

“Probably not” Sir Richard confirmed “Probably not...”

In an apartment on the fifth floor of the building directly opposite the Mobuto Embassy in Delabole Street, MI5, the National Police & Security Service and Sir Richard Crowthorne’s experts from his Section Fourteen organisation had been running an observation and listening post for over six months.

Their target for the two-man teams running on constantly rotating twelve hour shifts each was the renegade military leader of the group known as The Hand, Emmanuel or Sebastian St. John Adebesei who, not long after his arrival in the country had escaped to the Embassy and was now snugly settled in, revelling in the diplomatic immunity that he was instantly granted upon his arrival.

“I’ll say this for him” one of the officers observing out of the window remarked as he saw Adebesei emerge onto the fourth floor balcony of the Mobuto Embassy directly opposite, overlooking the street below “He’s always punctual.”

“Looks like we have got the usual audience of goons and loons downstairs” another officer commented as he surveyed four screens in front of him which were displaying live footage from a number of discreet CCTV cameras in the street outside.

“How many?” the first officer asked as he turned away from the binoculars that were trained on the balcony opposite.

“About a hundred odd” the second officer confirmed “All the usual Ixion nutters, a few journalists, a couple of curious passers-by.”

“Here we go” the first officer then called as Adebesei stepped up to the microphone stand that was set up on the balcony and held his arms aloft.

“My Brothers!” Adebesei called “By my Hand and under the watchful eye of the God of Ixion I call to you all and bid you welcome.”

“Yadda, yadda, yadda...” the second officer jokingly remarked.

“He does like the sound of his own voice, doesn’t he?” the first officer agreed.

Below them in the street, the crowd were cheering, chanting and waving banners with much enthusiasm as Adebesei continued his preaching.

“Let it be known among my brethren that we shall rise up in a halo of chaos, we shall trample down on those that oppose us and this world will become ours” he then announced.

As the two officers watched Adebese continuing his rambling sermon on the balcony, they were unaware of someone ascending the internal stairs of the apartment building they were in and approach their door.

“To the non-believers in our unholy cause, let it be known that we are now at our highest and ready to send our message directly to those that oppose us” Adebese then called before looking directly at the window opposite where the observation post was located.

“I think he knows we are here...” the first officer remarked.

“You do surprise me” the other officer wryly responded.

As they talked, the lock on the door to their apartment began to slowly move as it was manipulated from the outside.

“A message of power, a principle of war” Adebese loudly continued “A war between the Armies of Chaos, it’s foot soldiers ready to die for the light, against the darkness of the so-called security services who claim to be our defenders but yet imprison our brothers.”

At that exact moment, the apartment door was opened, whereupon two round objects were rolled inside along the hallway floor.

“To them I say simply, To Life Immortal!!!” Adebese then boomed, his arms held aloft.

At the exact same time, the two objects that had been rolled into the apartment through the door arrived in the front room where the two officers looked around and realised quickly what they were.

“Grenade!” one of the officers shouted but it was too late.

Adebese laughed loudly as an explosion blew out the apartment windows, sending burning debris into the street below and causing the Ixion Brotherhood supporters to quickly run for cover before they reconvened and started cheering again.

“Death to the infidels!!” Adebese called in jubilation “Burn! Burn! Burn!”

“This had better be good” The Commander remarked as he reached across to the telephone ringing urgently on the desk in front of him “The Guvnor” he then answered, “What is it?”

A few of the others in the Special Operations Control Room looked around and saw the look of disbelief and horror that appeared on his face as he received some shocking news.

“Oh hell...” The Commander uttered under his breath.

At the same time that The Commander was receiving shocking news, the same message was also being relayed to Dent who was on his mobile as he took a call himself a few moments later.

“What’s going on?” Tracy asked.

“It’s the observation post opposite the Mobuto Embassy” Dent responded as he lowered his phone, his hand practically trembling.

“Huh?” Sir Richard asked.

“This...” The Commander picked up a remote control and put the television on, showing the live broadcast of the BBC News channel.

“Initial reports say the explosion occurred a few minutes ago in an apartment on either the fourth or fifth floor in a building in Delabole Street in Kensington, West London” the BBC News Channel presenter confirmed.

“Isn’t that where the MI5 surveillance post watching Adebese is?” Tracy tentatively asked.

“Yeah...” The Commander regrettably confirmed as he hung up the phone.

“Eyewitnesses on the scene are reporting that it was a sudden and large explosion with a number of reported injuries among passers-by below caused by falling debris” the presenter continued.

“How many did you have on station?” Tracy asked.

“Two” Dent confirmed “Somebody somewhere has talked.”

The Commander let out a sigh as he reached for the telephone and made a call.

“Get me the Bomb Squad” he then called.

“Well, that’s the nosy neighbours taken care of,” Orbison remarked as he rubbed his hands with glee as he watched the live rolling reports on the BBC News Channel.

“My Lord” one of the Facilitators called “They are arriving.”

“Oh, right” Orbison responded as he got up, turning off the television and then offering an inverted genuflection to the altar before heading out of his personal chamber and on down a flight of stairs.

A few moments later Orbison and two of his Facilitators arrived in the basement of the Brotherhood Citadel building where a large dark blue luxury coach was arriving which pulled up in front of them whereupon the door slid open and the fourteen men who had arrived the previous day at Shoreham Airport disembarked, now all smartly turned out in identical black tailored suits and red ties.

From the under slung luggage lockers, their baggage was unloaded, consisting of suitcases and a significant number of weapons and ammunition boxes.

“Brother Olivier” Orbison greeted the leader of the group “Welcome to the United Kingdom.”

“Thank you, Lord Chaos” Torore responded before they both embraced for a few moments with a lot of mutual back patting “It is good to be here finally.”

“We have set aside our best accommodation for you and your special brothers” Orbison confirmed “Make yourselves comfortable, we have so much work ahead of us.”

“Brothers” Torore turned towards his men “Rest this evening, for tomorrow our war of chaos truly begins.”

“To Life Immortal” the men responded in uniform with a military salute.

“Dismissed” Torore declared whereupon they departed with the two Facilitators, leaving him and Orbison alone.

“We have much to discuss Honoured Brother” Orbison remarked as he and Torore headed upstairs.

“What of Honoured Brother Adebesei?” Torore asked.

“He continues to preach the word to our followers from the balcony of the Mobuto Embassy” Orbison confirmed “A better thorn in the side of the so-called justice and security agencies of this country we could not possibly ask for.”

“Excellent” Torore responded as they arrived at Orbison’s personal quarters and went inside.

“Brother Reaper’s excellent Soldiers of Ixion have started their work” Orbison confirmed as he offered Torore a drink which he silently and politely declined “including taking care of the nosy neighbours.”

“Nice work” Torore responded “I recall working with Colonel Reaper and his unit in Mobuto, some of the best mercenaries that money could buy.”

“Indeed” Orbison agreed.

“But what of Colonel Reaper himself?” Torore then asked.

“Unfortunately, he is still officially indisposed courtesy of the National Security & Police Service” Orbison remarked “But do not worry, that little problem is in hand and he will soon be back in the fold where he belongs.”

Delabole Street was a scene of chaos as the evening set in with the Fire Brigade still damping down smouldering wreckage whilst the white suited members of the Bomb Squad team were beginning to look through the area of the apartment explosion in search of evidence.

“What a mess” The Commander remarked as he and Tracy approached from the south and were let through the cordon that had been put up all around the area.

“It definitely looks like someone talked about MI5’s observation post” Tracy commented “What do you think?”

“I am guessing someone doesn’t like being watched” The Commander ruefully concluded before indicating ahead “Looks like the Bomb Squad guys are already getting to work.”

In the stairwell of the apartment building, the damage and mess from the earlier explosion and resulting fire was plain to see as the Bomb Squad team made their way through the wreckage, the emergency lighting the only illumination, debris strewn about and water dripping down.

As the team approached the fifth floor landing, one of them did a double take and trained their torch back on something on the floor amid the debris that had caught his attention.

“Guv!” the Bomb Squad member then called “Take a look at this” he indicated the object on the floor illuminated in the beam of his torch.

Bomb Squad Divisional Commander George Lewis turned round and looked for herself.

“Hello there...” Lewis remarked as she knelt down and examined the object in situ before indicating over to another Bomb Squad officer to photograph it.

“Got it boss” the photographer confirmed.

“Bag please!” Lewis then called as she proceeded to carefully pick up the object and then drop it into a clear plastic evidence bag that one of the other officers promptly produced.

“Georgie!” The Commander called up from the ground floor landing “You got anything?”

“Oh yes Sir” Lewis confirmed as she headed back down the stairs, the plastic evidence bag in her hand as they met.

“Is that what I think it is?” Tracy asked as she and The Commander looked at the object in the bag.

“Just looks like a bit of old metal to me” The Commander admitted.

“It’s a spoon, isn’t it?” Tracy asked.

“It is indeed” Lewis confirmed.

“Not going to be able to eat much ice cream with that” The Commander then remarked.

"A spoon from a grenade darling" Tracy corrected him.

“Guv!” came a call from upstairs whereupon they all looked up “Got another one!”

“Lovely!” Lewis responded.

“What’s the S.P. then?” The Commander then asked.

“Educated guess barring anything coming up in the nitty gritty of the lab examinations in the morning” Lewis remarked “Someone picked the lock, opened the door, pulled the pins on a couple of grenades and then tossed them in before legging it.”

“Ouch...” Tracy responded.

“Simple but effective it would seem” The Commander added.

“It looks like for added visual effect one of the grenades severed the gas main in the apartment” Lewis added “So even if the grenades hadn’t blown the two occupants to kingdom come, the gas going up would almost certainly have finished the job.”

“The spoons should have serial numbers on, yes?” Tracy asked.

“Yes” Lewis confirmed.

“Meaning we can trace where they came from and who they were sold to?” The Commander asked.

“It may be a bit of a long-winded international paper trail, but it should be possible, yes” Lewis agreed.

“Get on it” Tracy requested “We need to know who pulled those pins and quickly before anything else happens.”

Outside the building, Tracy and The Commander emerged into the outside air, the sun now having set and the streetlights now illuminating the street.

“The sooner we round up these assholes, dead or alive and preferably the latter, the better” Tracy declared.

“No argument from me love” The Commander readily agreed before looking up at the upper balcony of the Mobuto Embassy where Adebesei was looking down on them from above.

“Having a bad day Mr and Missus Policeman?” Adebesei cheekily called.

“Oh, to hell with this” the Commander lost his patience and drew his weapon and was about to aim it upwards towards Adebesei when Tracy quickly intervened.

“No, no, no, no...” Tracy politely warned, pulling her husband’s arm down again “You can’t just arbitrarily shoot somebody on diplomatic premises “It’s.... uncivilised!”

“Hmm...” The Commander responded as he reluctantly holstered his weapon once more.

“Besides” Tracy added “Your aim is so appalling you would more than likely hit Nelson’s Column than that sack of shit up there...”

“Good night silly little police people!” Adebesei then taunted as Tracy and The Commander returned to their car “Sleep tight, the fun starts tomorrow!”

“Be seeing you, asshole” The Commander responded with a knowing smirk before getting in the car.

“Don’t worry Commander” Adebesei remarked to himself as he watched their official car drive away “You will, you will....”

“Ah heck, there is a cobweb on it” Jack remarked as he took out his dress uniform tunic from the wardrobe.

“I think that is the least of your worries” Megan commented as she noticed something else “That looks suspiciously like ketchup down the front there.”

“Great!” Jack responded, “That’s going to look good for my first ever court appearance, isn’t it?”

“Come on” Megan then prompted, taking the tunic on its hanger “Let me see what I can do.”

“Thanks” Jack replied as he followed her through to the kitchen “I just want to look my best you know?”

“I know” Megan agreed “It’s not every day you get to give evidence on your first collar and against probably one of the most dangerous men ever to see the inside of the Old Bailey.”

“No pressure then...” Jack nervously responded.

“Oh, come on, after all you have been through over the years?” Megan commented as she proceeded to try and remove the stain from the tunic “This should be a walk in the park by comparison.”

“I don’t know” Jack tried to explain, “It’s just that I get this horrible feeling something is going to go wrong, so far everything has moved smoothly and on the button, and that is usually when the ground opens up beneath you and it all goes proverbially pear shaped.”

“Here” Megan handed him the tunic which she had managed to successfully clean “Hang that up to dry and by the morning it will be fine” she instructed.

“Thanks love’ Jack responded.

“Now, put all thoughts of things going wrong out of your mind” Megan then continued “All you have to do is turn up tomorrow morning on time and say your piece when you are called, everything else is out of your hands.”

“Yes, you are right” Jack admitted.

“Well of course I am right” Megan jokingly responded “Now, I think it is time to get some rest, don’t you?” she then suggested.

“Sounds like a plan my dear” Jack agreed “Sounds like a plan.”

“Oh, thank God!” Tracy exclaimed as she and The Commander arrived home at their apartment located on the south bank of the River Thames, opposite the distinctive headquarters building of MI6 located across the street in Vauxhall.

Whilst Tracy carefully hung up her uniform tunic on the hook in the hallway, The Commander by contrast casually discarded his over the back of a chair before heading towards the kitchen.

“I’m putting the kettle on love!” The Commander called as Tracy went through to the living room and collapsed back onto the sofa.

“Best idea I have heard all day” Tracy called back as she turned on the television only to be confronted by the BBC News Channel “I’ve had quite enough of that for one day thank you very much” she then exclaimed as she quickly changed the channel to something far less topical.

“Tea is brewing” The Commander confirmed as he came back into the room a few moments later and joined Tracy on the sofa, snuggling up to her.

“Lovely, thanks” Tracy responded.

“Have you heard from Sir Richard by any chance?” The Commander then asked as they both watched a game show on the television whereupon they both winced when the contestant being featured got a simple question terribly wrong.

“Erm, no” Tracy confirmed “I haven’t heard from him since this afternoon.”

“Oh...” The Commander responded as he got up again to fetch the tea “I was hoping he had managed to get something out of the guy that attacked Barrett.”

“Last report I heard before leaving the office was that despite the warm welcome Sir Richard and Barry, his interrogator friend have been giving him, he still isn’t talking” Tracy confirmed “Apparently the theory is that this guy has had some sort of anti-interrogation training.”

“Which fits in with the Soldiers of Ixion being members of Reaper’s old military outfit” The Commander remarked, “We need to identify every member of that unit still breathing, track them down and deal with them.”

“We could bung them on the official Terrorist Watch List?” Tracy suggested.

“That sounds like a good idea” The Commander readily agreed “With just one little problem, we don’t actually know who was in Reaper’s outfit.”

“Ah...” Tracy remarked “Oh come on!” she then exclaimed at the television as the contestant got another question hopelessly wrong.

“Blimey, where do they find them?” The Commander then asked.

“I dread to think” Tracy remarked “Probably the same mysterious dusty shelf that the file with Reaper’s crew listed in it is sitting on.”

“Indeed” The Commander mused “I think it may be time I called in on General Ford.”

“The Head of the Armed Forces?” Tracy exclaimed “You think he is hiding something?”

“I think a lot of people are hiding something in this little mess” The Commander grimly admitted “so I think it is time I rattled a few cages, kicked over a few rocks and see what crawls out, starting with the Ministry of Defence...”

“Come on Buster, get a move on” Fuller called to the family dog, a young West Highland Terrier as he walked him through the streets of Battersea on the last walk of the day before he intended to retire for the night.

As he walked up past Battersea Park towards the River Thames, something, he was not entirely sure what though attracted his attention some distance behind him.

Fuller’s initial reaction to the perceived problem was to subtly increase his pace, something that Buster was not overly keen on but a gentle tug on his lead saw him quickly keep up.

Reaching the south end of Chelsea Bridge, Fuller took a sudden turn off to the left and disappeared from view.

A few moments later as a figure followed his path up the road; a gun appeared from the shadows.

“Hold it right there mate” Fuller called as with gun in one hand, pointed at the mystery person who had been following him and Buster the dog under the other arm, he emerged from the shadows.

“It’s okay” Sir Richard confirmed, holding his hands up and looking back.

“Good evening” Fuller responded as he applied the safety catch on his firearm and holstered it whilst Sir Richard turned around, lowering his hands.

“I didn’t know you carried a gun?” Sir Richard remarked.

“Sign of the times” Fuller admitted as he lowered Buster back to the ground “Call it a prudent precaution in the light of recent events...”

“Quite” Sir Richard agreed “Sorry for the sneakiness but I wanted to talk to you alone.”

“As long as you don’t mind Buster here” Fuller indicated his dog.

“Has he signed The Official Secrets Act?” Sir Richard joked.

“I’m afraid not” Fuller amusingly confirmed.

“I guess I will have to chance it then” Sir Richard remarked “Tell me, do you think our communications are compromised?”

“In my opinion, and it is only an opinion I stress, yes” Fuller responded, “which I base on the theory that we have two serious problems.”

“Go on” Sir Richard prompted with sincere interest.

“Someone, and I still haven’t been able to trace who, has managed to infiltrate our core secure communications from a number of different entry points, many of them not easy to trace” Fuller explained his reasoning “Trying to keep on top of this with updated encoding and ciphers has kept both myself and two trusted colleagues at GCHQ occupied pretty much around the clock on rotating shifts for the last seven months.”

“Sort of like constantly trying to keep a room full of plates on sticks spinning” Sir Richard suggested.

“Yes” Fuller agreed after a moment of thought “That is as good an analogy as any.”

“And the other problem?” Sir Richard then asked.

“You mean our sudden outbreak of dead people?” Fuller responded to which Sir Richard merely nodded his head in agreement “Five people targeted so far from various security agencies, all triple level security, four dead, one alive only by pure luck and the skin of her teeth.”

“Yeah...” Sir Richard remarked “The key link being nobody should have had any idea what or who they were or what they did.”

“Lieutenant Commander Barrett is a particularly interesting incident” Fuller continued “I think whoever targeted her managed to establish who and what she is but then used her father’s car registration mark to zero in on her.”

“On my way over here, I got a call on the proverbial red telephone from my opposite number in Interpol” Sir Richard announced, “It seems one of their deep cover agents was shot dead in Dover Ferry Port about an hour ago, but they have managed to keep a lid on it so far.”

“It just doesn’t make any sense” Fuller remarked “It’s like somebody left everyone’s personnel file lying around somewhere.”

“Unlikely though, especially since members of multiple agencies have been hit” Sir Richard pointed out “If everyone were from just the one agency or were connected by history in some way then it would make just a little more sense.”

“I have checked the secure systems that store the encrypted personnel data of every agency I can think of and I have been unable to find any evidence that the firewalls have been breached or any data accessed” Fuller then confirmed “It just doesn’t make sense, but I will work it out, I have to.”

“That’s the spirit” Sir Richard jovially responded.

“Thanks...” Fuller replied.

“I also wanted to talk to you about your proposal that you submitted a few days ago” Sir Richard then continued, “Project Damocles?”

“It’s something I have been designing strictly off the books for a little while now” Fuller began to explain “and in light of recent events I feel now could be the right time to give some very serious consideration into making it a reality.”

“I agree” Sir Richard formally announced, “What do you need to make it happen?”

Absolute secrecy, twenty million quid, two and a half tons of equipment and somewhere very safe, secret and secure to install it” Fuller frankly confirmed.

“All right” Sir Richard agreed “The finance I can take care of, my Section Fourteen remit gives me certain financial privileges, just don’t look too closely at where the money originated from” he confirmed, “What about a location?” he then asked.

“One good possibility I have found although it will mean persuading London Transport to fix one of their lifts that has been locked out of use for the thick end of thirty years” he admitted.

“I have a reliable contact who can help with that” Sir Richard noted “Absolute discretion assured” he confirmed “Who were you thinking of telling about this little project of ours?”

“We keep it a strictly tight little group, invitation only” Fuller suggested to understanding nods from Sir Richard “You, me, Sir Hugo and the Director General of MI5, that’s it. Carefully vetted support and technical crew will be part of the assembly process of course but will be fed a cover story about an NHS data storage project or something similarly mundane.”

“Good idea” Sir Richard agreed “In which case I think we should proceed with the plan; I’ll get the money rolling.”

“Sounds like I had better go shopping in the morning” Fuller remarked.

“Don’t splurge” Sir Richard jokingly remarked “and you” he then looked down directly at Buster “keep schtum.”

Tracy and The Commander were snuggled up in bed when the mobile on the bedside table began to vibrate.

“I thought I turned that stupid thing off?” Tracy remarked as she clambered across and grabbed the mobile “Ah...” she then responded on seeing the screen.

“Huh?” The Commander sleepily responded.

“It looks like the emergency remote mobile activation protocol has been used” Tracy confirmed as she passed the mobile over to The Commander.

“You can do that? The Commander asked, “Turn on and ring a mobile that is switched off?”

“I am afraid so...” Tracy admitted as The Commander reluctantly took the call.

“It’s almost midnight and I am in bed with my wife so this had better be a matter of national importance or you may consider yourself unemployed in the morning” The Commander declared.

“Sir, the Daily Chronicle is about to hit the streets with an exclusive that you need to see right now” the Duty Supervisor at Scotland Yard advised “It has been posted on the BBC News website in the front pages section.”

“Tracy, love” the Commander called across whereupon she nodded in understanding and switched on her own mobile before quickly navigating to the BBC News website.

“Oh dear God, it looks like they just went public...” she then confirmed before showing her husband the screen on which the front page of the next morning’s edition of the Daily Chronicle newspaper was displayed.

“WORLD EXCLUSIVE!” shouted the main header whilst below it in equally outstanding type was the ominous words “DECLARATION OF WAR!”

“Today, The Chronicle talks exclusively to the United Kingdom representative of the military terror group The Hand as they announce their campaign against the forces of order, targeting their highly trained militia in what they describe as a legitimate God given war against the nations justice and security, heralding a new golden era of chaos and ensuring the freedom of their spiritual leader” Tracy read the opening paragraph of the article.

“Looks like The Hand and Orbison’s nutters just went on a publicity drive” The Commander admitted before returning to the telephone “Control, get me whoever wrote this in my office for seven a.m. sharp tomorrow morning” he then instructed “Drag them out of bed in handcuffs and throw them kicking and screaming into the back of a Black Maria if you have to.”

“Yes Sir” the Duty Supervisor confirmed.

“Goodnight” the Commander then grumpily called before hanging up.

“They have effectively declared open season on us, the Security Services, the Government, pretty much everyone” Tracy concluded from what she had read so far.

“Well, they won’t be getting Adebesei back if that is what they are after” the Commander concluded “The Home Secretary, the Foreign Office and pretty much everyone else would never allow it.”

“And that is assuming we could even get him out of the Mobuto Embassy which isn’t going to happen anytime soon” Tracy added.

The following morning as the sun began to rise; Jack looked out of the window clearly deep in thought.

“Someone is up early” Megan remarked as she joined him on the balcony.

“Old habit” Jack admitted “Back when I was a little scamp living on the streets, I used to watch the sun rise every morning, hoping it would be a better day” he explained “and besides, there is something just that little bit extra special about the sunrise over London.”

“You may well have a point there” Megan agreed “There is a big day coming up today” she then remarked.

“Ah yes, my day in court” Jack agreed, “I was rather hoping that it had been called off if I am honest.”

“Like I said to you last night, you will be fine” Megan reassured him once more, “and I will be there in the gallery watching your magnificent performance.”

“I can’t see it being exactly magnificent somehow” Jack admitted.

“All you have to do is stick to your notes and not let the defence barrister get to you” Megan advised, “Remember though, one slight deviation from your report or your official notebook or indeed any other public record of what happened, and they will jump on it.”

“Yes, of course” Jack agreed.

“Trust me, I am a lawyer” Megan reminded him, “Well, almost” she then admitted.

“Just out of interest, what happens when you have qualified, and you wind up representing the defence on a case I am involved with?” Jack then casually asked.

“It wouldn’t be allowed because of our relationship” Megan explained, “Ethically it would not be acceptable in a court of law, partially the reason why I am going into prosecutions rather than defence, the money is not as good but there is far better job satisfaction.”

Tracy walked down the corridor of their apartment to find The Commander in his study, sat at his desk writing.

“Oh, there you are” Tracy remarked.

“Sorry love” The Commander apologised, looking up “I couldn’t sleep” he explained “and besides, I didn’t finish up writing my journal last night.”

“How long have you been writing that?” Tracy then asked, looking at the dark red leather-bound notebook on the desk.

“Erm, pretty much since I was shot in Broadway on the day of the Lewisham Diamond Heist I think” The Commander recalled “It was a watershed moment you see.”

“And all handwritten” Tracy admired.

“Well, you know what I am like with computers love” The Commander admitted.

“Hmm, indeed” Tracy agreed “So how about telephones then?” she then asked.

“Huh?” The Commander replied.

“I got a message” Tracy explained “The Prime Minister wants to talk to us, right now.”

“Ah...” The Commander responded as he carefully put his pen down and reached across the desk for his mobile “I can hazard a pretty good guess what this will be about” he admitted as he found the correct number and proceeded to call it.

In Number Ten Downing Street, in the heart of Whitehall, the Prime Minister, Jayne Gray was on her way to her office, a large mug of coffee in her hand and a clutch of newspapers under her arm.

She was just about to reach the door of her office when her Personal Secretary came running up to her with an urgent message.

“Prime Minister” the Personal Secretary called “Sir Edward Regent on the line” he handed her a telephone handset.

“Here, hold this” the Prime Minister passed the papers over before taking the telephone “Commander, good morning” she then called.

“Good morning Prime Minister” The Commander responded, “I believe you wanted a word?” he ventured.

“Several actually” the Prime Minister confirmed “Why don’t we start with the front page of today’s Chronicle shall we and, if you will forgive me for my blunt line of questioning here, but just what the hell is going on?” she directly asked.

“Ah, that” The Commander responded.

“Yes, that” the Prime Minister confirmed.

“We seem to have a growing problem with that Adebesei guy and his gung-ho mates” The Commander explained “Although their declaration of war is actually a bit late as they actually started a couple of days ago.”

“The Carshalton Beeches so called ‘gas explosion’ I presume?” the Prime Minister suggested.

“Among other incidents, yes” The Commander confirmed “We have had at least three attacks, possibly four, all targeting individuals who work for various security agencies but, and this is the most important bit, they are all classified personnel which means, in theory at least, nobody should have known who they were or who they actually work for.”

“So, we must have a leak then?” the Prime Minister asked.

“Either that or incredibly coincidental bad luck” The Commander admitted “It’s almost as if someone has been slipping them our mailing list.”

“They being...?” the Prime Minister asked.

“Adebesi, The Hand, the Ixion Brotherhood, the Soldiers of Ixion, call them what you like” The Commander explained “In the end they are basically all the same group or at least a cooperative with similar ideals and goals.”

“And do you have a plan Commander?” the Prime Minister then inquired.

“Find the leak, nail it shut and then round up as many of Adebesi’s goons as we can find and either sling them in jail or throw them out of the country” The Commander determinedly confirmed “Unfortunately there is nothing we can do about Adebesi himself all the time he is hiding in the Mobuto Consulate.”

“Isn’t that opposite the explosion that occurred yesterday evening?” the Prime Minister recalled as she put two and two together in her mind.

“Yes, I am afraid so” The Commander grimly confirmed “That was the MI5 observation post until someone rolled in a couple of hand grenades.”

“I take it not many people knew of the existence of that operation either?” the Prime Minister asked.

“Myself, a couple of others, nothing written down to avoid a diplomatically awkward paper trail” The Commander confirmed.

“What a mess” the Prime Minister responded, “Get it sorted before this all spirals out of control” she then ordered “I want regular reports please, in writing and this time I would prefer them legible?”

“I’ll see to it Prime Minister” The Commander confirmed “Goodbye.”

“Legible, that would be a first” Tracy remarked.

“Is she criticising my handwriting?” The Commander then asked, slightly non-plussed “It’s not that bad, is it?”

“To be honest love” Tracy responded with a wry smirk “It’s bloody awful!”

The Prime Minister was not the only one who had been reading the morning papers, across the City the man known as Mr Taylor was also taking a considerable interest in The Chronicle's world exclusive story as he relaxed with a morning coffee and a cigar in a comfortable leather armchair in his personal study.

"Most excellent" he remarked to himself as he read the article which also ran across four pages inside the paper in addition to the inflammatory headlines splashed across the front page in large letters.

As he took a moment to put his cigar down and make some notes using an old-fashioned gold fountain pen, there was a polite knock on the door.

"Come in friend" Taylor called whereupon the door opened and a large well-built man in military camouflage clothing entered, stood to attention, and saluted.

"Ah, at ease Forrester" Taylor responded.

"Sir!" Forrester formally replied, merely relaxing his stance a little.

"Can you confirm that you have completed your mission Lieutenant Colonel?" Taylor then asked.

"The target has been neutralised and presented in accordance with your explicit instructions Sir" Forrester confirmed.

"Excellent" Taylor responded "Now, your orders are to return to your Unit, await further instructions and on no account talk to anyone about your private arrangements with our group, is that understood Lieutenant Colonel?"

"Yes Sir" Forrester quickly confirmed.

"All right" Taylor concluded "Keep you phone on; we will be in touch about the next phase" he then instructed.

"Understood Sir" Forrester replied before once again standing to attention and saluting whereupon he turned smartly on the heels of his brightly polished army issue boots and left the room.

"Hmm..." Taylor remarked to himself as he returned to studying his newspaper, "The perfect man for the job."

"Morning" The Commander called as he arrived in the Reception Area of New Scotland Yard "Any sign of that journalist I asked to be dragged in yet?"

"Nobody has come in so far Sir, sorry" Janice the Receptionist confirmed.

“May I...?” The Commander indicated the telephone on the desk to which Janice nodded.

A few moments later Tracy entered the Reception Area and joined The Commander by the desk as he was waiting for the call to be answered.

“Something wrong love?” she asked.

“Lately there always seems to be something wrong my dear” The Commander admitted just as his call was answered “It’s the boss” he then declared “Where the hell is that journalist I ordered to be dragged in?”

Tracy looked on as The Commander received the answer and she could also tell what it was as he rolled his eyes upwards.

“Right, send a couple of officers around to this journo’s drum and drag him in here, kicking and screaming if necessary” The Commander then instructed before hanging up.

“No show?” Tracy asked.

“No show” The Commander confirmed.

The early morning peace and quiet in the streets of Deptford was shattered when a Security Service vehicle approached at high speed, screeching to a halt outside an apartment building that had been converted from one of the old former docklands warehouses.

With swift efficiency the two officers deployed from the vehicle and proceeded inside the building, heading up to the apartment of the wanted journalist located on the fourth floor.

“Uh-oh...” one of the officers remarked to her colleague as they arrived on the fourth floor and immediately noticed that the door to the apartment was open with signs of some sort of struggle having taken place evidenced by the debris and broken fittings around the immediate area.

“Control from Lima Echo Eight Two Five, are you receiving, over?” the other officer called over the radio as they approached the open door, guns drawn.

“Control receiving Lima Echo Eight Two Five” came the response “Receiving, over.”

“We are on site at the apartment, but it looks like we are late to the party” the second officer confirmed “The door has been forced and there are signs that someone has been in a fight.”

“We have got blood here” the first officer nodded down at the floor where there were spots dotted around before they turned to look through the door into the apartment.

“Oh hell...” the second officer then responded as they both saw the body lying face down on the floor whereupon he kneeled down and checked for a pulse even though he knew he was probably not going to find one.

“Control, we have found the occupant” the first officer then called “Looks like someone has executed him.”

“Oh, please tell me something uplifting” The Commander desperately requested as he entered the Operations Room and all but flumped into the seat at the head of the conference table “as so far I think it is fair to say that this morning has been a bit of a downer.”

“We may have a possible lead on the Carshalton Beeches explosion” Fuller confirmed, “Will that do?”

“Well, I’ll take that for a starter” The Commander responded, “What have you got?”

“Forensics came up with not a lot” Fuller began to explain “just some fragmentary residue of the explosive and if it were not for the witness reports of the green flash when the explosion occurred, we would have struggled to tell little more than there was a very big bang.”

“So, I take it we are looking at other avenues of investigation then?” The Commander asked.

“Exactly” Fuller responded “We have been trawling CCTV and traffic cameras in the area in a window of approximately five hours prior to the explosion and one anomaly comes up, this” he then produced a photograph which he passed across.

“It’s a white van” The Commander commented, not looking overly impressed “There must be thousands of them, millions maybe.”

“I agree” Fuller responded, “However your average parcel courier or delivery driver usually makes frequent stops, they have a journey that when you plot it on a map looks like the footsteps of a very drunk squirrel on a Saturday night.”

“And this one wasn’t?” The Commander ventured.

“The van is registered to a hire company in Harlow” Fuller continued “All perfectly legitimate, they had nothing to do with this, the vehicle was hired for twelve hours by a customer who, surprise, surprise paid in cash and gave what has turned out to be duff details, plus it had a tracker fitted.”

“Now you have got my attention” The Commander’s interest clearly picked up.

“The normal domestic visible tracker was tampered with by the hirer” Fuller explained “It shows a random series of stop-start journeys but when you match the times and locations to CCTV they don’t match; the van isn’t actually there.”

“Curiouser and curiouser...” The Commander remarked.

“The mileage on the clock didn’t tally either which is why the hire company gave the local nick a call last night as they reckon something stank” Fuller continued “However because they have had problems with hire vehicles getting nicked in the past, they have fitted all their fleet with a second tracker, hidden deep inside the vehicle and virtually undetectable.”

“Let me guess” The Commander responded, “Completely different journey?”

“Exactly” Fuller confirmed “The journey recorded on that tracker fits with CCTV footage we have which shows the van was parked up outside the house that was blown up for over twenty minutes, approximately one hour before the bomb went off.”

“So, between the point where it was collected from the hire company and the bomb location, where did it go?” The Commander asked.

“Discounting momentary stops for traffic lights, jams, etc. it made just one other stop on the way, postcode reference N7 8TT, a large complex in Caledonian Road that I think we all know” Fuller leant forward to the computer and clicked his mouse whereupon a location on a map was displayed on the big screen in front of them.

“Well, I’ll be dammed...” The Commander exclaimed as he looked at the screen.

“On the way to Carshalton Beeches, our bomber made a stop at Pentonville Prison” Fuller confirmed.

Pentonville Prison in North London is probably one of the most well-known prisons in the country and holds some of the most dangerous and violent criminals the country has ever known.

This morning it was the turn of one of its more recent inmates to go on trial, Adam Reaper, a man who was facing numerous charges for numerous violent crimes, murder, and conspiracy.

Because of the serious nature of the charges and the connections that the authorities believe Reaper has, he was going to be getting a full security escort to his trial at the Old Bailey Courts.

At precisely eight thirty the escort convoy arrived at the main entrance to the prison and were quickly allowed inside before the large steel gates were shut again behind them.

The Prison Governor himself was waiting to meet the escort party and stepped forward as Tracy emerged from the leading patrol car before they met on the steps.

“Governor” Tracy called as they shook hands “Good to see you again” she remarked.

“We are honoured by your presence Divisional Commander” the Governor confirmed “This way please” he then indicated inside whereupon Tracy followed him inside whilst the armed escort officers remained outside by the vehicles.

“How is our local friendly violence loving psychopath?” Tracy asked as they entered the Governor’s office.

“Alleged violence loving psychopath Divisional Commander” the Governor reminded her “He hasn’t actually been found guilty yet.”

“I stand corrected” Tracy honestly admitted.

“It’s all right” the Governor responded, “I just lock them up, you are in charge of actually nabbing them.”

“With this long list of charges and the evidence we have against him” Tracy remarked as she looked through the paperwork “I think we can safely say he will a guest of these illustrious premises for a very long time.”

“I would hope that once his trial is over a move to Broadmoor would be arranged” the Governor suggested “As much as we are capable of housing the worst of the worst here, our friend Mr Reaper here is in a whole different league.”

“I am sure I can arrange that” Tracy confirmed with a wry smile “Just out of interest, what has Reaper been doing to keep himself busy during his stay.”

“According to his record he has been a remarkably busy boy” the Governor confirmed as he checked the file “Taking an Open University course and working in the Prison Workshop, quite the craftsman apparently.”

“How wonderful” Tracy responded as she checked her watch.

“Time for the off Divisional Commander?” the Governor asked.

“Indeed” Tracy confirmed “Let’s get this party started” she declared as the Governor reached for the telephone.

“This is the Governor, have the prisoner brought to the back gate please” he instructed.

A few minutes later, Tracy, The Governor and the detachment of armed Security Service officers were waiting by the main exit from the high security detention area for Reaper to be delivered into their custody.

“Okay, bring the van around and let’s get our boy on the road” Tracy instructed over her radio whereupon the prisoner van was quickly reversed into place and the armour-plated rear door opened in readiness.

“We’re good to go” The Governor confirmed whereupon with a siren sounding, the large metal doors began to open, and four prison wardens could be seen approaching them with a heavily shackled individual with his head bowed, between them.

As they neared the doorway, Tracy looked on with a little concern.

“He seems to have shrunk!” she then remarked as the prisoner was brought forward and he raised his head “Who the hell is this guy?” she then asked.

“What!?!” The Governor responded as he looked across and saw for himself that the prisoner was most definitely not Reaper but someone who had been substituted in his place.

“I am a messenger for the enemies of Chaos” the prisoner declared “A servant of our Lord and The Hand, and I rejoice in the sacrifice of myself so that my Greater Brother can be free!”

“Christ!” Tracy exclaimed “Lock this idiot back up” she then instructed before reaching for her radio “Angel One to Gold Command, ultraviolet priority message” she urgently called.

A couple of minutes later The Commander was looking over Fuller’s shoulder at various screens of CCTV footage from the Prison.

“There” he then pointed out whereupon Fuller froze one screen.

“Yes, that’s the van all right” Fuller then confirmed “It arrived at eleven thirty two, went around to the rear entrance of the prison workshop and left six minutes later at eleven thirty eight.”

“Can you compare images of the driver both arriving and leaving?” The Commander asked.

“Yes, of course” Fuller confirmed, immediately getting to work before producing two images on the big screen “Picture on the left is the driver on arrival, picture on the right is when he left.”

The Commander stepped down and went over to the large screen on the wall to take a closer look for himself.

“Can’t really tell much, that peaked cap is in the way” Fuller commented.

“Hang about...” The Commander then noticed something else “Can you move it down a bit?” he indicated the bottom of the photographs.

“Erm, yes” Fuller confirmed whereupon he adjusted the two views as required and The Commander craned his neck around to look more closely at something.

“Steering column” The Commander then declared “Look at the angle of it, low position in the arrival photo, significantly higher in the departing photo which means that the guy driving the van in was significantly shorter than the guy driving the van out.”

“That’s how Reaper got out undetected” Fuller concluded “They did a switcheroo and someone on the inside of the Prison was probably paid off to keep schtum on any suspicions.”

“Hell, he probably built the bomb mechanism in the Prison workshop for all we know” The Commander added.

“He wouldn’t have had the explosive there though, would he?” Fuller remarked “It would have been detected on one of their regular sweeps.”

“The way things have been going lately, I wouldn’t rule it out” The Commander admitted.

“Did I miss anything?” Dent asked as he entered the room.

“Reaper has gone walkies” The Commander explained “which means he is now number one candidate for the Carshalton Beeches bombing on what is admittedly a very short list.”

“Bloody hell...” Dent responded with an obvious sense of shock “Have you informed the Home Secretary?” he then asked.

“Just about to break the bad news to him now” The Commander confirmed as he reached for the telephone.

“You know, I was talking to the Home Secretary’s Personal Assistant the other day” Fuller remarked as The Commander reluctantly proceeded to make the call “Apparently whenever she informs him you are calling, he rolls his eyes upwards and mutters ‘Oh God...’ in a very depressed manner.”

“Home Secretary” the Personal Assistant called through from the outer office “Sir Edward Regent for you on the white scrambler.”

“Oh God...” The Home Secretary responded, rolling his eyes upwards.

“I knew you were going to say that” Sir Richard knowingly commented.

“Funny that” the Home Secretary sarcastically remarked as he picked up one of the telephones on his desk and pressed a button “Commander, what can I do for you on what was up until a few moments ago, looking to be a fine beautiful morning.”

“I’ve got one dead journalist on his way to the morgue and that psychopath Reaper has escaped” The Commander came straight out and admitted.

“Great...” the Home Secretary responded despondently.

“What’s happened?” Sir Richard discreetly asked.

“Reaper has escaped” the Home Secretary confirmed.

“Put us on speaker” Sir Richard then prompted “Commander?” he then called.

“Ah, I take it you heard the bad news then?” The Commander called.

“Yes” Sir Richard confirmed “How the hell did he escape?” he then asked.

“Not certain yet but the smart money is on him having switched places with a delivery van driver via the Prison workshop” The Commander explained “and then driving said delivery van to Carshalton Beeches whereupon the thick end of an hour later there was the very big bang.”

“Well, that changes things significantly” Sir Richard responded.

“I was considering tapping up General Ford and seeing if I could lever some information about Reaper and his rogue unit out of him” The Commander then remarked “Trouble is, I think the words blood and stone may apply.”

“A good idea” Sir Richard agreed “however if he tries stalling or fobbing you off, just utter one single magic word” he instructed “Serendipity.”

“Serendipity?” The Commander responded, completely non-plussed.

“He’ll know what it means” Sir Richard vaguely explained “In the meantime, considering that Reaper is officially back in play, has anyone checked where Jack is?” he urgently suggested.

Jack was in the Old Bailey courts in central London, waiting in a side room in his full best dress uniform. As one of the key witnesses at the trial of Adam Reaper, he was, understandably feeling somewhat anxious.

“You’ll be all right” Megan reassured him “If you think of all the extraordinary things that you have been through in your life so far, standing up in the dock as a witness for the prosecution should be the least of your worries I would have thought.”

“Yes, I suppose you are right” Jack admitted as he sat back down alongside his girlfriend and they held hands.

“All you have to do is say your bit, answer a few questions, treat the defence barrister with complete indifference and then we will be home for tea” Megan added.

“What if I fall apart in there?” Jack then asked, still clearly concerned.

“You are one of the toughest people I have ever met” Megan reminded him, holding his hand firmly in support “You will be fine” she strongly reiterated.

It was then that the door opened, and Tracy appeared, looking somewhat flustered.

“Ah, there you are” she called.

“Is our famous Colonel Reaper all nicely tucked up in the detention cells downstairs?” Jack asked.

“Err no, I am afraid not” Tracy responded, “He’s done a runner.”

“Oh great...” Megan remarked.

“I think in the light of how Reaper feels about you” Tracy urgently suggested “We had better get you back to The Yard whilst Megan, you need to be protected.”

“She stays with me” Jack insisted as they stood up in unison “even if we have to sleep in a hammock strung across your office.”

“The night cleaner will love that...” Tracy remarked as they left, meeting Sir Richard in the corridor.

“Ah, good” Sir Richard remarked as they met up “It seems we both had the same idea.”

“With Reaper apparently on the loose I thought it was a good idea to advise Jack in person” Tracy admitted.

“We’ll take my car” Sir Richard suggested as led the way towards the exit “I’m parked around the back.”

In the Ministry of Defence building in Whitehall, the Chief of the Armed Forces, General Ronald Ford was a worried looking man. Twenty minutes earlier he had received a telephone call which had shaken him as if it had revived an old ghost from his past.

With a heavy heart he left his office and proceeded down the ornate marble lined corridor to the lifts at the far end where, with a key he produced from his pocket, he unlocked the lower part of the control panels and pressed the bottom most button.

Without interruption, the lift descended through the building, past the ground and lower ground floors to the lower basement, the secure archive area, the existence of which few knew about and even fewer still, had access to.

When the lift stopped and the door opened, General Ford stepped out into the poorly lit corridor and looked on through what was in effect a large subterranean chamber some fifty feet below street level with the distant rumbling of the District & Circle Line audible on the other side of the nearby wall.

The rest of room was full of row upon row of shelving containing files and boxes, many of which judging by the fine layer of dust on them, had not been disturbed in many years.

Ford looked around before heading off down one side until he approached a further door set into the far wall, a door that was made of solid reinforced steel and with a formidable lock which required a combination of keys and a numerical code.

Taking out another set of keys, Ford unlocked the physical lock before entering the code number and then opening the large metal door which creaked and groaned on its elderly and little used hinges.

Reaching inside the door for the old brass light switch and flicking it on activated the antiquated lights which probably dated to before the Second World War and rarely saw use.

Row upon row of dusty seemingly forgotten locked boxes filled the chamber and it was towards one of these that Ford proceeded and then unlocked, revealing a red box file with a faded handwritten label on the spine which said just one word. Serendipity.

With a hesitant breath, Ford took the file off of the shelf before walking slowly away with it under his arm.

“Taxi!!!”

The call came from a tall well-dressed gentleman in his mid-thirties who came out into the street from the Probation Service offices on the apex of the corner where Great Dover Street meets Borough High Street, opposite Borough Underground Station.

Initially it looked as if, despite holding his right arm high aloft, his call was unanswered as the heavy late morning traffic continued to roll past.

It was a few moments later when the man was slightly startled by the sound of a car horn whereupon he turned to see a traditional London black taxicab pull into the side of the road having emerged from a nearby side street.

Getting in the back and closing the door, the man called up to the driver.

“Petty France, St. James’s Park please” the man instructed.

“You got it Guv” the cab driver confirmed as he turned off the ‘For Hire’ light and drove off.

The man looked out of the window as the taxi proceeded down Great Dover Street, thankful that the cab driver was not one of those overly chatty types who simply just got on with the driving.

Suddenly the taxi came to a dramatic halt in the middle of the road, throwing the man forward, only the seatbelt preventing him from being propelled across the passenger cabin.

“Is something wrong driver?” the man asked, looking around as he assumed something must have either crossed their path unexpectedly or stopped suddenly in front of them to cause the emergency brake application.

“It’s all right Guv” the cab driver calmly confirmed whereupon he opened the clear sliding dividing window and turned to look at his passenger with a menacing smile.

“You!” the man responded as; with a sense of shock, he recognised the face.

“No charge Guv” the cab driver ominously confirmed before pointing an automatic firearm through the aperture “To Life Immortal” he then declared before opening fire, riddling the man and the interior of the passenger cabin with bullets, killing the target instantly and shooting out the glass of the rear window.

With the sounds of screams and panic outside in response to the sound of the gunfire, the cab driver calmly got out of the taxi and took his peaked flat cap off to clearly reveal it to be Reaper.

“Here, what the hell do you think you are playing at pal?” an angry Bus Driver called from his cab having been forced to stop suddenly himself.

“Don’t...” Reaper politely but firmly advised, briefly revealing the firearm holstered under his jacket.

“Hey, peace man...” the Bus Driver responded, holding his hands up.

Reaper merely smiled in response before disappearing into the crowds as the sound of emergency service vehicle sirens drew near.

“Ma’am!” a young officer called towards Tracy as he chased after her in the corridor “Red flash from City Division, they have got a dead body full of bullet holes in the back of a black cab just down the road from Borough tube station.”

“Anybody we know?” Tracy asked, clearly concerned.

“City Division guys were the first on the scene” the officer confirmed “Initial eyewitness reports say the victim hailed a cab outside the Probation Service offices, a minute or two later the cab stopped, there were multiple gunshots inside the vehicle whereupon the driver calmly got out and walked away.”

“All right Lieutenant” Tracy then instructed “I want you to personally get hold of whoever at City Division is handling the scene, tell them I need confirmation of the identity of the victim as soon as possible but to keep it out of the press for as long as they can.”

“Yes Ma’am” the Lieutenant confirmed before like leaving her whereupon Tracy headed into the main Control Room.

“Can someone pull up the traffic camera footage from Borough High Street and Great Dover Street for the last hour please?” Tracy requested.

“Already being done Ma’am” the Control Room Duty Supervisor confirmed.

“Ah, efficiency” Tracy remarked as she sat down “How refreshing.”

A few moments later, Fuller put his head around the door of the Control Room.

“Has that shooting scene been completely sealed off?” he asked around.

“Barriers are up at one kilometre points in all directions from the body and all vehicles and buildings inside the zone are being carefully evacuated with full searches” the Control Room Supervisor responded.

“Great” Fuller responded as he then came fully into the Control Room and took over one of the computer terminals.

“You have the appearance of a man with an idea” Tracy remarked as she got up and joined him.

“Just something I have wanted to try for a while” Fuller explained as he worked on the computer terminal and then brought up a map of the area of the shooting up on the main screen.

Then with a further press of a button, a series of red rectangles appeared at various locations with numbers on them, some of those outside the exclusion zone were also moving on the map whilst those within the zone were stationary.

“What are those?” Tracy then asked.

“Buses, red London buses to be precise” Fuller explained as he looked across the screen, “Every Transport for London bus basically is now not only trackable to within five inches of its exact location but the on-board monitoring and recording equipment can now be remotely accessed as well.

“You’ve got quite a few to choose from” Tracy remarked.

“Jim, where is the taxi please?” Fuller then called across the Control Room to the Supervisor.

“On your screen now” the Control Room Supervisor then replied as a black rectangle appeared on the map.

“Thank you!” Fuller responded before looking again at the map on the large screen, “Right, let’s try you” he then moved his mouse cursor to the closest red rectangle on the map to the taxi and clicked on it.

“That is a lot of numbers” Tracy commented as a box containing several bits of information appeared on the screen, “What does all that mean?” she then asked.

“Route 21 to Lewisham, Go-Ahead London Central operated, Boris Bus fleet number LT846” Fuller explained, “Believe me this software could revolutionise bus spotting.”

“There is such a thing as bus spotters?” Tracy asked with some sense of surprise.

“Oh yes...” Fuller confirmed as he continued to work.

“So, now we know what bus it is and where it is or rather was going” Tracy summarised, “Now what?”

“Time to tap into her little black box” Fuller explained as he continued to work, “Oh, here we go” he then declared as a number of CCTV video feeds appeared on the screen from the numerous cameras fitted to both the interior and exterior of the bus.

“That must be the taxi, it is right in front” Tracy pointed out the live camera image on one of the screens showing the taxi with its shot out rear window and numerous emergency service personnel gathered around it.

“Okay, let’s take it back and see what happens” Fuller then remarked as he got to work.

Tracy and those in the Control Room not engaged on other duties watched intently as Fuller cycled through the video footage pausing it at the point at which the taxi could be seen coming to a halt in front of the bus before letting it play out at normal speed.

“Here we go...” Fuller remarked.

“Oh nasty” Tracy responded when the video showed the moments the shots were fired inside the taxi, demonstrated by the numerous shots that shattered the rear window, a couple of which even passed through to strike the bus, fortunately without further harm.

“Here comes the driver” Fuller then remarked as the video showed the driver’s door of the taxi open and an individual, just on the edge of the frame step out.

“Can’t see him” Tracy called.

“Not a problem” Fuller confirmed as he changed the view to another camera mounted on the ceiling of the drivers cab and pointed outside.

“Wait” Tracy then called out as from the new camera angle, the driver of the taxi appeared on the screen whereupon Fuller quickly pressed a button and froze the image at the exact moment that the individual was looking straight at them.

“Now, there is a familiar face” The Commander remarked as he came into the room at that moment.

“Well, I’ll be damned” Tracy agreed, “If it isn’t our Jack’s favourite one legged scum bag.”

“I probably wouldn’t say that to his face though” The Commander wisely suggested.

“Err no, quite” Tracy readily agreed.

“One thing is for sure” Fuller remarked as he went through the footage again and followed Reaper through various camera views until he disappeared from sight “Our boy here has no qualms whatsoever about being identified.”

“He’s practically goading us” The Commander pointed out as he reached for the telephone and dialled a single number that connected him with the New Scotland Yard switchboard.

“Who are you calling?” Tracy asked out of curiosity.

“The one person who may hold the answers to the former Colonel Reaper” The Commander confirmed before his call was answered, “Ministry of Defence, General Ford please, urgent” he then formally requested.

Not far away on the top floor of the Ministry of Defence building in Whitehall, General Ford was sat in his office, nervously tapping his fingers on the box file he had earlier extracted from the basement archives when the telephone on the desk rang ominously.

Slowly he reached across and picked up the receiver before putting it to his ear.

“Chief of Defence, General Ford” he formally called.

“General” The Commander responded, “How is Serendipity?” he then asked.

“Sitting on my desk, right in front of me Commander” the General confirmed, glancing across at the red box file in front of him.

“Good” The Commander responded, “I’ve got a growing number of very pissed off dead people who, like me would dearly like to know what the hell is going on” he then explained.

“Right...” the General replied with obvious hesitancy.

“In case you were wondering General, I have a lovely image on the big screen in front of me of Colonel Reaper, casually smiling at the camera having just blown some poor sod to kingdom come in the back of a taxi not twenty minutes ago” The Commander confirmed “which means he is loose on my manor and I want to know everything there is to know about him.”

“In which case you and your good lady wife had better come over” the General replied, “I think what is contained in this file really should be for your eyes only; it cannot be trusted to anyone else.”

“Sounds ominous...” Tracy remarked.

“Very well General” The Commander agreed “We’ll be over later this afternoon.”

“Until then Commander” the General agreed, still somewhat hesitant before hanging up.

“That was interesting” The Commander remarked as he hung up the telephone.

“He is definitely hiding something” Tracy agreed “and whatever it is, he is seriously spooked.”

“Yeah...” The Commander confirmed.

“Any identification on our body in the taxi yet?” Tracy then called across.

“First details coming through now Ma’am” came the response from the Control Room Duty Supervisor, “Robert Slade, works for the Probation Service apparently.”

“Simon?” The Commander called across to Fuller who immediately set to work on the computer.

“Here we go” Fuller then confirmed a few moments later, “Robert William Slade, forty three years of age, he has been with the Probation Service for eleven years, the last six months being seconded to a specialist prisoner rehabilitation project.”

“Just out of curiosity, anybody familiar cross the late Mr Slade’s path, professionally speaking?” Tracy asked.

“Oh yes” Fuller responded, “He was the Prison Liaison to none other than one Adam Reaper.”

“What a tangled web we weave...” The Commander remarked.

As the day turned into early evening and the sun started to set over London, Sir Richard let out a huge yawn and put down his pen before swivelling around in his seat to look outside the window at the view across Horse Guards Parade towards St. James's Park in the distance.

The Pyramid Inquiry which he chaired had been suspended a couple of hours earlier supposedly for legal arguments to be considered, but Sir Richard had simply had enough of listening to lawyers and witnesses droning on all day and just wanted a break.

Instead, he had used the last couple of hours to catch up on some reading and do some thinking about the current situation.

"Time for a drink" he then remarked to himself before closing the files and placing them in his briefcase, "Actually, it's always time for a drink" he then admitted with a smirk before putting on his long overcoat and leaving the chamber.

A few minutes later he exited out of the Cabinet Office building into Whitehall and proceeded to head towards Parliament Square.

Passing across the entrance of Downing Street, Sir Richard's years of experience began to tell him something was not right, there was the possibility that he was being followed.

He did nothing to alert the suspected follower that he was aware of their possible presence, he merely continued before heading down the steps on the corner of Parliament Square and Parliament Street and entering the passageways leading to the sub level ticket hall of Westminster Underground Station.

It was not his intention to board a train, what Sir Richard was doing was merely a diversionary tactic, passing through the ticket hall area and then leaving the station again by the main exit opposite the Houses of Parliament.

As he suspected, he was indeed being followed, a tall man in his mid thirties who Sir Richard had identified as he headed into the station, duly emerged from it again and then hung back.

"Interesting..." Sir Richard remarked to himself as he picked up a copy of the Evening Standard newspaper before continuing towards Westminster Bridge.

In fact, there were two people following Sir Richard as he passed Portcullis House and then turned left onto Embankment. The man he had identified was continuing to keep a moderate distance behind him but the second person following which Sir Richard was not yet aware of, was seemingly following the first man.

Embankment is the main road that runs along the north edge of the River Thames from the Houses of Parliament and heads east towards the Tower of London via some of the city's best-known sights.

A short distance from Portcullis House, Sir Richard passed the distinctive brick building which was once the second building to carry the name Scotland Yard but was now parliamentary offices, all the time using his years of experience to ensure his follower was still behind him but yet remain unaware that he had been spotted.

Extensive building work with scaffolding protruding onto the pavement up ahead gave Sir Richard an opportunity. Suddenly he ducked out of sight causing the first man who was following him to look on with some concern.

The follower quickly picked up the pace and sprinted towards the scaffold clad building site but found no sign of Sir Richard until suddenly an arm appeared from behind him, grabbed the man around the neck and brought him to the ground.

“Good evening” Sir Richard called as he restrained the man on the ground, “Looking for me?” he then directly asked.

The second person, who had been following, stopped as soon as he saw what was happening and stepped back into the shadows.

“Enemy of chaos, you will die with all the rest of them!” the man protested despite the choke hold that Sir Richard had tight around his neck.

“Feisty little chap, aren’t you?” Sir Richard practically complimented, “Who sent you?” he then demanded to know.

“I am the voice of my own God!” the man then declared. “Welcome to the Revolution!”

“Oh no you don’t!” Sir Richard responded as the man began to struggle free with immense strength, too much as it turned out for Sir Richard who was quickly overpowered and suddenly pushed to the ground whereupon he found a knife at his throat.

“To Life Immortal!” the man then declared only for him to be suddenly interrupted by someone else who smashed a piece of masonry over his head, knocking him out instantly.

“What the hell?” Sir Richard generally asked as he pushed the unconscious body off him and looked around, understandably confused.

“Lucky for you I happened to be passing by” called the voice of Sir Richard’s saviour, Divisional Commander Appleby who then casually tossed the brick aside and helped him back to his feet.

“Err, yeah” Sir Richard agreed, “Thanks mate.”

“Not a problem” Appleby confirmed before they both looked down at the unconscious man, “So what do you want me to do with this comedian?” he then asked.

“Best rustle up a Paddy Wagon for this guy I expect” Sir Richard admitted “Only, do you think we can keep this on the QT as I don’t really want anyone to know about this, it’s a bit embarrassing and bad for the image.”

“Well, seeing as I am not actually here, I was just following a hunch...” Appleby began.

“Uh huh....” Sir Richard nodded in understanding.

“...I’ll see what I can do” Appleby then confirmed.

“A hunch huh?” Sir Richard then asked, sensing that Appleby was hiding something.

“Just a hunch” Appleby evasively confirmed.

“Well, here it is Commander” General Ford remarked as he hesitantly pushed the large red box file across the desk.

Tracy looked on as The Commander took the box file and released the security seal on it.

“There are certain people who if they found out I had even looked at that file, let alone retrieved it and passed it to you, would be going absolutely mental right now” the General ominously advised, “I am talking full Court Martial and firing squad here, indeed they might even consider skipping the Court Martial and going straight to the last bit.”

“I take it this is one of Her Majesty’s Government’s dirty little secrets that was supposed to remain firmly buried for all eternity?” Tracy asked.

“Something like that, yes” General Ford confirmed “Err...” he began, obviously finding it difficult.

“It’s all right, you can tell us” The Commander prompted.

“Colonel Reaper was probably one of the best advanced operations officers our armed forces have ever produced in the last twenty or thirty years” General Ford began to explain, “I know this for a fact because I was his instructor, I trained him” he admitted.

“You mean you created this monster?” Tracy responded, understandably aghast.

“He somehow managed to fool all his superior officers and the physiological monitoring” General Ford confirmed “It was only when he became friendly with the militia in Mobuto, and he saw the money that was on offer that he and almost all of the rest of his unit went rogue.”

“Ah...” The Commander remarked.

“And that was when, in conjunction with my predecessor in this office and the then Secretary of State for Defence that I issued the Black Flag order on him” General Ford then slightly sheepishly admitted.

“Black Flag order?” Tracy asked, unfamiliar with the term.

“A kill order in effect” The Commander explained “Cut off his support, communications, supplies and then either discreetly tip off the locals or send in MI6 or whoever is available to end it.”

“Exactly” General Ford confirmed “The locals were of no use as Reaper was in their pockets, MI6 had nobody suitable available at the time, so we called in a favour from the Israelis who had a few axes to grind with Reaper’s crew as well and they were more than happy to help.”

“Ah, the dead Mossad Agent who Reaper and his pals posted back to Tel-Aviv divided across several very small boxes” Tracy recalled.

“I would normally call Colonel Reaper a psychopath but that would be unfair to your average hard working ordinary psychopath” General Ford continued “Needless to say, as soon as we realised that he was beyond our control or reach, we burned him and buried all knowledge of our involvement with him.”

“Let me guess” The Commander mused “You reckoned at some point he would wind up dead in the desert somewhere and this dirty little secret” he indicated the box file “would never have to see the light of day again.”

“Something like that, yes” General Ford admitted “Unfortunately he wound up intertwined in the Mobuto military forces and this Hand bunch where it seems his not inconsiderable talents and those of his unit were greatly appreciated and fully utilised, not to mention handsomely rewarded.”

“Our Foreign Office liaison was talking about war crimes in Mobuto” Tracy remarked.

“When the current President came to power about fifteen years ago” General Ford continued “He initiated a program of what he called ‘Strategic Economic Restructuring’ which was conducted by this General Adebesei character with Colonel Reaper and his Unit doing the donkey work on the ground.”

“Strategic Economic Restructuring?” Tracy asked.

“In other words, mass murder, genocide, ethnic cleansing, choose your cliché” General Ford grimly confirmed “Under the direction of General Adebesei, Reaper and his boys swept through the country wiping out anyone opposed to the new regime, whole villages were wiped out, Government officials murdered, three years of bloodbath.”

“So how did this Hand lot come about?” The Commander then asked.

“After the bloodshed ended and most of the President’s opponents were either dead, disappeared or in exile, the people were encouraged to embrace the supposedly miraculous rebirth of the country” General Ford continued “They were hailed as saviours when in reality, and with the full backing of the President, they were only interested in power, wealth and bloodshed.”

“And at some point, they managed to achieve a cult status with followers all round the world” The Commander added.

“Colonel Reaper was on the MI6 terrorist watch list but somehow managed to sneak back into the UK without anyone noticing and hook up with that Lord Chaos whacko” General Ford continued “The first we knew of his unwelcome return was when your boy Jack slapped the cuffs on him six months or more ago.”

“We believe the surviving members of his old Unit make up the core of the so-called Soldiers of Ixion” Tracy commented “We also strongly believe that Reaper and his merry men plus whoever else they have enlisted to their little private army are responsible for a number of recent attacks including the explosion in Carshalton Beeches a couple of days ago.”

“Current running theory is that Reaper constructed the bomb in the prison workshop would you believe?” The Commander added.

“Not surprising really” General Ford remarked, “He is an exceptionally talented man. Give Colonel Reaper a box of nuts and bolts, a roll of gaffer tape and a Swiss Army knife and he will MacGyver you a bomb faster than it takes to make a cup of tea.”

“Thank you for this General” The Commander called as he picked up the box file “I think it is time this merry band were rounded up and put out of business.”

“Good luck, you are going to need it” General Ford ominously warned as Tracy and The Commander got up.

“If there is anything left by the time we have finished with them, would you like them?” Tracy asked.

“Feel free to bury them somewhere deep and dark before you throw away the key” General Ford grimly responded.

“Consider it done” The Commander readily agreed before they left, closing the office door behind them.

General Ford looked on for a few moments before getting up and going over to the side table where he proceeded to pour himself a drink from the crystal glass decanter.

As he raised the glass to his lips, a hidden connecting door opened silently.

“Good evening Colonel” General Ford called over his shoulder before turning “I was wondering when you might appear” he remarked as Reaper, dressed in full and correct military dress uniform entered the room, holding a semi-automatic handgun with muffler fitted and aimed directly at him.

“Good evening Sir” Reaper formally responded.

“I know why you are here” General Ford remarked as he sat back down whilst Reaper went around to the opposite side of the desk, all the time maintaining his aim squarely ahead upon him, “The question is, how did you manage to get in here?”

“I still have friends here” Reaper explained “and I know all this building’s little secrets.”

“I don’t doubt it” General Ford responded, “Would you care for a drink?” he then indicated the decanter.

“No thank you Sir” Reaper replied, “I am on a mission.”

“So I understand” General Ford remarked “How long were you waiting behind that door for if I may ask?”

“Long enough” Reaper honestly admitted “When certain people find out you have allowed my file to leave the building there are going to be a lot of awkward questions to answer.”

“What happened to you Colonel?” General Ford then asked, “You were the brightest and best, hell in time you could have been sat in this very office.”

“I still might General” Reaper explained “You see there is a new world order coming, an army of chaos, a firestorm of madness and the war has only just begun.”

“And what are you in this whole sorry mess, Supreme Allied Commander?” General Ford dismissively asked.

“Something like that Sir” Reaper confirmed “That however is business, this little matter, you and I have is strictly personal.”

“I figured as much” General Ford remarked.

“Despite all the training, mentoring and all the clandestine black ops you coordinated and sent me and my team on, you were the one who signed the Black Flag order” Reaper explained, reaffirming his grip and aim on the weapon “You did not even have the guts to carry it out yourself, you owed me that much at least.”

“Yes Colonel, you are right” General Ford admitted “I should have handled the matter in person, man to man.”

“Well Sir” Reaper declared “Here I am!”

“What do you propose?” General Ford asked even though he knew, indeed he had known for a long time that this day, this moment would eventually come.

“Quick, simple and painless” Reaper confirmed “I think considering our history I owe you that much.”

“Thank you, Colonel...” General Ford responded as he finished his drink before putting his glass down neatly on the desk in front of him and straightening his uniform tunic.

“Good night Sir” Reaper then called before opening fire three times in quick succession, killing the General almost instantly.

For a moment, Reaper paused, his gun still aimed at the slumped body of the General before lowering it, removing the muffler, and holstering the weapon inside his uniform tunic.

Looking around the office, Reaper then proceeded to the door that led out into the main corridor and fiddled with something around the door handle, fitting an object that he had brought with him and attaching it firmly in place on the inside of the door.

Once this task was complete, he then took a large marker pen from the desk and wrote something in large lettering across the face of the huge map that dominated the west wall.

Before leaving, Reaper proceeded to remove General Ford’s ceremonial sword and gazed at it in admiration for a few moments.

Then with the sound of voices as a couple of people passed by outside, Reaper quietly left the office through the same side door that he had entered.

“Come on love” Tracy enthusiastically called as she waltzed into The Commander’s office early the next morning and took him by the hand “Grab your coat, we are going out, it’s a nice day for a walk.”

“Are we?” The Commander responded, completely taken by surprise as he got up from his seat and grabbed his uniform overcoat from the hook and put it on “Where are we going?” he then asked.

“Downing Street” Tracy confirmed as they headed for the lifts “The Prime Minister has requested an audience...”

“Oh joy...” The Commander mockingly response.

“I thought you would like it” Tracy remarked as they entered the lift and the doors closed.

“So, what is it about?” The Commander asked as the lift descended.

“She didn’t say unfortunately” Tracy admitted as the lift reached the ground floor and the doors opened.

“Mystery tour then” The Commander remarked as they passed through the reception area “Although I can make a fairly educated guess as to what it might be about.”

“Which way shall we go?” Tracy asked as they came out of the main door and then stood together on the pavement in Broadway.

“Through the Park I think” The Commander suggested “It’s such a lovely day.”

Tracy and The Commander walked arm in arm around the front of St James’s Park Underground Station and towards the nearby Park.

“It is such a beautiful day” Tracy remarked as they crossed Birdcage Walk and entered the park before heading to the right.

“Indeed, it is” The Commander agreed “So, do you think we are about to get an official bollocking or just a standard what the hell is going on enquiry?”

“Hope for the best, prepare for the worst” Tracy responded as they continued to walk through the Park.

“Ah...” The Commander then remarked, looking upwards at the sun shining down through the trees “Let’s talk about something else before our Prime Ministerial inquisition” he then suggested.

“Good idea love” Tracy readily agreed before thinking for a few moments “I have an admission to make” she then remarked to which she and her husband exchanged an amused look at each other in response.

“Oh, I am all ears” The Commander remarked with obvious curiosity.

“I read one of your old journals” Tracy admitted, slightly embarrassed.

“Not exactly the crime of the century” The Commander responded, “I certainly don’t mind.”

“I wanted to check something” Tracy then explained “Did you know we have met before?” she then asked.

“Err...” The Commander replied, not entirely sure what she was on about.

“I recalled last night that we met, all be it ever so briefly a couple of years before we officially met, if you see what I mean” Tracy confirmed.

“I think the mists are clearing” The Commander admitted “Middle of the Priory Park investigation?” he then ventured.

“Your investigation ran a cart and horses through my Guvnor’s six month pet project if I recall” Tracy explained “and as soon as he found out, he collars me out of the office and next thing I know I am driving him over to Haychester for him to have a heart to heart with your Guvnor over how, and I quote ‘some whipper snapper junior officer’ had managed in two days to all but solve a case that he had personally been working on for over six months.”

“I did get the impression at the time that he was none too pleased about it” The Commander fondly recalled with a wry smirk “It was outside the office we met, wasn’t it?”

“You do remember?” Tracy responded.

“We bumped into each other if I recall, you were heading out as I was heading in” The Commander continued “Let us just say you made an impression.”

“Did you ever solve that case in the end?” Tracy then asked as they reached the edge of the park and crossed the road towards Horse Guards Parade.

“A day or so later” The Commander confirmed “Although, needless to say there was a bit of chaos, mayhem, some jumping off of a cathedral and the odd gunshot or two involved” he winced slightly.

“Why am I not surprised?” Tracy giggled in response.

The security guard on duty at the back gate into Downing Street acknowledged the two senior officers as they approached and opened the gate to allow Tracy and The Commander to pass through unobstructed whereupon they both headed towards the back door into Number Ten.

One of the official Downing Street staff allowed them in the door before escorting them through the corridors and up the back stairs.

“I feel like we are being summoned to see the Headmistress” The Commander remarked aside to Tracy “What where you like at school?”

“Oh, I never got summoned to the headmaster’s office” Tracy confirmed.

“I see, you were a little goodie two shoes then?” The Commander asked.

“No, just never got caught...” Tracy responded with a smirk “You?”

“Let’s just say my education was colourful and incident filled and leave it at that” The Commander replied as they reached an ornate double door through which they were let.

“Ah, there you are” the Prime Minister called as she rose from her seat behind her desk “Thank you for coming over so promptly.”

“Well, it was a nice morning for a walk” The Commander admitted.

“Do please sit down” the Prime Minister indicated whereupon they all sat down around her desk.

“So, what can we do for you Prime Minister?” Tracy then asked.

“Erm how do you say it?” the Prime Minister pondered for a moment, “Ah yes, I want the full S.P. and don’t leave anything out” she then prompted.

“Okay then, in a nutshell, someone somewhere has either been given or has hacked confidential personnel information on various individuals in various agencies including our own” The Commander summarised “and Reaper, the remaining members of his old army unit plus other individuals we believe under the command of a man named Olivier Torore are doing a pretty good job of indiscriminately killing them in various imaginative, colourful and violent ways.”

“Oh my God...” the Prime Minister responded with a sense of shock.

“Olivier Torore is reportedly to be the Number Two to our favourite embassy dweller Adebesi” Tracy then added.

“That slime bucket...” the Prime Minister summarised.

“...and then there is this very public so called ‘Declaration of War’ against order by the army of chaos or whatever it was they have chosen to call themselves” The Commander confirmed “If it weren’t for the various attacks that have occurred, I would dismiss it as Lord Chaos’s usual idiotic wibblings but with these heavily armed and trigger-happy bastards roaming around, we now have a very, very serious problem.”

“So, what is the body count now?” the Prime Minister asked.

“I’ve lost count” The Commander reluctantly admitted “Latest one is the incident in Borough High Street where a taxi driver gunned down his fare in the back of his cab yesterday afternoon.”

“I heard about that” the Prime Minister confirmed “Who was the victim?” she then asked.

“Not publicly confirmed at the moment but it appears he was one Robert Slade who was an investigative officer for the Probation Service” The Commander confirmed.

“And for ten points, guess who one of his prisoner cases was?” Tracy asked.

“Oh no...” the Prime Minister responded in realisation “Reaper?” she then asked to which The Commander merely nodded his head in confirmation.

“Whilst we don’t know much about Adebese’s gang other than this Torore character” Tracy continued “General Ford has managed to see the light and provide us with the secure file about Reaper and his old Army unit, it seems their skill set was a lot more advanced and in depth than we had at first been led to believe.”

“All right, I have had my breakfast so give me the bad news” the Prime Minister reluctantly requested, rolling her eyes upwards in despair.

“Up until yesterday evening we were under the distinct impression that Reaper was a regular army grunt who was seconded into a United Nations peace keeping unit and then went rouge after being on the receiving end of some local influence” Tracy explained “but...”

“There’s always a but...” the Prime Minister remarked under her breath.

“...it transpires he was in fact a specially trained and multiskilled black operations specialist and we, the good old UK Government through its armed forces, are in fact responsible for the creation of this monster” Tracy then concluded.

“Why am I not surprised?” the Prime Minister then sarcastically asked.

“We do now have the details of the members of Reaper’s rogue unit at last” The Commander then confirmed “It took some serious crow barring of General Ford to get it out of him mind, it seems that the armed forces are somewhat embarrassed about Reaper and have been rather anxious to bury any evidence of their involvement in this mess.”

“So, do you two have a plan?” the Prime Minister hopefully inquired.

“Now that we know who was in Reaper’s rogue unit” Tracy explained “we want to do a full track, trace and observation on every single one of them but...”

“Let me guess, you need money by any chance?” the Prime Minister ventured knowingly.

“Basically, yes and lots of it” The Commander admitted “We want to trace everyone on the list who isn’t incarcerated or pushing up daisies, then put them under full surveillance, phone taps, internet usage monitoring, satellite tracking, delve into bank accounts, the whole nine yards.”

“Forty odd individuals?” the Prime Minister summarised “that is a hell of a lot of resources” she pointed out.

“And that doesn’t include the dozen or so gun toting nutters that we know about from The Hand who are in the country at the moment” Tracy added “and until they decide to show themselves, we are effectively blind as to their activities and intentions.”

“I need the National Terrorist Threat Level raised to as high as it is politically convenient as possible” The Commander then formally requested “Until we can find the source of the leaks and nail these guys, preferably to the wall using exceptionally large, sharp and long nails, we are going to be constantly playing catch-up and we need resources, lots of them.”

“Raising the threat level automatically triggers a funding release from The Treasury” Tracy added with a smile.

“The Chancellor is going to have kittens...” the Prime Minister remarked with a snigger “It’s worth making the call just to see the look on his face when I tell him!”

“Right, thank you” The Commander responded, “In which case I think we had better get to work.”

“What about that Orbison character?” the Prime Minister then asked.

“Unfortunately, every time we try and do anything involving the infamous Lord Chaos and his Ixion Brotherhood loonies, we get the proverbial back off warning from an armada of lawyers led by that sack of shit Bermann and his greasy associates” Tracy explained.

“Anyway, Orbison is a mouthy dweeb with delusions of grandeur” The Commander commented “He can wait, it’s Adebese’s mob and Reaper’s crew that are the big problem at the moment.”

“Is there any movement on getting that asshole out of the Mobuto Embassy?” Tracy then asked, “We have our Foreign Officer liaison officer on board, but it seems to me he is not actually doing much liaising, at least not from what I can see.”

“Actually, he has been in high level meetings between the Foreign Office and representatives of the Mobuto Government for the last few months” the Prime Minister “I didn’t want to tell you this...”

Tracy and The Commander rolled their eyes upwards in mock surprise.

“...but there has been no movement whatsoever” the Prime Minister confirmed, “Of course there is the small matter that the legal representative of the Mobuto Government doing all the talking is none other than our favourite legal eagle Hermann.”

“Well, that explains a few things” Tracy remarked.

“What is Orbison doing at the moment?” the Prime Minister then inquired.

“Still preaching to the converted” The Commander confirmed “GCHQ are working around the clock trying to keep up with the constantly changing encryption on his online channel but for the moment it is still mostly the usual gibberish and wibble.”

“Chris Dent over at MI5 has a theory that in amongst all the codswallop there may be encoded messages to key members of the Brotherhood with instructions on what to do but for now, that is just a theory” Tracy added “Proving it however is another matter entirely.”

“All right” the Prime Minister remarked as she stood up “I won’t keep you any longer, find that leak and get those buggers arrested.”

“Oh, we intend to” The Commander agreed as he and Tracy also got up and prepared to leave.

A few minutes later Tracy and The Commander were at the famous front door of Number Ten Downing Street where the officer on duty duly opened it and they stepped outside into the street where the members of the press who were usually to be found encamped on the opposite side of the road duly called over.

“Smile love” Tracy called aside to her husband as they stood, arm in arm and posed for the cameras for a few moments before heading off.

“Any Alpha Officer receiving, ultraviolet priority” the Duty Supervisor at the New Scotland Yard Control Room called over the radio.

“There goes the neighbourhood” Tracy remarked as she and The Commander were walking together down Downing Street towards Whitehall, “Would you like to do the honours my dear?” she then asked her husband.

“Why thank you my love” The Commander responded as he reached for his radio “Eagle 1 receiving, pass your message, over.”

“We just got another coded bomb warning, no specified time but the location seems to be in Westminster” the Supervisor explained.

“Where exactly?” The Commander then asked with a renewed urgency.

“All we have is a postcode, SW1A 2HB, that is Sierra Whisky One Alpha, Two Hotel Bravo” the confirmation came.

“That’s the Ministry of Defence building” Tracy realised.

“Come on!” The Commander urged as they both ran off down towards Whitehall where the gates were swiftly opened to let them through.

As they headed down the street, The Commander got on his mobile and tried to call General Ford.

“Damm it, he’s not answering” he responded.

“It’s all right” Tracy then called as they continued to run down Whitehall towards the imposing Ministry of Defence building in the distance “I’ve got the main desk; they are sending someone up to Ford’s office now.”

A short distance away inside the Ministry of Defence building, one young military officer was walking briskly down the marble lined corridor towards General Ford's office as the fire alarm began to sound and an evacuation of the premises commenced.

"General, are you there Sir?" the officer called, knocking urgently on the door but got no answer so he then tried the handle.

Initially trying the door handle revealed that it seemed to be secured from the inside which seemed odd, so he tried a bit more force.

The door was in fact secured by something other than the lock and it was as the officer managed to release the catch that there was a loud click...

"What the...?" The Commander exclaimed as a large explosion suddenly erupted from a number of windows on the top floor of the Ministry of Defence building, sending rubble, shards of glass and burning debris down onto the lawns and the street below.

As the explosion erupted with the loud bang echoing off the walls of the surrounding buildings, The Commander instinctively grabbed Tracy and brought her to the ground before covering her with his own body to protect her.

Some small pieces of dusty debris managed to reach as far as the two officers and as the echoes of the explosion died down, they both got up.

"Are you okay love?" The Commander asked.

"A bit dusty but I will be all right" Tracy confirmed.

"Control from Eagle One" The Commander then called into his radio "Large explosion at the Ministry of Defence building, get the cavalry down here and get me an exclusion zone around the area right now."

"I'll sort out the traffic love, you go on ahead" Tracy urged.

"Okay my dear" The Commander agreed before heading off towards the scene of the explosion.

"Hey guys!" Tracy then called out to a couple of Security Service patrol officers nearby "Give me a hand and let's get this traffic out of here!"

As The Commander ran towards the main entrance of the Ministry of Defence building, he met numerous civilian and military personnel coming out the other way, some clearly injured and shocked.

Tracy meanwhile had managed to commandeer further officers and effectively clear the traffic and passers-by from the immediate area as sirens heralded the arrival of further emergency service vehicles on the scene.

“Good grief!” The Commander exclaimed as he entered the building where the fire alarm was sounding loudly.

“Sir?” one of the senior military officers called as they met.

“I was in the neighbourhood” The Commander explained “Have we confirmed the building has been evacuated yet?” he then asked.

“Foxtrot Echo to all Fire Marshall’s” the officer called into his radio “Have we confirmed full evac, over?”

The Commander looked on as the various fire marshals reported in.

“Foxtrot Delta, can you confirm please?” the officer then asked.

The Commander then leant forward so that he too could hear the response.

“We have three unaccounted for on the ninth floor” the confirmation came over the radio “The General and two other officers based on the same floor.”

“Fire brigade are here” The Commander confirmed as several fire-fighters in full equipment arrived through the main doors, “Guys, possibly three trapped and or unaccounted for on the ninth floor, everyone else is out” he called over to them.

“Right” the Fire Chief confirmed, “Out!” he then ordered.

“I think he means us” The Commander confirmed as he and the Fire Marshall officer headed outside where further fire brigade personnel were arriving along with the large aerial platform which was already being raised up to allow the fighting of the fire to be done from directly outside as well as from within

“I’ve got the street sealed off” Tracy confirmed as she joined her husband outside the building, standing back to allow the fire brigade personnel to go about their work.

“Nice work my dear” The Commander commented.

“Thanks” Tracy responded “So, what’s the damage?” she then asked with obvious concern.

“It looks like we have three missing on site including General Ford” The Commander grimly confirmed.

“Oh dear...” Tracy responded as they both looked up at the scene of the explosion where, thanks to the quick actions of the fire and rescue service, the flames were already being dampened down.

An hour later Tracy and The Commander were approaching the bomb-damaged part of the top floor corridor where the Bomb Squad Divisional Commander, Georgie Lewis and two of her experts were working in the area where the explosion had occurred.

“All right then Georgie, what’s the story?” The Commander asked as they arrived.

“Whoever designed, manufactured and then set this bomb was very, very good” Lewis confirmed “We are talking the gold standard of bomb making here.”

“What happened?” Tracy asked.

“The bomb was installed on the inside of the office door so that when you guys called the MoD to warn them, one of their lads came down here, tried the door, set it off and wound up being blown out through the window” Lewis explained “Probably didn’t know what hit him.”

“Poor sod” Tracy responded.

“So, when we got the coded warning” The Commander concluded “By calling the MoD we effectively triggered their bomb for them.”

“Oh, nice...” Tracy sarcastically responded.

“Your second victim was the General” Lewis continued “Only he wasn’t killed by the bomb, he was dead long before this went off.

“This is starting to get complicated...” Tracy hesitantly remarked.

“Now, admittedly, I am no ballistics expert” Lewis remarked “but when the coroner took the body out of there ten minutes ago, it looked to me like there were three bullet holes in him, two to the chest and one to the head.”

“Which means he was executed” The Commander grimly concluded.

“Like I said, not my field” Lewis agreed “But it sure as hell looks like it.”

“The question is who did it?” Tracy then asked as they stepped carefully into the damaged but still recognisable office.

“And when?” The Commander added.

“It must have been after five o’clock last night” Tracy concluded “He was definitely still alive when we left here, the door was still intact too.”

“Whoever it was that planted this bomb was clever” Lewis continued “They placed it over the door handle mechanism so that it blew outwards, leaving the office here all but intact.”

“How did the bomber get out of the room with the device on the door without setting it off?” Tracy asked.

“Search me” Lewis confirmed “Whoever he or she was, they sure as hell didn’t go out this way though.”

“Well, he didn’t jump out of the window, not this high up” The Commander concluded.

It was then that Tracy noticed something on the wall, stepped forward and used her hand to sweep off the fine layer of soot from the large world map near the door, revealing some large handwritten wording in a foreign language across the map.

“What the hell is that?” The Commander asked.

“Not good with foreign languages then Sir?” Lewis remarked.

“Russian, a little Minbari and a few German swear words thanks to not paying attention in school but that is about it” The Commander admitted.

“It’s Latin” Tracy confirmed “Ut vitae immortalis” she read out.

“Err...” The Commander responded before admitting defeat at any attempt at translation.

“To Life Immortal...” Tracy confirmed.

“Ah...” The Commander responded, “That puts our favourite psycho, Colonel Reaper firmly at the top of a very short list of likely suspects.”

“So how the hell did he get out of here?” Tracy asked as they both looked around as if in search of inspiration.

“This is an old building, I sure it must have some secrets” The Commander remarked.

“Oh, hang about” Tracy called “There seems to be some sort of loose panel here” she fiddled with what at first appeared to just be a wooden panel section of wall but discovered that it was in fact hinged.

“Back door?” The Commander remarked.

“Looks like it” Tracy confirmed “Anyone got a torch?” she then asked.

“Here” Lewis passed a torch from her toolkit over which The Commander took and switched on.

“Thanks” he responded before turning to Tracy “After you my love” he then indicated the way ahead.

“Why thank you my dear” Tracy responded before leading the way into a tight enclosed spiral staircase with virtually no lighting, only the light from the borrowed torch giving them any chance of making out where they were going.

“Where do you think this leads to?” The Commander asked as he followed Tracy down the steps.

“All the way to the basement I expect” Tracy commented “I wonder what they keep down there?”

“I think we are about to find out” The Commander admitted.

It took several minutes to navigate the staircase down to its lowest level where a lone old bulkhead light shone dimly above a door set into the wall.

“Locked...” Tracy confirmed as she tried the door “Hang about” she then took out her lock picking kit and worked on it before successfully opening the door.

“Nice one love” The Commander complimented her as they entered an old basement storage room where they were confronted with seemingly long forgotten dusty shelves full of old equipment.

“Now where do we go?” Tracy then asked, scanning the torch around.

“Is it me or is the dust down there to the left disturbed?” The Commander indicated ahead and to the left.

“Looks like it” Tracy agreed “Let’s see where it leads shall we?”

“Why not” The Commander confirmed as they duly followed the trail of disturbed dust.

Making their way through the dark, they eventually reached the far side of the chamber where there was an old metal door which was only visible in the darkness because of a crack of light coming through the bottom.

The Commander leaned forward and put his ear to the door, listening carefully, “I can hear voices” he then whispered.

“I don’t like it” Tracy whispered in response as they both instinctively drew their weapons.

“On three?” The Commander suggested.

“On three” Tracy agreed whereupon The Commander stood back, raised his foot and prepared to kick open the door.

Moments later Tracy and The Commander burst through the door, brandishing their guns but were forced to quickly put them down again as they both realised that they were in the lower levels of Westminster Underground Station where various passing passengers looked on with some surprise at the two dusty cobweb covered senior Security Service officers who had suddenly appeared.

“Whoops...” Tracy remarked as they both holstered their weapons again and looked around slightly embarrassed.

“So now what do we do?” The Commander asked as they started to make their way towards the escalator up to the surface level ticket hall.

“Get the Transport Division to pull the station CCTV and see if the Ministry of Defence’s mystery caller appears on camera somewhere?” Tracy suggested.

“Sounds like a plan love” The Commander readily agreed.

“You are our official Foreign Office liaison Mr Grantham” Sir Richard remarked as he entered the Special Operations Control Room “When are you going to start actually doing some liaising with the Mobuto Government and get them to hand Adebese over to us?” he then abruptly asked.

“Believe me Sir, we are trying” Grantham confirmed with an obviously frustrated tone, “For the last six months we have been in negotiations with the Mobuto representatives in the United Kingdom and thus far there has been no movement on their side despite the potential financial incentives that the UK Government has offered.”

“Hmm...” Sir Richard remarked, distinctly unimpressed.

“They are blocking us with every diplomatic negotiation trick in the book” Grantham confirmed “On the outside it is all smiles and faux co-operation, in reality though, it is a smoke screen that diplomatically hides their determination to not give in one inch.”

“Right” Sir Richard responded with a determined stance “In which case I think it is time we tried the undiplomatic approach” he remarked as he took out one of his mobile telephones and began to dial a number.

“Do I want to know what you are planning Sir?” Grantham tentatively asked.

“Probably not” Sir Richard responded with a wry smile “Probably not...”

“Oooh, that looks nice” Fuller remarked to Janice, the New Scotland Yard receptionist on catching sight of the shiny new necklace on proud display around her neck.

“Do you like it?” Janice showed it off with a sense of pride “Cassini and I combined our special rewards bonus” she explained “We did think about putting it towards an engagement ring...”

“Aye aye...” Fuller remarked with a smirk.

“...but then we saw this little number on the jeweller’s website last night” Janice continued “and as they were part of the bonus scheme, we picked it up this morning.”

“Very nice” Fuller responded before something then occurred to him, “Hang about, what bonus scheme?” he then asked.

“Haven’t you heard?” Janice replied, somewhat surprised.

“It’s been a tad hectic around here” Fuller admitted.

“Fair enough” Janice remarked in response, “Well anyway, it was launched yesterday” she continued to explain “A Greater London bonus scheme for all public sector workers, we are all registered on this website where we can get discounted stuff from major online retailers and to kick it all off, we all got a fifty quid bonus each.”

“Right...” Fuller responded as a potentially worrying thought began to occur to him “How does it work?” he then asked.

“Well, we all got a letter about it through the post yesterday” Janice confirmed as she fished about in her handbag before extracting the letter and passing it over “We all have had an online account set up for us, all we have to do is put in our agency email address and the default password.”

“Okay...” Fuller slowly responded, his tone becoming increasingly worried as he read the letter and began to contemplate the possibilities, “Can I borrow your computer terminal for a minute?” he then asked.

“Yes, sure” Janice agreed, sliding her chair aside as Fuller came around and sat down at her computer terminal before looking once again at the letter.

“Okay” Fuller remarked “Let’s get this site up and take a look.”

“What is on your mind?” Janice asked with a little concern.

“It’s just a theory I have brewing, one that I hope to God is wrong” Fuller admitted as the website appeared on the screen and he had another look at the letter “All right, let’s try my email address and see what happens.”

Janice watched over Fuller’s shoulder as he entered his own Security Service email address into the logon box on the screen before checking the letter again for the default password.

“Are they serious? ‘Password123?’” Fuller remarked.

“It worked on mine” Janice confirmed “Now I come to think of it, I don’t remember being asked to change it either.”

“I don’t like the looks of this” Fuller then commented as he input the password “Okay, we are in.”

“It’s a very flashy website, isn’t it?” Janice remarked.

“Yes” Fuller agreed as he began to navigate the website “and hosted by a third-party organisation outside of the national security net.”

“You go up to that little icon top right” Janice indicated.

“Thanks” Fuller responded “All right, account details, here we go and, oh dear...”

“That is a lot of information” Janice remarked.

“That is a hell of a lot of information” Fuller agreed with increasing concern, “Let me just try something else” he then remarked as he logged off from his own account and tried another.

“Who’s that?” Janice asked as she watched Fuller input a different set of details.

“This is the name of that poor sod in Carshalton Beeches who got blown up the other day” Fuller explained “and, oh hell...”

“Not good?” Janice ventured.

“Not good” Fuller confirmed “Can I borrow your phone?” he then asked.

“Yes, sure” Janice confirmed, passing the telephone across the desk whereupon Fuller picked up the handset and dialled an internal number.

“Control Room, this is Commander Fuller” he then called, “Red flash the entire senior command staff on an Ultraviolet Priority, we have a very serious problem.”

“What the hell is going on?” The Commander asked as he and Tracy entered the Special Operations Control Room where they saw Fuller, Dent, Sir Richard and the Home Secretary all gathered around a single computer.

“It seems we may have found our leak” Sir Richard remarked, “Now, do you want the good news or the bad news?”

“Give us the good news first” Tracy prompted.

“Sorry, I don’t think there is any” the Home Secretary ominously confirmed “At least none that I can see.”

“All right, what’s the bad news then” The Commander then responded.

“Someone thought it would be a good idea to set up an online benefits and rewards system for all public sector workers who work and or live in the Greater London area” Fuller began to explain.

“Sounds all right so far...” Tracy ventured.

“So, in order to set this up, the organisers, a company that specialises in this sort of thing for organisations, mostly in commercial, retail and manufacturing sectors for example takes a list of the employees and sets them all up with accounts” Fuller explained “and they usually kick start the scheme with fifty quid in their bin to generate suitable interest, get things going.”

“And the problem is?” The Commander then asked.

“In order to set it up, someone has to give the company running it a list of everyone who is eligible” Sir Richard explained “And therein lies our problem.”

“I think I am beginning to see where this is going...” Tracy concluded with a worried look.

“They have set up accounts for every single public servant, Security Service officer, civilian personnel, civil servant, etcetera, etcetera, working and or living within Greater London” Fuller continued “and when I mean everyone, I mean absolutely everyone.”

“Oh God...” The Commander sensed the realisation.

“Yep” Dent confirmed “The list includes every single employee of MI5 from the tea lady to the Director General and the same seems to be the case for MI6, Special Branch, Section Fourteen, the civil service, the entire National Security & Police Service plus every single Government ministry and department, the Ministry of Defence, the Inland Revenue, Transport for London, even the UK Interpol office.”

“Shut it down” The Commander ordered “Shut it down now,”

“Already done” Fuller confirmed “but the damage is potentially extensive when you look at the account details, clearly showing name, address, job title, place of work and even the details of their registered motor vehicle and all accessible from an easily guessable username and default password.”

“Everyone who has been hit over the last week or so” Tracy then asked, “Are they on the system?”

“All except Lieutenant Barrett” Sir Richard confirmed “but she was driving her father’s car and he is on there, complete with the details of his car.”

“How long has this been in circulation?” The Commander asked, his concern increasing with every moment.

“Admittedly this is not very scientific” Fuller responded, “but the late Dave Collins is on there but Jack isn’t so the listings may be about a year old but no older than six months.”

“I have just had this horrible thought” Dent remarked “Is it just possible that the car bomb that blew up my old boss was the first usage of this data like a test?”

“I would say that is a very distinct possibility” Fuller agreed.

“All right, which cretin is responsible for this fiasco?” The Commander then demanded to know “as I want them found, shot, hung, drawn, quartered and ritually disembowelled, oh and then shot again just to make sure.”

“The scheme is the brainchild of no less a mortal than the Mayor of London, Alfred Oscar” Sir Richard confirmed.

“Uh-oh...” the Home Secretary remarked.

“I should have guessed” Tracy added.

“The data itself which was used to create the database was assembled by our very own New Scotland Yard based Employee Engagement Champion” Fuller continued.

“Sorry, our what?” The Commander responded incredulously.

“One of those pointless middle management roles that the Mayor’s office keeps creating and imposing on us under the guise of various initiatives” Tracy explained “There’s probably an unread memo somewhere on your desk about it I expect.”

“And the legal implications of this disaster?” The Commander then asked.

“Data Protection Act, GDPR, Official Secrets Act, take your pick” Sir Richard advised.

“What a mess...” the Home Secretary confirmed.

“Whichever way you look at it” Tracy summarised “This constitutes one of the biggest data breaches since the invention of the pocket calculator.”

“Right” The Commander then declared “Put out a full red alert to everyone whose personal data has been compromised.”

“That could be tens of thousands of people, not including their immediate families” Sir Richard pointed out.

“Indeed” The Commander agreed “but they all need to be alerted, check their surroundings, watch out for anyone following them, check their vehicles for any potential explosive devices, watch for any unexpected packages in the post.”

“Good old fashioned Belfast protocol then” Dent confirmed, “I am going to have to relocate probably all my people and Hewitt over at MI6 will have to do the same, he is going to just love that.”

“In the meantime, I want this Employee Engagement Champion or whatever he or she is called found and brought to my office in one hour” The Commander grimly instructed “and there is no need to be too subtle about it either.”

In his personal private meditation chamber, Orbison was sitting on the floor, legs crossed and with his eyes closed as he meditated amidst the scented smoke from candles and josticks that filled the room.

His meditations were however to be interrupted when one of his personal facilitators knocked on the door.

“Come unto thee my Brother” Orbison called.

“My Lord” the Facilitator called “Our Brother inside the army of order has just contacted us” he announced, “Apparently they have discovered the system breach and have shut it down.”

“It was only a matter of time” Orbison confirmed “Despite them being the enemies of chaos, we must not underestimate their intelligence and resourcefulness and besides, it is irrelevant, we have the list, we know everyone who is our enemy and the time to strike is at hand.”

On the second floor of New Scotland Yard reside mostly administrative functions, a section of the Security Service often forgotten about and frequently overlooked but still essential to the day-to-day operation of the rest of the Service.

Normally the corridors of this floor are quiet but that day there was the unusual sound of hard soled boots marching purposely towards a specific office.

Moments later the boots stopped abruptly and the lead officer of the team of four armed officers knocked pointedly on the door before proceeding inside.

“Amanda Eloise Reed?” the lead officer asked of the lady sat behind the desk inside the office.

“Err, yes?” she responded, understandably somewhat surprised by having four fully armed officers confronting her in her office.

“Under direct orders from the National Administrator General, you are under arrest” the officer formally informed her.

“I am sorry, what is this?” Reed asked, somewhat bewildered.

“Your presence is requested upstairs” the lead officer confirmed as two of his colleagues went around her desk to stand either side of her. “That would be now...”

“Blimey, have you seen the command corridor?” Fuller remarked as he entered the Control Room “It’s like a goons convention outside The Commander’s office.”

“Oh yes” the Duty Supervisor confirmed “Apparently virtually every agency that has been affected by the data breach want a piece.”

“In which case things are about to get interesting...” Fuller confirmed.

Reed knew she was in serious trouble as soon as she realised that not only had she been summoned to the Commander’s office by armed officers, but there were also a significant number of people waiting in the command corridor as she was escorted through, who were watching her with evil looks as she passed.

Her feeling of dread was not in any way reduced as she was formally shown into the inner office and she was confronted with a very stern looking Commander sat behind his desk, leafing through a file as Tracy was sat on the couch over one side, arms crossed and watching her very carefully.

“Thank you, Lieutenant,” the Commander formally called “If you could wait outside please, I will call you when we are ready.”

“Sir” the escorting officer formally responded before leaving the office, closing the door behind him.

“Miss Reed” the Commander then called, looking up at her for the first time.

“Ms actually...” Reed went on to correct him but quickly stood down when she saw the Commander roll his eyes upwards “...but Miss is fine Sir” she then quietly admitted.

“Remind me Ms Reed, what exactly is it you do here?” the Commander formally asked.

“I am the Employee Engagement Champion, appointed by the Mayor’s office to boost morale and co-operation in the workplace and form a more cohesive and friendly workforce across all public facing organisations in the City” Reed began to explain with ill placed enthusiasm.

“Yeah, whatever” Tracy responded dismissively as she got up and began to pace around Reed which only made her feel increasingly uncomfortable.

“So where in your operating brief does it say that you have the right to take actions which result in the death of secret service officers and compromise the safety of every single member of this service, MI5, MI6 and God knows who else?” the Commander demanded to know as he stood up.

“I don’t...” Reed stammered “I don’t understand?”

“You passed on the personal details of every single member of this Service along with those of several other agencies, indeed anyone who works in a public or civil service role in the Greater London area to a third party without authorisation” the Commander explained, his tone getting angrier and more direct.

“I had a direct order from the Mayor’s office Sir” Reed began to defend herself.

“I don’t care if it was written in blood on the back of a Papal Bull and signed by the Queen bloody Mother!!!” the Commander angrily responded, slamming the file down on the desk in front of him.

“This was a great opportunity to reward everyone through a generous scheme to provide rewards and recognition to those who work hard in the City” Reed effectively quoted from the official line on the scheme.

“What you did in fact, was partake in the biggest breach of personal data security since the Black Death!” the Commander angrily pointed out, “and the chances are it could very well have resulted in a similar toll of death and misery had we not plugged it!”

“So where do I fit in here Sir?” Reed asked.

“Well, in a nutshell” Tracy casually summarised “You’re fired!”

“But I am appointed by the Mayor’s Office though” Reed attempted to protest.

“That idiot, the Mayor does not run the National Security & Police Service” the Commander pointed out sternly “I do” he confirmed “and as such anyone working under this roof falls directly under my Command and if I say you are fired, you are fired. Is that understood?” he then asked directly.

“Yes Sir...” Reed reluctantly responded.

“As it stands you are currently facing a range of very serious charges under the Data Protection Act, the National Security Act, the Official Secrets Act and potentially second-degree manslaughter” the Commander then formally informed her.

“Shouldn’t you be addressing this matter to the Mayor Sir?” Reed then tentatively asked.

“Oh, don’t you worry Ms Reed” the Commander reassured her “That snivelling little weasel is the next stop on my list” he confirmed before looking across at Tracy.

“Lieutenant!” Tracy called whereupon the leading escort officer returned.

“Ms Reed” the Commander then continued “The Lieutenant here is going to escort you to your office, watch you pack up your personal belongings then escort you home where you will be detained under house arrest until we decide what to do with you.”

“The alternative in case you were wondering is to hand you over to the two beefy lads from MI5 who are waiting outside who want to take you into a sound proof room where I believe their plans for you involves a pair of pliers and a carving knife” Tracy then advised her to which Reed gulped nervously “and when they have finished, there is MI6, Interpol and quite a few others also queuing up to have a little chat.”

“For an added bonus, you also get to spend some quality time with a couple of broad-shouldered lads with no sense of humour, from Special Branch as well” The Commander then added with a mock grin.

“I want a solicitor!” Reed then formally requested.

“I’d get two; you are going to need them” Tracy remarked.

“As you wish” The Commander agreed, “Lieutenant, take her away...” he then ominously instructed.

“Really?” Fuller asked “That is very interesting indeed; yes I will pass it on, bye.”

“Hello Simon, long time no see” called a voice across the Special Operations Control Room to which Fuller looked up to see Lieutenant Commander Barrett approach, her arm in a sling and her uniform tunic still battered and blood stained from the attack the previous day.

“Lizzie, how are you?” Fuller asked as he pulled out a chair to allow her to sit down.

“Full of holes” she wryly admitted, indicating her shoulder “Well, just the one hole actually. Once the adrenalin and the hospital anaesthetic wore off, that was when I started to feel it somewhat which means I am now on enough painkillers to knock out an elephant!”

“At least you are still here which is more than can be said about this guy” Fuller looked down at the file in front of him.

“Which poor sod is that one?” Barrett asked.

“The journalist who wrote the ‘Declaration of War’ interview story in yesterday’s Chronicle” Fuller confirmed “Only, something rather odd has cropped up.”

“Well, I have a free afternoon” Barrett confirmed “and quite frankly I need something to do if I am honest so, what have you got?”

“This is the journalist, Ian Moran” Fuller passed across the file to her “and this is his laptop” he then indicated the computer in a clear plastic evidence bag in front of him.

“According to his computer logs, he began typing the story on his work supplied laptop in his apartment at 16:55 and concluding writing and editing it at 21:37 yesterday evening” Fuller then went on to explain “then it was emailed to the Editor at 22:05 where it was posted up and published in this rag that hit the streets shortly before midnight.”

“That all sounds okay so far” Barrett remarked.

“Our armed equivalent of room service knocked on his door at about seven yesterday morning which was when they found him dead” Fuller continued “The problem is that the Pathologist has just been on the phone and confirmed that when we found him, he had already been dead for two days which meant unless there was a séance, he didn’t write the article.”

“Oh...” Barrett replied in realisation “That rather throws a spanner in the works.”

“Which means that someone has been manipulating the media for their own ends” Fuller concluded.

“Who?” Barrett then asked, “The Brotherhood?”

“Possibly” Fuller admitted “but probably under the direction of Adebese and The Hand. I am about to send his laptop and everything else we seized from his flat over for forensic analysis, see if it can tell us any secrets and maybe give us a heads up on what else has been spoon-fed to the press whilst we were not looking.”

“I dread to think” Barrett admitted, “Trouble is, manipulation of the press and in particular social media which is where the press get much of their source material these days seems to be the key to success.”

“Ah, you’d noticed!” Fuller responded.

“Whilst you are waiting on the forensic guys, perhaps you could look over this and tell me what you think” Barrett then suggested as she produced a file and passed it across.

“Origins, Chronological Developments, Future Deployment and Collateral Effects of K200 Based Brain and Skill Enhancement Narcotics” Fuller read the cover, “Catchy title, where did you get this.”

“A friend of a friend of a friend who found it buried beneath a lot of proverbial rocks” Barrett slightly evasively explained “Even my boss doesn’t know about this so if you could keep it strictly between you and me for now.”

“Looks interesting” Fuller remarked as he quickly flicked through the extensive and length report.

“It seems someone somewhere, probably locked in the basement of some nameless Government Department has known a lot about the origins of Lord Chaos’ K200 based narcotic for quite some time” Barrett explained “and indeed I reckon it is not beyond the realms of possibility that this being in my possession was the reason I got shot at yesterday” she then ventured.

“Can I keep this for now; give me time to look through it?” Fuller asked.

“By all means but keep it to yourself, okay?” Barrett warned.

“Of course” Fuller readily agreed, “Discretion absolutely assured.”

Alfred Oscar, The Mayor of London was happily working the room, sipping champagne and talking with various business leaders and other notable dignitaries when his Personal Assistant entered the room, looked around and then came over.

“Ah George, there you are” the Mayor merrily called “Everyone, this is my Personal Assistant George Trent, an invaluable and irreplaceable member of my senior staff.”

“I am sorry to interrupt Sir” Trent politely responded.

“Not at all” the Mayor replied, “Why not have some champagne while you are here?” he then suggested.

“Maybe later, thank you Sir” Trent replied “I have an urgent message for you” he then passed a piece of paper across.

“Would you hold this for me?” the Mayor asked as he passed his glass to Trent and then took the piece of paper and unfolded it.

Reading the message saw a noticeable change of demeanour in the Mayor’s face which went from jollity to a resigned sigh in the blink of an eye.

“Oh...” he then responded with a resigned sigh as he folded the paper again “Tell him I will meet him on the east balcony in a couple of minutes” he then instructed.

“Yes Sir” Trent confirmed before discreetly leaving again.

“I’m sorry about this gentlemen” the Mayor called as he returned to his guests “Something has come up which I must attend to so if you will all excuse me, I won’t be long.”

With that, the Mayor gulped down his champagne, placed the now empty glass on the tray of a passing member of the catering staff and discreetly left the room by a side door.

“How come we never get invited to these swanky soirees?” The Commander asked as he and Tracy waited patiently, listening to the classical music and murmurs of polite after dinner conversation filtering up from the main banqueting hall below.

“Probably because they don’t serve fish fingers and chips at these shindigs and, knowing you there is a real possibility that we will have either arrested, shot or possibly even both at least one of the guests before we have reached the dessert course” Tracy wryly responded.

“Yeah, that sounds about right my love...” The Commander admitted, “Pity though, the desert course is my favourite bit, just fancy a jam sponge pudding and custard right now.”

“Oh great, both of you” the Mayor remarked despondently as he appeared on the balcony and saw the two officers together waiting for him “So, to what do I owe this displeasure?” he then demanded to know.

“It is about your little bonus rewards scheme for all public sector workers in the Greater London area” The Commander responded.

“Ah yes, the flagship goodwill project of this administration” the Mayor proudly responded.

“We have had to shut it down” Tracy unsympathetically confirmed “Sorry...”

“What!?!” the Mayor stammered in response “Why? On what authority?”

“Your now well and truly sunk flagship was set up using secure personnel data which has compromised the identities of several thousand officers, agents and civilian staff across multiple security agencies including us, MI5, MI6 and numerous others” The Commander informed him most sternly.

“This, this can’t be right, surely?” the Mayor stammered in response.

“Your wonderful scheme basically breaks every data protection rule in the book and that is before we even discuss the implications under the Official Secrets Act” Tracy confirmed.

“This is ridiculous, what the hell are you talking about?” the Mayor asked, his anger beginning to noticeably increase.

“We could be looking at extremely serious charges here” Tracy explained “By providing all that personnel data to an unauthorised third party and then not effectively securing it, anyone and everyone basically had unrestricted access to the personal details of pretty much everybody, ironically including yourself.”

“Hence the various regrettable incidents over the last few days” the Mayor regretfully concluded.

“Exactly” Tracy confirmed as she and The Commander exchanged a look for a brief moment.

“But I devised the scheme in good faith” the Mayor attempted to defend himself “It seemed like an excellent idea at the time.”

“Oh, I am sure it did” The Commander agreed “however it is essential that the real reason for the scheme being suspended is not revealed. Call it a technical glitch or something” he strongly suggested.

“All right, I will see what I can do” the Mayor agreed “Of course the errant data in question was sourced and collated by the scheme administrator, Ms Reed” he then pointed out.

“Ms Reed is currently having a very unpleasant experience with a couple of broad-shouldered lads from Special Branch” Tracy confirmed “She won’t be seeing the outside world again anytime soon.”

“Oh dear...” the Mayor remarked “Well erm, I had better get back to my guests” he then declared “Thank you for coming and keep me informed” he then requested before leaving.

“He is not a happy bunny, is he?” Tracy remarked as they walked off, arm in arm.

“Indeed, he is not, my love” The Commander agreed “and I take it you spotted the same thing I did?”

“Yep” Tracy confirmed “He knew about the attacks.”

“Now, where do you suppose he got that information from?” The Commander then asked as they headed for the exit.

“Where indeed...” Tracy agreed.

As they disappeared from view, the Mayor emerged from the shadows and watched after them before taking out a mobile phone and making a call.

Before his call was answered, he quickly checked around to ensure he was still alone and not being overheard.

“Hello?” came a response over the phone.

“My Lord, this is Saracen” the Mayor called “We need to meet, tonight, usual time” he formally requested.

“Agreed Brother” the voice on the other end of the call was heard to agree “See you this evening. To life immortal.”

“All right let’s see what we have got” Fuller declared as tentatively he pressed a button on the laptop in front of him.

At that moment the huge screen that dominates the front wall of the Special Operations Control Room illuminated and began to display a large number of mug shot photographs with names and some known information detailed alongside each one.

“Ugly looking bunch” Lieutenant Shelby remarked as he scanned the screen.

“Recognise anyone?” Sir Richard asked.

“Oh yes, top middle, Colonel Reaper” Shelby confirmed “Who are these other dudes?”

“Dudes?” Barrett remarked with a wry smile.

“These other ‘dudes’ as you so eloquently put it” Fuller explained “are the forty members of Colonel Reaper’s unit that went rogue twelve years ago in the charming little country of Mobuto.”

“Are these the guys believed to be the Elite Core of these Soldiers of Ixion?” Barrett asked.

“That’s the chaps” Sir Richard agreed.

“Whilst I have never had the pleasure of meeting this Reaper character...” Barrett remarked.

“Lucky you...” Shelby commented, feeling his knee which still ached a bit from where Reaper shot him a little over six months earlier.

“...that guy, second row, third from the left I have most definitely met” Barrett confirmed.

“Henri Legrande” Fuller confirmed as he called up the file “Specialist in firearms and ambush tactics, spent six years in the French Foreign Legion before being assigned to Reaper’s unit by the United Nations Peacekeeping Force.”

“Also trained in anti-interrogation techniques” Sir Richard added “Despite our best efforts he hasn’t uttered a word.”

“So, from this rogues gallery we can definitely eliminate seven” Fuller confirmed as he worked on the laptop and big red X’s appeared across the seven faces ruled out “They are either confirmed dead or languishing in jail somewhere in the world.”

“Two of the dead were dragged out of a crashed Land Rover which wound up at the bottom of a lake in West Mobuto not long after Reaper’s unit went rogue” Sir Richard confirmed as he read from the file in front of him.

“I guess they didn’t fancy joining the club” Shelby summarised.

“One was an agent for Israeli Intelligence who was trying to infiltrate the Unit” Fuller continued “He met a sticky end.”

“What happened?” Barrett asked.

“They sent him back to Tel-Aviv in cargo in several little boxes” Fuller confirmed to which Barrett winced at the thought.

“Three more are in jail for various offences and or pending trial” Sir Richard checked the file “and yes, we have checked they are actually there unlike our old friend the Colonel unfortunately.”

“Oh, there is a dodgy looking bunch if ever I have seen it” Tracy remarked as she and The Commander arrived in the room.

“How’s the Mayor?” Sir Richard asked.

“Thoroughly pissed off” The Commander confirmed almost smiling at the result.

“Oh dear, how sad, never mind...” Barrett mockingly responded.

“That man is a pratt of the first water” The Commander then added.

“So, what is the S.P. on this rogue’s gallery then?” Tracy asked as she walked in front of the large screen and surveyed the faces.

“Some of these photos are pretty ancient so gawd knows what some of them look like now” Sir Richard remarked “others we have managed to update from various encounters we have had with them so at least we have some more recent images.”

“Right, time to spend some money” The Commander then declared.

“Which we probably haven’t got” Tracy pointed out.

“I want every single one of these guys tracked down and then a full surveillance team put on them” The Commander then ordered “Phone taps, bugs, video and sound surveillance, bank account investigations, the whole nine yards.”

“That is a hell of a lot of warrants to organise” Sir Richard pointed out.

“Paperwork we can sort out later, just find these men” The Commander confirmed.

“What about The Hand and their guys?” Tracy then asked.

“Sadly, a membership list isn’t available” Fuller replied, “The only two individuals we definitely do know about are their leader Adebese who is of course in the Mobuto Embassy and this man” he then put two photos up on the screen, one of Adebese and the other the photograph from the passport recovered from the scene of the airplane incident at Shoreham Airport “Adebese’s Number Two, Olivier Torore.”

“I take it there has been no success finding any of the rest of the crew?” Tracy asked.

“We are pretty certain that they are now active on the manor, but the problem is, bar this guy Torore we have absolutely no idea who they are, what they look like or where to find them” Fuller confirmed.

“Right, let’s tighten the screws” The Commander concluded “Up the threat level to as high as we can squeeze it without the Prime Minister finding out, call in every spare officer we have and step up patrols across the country”

“And there goes the overtime budget...” Fuller remarked.

“The way I am feeling I am more than happy to find some spare cell space for the accountants if it comes to it” Tracy wryly suggested.

“That will be another couple of warrants to add to the list then” Barrett wryly remarked.

The wheels of the metallic black Mercedes saloon car scrunched on the gravel as it was brought to a stop by its driver immediately outside the Georgian manor house in rural Buckinghamshire whereupon the Butler emerged from the doorway holding an umbrella to protect the Mayor as he climbed out of the back of the car and hurried inside.

“Good evening Sir” the Butler called as once inside, he shook out and folded the umbrella before taking the Mayor’s coat.

“Good evening Bertram” the Mayor responded.

“Your guest is waiting for you in the lounge Sir” the Butler then informed him to which the Mayor gave a resigned look.

“Thank you” the Mayor replied “See to it that we are not disturbed please” he then insisted.

“Very good Sir” the Butler confirmed before turning smartly on his heels and walking away.

The Mayor paused for a moment before taking a deep breath and then heading down the ornate corridor and through into the lounge.

“Good evening” Orbison called as he relaxed in a huge leather reclining chair by the roaring fireplace, a large glass of red wine partially consumed in his right hand, “I got your message.”

“You and I have a mutual problem” the Mayor called as he picked up a glass and poured himself a brandy.

“I presume our mutual problem doesn’t have anything to do with our shared tastes in fine wines?” Orbison remarked as he took another careful sip “Only this is a particularly nice Bordeaux you have here, you must let me have the name of your wine merchant.”

“No, it’s not the wine Michael, it’s the imbeciles” the Mayor firmly replied to which Orbison gave a slightly quizzical look in response.

“You are going to have to be a bit more specific Mr Mayor” Orbison responded, “I know a lot of imbeciles, to which specific ones are you referring?”

“The National Police and Security Service” the Mayor confirmed, finishing off his brandy before quickly pouring himself another.

“Ah, those imbeciles” Orbison remarked in realisation, “I take it that Bermann’s legal roundabouts have failed to stem their enthusiasm?”

“I am trying to create a free unified city; your goal is a utopia of chaos” the Mayor formally stated.

“Utopia of chaos” Orbison mused “I like that...”

“Either way, they are getting in the way of both of our goals” the Mayor continued.

“Have you tried political pressure?” Orbison asked.

“The Prime Minister stands by them; she refuses to intervene, and all other avenues have to be done via the United Nations Security Council over which I have no influence whatsoever” the Mayor explained, clearly frustrated.

“And our mutual friends?” Orbison then inquired thoughtfully.

“I have consulted with Mr Taylor and he has said we can proceed with the next phase right away” the Mayor confirmed, almost excited by the prospect.

“Hmmm” Orbison mused “So how do I fit into this little world vision that you and Mr Taylor have created then?” he asked.

“Your well-funded and very public revolution of chaos” the Mayor responded, “We are going to need some logistical input, some donkey work done if we are going to pull this off. Do you think you and your minions are capable of making this work?” he then asked.

“Careful Mr Mayor, this is a very dark path down which you are proposing to take us” Orbison warned.

“You have a problem with that?” The Mayor asked with some slight surprise.

“No, not at all” Orbison confirmed “but it will mean the ultimate shit storm when we unleash our big campaign of chaos and disorder.”

“Can you do it?” The Mayor asked insistently.

“With Brother Reaper’s expertise, The Hand’s dedicated troupe of experts in the application of chaos and the extensive resources I have at my disposal plus the dedicated members of the Brotherhood ready to act on my every word” Orbison summarised “Oh yes, we are ready.”

“Well, I think it is about time that you played your part.” the Mayor suggested “I have done plenty of favours for you and the Brotherhood over the last couple of years and Mr Taylor and his group have been incredibly supportive, now it is time to repay that loyalty” he reminded his guest.

“If I recall correctly, I funded pretty much your entire electoral campaign when you ran for Mayor” Orbison recalled.

“Hey, I am not the only one with skeletons in the closet” the Mayor quickly retorted.

“Touché” Orbison replied before sipping the wine again in a thoughtful manner. “All right then, what specifically do you want?” he then asked.

“The same thing as you do” the Mayor confirmed “The Security Service brought into check, by any means necessary.”

“I will need guarantees, protection” Orbison stated, “Whilst the Brotherhood are sworn to sacrifice themselves on my word for the greater good, it would be terribly bad form if I were to be detained at Her Majesty’s pleasure as a result.”

“Uh huh” the Mayor nodded in agreement as he went over to a painting on the wall which as he moved it revealed it to be hinged and hiding a sophisticated safe set into the wall behind.

Orbison watched with interest as the Mayor opened the safe and extracted a dark green envelope which he then passed across.

“What’s this?” Orbison asked as he took the envelope and proceeded to open it.

“Your ‘insurance’ policy, call it something for a rainy day” the Mayor confirmed as he watched Orbison extract the document from the envelope and begin to study it with a look of amazement.

“A genuine bona fide Public Interest Immunity Certificate!” Orbison remarked with astonishment.

“Your very own personal ‘Get out of Jail Free’ card” the Mayor responded with a smirk.

“How the hell did you get this?” Orbison asked with amazement.

“Some discreet telephone calls, the nudging of a few shoulders behind the scenes by Mr Taylor and his group plus a friendly contact in the Attorney General’s office combined with the careful application of a large case of twenty five year old single malt” the Mayor explained “all whilst our friendly lawyer Mr Bermann greased the legal wheels of course.”

“Okay, I am officially impressed” Orbison declared as he folded the document, returned it to the envelope and placed it in his inside jacket pocket for safekeeping.

“Under the terms of that document you are protected from prosecution over anything anyone does in the name of the Brotherhood or yourself” the Mayor went on to explain “You and Mr Taylor will have to throw the authorities a few sacrificial lambs along the way of course but apart from that you now have the authority to unleash as much chaos as you want.”

“I think we can manage that” Orbison agreed as he refilled his glass “To Life Immortal...” he then raised his glass.

“Latest reports from GCHQ love” Tracy confirmed as she came into The Commander’s office and passed him a file before sitting down alongside him.

“Anything interesting?” The Commander asked as he opened the file and began to read it.

“Taps active on all known Ixion Brotherhood mobiles and landlines but it looks like they know we are listening” Tracy replied, “Nothing exciting except an off the cuff remark by one Facilitator referring to a contact they call ‘Saracen’ apparently but no name to go with it.”

“What about Orbison’s online broadcasts?” The Commander asked.

“Still the usual drivel” Tracy confirmed “His encoding keeps changing and they are constantly playing catch up, the only time it is in the clear seems to be when he makes any pronouncement that he actually wants us to hear.”

“Orbison isn’t really the main problem though” The Commander concluded “He is just the mouthpiece with an over inflated ego attached, it’s Reaper, his muscle and Adebesi’s loons that are the real problem.”

“Simon has been working all evening with MI5, the MoD Police and Interpol on tracing as many of Reaper’s unit as they can find” Tracy added “So far nine have popped up on the radar at various places and we have got definite places of residence for three more of them, all of the traces are in the country and all three residences are within Greater London.”

“Time to send in the sneak and peek guys” The Commander declared.

“Commander Cassini and his dedicated team of sneaky sods have already been woken from their pits or dragged out of the pub” Tracy confirmed.

“Wafting a wedge of overtime cash underneath the nose can be an amazing motivator” The Commander added “Mind you, all that overtime isn’t much use if you don’t get the free time to actually spend it.”

“Have you heard Cassini and Janice are getting hitched?” Tracy then asked.

“I had heard about the necklace he bought her” The Commander confirmed “Actually it was the necklace that set Simon on the course to revealing the rewards website fiasco.”

“What an absolute nightmare that has turned out to be” Tracy admitted “Removal men are going to be making a fair few quid relocating all of MI5 and MI6’s agents as soon as possible.”

“What about our people?” The Commander asked, “Are we relocating any?”

“I decided to make it voluntary” Tracy explained “Set out the situation, advised increased precautions and if anyone want to be emergency relocated then we can provide a team of beefy lads, a pile of boxes and a couple of vans.”

“Sounds like a sensible approach” The Commander admitted, “Do we need to pack a bag?” he then asked.

“I think we can take care of ourselves” Tracy remarked “Mind you, packing a bag and bugging off on holiday for a few weeks somewhere rural, remote and quiet sounds like an incredibly good idea right now” she admitted.

“I’d sign up to that” The Commander readily agreed “A nice cottage somewhere on a remote Scottish island sounds like my idea of heaven.”

“Perhaps when all this palaver blows over, we should chuck the keys to the Yard over to the nearest random senior officer, get them to hold the fort for a couple of weeks and then scarper” Tracy suggested.

“Best idea I have heard this year” The Commander confirmed “All we have to decide on is which Scottish island and which sucker in a uniform we throw the keys at...”

In a small workshop in the basement of the Ixion Brotherhood's Citadel Complex, Reaper was sat at a workshop bench working on a project, by the light of a desk lamp and with the aid of a spectacles worn magnifying glass skilfully using a soldering iron on a circuit board.

As he successfully soldered a wire to the circuit board, releasing a little puff of smoke, one of Orbison's inner circle of facilitators appeared in the doorway and approached him.

"What can I do for you Brother?" Reaper asked.

"Our Lord is on his way back from visiting Saracen and requests an audience with you as soon as you arrive, my Brother" the Facilitator formally requested.

"Thank you, Brother" Reaper responded.

The Facilitator respectfully nodded before withdrawing from the room.

Reaper returned to his work and finished soldering the last wire onto the circuit board before carefully lifting it into its intended place inside a plain black hardened plastic box and then closing the lid.

A couple of minutes later Orbison returned to the Citadel and after quietly consulting with the Facilitator, proceeded directly down the spiral staircase to the lower level workshop where he found Reaper methodically putting his tools away in their neatly organised drawers.

"Brother Reaper" he called as he entered the room.

"My Lord" Reaper bowed in respect.

"I have just come from a very interesting meeting with Saracen" Orbison informed him "The Cato Project" he then declared "The timetable needs to be brought forward as a matter of urgency."

"Phase one is complete My Lord" Reaper confirmed "We have got the authorities scared, constantly looking over their shoulders."

"Indeed, and very well done Brother" Orbison agreed "You and your men have performed admirably, above and beyond the call of duty."

"Some of it was more personal I will admit My Lord" Reaper then remarked with a satisfied smirk.

"Yes indeed" Orbison responded, "I thought the Ministry of Defence job was a particularly well-crafted bit of work, my congratulations."

"It gave me a certain sense of closure and satisfaction I must admit My Lord" Reaper agreed.

“Now we must consider Phase Two of the Cato Project” Orbison then continued “I have already consulted with Brother Adebese and his people are ready to proceed.”

“In which case I had better get my little party tricks ready My Lord” Reaper confirmed as he lifted up one of the small black plastic boxes on the workbench and held it up with an obvious sense of pride.

“Excellent craftsmanship Brother, most excellent” Orbison complimented “How does it work?” he then asked.

“The core is our old friend RS232 with a little added refinement of my own making” Reaper explained “A little something I picked up whilst doing some wet work in Afghanistan some years ago.”

“Most impressive” Orbison remarked.

“Up until now detonation was achieved by dialling in a specific set of tones by mobile phone” Reaper continued to explain “I tried a new design involving a contact detonation on the Carshalton Beeches job which worked very well, I then refined it for the MoD job yesterday and have just finished making some more adjustments so what we have here is the ultimate development of the RS232 based explosive device.”

“Behold the instruments of ultimate chaos” Orbison declared with an inverted genuflection.

“So, when do we move My Lord?” Reaper then asked as he took the device back and placed it in a silver metal secure case and slowly closed the lid.

“Tonight” Orbison confirmed “You will need these” he then handed a folder of paper forms to Reaper “Courtesy of the Mayor’s office.”

“Public works orders, nice...” Reaper responded with a wry smirk.

The chimes of Big Ben echoed across Westminster, declaring the time as eight o’clock precisely when Foreign Office Liaison Ian Grantham left the Foreign Office building in King Charles Street and walked into Parliament Street before turning right towards Parliament Square, the end of a very long day of frustrating negotiations, meetings and video conferences which had left him physically and emotionally drained.

Heading towards the nearby entrance to Westminster Underground Station, Grantham was unaware of someone emerge from the shadows of a side alley and begin to discreetly follow him down the steps into the ticket hall of the station where he passed through the ticket barriers and headed on towards the westbound District & Circle Line platforms.

A couple of minutes later Grantham was waiting on the platform as the next District Line service was pulling in when the individual who had been shadowing him approached and stood alongside.

“Good evening brother” the follower coolly remarked.

“Blessed evening brother” Grantham responded.

At that moment the District Line train of brand-new S type stock came to a halt and the doors opened whereupon the two men boarded, taking seats next to each other on the far side of the last carriage where it was quiet.

“Your services are required by the Brotherhood” the follower explained “You have been selected for a task of utmost importance to the cause.”

“I stand ready to serve Brother” Grantham confirmed a little nervously “How may I be of service to the greater good?”

At that point, the doors closed, and the train moved off towards the next stop of St James’s Park.

“Your instructions are all in here” the follower passed across a plain brown envelope which Grantham discreetly took and placed in his inside jacket pocket “You will need to begin your task this evening for tomorrow is the grand day that chaos will commence.”

“To Life Immortal...” Grantham responded.

“Blessed be the chaos makers” Orbison called as he and Torore arrived in the loading bay in the basement of the Citadel Complex where Reaper and a select number of his unit were loading cases and toolboxes into the back of a van.

“A most excellent operation My Lord” Torore remarked “On behalf of my blessed Brother Adebese, I want to personally thank you for this excellent opportunity to unite in chaos against the establishment.”

“The pleasure is all ours Brother” Orbison responded, “The age of Chaos is here.”

They both stood and watched as Reaper silently indicated to his men to get in the vehicle whereupon the engine was started, he got in the front passenger seat and they departed, the tyres squealing on the polished stone surface of the loading bay before disappearing up the ramp and out into the night.

“And now the fun begins...” Orbison remarked with a smirk.

“Ah, thanks love” Jack remarked as Megan passed him one of the mugs of fresh coffee that she brought out onto the balcony before joining him in watching the sun rise over the skyline of South London.

“So, what is on your agenda today then love?” Megan asked, “Seeing as it is such a beautiful morning.”

“I have a stack of files on my desk to go through” Jack admitted “That special operation on pickpockets on the Central Line went pear shaped the other day and I am trying to pick out any bits from the wreckage that we can still use.”

“What happened?” Megan asked, “Err, professional interest” she then added.

“Delta Section had a sweet little plain clothes operation at Oxford Circus and Tottenham Court Road targeting the dips in the area” Jack explained “Looked like we were onto a winner when one of the suspects was collared, which was when he screamed ‘To Life Immortal...’ and promptly head butted a fire axe.”

“Ouch...” Megan responded.

“Yep” Jack confirmed “Practically cleaved his head in two right in the middle of the Oxford Circus ticket hall at the height of the morning peak.”

“And there was you saying how the Transport Division was all hum drum and everyday” Megan reminded him.

“I fear my section is starting to encounter the Ixion loons” Jack regrettably responded, “I was hoping they would stick to the streets and stay the Metropolitan Division’s problem.”

“It looks like this Ixion bunch is spreading their wings all right” Megan admitted “The amount of case files with links to them coming through the office from the CPS has increased from a trickle to a torrent in the last couple of weeks.

“Yeah, this is all building up to something” Jack admitted “With this so-called declaration of war in The Chronicle the other day, I am getting this horrible feeling this could turn really nasty really quick.”

“You will be careful won’t you love?” Megan asked, seeking reassurance and hugging Jack firmly.

“Of course I will love” Jack confirmed “You know me, I never go looking for trouble.”

“No, it usually knows where you are most of the time...” Megan wryly responded.

“A bit more good news for you this morning Sir” Fuller called as The Commander entered the Operations Room “We have managed to identify three senior members of The Hand.”

“Nice work” The Commander complimented “How did you manage that?” he then asked.

“A drink with a discreet contact in Interpol” Fuller explained “It turns out that some of Adebese’s lads have a few money-making side-lines that meant they popped up on the radar here and there from time to time.”

“I wonder what The Hand’s policy is on moonlighting?” The Commander wryly remarked “Acquaint me with them” he then promoted.

“Two of them are pretty much little more than foot soldiers” Fuller began as he put the photographs and details that he had managed to obtain up on the screen in front of them “This guy however” he indicated the third individual “Is far more interesting, one of Adebese’s lieutenants no less.”

“So, what has he been up to then?” The Commander asked.

“Apparently he got into a bit of consultancy work for the international criminal community” Fuller explained “Word has it from my opposite number in Vienna that this guy was the planner for a still unsolved bullion robbery on the Swiss/Austrian border a couple of years ago.”

“This is good, this is very good” The Commander remarked “It opens up the possibility that The Hand may link up with local organised crime here in the UK.”

“I took the liberty of quietly tipping off Commander Rolfe over in the Organised Crime Squad” Fuller added “He is going to give me the nod if anything comes up.”

“That’s great” The Commander remarked, “Any luck tracking down Reaper’s goons?” he then asked.

“On that front, there is good news and bad news” Fuller slightly hesitantly replied “We now have confirmed locations for nine of them and are watching them around the clock but four that were on our radar at close of play yesterday have vanished overnight.”

“Just lost surveillance or something more?” The Commander tentatively asked.

“All four of them gave Cassini’s guys the slip at approximately the same time yesterday evening, and it gets worse” Fuller confirmed “All their communications, mobiles, landlines, email that we have been able to trace to them, all went completely silent at the same time.”

“Meaning they have gone to ground” The Commander grimly concluded “which could indicate they are planning something they don’t want us to know about.”

“A very distinct possibility” Fuller agreed.

“The Bomb Squad also got back to me a short while ago about the Delabole Street explosion” Fuller then continued, “They have managed to trace the grenades from the serial numbers on the spoons they found.”

“Oooh, do tell” The Commander prompted, his interest suitably piqued.

“By going back to the original manufacturer in Turkey, they managed to establish that they were sold through an arms dealer working out of Kenya, one Charles Cooper” Fuller produced some details on the large screen ahead of them.

“No picture?” The Commander asked.

“Nothing on file” Fuller confirmed “It is probably not the guy’s real name either but whoever he is, he has been the go-to guy for armaments, explosives and associated materials for the Mercenary trade for the last fifteen or twenty years apparently.”

“Just the sort of dealer who would be more than happy to sell to the likes of The Hand and Reaper” The Commander concluded.

“A sort of ‘If the cash is there, I don’t care’ type” Fuller agreed, “which leads me to this pile of reports from the ballistics section” he then passed across another file.

“They’ve been busy” The Commander remarked upon seeing the fat file that Fuller had just handed over.

“It seems that everyone from the Ixion Brotherhood, Reaper’s rogue unit and The Hand that we have encountered over the last seven or eight months all shop at the same Guns & Ammo shop” Fuller continued to explain, “All very loyal customers as all the weaponry we have seized off them can be traced to the same source.”

“Our mysterious Mr Cooper I presume?” The Commander suggested.

“Got it in one Sir” Fuller confirmed.

“All right, keep on it” The Commander instructed “Use all your tricks, call in every favour we are owed, throw as much money at it as is necessary, I want these bastards found and if we can put a face to this Cooper guy whilst we are at it, so much the better.”

“You got it Sir” Fuller grimly confirmed.

As The Commander turned to leave, he became aware of Foreign Office Liaison Officer Grantham discreetly trying to get his attention without actually being noticed.

“You look worried” The Commander remarked to which Grantham responded with a slightly awkward smile “Something I can do for you?” he then inquired.

“Erm, can we talk somewhere private Sir?” Grantham quietly asked.

“Yes, of course” The Commander confirmed as he looked around before noticing a vacant office nearby and proceeding towards it, “In here” he then showed Grantham inside before discreetly closing the door.

“Something has happened in our ongoing negotiations with the Mobuto Government” Grantham explained “One of The Hand’s senior Lieutenants has made direct contact via secure diplomatic channels, saying he wants to defect.”

“Really?” The Commander responded, clearly unsure how to greet this apparent development.

“Apparently this guy is disillusioned with the way the group are moving forward so apparently he wants out” Grantham explained “But there are conditions attached.”

“Naturally...” The Commander responded.

“In exchange for immunity from prosecution and a new identity, he is ready to give you the entire Hand organisation on a plate” Grantham confirmed.

“Okay, let us say for a moment I am interested in what this chap has to say,” The Commander remarked “What does he propose?”

“He wants to meet” Grantham explained “You and you only, a place and time of his choosing and nobody other than you, me and him to know anything about this.”

“That seems reasonable” The Commander agreed “I can’t blame this guy for wanting to be cautious, apparently the last member of The Hand to try and defect met with a rather unpleasant end involving an elephant gun and a bulldozer.”

“Eww...” Grantham responded.

“Where and when?” The Commander then asked.

“The bridge over the middle of the lake in St. James’s Park, twelve thirty today” Grantham confirmed.

“Can you get a message to this guy?” The Commander inquired.

“I think so Sir, yes” Grantham nodded in agreement.

“All right then, tell him I will be there, alone” The Commander responded.

“Yes Sir” Grantham agreed.

“Nice work by the way Mr Grantham” The Commander called as he turned to leave.

“Thank you, Sir,” Grantham called back before leaving.

The Commander took a few moments to think about this news he had just received before picking up the telephone handset on the desk and dialling an extension number.

“Janice, it’s the boss” he then called as soon as his call was answered “Can you page Big Bob and tell him it’s time for a tea break” he cryptically asked “Thanks.”

“Ma’am, Duty Operations Commander Monroe from West End Central on line four for you” called the Personal Assistant having knocked on Tracy’s office door and entered when promoted.

“Thanks!” Tracy called as she reached for the telephone and pressed the button to take the call “Morning Andy, what can I do for you?” she asked.

“I am sorry to disturb you Ma’am” Duty Operations Commander Monroe called “Where you aware of a protest march planned for today?” he asked.

“It’s the first I have heard of it” Tracy admitted as she checked her large leather-bound diary on the desk but found no reference “Nope, nothing in the diary” she then confirmed.

“Apparently it’s one of those multi-faceted demos, usual route from Regents Park to Trafalgar Square then on to Parliament Square” Monroe confirmed “I only got the notification for it about ten minutes ago.”

“Well, it was nice of them to tell us in advance!” Tracy sarcastically remarked “Where did the notification come from?” she then asked.

“The Central London Events Coordination Office” Monroe read from the top of the notification “Another one of the Mayor’s useless quango’s I believe.”

“Oh great...” Tracy responded, “Does this notification indicate anything actually useful by any chance?”

“Estimate of five to ten thousand attendees, possible counter protest along the route and it all kicks off about eleven o’clock” Monroe confirmed.

“You couldn’t make it up...” Tracy lowered her head into the palm of her hand for a few moments as she contemplated the problem “All right, round up whatever spare officers you can, bus them in from the Home Counties if you have too, notify the Mounted Division, Traffic, Parks Division and the Transport guys.”

“What about overtime?” Monroe tentatively asked.

“Authorise whatever it takes” Tracy confirmed “Christmas is coming up so I am sure our guys and girls will be happy to earn a little extra cash.”

“Right away Ma’am” Monroe agreed.

“If there are any problems or if anyone starts getting arsey, give me a call” Tracy then called “I am in the mood to willingly introduce my steel toe capped boots up some well deserving backsides.”

“Good morning Sir” Bob called as The Commander joined him by the coffee vending machine in the main corridor of the seventh floor.

“Morning Bob” The Commander responded, “What’s your poison?” he then asked.

“Oh, that is very kind of you Sir” Bob replied, “Black coffee with two please.”

The Commander discreetly looked around as he found some loose change in his pocket and proceeded to purchase a coffee from the machine.

“Thanks for coming” The Commander called as he handed the white plastic cup over.

“Thanks for the coffee” Bob responded “So, what can I do for you Sir?” he then asked.

“If anyone asks, we are not here, and this conversation never happened” The Commander ominously began.

“Understood Sir” Bob agreed.

“I have just received a tip off from a reliable source” The Commander began to explain “One of The Hand’s senior lieutenants wants to meet to discuss defecting.”

“Whoa...” Bob responded in surprise.

“Exactly” The Commander agreed “Trouble is he will only meet me, alone in a specific location and at a time of his choosing. Nobody else is to know about it.”

“I think I see where you are going with this Sir” Bob confirmed.

“So, what are the chances that at about half twelve you and a suitably trustworthy colleague could be casually strolling through St. James’s Park, say, near the lake for example?” The Commander then discreetly asked.

“Lunchtime, due for a break, decent cafe near the Horse Guards Parade end” Bob summarised “I reckon that is entirely possible” he concluded.

“Thanks” The Commander responded “And erm strictly on the Q.T. right?” he reminded him, tapping his nose.

“You got it Sir” Bob confirmed “Mum’s the word.”

“Bloody cockwombs!!” Tracy loudly exclaimed as she stormed out of her office and headed on down the corridor causing everyone else to look around at her, some suppressing giggles at her amusing sudden outburst.

“Err Ma’am?” a slightly nervous looking officer remarked as she approached Tracy.

“This has better be good Lieutenant” Tracy responded with a now much calmer tone.

“This just arrived by secure internal courier, urgent, eyes only” the Lieutenant explained as she handed a sealed yellow envelope over to her.

“Thank you” Tracy responded as she took the message whereupon the Lieutenant duly departed.

Looking around to see that no one was watching, Tracy broke the security seal on the envelope, opened it and extracted the message contained inside.

“Interesting...” Tracy remarked to herself as she studied the message carefully before returning it to its envelope and putting it in her uniform tunic inside pocket.

“You two look like you could use some fresh air” Divisional Commander Jim Appleby, head of the Transport Division of the Service called as he walked into the main office on the fifth floor of the Divisional Headquarters building in High Holborn.

“Sir?” Jack responded, looking up from the pile of files liberally spread across both his desk and the one directly opposite, behind which sat his colleague Lieutenant Connor Shelby.

“Your mother has just been on the phone” Appleby explained “Apparently there is a massive protest march going off in central London in about an hour which nobody bothered to tell us about.”

“What are they protesting about this time?” Shelby asked.

“Search me” Appleby honestly responded, “Equal rights for one legged lesbian llamas with free vegan sandwiches or something I expect.”

Both Jack and Shelby smirked in response.

“Well, whatever they are protesting about” Appleby continued “We need bodies on the ground to make sure they don’t wreck any transport infrastructure so, round up whoever you can find and get down there” he instructed.

“Yes Sir” both Jack and Shelby confirmed as they got up, grabbing their uniform tunics as they left.

“Oh, Jack?” Appleby called after them as they were leaving “Try not to get into any bother?”

“Of course not Sir, you know me” Jack responded before he and Shelby disappeared from view.

“Yeah, I know you all right” Appleby remarked to himself with a brief knowing smile before returning to his office where he went to his safe, opened it and extracted two files which he placed on his desk.

One of these files was Jack’s personnel records, the other a fairly dull looking dark red box file marked by a white label affixed to the front which bore just a single word, ‘Cato’.

“What’s all this I hear about you, my love?” The Commander asked as he joined Tracy in the Operations Room.

“Hmm?” Tracy asked, not understanding the question.

“Who have you been calling a cockwomble?” The Commander then explained.

“How did you hear about that?” Tracy asked, slightly surprised.

“Walls have ears and all that” The Commander explained “Besides, I am the Administrator General; it’s my job to know about these things.”

“The Mayor’s minions” Tracy confirmed “The Events Co-ordination Office forgot to pass on to us the joyous news that we have a protest march in Central London this lunchtime.”

“Seriously?” The Commander responded in disbelief.

“They claim they sent us, Parks Police and Transport Division the paperwork three weeks ago” Tracy explained.

“Beep, beep, beep!” The Commander responded

“Jack’s patented bullshit-o-meter?” Tracy suggested.

“Needle well and truly buried once again” The Commander confirmed.

“I have spent the last hour or so ringing around all the Duty Commander’s trying to rustle up as many bodies as I can find to try and control it” Tracy continued, “I swear that someone at County Hall is going to feel my steel toe capped boot right up their jacksi before the day is over.”

“Ouch...” The Commander winced.

“With a bit of calling in of favours and some overtime, I think we have got it covered though” Tracy confirmed “We will just have to hope that they behave themselves and nothing else goes wrong.”

“Well, if there is any excitement, I will be in the Joint National Security Committee meeting” The Commander responded, pretending to momentarily nod off at the anticipation of the meeting.

“We err could meet for lunch?” Tracy then suggested “What are you doing about half twelve, protestors not withstanding?” she asked.

“As much as I would love to” The Commander responded, “Regrettably I have another appointment.”

“Anything interesting?” Tracy inquired.

“Just a little information gathering exercise, probably nothing” The Commander casually dismissed the inquiry which told Tracy a lot more than he had hoped to reveal.

“Hmmm...” Tracy responded knowingly.

“Sorry my love” The Commander responded, “I got a tip strictly on the Q.T. from a reliable source and I am not supposed to tell anyone, not even you.”

“In which case I will pretend this conversation never happened and you can tell me all about it over dinner later” Tracy confirmed with a smile.

“It’s a date” The Commander confirmed giving her a peck on the cheek “I’ll see you later love.”

“Well, well, well” Dent remarked as he read through the morning reports on his desk “Would you look at that.”

He continued to read them with considerable interest, certainly more interest than he usually did with the overnight reports.

“So, what are you up to you little toad?” he then continued to comment before getting up from behind his desk and going over to the glass wall that separated his office from the general office outside.

His second in command, Gareth Pointer was at his desk in the general office when he heard his boss knocking on the glass which caused him to look up and see Dent waving him in.

“Oh, here we go” Pointer remarked to one of his colleagues before getting up and heading over to the office door.

“Everything all right boss?” Pointer then asked as he came in.

“Come in Gareth, shut the door” Dent called, “Have you seen the overnight reports?” he then asked, proffering them towards him.

“Err, no not yet Guv” Pointer admitted “I have been up to my ears in sorting out the forensic reports from the Carshalton Beeches and MoD bombs.”

“Anything interesting come up?” Dent asked.

“Just confirmation that the explosive used in both jobs was our old green friend RS232 and that the detonation mechanisms have got Colonel Reaper’s trademarks all over them, fits his style perfectly.”

“It seems Lord Chaos Orbison popped out for some fresh air yesterday evening” Dent explained.

“That’s the first time he has been out in months, isn’t it?” Pointer recalled.

“It is indeed” Dent confirmed “Page seventeen” he then nodded to the report which caused Pointer to flick through it.

“Whoa...” Pointer responded with a look of amazement “He didn’t just pop out for a bag of chips and a packet of fags then.”

“No” Dent responded with a knowing smile “No he didn’t.”

“What the hell was Orbison doing over at the Mayor’s place?” Pointer then asked.

“A very good and intelligent question Gareth” Dent agreed “and one I intend to find an answer to.”

“We could send in the Scotland Yard guys to have a chat” Pointer then suggested.

“Unfortunately, since The Commander spoke to the Mayor yesterday and gave him a very well deserved verbal bollocking for the loyalty bonus website fiasco” Dent explained “we have all had a papal bull from various highly placed legal eagles telling us in no uncertain terms that we are not to go anywhere near the Mayor unless it is bearing smiles, flowers, chocolates and most importantly of all, apologies.”

“Chocolates?” Pointer snorted in response “I wouldn’t spit on that cretin if he were on fire.”

“That’s the spirit!” Dent congratulated him “Have you been on the same tact and diplomacy course as The Commander by any chance?” he then joked.

“So, what can we do Sir?” Pointer then asked “If Orbison and the Mayor are proverbially in bed together...”

“Let’s hope it is just proverbial...” Dent interjected with a grimace at the mere thought.

“Quite” Pointer swiftly agreed, “Then we can’t just sit on our hands and do nothing.”

Dent sat back down behind his desk and thought to himself in silence for a few moments as Pointer looked on in anticipation.

“Do we still have the warrant orders for the phone taps and surveillance on Reaper’s unit lying around here somewhere?” Dent then asked.

“I think so Sir” Pointer replied.

“Do you think anyone would notice if we discreetly added a couple of extra names and addresses to the list then?” Dent then suggested “Say the Mayor, his closest personal staff and his private residence?”

“I think it could be done Sir” Pointer admitted “If I buried it sufficiently in amongst all the other names and addresses that we are submitting then the chances are it will pass through the system unnoticed, more so that today is Friday.”

“And I will be unavailable in the Joint National Security Committee meeting all morning so I can remain completely ignorant if anything does flash up” Dent then thoughtfully concluded.

“Do it” he then ordered “Tell nobody else, not even your budgerigar” he then requested.

“Yes Sir, right away” Pointer confirmed before leaving, gently closing the office door behind him.

“Right then” Dent determinedly remarked as he looked across at the photograph of the Mayor on the front page of the previous days’ edition of the Evening Standard newspaper that was nearby on his desk “Let’s see what you are up to shall we?”

“Well, there are the first ones through the door” Jack remarked as he and Shelby stood by one of the main street level entrances of Piccadilly Circus Underground Station as a group of people dressed gaudily in multi-coloured costumes emerged into the daylight carrying a myriad of homemade placards and banners.

“I hate these protest march jobs” Shelby admitted as they discreetly followed the group across Piccadilly Circus towards Regents Street “Give me a nice honest pickpocket any day of the week.”

“Gets my vote” Jack agreed as he reached for his radio “Lima Tango Control from Nine Nine Three, are you receiving, over?” he then called.

“Lima Tango Control receiving go ahead Jack” came the response.

“Let the boss know and probably The Yard as well, the first of our protestors have wandered in high as kites as per usual, over” Jack called.

“Understood Nine Nine Three, out.”

“And now the fun begins” Shelby remarked with a wry smile as they heard hooting and looked back to see another group of protestors appear.

“Welcome back Brother Reaper” Orbison declared as the van stopped in the basement of the Citadel Complex and the men inside got out.

“My Lord” Reaper responded reverently.

“Is everything set for our glorious day?” Orbison asked, excitedly awaiting the news.

“Indeed it is My Lord” Reaper confirmed “Our people are already filtering into the city to raise the message of Chaos on your command and our special messages are ready to be delivered to our lucky recipients.”

“Excellent, most excellent” Orbison responded, rubbing his hands together with glee.

At that point they were joined by the tall dominant figure of Olivier Torore and three of his men who all bowed reverently as they approached.

“The time has come?” Torore asked with a sense of great anticipation.

“Indeed it has Great Brother” Orbison confirmed “The great moment has come; it is time for Brother Adebese and I to prepare to announce to the world that the age of chaos has arrived!”

“Lima Tango Nine Nine Three from Lima Tango Control, are you receiving, over?” came the call over Jack’s radio but initially he did not hear it as the noise from the increasing number of protestors in and around Oxford Circus was now reaching deafening levels.

The message was repeated again with Jack just catching part of it and ducking down into the Underground Station ticket hall below the street level in order to try and get some quiet.

“Lima Tango Nine Nine Three, is someone trying to call me?” Jack called.

“Affirmative” came the response “Urgent message from Lima Tango Two Six Seven, your presence is requested by an informant on a case you are working on apparently.”

“Huh?” Jack responded, slightly confused.

“It’s an informant who wants to talk to you about some guy named Reaper?” the caller confirmed.

“Now you have my attention” Jack responded, “Where did the message originate?” he then asked.

“Secure messaging system from MI5” came the response “Apparently the contact wants to meet you alone, St. James’s Park at twelve thirty.”

“All received” Jack confirmed.

“Everything all right Jack?” Shelby asked as he joined him in the ticket hall.

“Apparently I have an appointment” Jack explained “Someone wants to talk to me about our old friend Mr Reaper.”

“Sounds interesting” Shelby commented “When?” he then asked.

“St. James’s Park, twelve thirty apparently” Jack checked his watch and as a backup the 1930’s art deco style clock nearby on the wall of the ticket hall.

“Am I invited?” Shelby then asked.

“You can come along and watch my back if you like” Jack readily agreed, “It’s probably nothing though so don’t get too excited.”

“Anything has got to be better than babysitting this bunch of clowns...” Shelby admitted as they both looked around them as they ascended the steps back to street level and emerged near to the throngs of noisy protestors.

“You’ve got a point there” Jack readily agreed.

Across the centre of the City, the protestors were arriving in ever increasing numbers, summoned by the persuasive power of social media and online forums which had ensured that the message had got out far and wide, resulting in thousands of people from all different backgrounds and with many different causes to come to London.

In Piccadilly Circus, Commander Monroe was overseeing the build-up of the crowds from the relative comfort of a seat on board one of the Metropolitan Division’s mobile operations units, effectively a converted single deck bus with a miniature control room and communications set up along with mess facilities in the rear part of the former passenger saloon.

“Good God, there are thousands of them...” Monroe remarked with worried look at the scrolling traffic camera feeds from across the area which were showing a steady flow of protestors heading through the streets towards Hyde Park where the march was scheduled to commence from.

“Transport Division reckons we are looking at a couple of thousand arriving on trains into Central London every ten minutes at the moment Sir” one of the officers alongside him confirmed.

“I don’t like this; it just feels wrong somehow” Monroe ominously commented.

Whilst many thousands were perfectly legitimate protestors, there were significant numbers of individuals throughout the massed crowds who had ulterior motives.

They kept a low profile, joining in with the cheering and chanting, waving homemade placards and even singing in some places but as they progressed through the streets, they had a mission to carry out.

In numerous locations, these specific individuals would use the cover of the crowd to go up to one of the many public refuse bins in the street or some of the industrial bins that were more commonly found along the side and back streets.

With a swift well-trained movement, a package wrapped in old newspaper or an innocuous looking plastic bag was dropped into the bin and then they would carry on their way.

What was in these mysterious packages was a mystery to the people dropping them off, they were merely following the orders and teachings of their Brotherhood, but for now these remained in the dark, dormant, silent, and waiting...

Orbison knew what the packages were; he was the one who issued the orders to deliver them.

In his own personal operations room or Mission Control Chamber as he preferred to ostentatiously call it, he watched as on a large map of central London being displayed on a screen, numerous little red dots started to appear, each one corresponding to a delivered package.

“Oh, we are going to have so much fun today” Orbison called in jubilation.

“I would temper your enthusiasm if I were you Mr Orbison” called a voice which caused him to look around and see Taylor enter the room, as always smartly dressed in total contrast to the elaborate robes and ceremonial decoration that Orbison was wearing.

“You really do know how to suck the fun out of things don’t you?” Orbison remarked.

“As I said yesterday evening, my goal and that of my group is a very much a long-term aim” Taylor reminded him “I have patience, our time will come and whilst you will get your utopia of chaos, we will then emerge victorious from the ashes, a new world order.”

“Oh, chill out” Orbison responded, “Perhaps what you need is some of my special tonic?” he then suggested.

“No thank you” Taylor politely declined “Save your mood-altering narcotics for your soldiers and followers, I need to keep a clear and uninfluenced mind for the task ahead.”

“Suit yourself” Orbison remarked as he returned the packet of green powder back to his pocket.

“So, what time are we scheduled to begin the festivities?” Taylor then asked.

“The first course is due to be served at half twelve” Orbison confirmed, indicating a specific part of the map “then my followers and Brother Adebese’s dedicated team will begin their honoured task.”

“And all this?” Taylor indicated the various growing number of small red dots across the map ahead of them.

“That’s for dessert” Orbison evasively explained “I like to keep my audience on its toes you know.”

“In which case Mr Orbison, I will take my leave” Taylor then confirmed “I have a few sacrificial lambs to organise, that’s my fun for today.”

“Enjoy yourself” Orbison responded.

“You too...” Taylor replied before discreetly departing.

“Ah...” Orbison gleefully remarked with a broad smile as he turned back to the map on the screen, “And so it begins...”

“What time do you make it?” Jack asked as he and Shelby watched a small group of protestors heading across Marble Arch towards Hyde Park, many of them having emerged from the main entrance of Marble Arch Underground Station at the west end of Oxford Street.

“Just coming up to half eleven mate” Shelby confirmed as he checked his wristwatch, “You think it is too early for lunch yet?” he then tentatively asked.

“Well, it looks like most of this lot are now safely tucked up in the Park which puts them off our jurisdiction” Shelby indicated the dwindling number of protestors in the area, many of them now having arrived in Hyde Park where the protest march was scheduled to commence from fairly shortly, “It’s Metropolitan and Parks Division’s problem now until the all head for home.”

“Sounds good enough to me” Jack readily agreed as he reached for his radio, “Lima Tango Nine Nine Three to Lima Tango Control, are you receiving, over?” he then called.

“Go ahead Nine Nine Three” came the swift response.

“The protestors are now all safely tucked up in Hyde Park” Jack then confirmed, “We are going to head back towards Trafalgar Square and make sure everything is all right over that way” he then declared.

“Very well, received and understood” the response came.

“Lima Tango Nine Nine Three, out” Jack confirmed.

“Lunch?” Shelby then suggested as soon as Jack had put his radio away again.

“Lunch” Jack agreed.

In her office on the top floor of New Scotland Yard, Tracy was re-reading the message she had received earlier with much consideration.

It was a handwritten letter, one single sheet of A5 size paper, yellow in colour which had been personally addressed to her and delivered by hand in a matching colour envelope.

Having finished reading it for what must have been the fourth or fifth time she instinctively reached for the telephone on her desk but then hesitated, withdrawing her hand just as it was about to pick up the handset.

“Ah you daft woman, you are imagining things” Tracy then remarked to herself as she then folded the letter again and replaced it back in the envelope.

Pushing her chair back and then standing up, Tracy placed the envelope back in her inside tunic pocket before looking out of the large window at the view across the skyline of Central London set out before her.

She was still uncertain about the letter’s contents. It seemed to her to be just too fanciful but then she realised there was a way she could at least check one part of it to seem if some semblance of truth lay within its words and she duly hurried out of the office with a purposeful stride.

Down the corridor, Fuller was back in his office working on the large multi screen computer terminal that dominated the room when there was a quiet knock on the door.

“Come on in!” Fuller called back over his shoulder, not even taking his eyes off his screens for a moment to see who it was who was calling.

“Hello” Tracy called as she entered; discreetly closing the door behind her, a point that Fuller quickly picked up on but said nothing about.

“Morning Ma’am” Fuller responded, “What can I do for you?” he then enthusiastically inquired.

“Could you run a name through you magic box of tricks for me and see if anything goes ping?” Tracy then asked as she took out the letter once again and checked it.

“Sure” Fuller confirmed as he returned to his keyboard and prepared to enter the details.

“The name is, err...” Tracy struggled with the pronunciation, a combination of a highly unusual name combined with the handwritten nature of the letter causing her problems, “Dakarai Eebo” she then confirmed, proceeding to then spell it out.

“Interesting name” Fuller commented as he input the name into the computer and prepared to conduct his search, “Anyone we know?” he then asked.

“That is what I was hoping to find out” Tracy then admitted, “I hope it is just a red herring to be honest.”

“Here we go...” Fuller watched as the search window on his screen scrolled quickly past his eyes before it suddenly stopped, “...and we have a match!”

“Let’s see” Tracy then urged as she looked over Fuller’s shoulder.

“Dakarai David Eebo” Fuller read the details, “Born in Cape Town, South Africa, joined the South African Army at the age of eighteen, went freelance in the Congo about three years later and then seems to have disappeared off the grid ever since.”

“Is that what he looks like?” Tracy then asked as a black and white photograph appeared on the screen alongside the details.

“Well, used to” Fuller admitted, “This picture was taken during his South African Army days which were the thick end of twenty years ago; if he is still alive then I reckon he will look a fair bit different now.”

“Right...” Tracy reluctantly remarked, clearly deep in thought.

“Oh hello, there is an outstanding arrest warrant on him” Fuller then added as a further bit of information appeared, “The South African National Police Service want a word in his shell like it would appear.”

“Well, they may get the chance” Tracy responded.

“Ma’am?” Fuller asked, not understanding the reference.

“Strictly on the quiet you understand, this does not leave this room” Tracy began to explain to which Fuller nodded in complete agreement, “According to a communication I received earlier, this guy Eebo is a member of The Hand and he is coming here at twelve thirty today to hand himself in, he wants to defect.”

“Interesting” Fuller remarked “When you say he is coming here, you mean actually here as in this building?” he then asked.

“Main Reception at twelve thirty prompt” Tracy confirmed “and he will only surrender himself to me in person.”

“Why not The Commander if I may ask?” Fuller then wondered.

“I thought the same thing, but he is off at that Security Committee meeting and then he is apparently busy after that” Tracy explained.

“Very kind of this guy to check The Commander’s social schedule and not bother him” Fuller commented.

“Yes, that is the bit I find most odd” Tracy admitted, “The fact this guy hasn’t even been seen for almost twenty years tends to make me think he is actually dead, and this could just be an elaborate wind up.”

“So, what are you going to do Ma’am if I may ask?” Fuller then inquired.

“Be in Reception at twelve thirty I guess” Tracy then admitted “I will give the guy ten minutes to turn up and then I am going to lunch.”

“If you like, I can always increase the monitoring of the area outside the Yard to see if he appears?” Fuller suggested.

“Yes, do that” Tracy agreed “but this stays strictly between the two of us because if I made a big song and dance about it and he was a no show, I am going to look like a right Muppet.”

“Understood Ma’am” Fuller agreed as Tracy turned to leave.

“Thanks Simon” she called back before closing the door and leaving him alone once more.

“That was odd...” Fuller remarked to himself before looking at Eebo’s details on the screen once more, “and what are you all about?” he then asked the old photograph being displayed.

After a few moments thought, Fuller took a look in a small diary he kept in his jacket pocket and found a telephone number which he then dialled on his mobile.

“South African Consulate” came the response over the telephone as soon as his call was answered.

“Hello” Fuller called “Can I speak to your Security Bureau please, it’s Commander Simon Fuller over at New Scotland Yard” he then confirmed.

If there is one thing that you will find plenty of in the streets of central London, it is mediums sized delivery vans, many of them white, some of them a plethora of other colours and probably only outnumbered by red London buses and taxis, but not by much.

One of these vans was a white Mercedes Benz Sprinter van which was being driven through Central London and as the chimes of Big Ben rang across the City declaring the time as eleven forty five, the driver proceeded west along the Embankment towards Westminster.

Whilst most delivery vans were usually to be found darting about, making frequent stops, this one was being driven methodically and carefully.

At the wheel, dressed in the overalls of a fake parcel courier company was Olivier Torore. His unfamiliarity with the centre of London meant he was relying on the satellite navigation screen on the dashboard in front of him to negotiate the busy streets.

With the typical traffic, it was slow going approaching Westminster Bridge but soon he managed to get around and turn right past Portcullis House and into Parliament Square.

Rounding the Square in the flow of traffic, Torore saw his chance and swung around a London Bus and into Victoria Street, passing the ornate and dominant Westminster Abbey on his left and the rather contrasting 1960's brutalist Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre building on the right.

But Torore was not here for sightseeing, he had a specific destination he was heading towards and now he was nearly there.

When the traffic lights duly changed and the queue of slow-moving traffic finally moved off, Torore turned right into Dean Farrar Street and then left in Dacre Street before reaching the end and then bearing around to the left, into Broadway.

The familiarity and indeed, subconscious disregard for such an everyday sight as a delivery type van parking somewhere a bit odd meant that when Torore stopped outside the main entrance of New Scotland Yard, nobody took any notice of it.

Even when he stepped out and looked around, no one called or challenged him as to why he had parked there.

A few moments later Torore turned and locked the van doors before dropping the keys deliberately whereupon they fell into a drain and disappeared from view.

“Whoops...” Torore mockingly remarked before smiling and simply walking away.

Orbison, dressed in his full ceremonial robes, was kneeling in total silence before the altar in one of the large Worship Chambers of the Citadel Complex.

Only the genteel ticking of the clock and his low deep breathing disturbed the absolute silence in the room.

He had remained there in total solitude and silence for almost an hour, deep in meditative thought.

It was only as the mechanism of the clock began to whirr with the approach of the hourly chimes that for the first time, he raised his head.

The silence was broken as the antique clock began to strike, announcing the time as twelve o'clock.

As the dozen chimes rang out, Orbison pushed back the hood off his head and slowly rose to his feet.

“By the divine power of your teachings, guide us through our mission of chaos and deliver us from law and order” Orbison reverently declared “To Life Immortal, amen.”

With that declaration, Orbison smirked knowingly before stepping forward and blowing out the four candles on the altar and then leaving the chamber.

Proceeding down the candle lit main corridor, Orbison soon arrived in a side room full of large screens linked to an extensive array of computer equipment.

“Gentlemen” Orbison called to the technical team of computer specialists sat at the computer consoles “Brothers, it’s time to start the music!”

At his command, the technicians immediately began to work on the computers, fingers typing on the keyboards at such a frantic pace they were practically a blur.

Orbison looked on with a sense of pride for he knew his campaign of chaos had well and truly begun.

“The fact remains ladies and gentlemen that we are all severely over stretched, over budget and under resourced” The Commander informed the gathering of the Joint National Security Committee meeting “I know it is a well-worn stuck record, but we trot it out every single time simply because it’s true.”

“The UK Government does not have a bottomless pit of money” the Home Secretary began to point out.

“No, just a bottomless pit of excuses and daft ideas...” The Commander muttered under his breath.

“However, there may be the possibility of emergency funds if, and I stress if you can justify the requirements” the Home Secretary then continued as Sir Richard tried to suppress the giggles at The Commander’s little snide remark that was so typical of him.

“Well, anything is better than nothing” The Commander agreed “I cannot underestimate the serious workload we and our colleagues in our sister agencies are currently under with this Ixion Brotherhood and The Hand mess going on.”

“If I may ask” the Home Secretary took off his spectacles and looked across the conference table with a thoughtful look “What is the situation with the data breach?”

“Certain security sensitive personnel are being secured and or relocated” The Commander confirmed “We have upped security checks on other key personnel and sent out a general alert for everyone to be extra vigilant with their personal security and so far, we have not had any incidents since the Ministry of Defence bomb yesterday morning.”

“Well, there is that to be thankful for I suppose” Dent commented to mutual nods from all around the table.

“Have you had any better luck getting anything out of my old friend ‘Fred’ by any chance?” Sir Richard then asked.

“I had a couple of my specialist interrogation technicians give him a good session overnight” Dent confirmed “He eventually agreed to confirming his name, Henri Legrande as, thanks to the efforts of Commander Fuller, we had managed to identify him through other sources, but he is still resisting everything we figuratively and literally throw at him.”

As Dent continued his briefing, The Commander looked discreetly at his pocket watch, something which Sir Richard quickly picked up on.

“I’m sorry, are we keeping you Commander?” Sir Richard knowingly asked with a bit of a smirk as The Commander hurriedly put his pocket watch away again in response.

“My sincerest apologies everyone” The Commander humbly responded “It’s just I do have an urgent appointment coming up” he slightly evasively explained.

“Hmm...” Sir Richard looked at his own watch thoughtfully “All right then ladies and gentlemen, in which case I think this is a good time to break for lunch” he then declared, “Shall we say, resume at one thirty?” he then suggested to nods and murmurs of agreement from everyone in the room.

As the meeting broke up, the Home Secretary tapped his Foreign Office colleague on the shoulder.

“Coming to the Cabinet Office bar for a liquid lunch Adrian?” the Home Secretary suggested.

“That sounds like an excellent idea Nigel” the Foreign Secretary agreed.

“Sir Richard, will you join us?” the Home Secretary then called across.

“Erm, maybe later thanks” Sir Richard responded, “I have an awful lot of paperwork to read through before we resume” he admitted “I’ll catch up with you later.”

With that confirmation, both the Home and Foreign Secretary’s duly left the room, following the others who had already swiftly departed.

“Sir Richard initially returned to the files in front of him before pausing, putting his pen down and turning around to look out of the window where below he could just see The Commander crossing Horse Guards Parade and heading towards St. James’s Park.

“What the hell are you up to Eddie?” Sir Richard asked himself before turning back, shrugging his shoulders, and returning to the papers on his desk with a small, resigned sigh.

“What time do you make it?” Jack asked across to Shelby as he drove the Transport Division patrol car carefully past the cordoned off protestors who were marching around Trafalgar Square before passing through Admiralty Arch and on to The Mall.

“It’s about a quarter past twelve” Shelby confirmed.

“Call in will you” Jack then requested “Tell Control we are going off watch for half an hour.”

“Okay...” Shelby agreed with a definite tone of uncertainty as he reached for his radio “Lima Tango Seven One Seven to Control, are you receiving over?”

Jack looked across momentarily as he brought the patrol car to a stop by the side of the road as Shelby’s call was unexpectedly greeted with complete silence.

“That’s odd” Shelby then remarked “I’ve got no signal at all.”

“Try channel five” Jack then suggested.

“Okay, here we go” Shelby declared as he changed the frequency and tried again “Lima Tango Seven One Seven to Control, are you receiving over?”

Once again there was no response, only silence.

“Either you have got a duff radio, or the system is overloaded” Jack remarked “Never mind, try again in a bit.”

“So, what are we doing here?” Shelby then asked as he and Jack got out of the patrol car and stood on the pavement looking towards St. James’s Park with Buckingham Palace in the distance in one direction and the rear of Horse Guards Parade in the other.

“That my friend, is a very good question” Jack admitted “A very good question indeed...”

“Hello? Hello?!?” Fuller called over a headset in the New Scotland Yard main control room “Can anybody hear me?”

“I’ve got nothing here Sir” one of the control room operators then confirmed.

“Me neither” another operator agreed “mobile networks are fine though” she then reported.

“What the hell is going on?” Tracy asked as she popped her head around the door.

“Radios are down by the looks of it Ma’am” Fuller regretfully confirmed “Shifting to mobiles for the time being.”

“All right, keep me informed” Tracy responded, “I’ll be in Reception for a while, but my mobile will be off.”

“Understood Ma’am” Fuller responded as Tracy left.

“Broadsword calling Danny Boy!” Fuller then generally called over the radio “Can anybody hear me?”

Once again there was nothing and Fuller duly gave up, taking off his radio headset and casually discarding it on the desk.

“All right, we had better start dialling numbers I suppose” he then declared.

The Commander was quite enjoying the early winter sunshine as he casually strolled across Horse Guards Road and started to walk around the end of the huge lake that dominates the centre of St. James’s Park, running almost the full length down the middle of it.

A short distance away at another entrance to the park on Birdcage Walk, Bob and one of his colleagues from his Specialist Firearms Section were walking in parallel to The Commander in roughly the same direction, only sticking to the boundary road footpath to appear as if on routine patrol as requested.

The Commander took a moment to pause and look across the lake at a couple of the resident pelicans perched near the water's edge, being photographed by some excited tourists before briefly checking his pocket watch and moving on.

The Park was quite busy, the unusually fine weather having brought out some tourists plus quite a few workers from nearby offices on their lunch breaks.

Most of them paid no attention to the senior Security Service officer walking amongst them. With New Scotland Yard nearby, it was not that an uncommon sight there pretty much at any time, even in full dress uniform.

Across the midpoint of the huge lake that dominates the centre of the park is an uninspiring looking foot bridge of 1960's style appearance with its low concrete decking and metal railings where visitors often gather to be photographed with either Buckingham Palace as a backdrop in one direction or Horse Guards Parade, Big Ben and the London Eye Ferris wheel in the other.

Reaching the end of the bridge, The Commander once again paused to check his watch as Bob and his colleague stopped nearby at the gate parallel to his location and observed.

“What is he up to?” Bob's colleague asked.

“Search me mate” Bob responded with a casual shrug of his shoulders.

The chimes of Big Ben began to strike to herald half past twelve when The Commander stepped onto the bridge and proceeded steadily towards the centre.

In amongst the small number of passers-by stood a tall dark-skinned man, clearly of Central African origin, dressed in a smart tailored grey suit and dark green tie.

He stood out clearly from the regular tourists not only in his appearance but also in his stance, standing still in the exact centre point of the bridge, taking absolutely no interest whatsoever in the surrounding scenery or views.

As The Commander approached the centre of the bridge, the man turned to face him directly.

“National Administrator General Sir Edward Regent” the man formally called “So glad you could come” he then declared.

“Olivier Torore” The Commander responded with a mix of concern and surprise as he recognised the man standing before him.

“I see you know me” Torore responded.

“We have a rather unflattering picture of you on the wall back at the office” The Commander admitted.

At the same time as Torore and The Commander were meeting, Tracy was arriving in the New Scotland Yard reception area where Janice was just taking a telephone call.

“Ma’am!” Janice called with obvious urgency “We just got a call from the BBC newsroom, someone just phoned in a coded warning.”

“Oh hell, that is all we bloody need right now!” Tracy exclaimed as she leant over the reception desk and took the telephone handset “Caverner here” she then called “Where and when?”

“Central London, imminent” came the confirmation from the Control Room upstairs.

“So, what can I do for you Mr Torore?” The Commander asked as they stood together, face to face in the exact centre of the bridge.

“You may have noticed that the World is changing Mr Commander” Torore declared, “You and I come from an older generation, we don’t adapt to new ways so easily.”

“Hmm...” The Commander responded, not in the least bit convinced.

“Nothing can stop what is coming, what my Brothers have planned” Torore continued “However my superiors feel there is something you can do to make things a little more bearable...”

“Who for, your lot or mine?” The Commander asked semi dismissively.

“Oh, err would you excuse me a moment please” Torore reacted as the mobile in his hand began to ring “Remain here please, I have to take this.”

“Go for it...” The Commander casually agreed and watched as Torore withdrew towards the far end of the bridge.

At the other end of the bridge, Bob and his colleague watched.

“Are the radios back up yet?” Bob asked.

“No Guv” his colleague confirmed as he tried his radio again without success.

“I don’t like this, something is wrong...” Bob worryingly remarked.

The Commander watched Torore as he reached the far end of the bridge before he turned smartly on his heels to face back towards him once more.

“Commander?” Torore then called with a knowing smirk and holding up his mobile “To Life Immortal...”

“What the...?” The Commander remarked as he then saw Torore suddenly duck down to the ground.

What happened next literally and figuratively rocked the greater Westminster area as the footbridge was suddenly enveloped in a huge explosion with a highly distinctive green flash of flame.

The sound of the explosion boomed through the air as flames, smoke and debris were thrown in all directions and people all around screamed and ran away in response.

Windows were shattered, car alarms set off and the entire centre of the city seemed to stop as if holding its breath, wondering what had just happened.

“Jesus Christ!” Bob exclaimed as he and his colleague instinctively hit the ground amid a shower of burning debris that was landing both in the water and on the ground across a wide area.

In the meeting room a short distance away, Sir Richard Crowthorne was forced to duck below the desk as the shockwave hit the window he was sitting in front of, shattering the glass and showering him in shards whilst his cup of coffee shuddered across the desk in front of him.

Elsewhere in the building in the Cabinet Office bar, the Home Secretary stopped in mid sip of brandy when the explosion was heard and the building shook.

“That didn’t sound good” the Foreign Secretary remarked with foreboding as the general alert alarm began to sound out from all Government buildings in the area.

“Drink up, quick” the Home Secretary then wisely suggested.

Half a mile away in New Scotland Yard, Tracy had also heard the explosion although the shockwave did not reach that far due to the number of other buildings in the way.

“What the hell was that?” she called out generally as the echoes of the explosion began to fade.

Back in the park, amidst the screaming and panic, Bob was co-ordinating what help he could in getting tourists and other passers-by out of the immediate area when he noticed something in the water.

“Here, take this” he then called to Shelby who had run to the scene as he took off and passed him his weapon, bullet proof vest and equipment before running to the lakes edge and diving in.

On the opposite side of the lake, Torore stood looking on as the last bits of debris fell and the smoke began to clear revealing the charred stumps of the bridge supports with a few flickering licks of flame emitting from them before smiling and turning around to leave.

“Don’t move asshole!” Jack called, his old six shot revolver drawn and aimed directly at him.

“Oh, you are not supposed to be here young man” Torore calmly pronounced.

“Really?” Jack responded, clearly unimpressed and maintaining his aim, “So where am I supposed to be then?” he asked.

“Over there” Torore indicated towards Jack’s patrol car parked nearby which at that exact moment also exploded with the same distinctive green flash, destroying the vehicle instantly and sending yet more burning debris into the air and triggering still more screams and panic.

Jack instinctively ducked down as soon as the explosion began and by the time, mere moments later, he had recovered, Torore had made good his escape, making good use of the cover afforded by the panic of fleeing tourists and other civilians.

In the lake, Bob reached the object in the water; the battered body of the Commander who he quickly grabbed hold of and began to haul back to the shore.

“Oh, dear God...” Cassini responded as he arrived on the scene and saw the state of the Commander as he and Shelby helped Bob to drag him out of the water.

“I’ve got a pulse here” Bob called “It’s really weak though.”

“Medic!! MEDIC!!!” Cassini urgently called out.

At the same time over at New Scotland Yard, Tracy was just about to head back upstairs to the Control Room when the white van that Torore had parked outside the main entrance a short while earlier, suddenly exploded as a third device in the space of less than a minute was detonated.

The powerful force of the explosion caused the doors and windows on that side of the building across the lower half dozen floors to be violently blown in, Tracy herself being thrown against the reception desk with quite a forceful impact.

As alarms continued to sound both within the building and across Westminster, Tracy, somewhat dazed and bruised, managed to get up off the floor as a quick-thinking Janice quickly doused some small pockets of fire with an extinguisher.

“Are you all right Ma’am?” Janice asked as she casually tossed the now empty extinguisher aside before helping Tracy back onto her feet.

“Do you ever get the feeling someone doesn’t like you?” Tracy wryly asked as she dusted herself down.

“Well, the phone still works” Janice remarked as the dust covered telephone on her now battered desk began to ring and she reached over to answer it.

“Is everyone all right?” Tracy asked around to which she got mostly nods and thumbs up of confirmation.

“Good God, what a mess” Fuller exclaimed as he emerged from the stairwell.

“Control from Angel One” Tracy called over her radio as soon as she had managed to get it to work “I want the whole of central London in lockdown as of thirty seconds ago, all non-essential Government personnel, the Cabinet, the Prime Minister and the Royal Family to be evacuated within the next fifteen minutes.”

“Yes Ma’am” the crackly response came.

“What’s the damage?” Tracy then asked.

“I think we were lucky” Fuller confirmed “I don’t know for sure yet though; it looks like we’ve got a shed load of cuts and bruises and we are going to need a shit load of new windows.”

“Comms?” Tracy then inquired.

“Patchy” Fuller confirmed “I think some of our landlines are working; radios seem to be all right now as you have just discovered but all the mobile telephone channels are jammed with the high volume of emergency calls and no doubt uploading of crap to social media I expect.”

“All right, call Holborn and transfer London control to the Transport Division guys until we can straighten out the mess here” Tracy then instructed “and someone find my husband, quick.”

“Ma’am” Janice urgently called to which Tracy turned to see a worried look on her face that spoke volumes “You are wanted in St. James’s Park; Cassini says you had better hurry...”

Tracy looked on with a slight sense of confusion at first until her instincts kicked in and told her something was terribly wrong.

“Simon, you are in charge until I get back” Tracy declared as she quickly headed for the exit.

“What the...?” Fuller exclaimed, turning towards Janice as she slowly hung up the telephone.

“Something has happened to the Commander” she explained.

“Oh no...” Fuller responded in slow horrific realisation.

Outside, Tracy was forced to pick her way through the strewn smouldering debris and the burning remains of the exploded van that was just about to be doused down by the Fire Brigade who had only just arrived.

The sound of sirens filled the streets and sound of helicopters filled the air overhead, but Tracy heard nothing except the rapid beating of her heart as she ran as fast as she could through the streets towards the park.

As soon as she crossed Birdcage Walk, the road that bordered the south side of the park, Tracy could see the chaotic scene before her, fire crews attending to the various bits of smouldering debris whilst paramedics were attending to numerous injured victims amid Security Service officers who were attempting to seal off and evacuate the area.

It was the group of paramedics and officers near the end of the remains of the bridge that Tracy was instinctively drawn to where, as she approached, she recognised Bob, Shelby and Cassini who together with paramedics were leaning over someone badly injured on the ground.

“It’s all right Sir” Bob called “Your wife is here.”

“What the hell happened?” Tracy demanded to know as she was allowed through and knelt down beside the Commander who was showing severe injuries, burns and blood loss.

“That bastard Torore led him into a trap and then blew up the bridge with him on it” Cassini angrily confirmed.

“Can you hear me love?” Tracy called, holding the Commander’s burned right hand which slowly closed around her own.

The Commander managed to open his eyes and tilt his head slightly towards her.

“Be careful Ma’am” the paramedic working hard to try and stabilise the Commander’s condition advised, “He’s lost a lot of blood, probably forty percent burns and most of his left leg is gone.”

“Oh, dear God...” Sir Richard Crowthorne exclaimed in shock as he arrived along with Christopher Dent who had both run to the scene as fast as they could as soon as they had heard the news.

The Commander managed to turn his head towards Tracy and smile just a little before silently mouthing something as he was unable to speak.

“I love you...” Tracy responded, fighting back tears but then the Commander exhaled his last breath, his eyes closed, and his head fell to one side.

----o----

“Chris, you know what to do” Sir Richard informed Dent “Initiate the Pegasus Protocol, lock everything down and get it secured as soon as possible.”

“Yes Sir” Dent responded as he looked on with a heavy heart for a moment before he withdrew from the group and proceeded to make a phone call.

“Gareth” Dent then called as he was quickly answered “Red flash everyone we have got and then go into my office, third drawer down, right hand side of my desk, blue envelope marked ‘Pegasus Protocol’ in there” he clearly instructed, “Open it and act upon the instructions you find there, I will re-join you in approximately fifteen minutes.”

“Commander Caverner” Sir Richard called; placing a hand on Tracy’s left shoulder “We need to get you to a place of safety right away.”

“My place is here by my husband’s side” Tracy defiantly responded with clear insistence.

“There is nothing you or any of us can do for him now” Sir Richard insisted “These attacks were targeted against both the Commander and you.”

“Where’s Jack?” Tracy then asked as she very reluctantly let go of the Commander’s hand and with Sir Richard’s help got back up on her feet.

“I’m sorry, I have no idea” Sir Richard admitted.

“He was with me Ma’am” Shelby confirmed “I haven’t seen him since the first explosion though; we got separated in all the confusion.”

“All we know is that his patrol car was destroyed by the second device moments after the bridge detonation” Sir Richard added.

“Lima Tango Nine Nine Three from Angel One” Tracy called into her radio as she wiped away her tears with the silk handkerchief that Sir Richard had just passed to her.

“Jack, where the hell are you?” she then called in desperation upon receiving no response.

“We’ve got an eyewitness report saying a Security Service officer who matches Jack’s description was seen on the far side of the bridge attempting to apprehend the suspected bomber moments before the second explosion” Cassini confirmed.

“I don’t know what to do anymore” Tracy stood there looking bewildered and slipping increasingly into a state of shock.

“We should get you out of here to a place of safety right away” Sir Richard strongly suggested.

“I am not going anywhere” Tracy angrily insisted “I have work to do!”

“Not any more you don’t” Sir Richard responded, “I am relieving you of Command and putting you on compassionate leave, effectively immediately.”

“But this is personal!!” Tracy angrily protested with one of her trademark stern stares that few have faced and even fewer have managed to defeat “in case you haven’t noticed, that is my husband lying there.”

“I understand, believe me” Sir Richard sympathised, having to raise his voice over the sound of sirens and hovering helicopters “but we are all personally involved on this one” he explained “I’ve known him since he was a little lad, I was practically his Godfather in all but name but you need to realise, the three attacks were targeted at you, your husband and Jack and when I last looked, things didn’t get much more bloody personal than that!”

“I am going to find Jack” Tracy insisted “Not as an officer, not as an upholder of justice or enforcer of the law but as a mother because as of a couple of minutes ago, he is all I have got left.”

“All right...” Sir Richard held his hands up and reluctantly conceded, “But from now on wherever you go you will have backup” he insisted “Bob!” he then called over.

“Yes Sir” Bob responded as he came over having now managed to sort himself and his equipment out having been in the water a short time earlier.

“I want you to accompany Administrator General Caverner wherever she goes and see to it she doesn’t do anything rash” Sir Richard announced which caused some heads to turn for in that one sentence he had officially promoted her as well as issuing his instructions.

“You’re brave” Tracy responded “making me the chief is a bold move that will upset a few people in the corridors of power” she remarked.

“Good” Sir Richard responded with a wry smile “Besides, nature abhors a vacuum, and we need someone in charge now more than ever.”

“In which case, it’s time to get to work” Tracy declared “Sir Richard, I want you to ensure the safety and security of my husband.”

“Already in hand Administrator General” Sir Richard confirmed with a nod of respect.

“Thank you” Tracy responded, now a little calmer “Lieutenant Shelby” she requested “As soon as the area is secure and the casualties taken care of, I want you to find Jack.”

“Understood Ma’am” Shelby confirmed.

“In the meantime, someone give me a gun” Tracy then formally requested.

“Here you go Ma’am” Bob passed across one of his weapons whilst Shelby passed his spare weapon as well.

“So, what is the plan?” Bob asked.

“Find Jack, find the bastard that did this, then we start kicking in doors and hurting people” Tracy determinedly declared “Come on” she then called “Let’s go.”

“All units, this is Pegasus Control, Silver Commander” Pointer called over the dedicated secure radio channel from the MI5 Operations Control Room at Thames House, “Be advised, three - repeat - three confirmed detonations of high explosive devices in central London, multiple casualties have been reported.”

“Sir!” an agent came running into the room with an urgent message “This just in.”

“Right, thanks” Pointer responded after reading the message and then returning to the radio.

“All units, this is Pegasus Control, Silver Commander” he then called once more “New information, a second set of coded warnings has been received indicating possible further devices in central London. I am initiating a Priority One Evacuation immediately.”

“What have I missed?” Dent asked as he arrived in the room, casually chucking his coat onto the back of a chair.

“Further coded warnings” Pointer confirmed “I have initiated a Priority One Evacuation.”

“Good, very good” Dent responded.

“The Prime Minister will be picked up from Horse Guards Parade by helicopter inside of ten minutes and the VIP Protection Branch are collecting the Home Secretary and Foreign Secretary from the Cabinet Office imminently but fortunately it looks like most of the rest of the Cabinet are either out of town or over at the Houses of Parliament at the moment” Pointer confirmed.

“What is the situation with the National Police and Security Service?” Dent then asked.

“Commander Fuller called from New Scotland Yard a few minutes ago” Pointer explained “They have no power at the moment, so all central London operations are being transferred over to the Transport Division at Holborn for the time being.”

“The Royal Family?” Dent then asked.

“Already checked with Special Branch, they are all at Sandringham so no problems there” Pointer confirmed.

“PM’s helicopter due in two minutes Sir” came a call from the other side of the room.

“Find some way of contacting Administrator General Caverner, I want her out of town as well” Dent then instructed “It’s just too dangerous. Bung her on the chopper with the Prime Minister.”

“Where do we send everyone?” Pointer then asked.

“Over to Chequers” Dent responded, “It’s a fully equipped control centre with secure communications and several van loads of SAS trained lads with dogs patrolling the grounds, I think it should be safe enough.”

“There is one thing Sir” Pointer then reluctantly remarked as he realised what Dent had just said “You just called Tracy Caverner Administrator General and we haven’t been able to get hold of The Commander, he doesn’t seem to be responding.”

“Yeah...” Dent reluctantly responded; a tone Pointer quickly picked up on “He’s dead...”

Despite the intense activity in the Pegasus Control Room, those two simple words caused everyone to pause and look on in shock.

“Are you sure Sir?” Pointer asked, not really believing what he had just heard.

“He died ten minutes ago; in St. James’s Park” Dent regretfully confirmed “I was there...”

“Prime Minister” Amber McWilliam announced as she abruptly arrived in her office in Ten Downing Street “By orders of Sir Richard Crowthorne the Pegasus Protocol is now in effect and you are to be evacuated to Chequers immediately, your helicopter is waiting.”

“I have a helicopter?” the Prime Minister asked in some surprise as she took the headphones out of her ears and looked on, slightly bemused.

“Yes, you do and it’s waiting for us, let’s go” McWilliam insisted.

“Hang on a minute Amber” the Prime Minister responded, clearly confused by this sudden development “What’s going on?”

“Has no one told you?” McWilliam asked with a sense of some surprise “Three confirmed detonations of explosive devices about fifteen minutes ago, two in St. James’s Park and another outside New Scotland Yard.”

“I heard something a while ago, but I had my headphones in, so I thought it was cannons going off for some royal birthday or something” the Prime Minister remarked in astonishment “Any casualties?” she asked as she started to urgently gather together the papers that were on her desk.

“Initial reports say quite a few with potentially a couple of hundred walking wounded on top” McWilliam reported, “Prime Minister, The Commander is dead.”

“Oh hell...” the Prime Minister responded, sitting back down again as the shock of this news hit her, “Has this been confirmed?” she then asked.

“Sir Richard called it in about five minutes ago” McWilliam confirmed with sadness readily apparent.

“Right, erm, where is Divisional Commander Caverner?” the Prime Minister then enquired.

“Administrator General Caverner is trying to track down Jack Regent” McWilliam confirmed “It’s possible he may have gone off in pursuit of the St. James’s Park bombing suspect.”

It was then that there was a knock at the door and one of the Downing Street aides came in.

“Sorry to interrupt Prime Minister, Commander McWilliam” the aide called, clearly worried “but we, the BBC and MI5 just got a verified coded bomb warning.”

“I think they are a little late” McWilliam remarked.

“No, this is in relation to further devices” the aide confirmed.

“Right, that’s it” McWilliam responded “We are leaving, right now” she ordered.

“I can’t leave now, not in the middle of this crisis” the Prime Minister protested.

“It’s not safe here” McWilliam insisted “I am in charge of your personal safety and security and that means when I say we are going, we are going and make no mistake, that is an order, not a suggestion.”

“All right” the Prime Minister relented “I am coming, but I want the Security & Civil Defence Committee convened in one hour at Chequers with Administrator General Caverner present and get the Attorney General there as well.”

“Done and done” McWilliam agreed “Now if you wouldn’t mind, we need to haul ass!”

“Prime Minister confirmed heading to her helicopter now” Pointer confirmed as he received the news over his headset and relayed it to Dent who nodded in understanding “Home Secretary and Foreign Secretary should be rolling in the next couple of minutes too.”

“Good” Dent responded “In the meantime I want a lid on the Commander’s death right now” he then instructed.

“Too late Sir” one of the agents responded, “It was all over social media within moments of it happening.”

“Damm it!!” Dent threw his pen across the office in anger and frustration “Tell me Gareth, if I pick up the phone and dial 999 is it now ‘Which emergency service do you require, Police, Ambulance, Fire or sodding YouTube?’ or am I just getting cynical?”

“All communications confirmed transferred from New Scotland Yard Sir” one of the Control Room operators at the Transport Division headquarters in Holborn confirmed as Divisional Commander Appleby arrived in the room.

“Right, thank you” Appleby confirmed before calling for the attention of those present.

“For those of you who don’t know” Appleby then announced, “The Pegasus Protocol has been activated and is being coordinated by MI5, this means that the Cabinet is being evacuated from Westminster to Chequers so please ensure we have all the secure escort officers they need to ensure a smooth passage.”

“Yes Sir” came the response.

“In the meantime, have we done a check of all of our Division’s officers yet?” Appleby then asked.

“All accounted for except seven one seven and nine nine three” another officer confirmed.

“Why am I not surprised?” Appleby then generally asked.

“Unconfirmed reports from the scene say the second explosion in St. James’s Park destroyed one of our division’s patrol cars Sir” called the first control room officer.

“Oh God...” Appleby looked upwards as if in search of inspiration or reassurance for a few moments “All right then, keep trying them both and let me know the moment you hear anything.”

“Sir” came another call “Pegasus Control for you, secure line.”

“Appleby” he called once he picked up the telephone.

“Jim, this is Christopher Dent, Gold Commander” Dent called “Off the record I thought you should know, the Administrator General is dead...”

“What?” Appleby responded, visibly shocked “Surely not?”

“He was the target of the first bomb it seems” Dent sadly confirmed “They lured him into a trap, he didn’t stand a chance.”

“What about Divisional Commander Caverner?” Appleby then asked with obvious understandable concern.

“She was injured in the New Scotland Yard explosion but is alive and nominally Acting Administrator General” Dent informed him “She is being evacuated with the Prime Minister in a chopper in the next few minutes all being well.”

“Neil!” Appleby called over to one of his Control Room officers “Get everyone you can find, our Division, Met, City, Parks, traffic wardens, whoever is still mobile down to Westminster right now and lock it down” he ordered.

“We have also had further coded warnings of more devices” Dent then continued “Nothing has gone off yet though but for God’s sake, you guys be careful” he ominously warned.

“Oh, don’t worry, we will” Appleby readily confirmed.

“By the all mighty power of The Hand!” Adebese called loudly from the balcony of the Mobuto Embassy “Brothers!” he then declared, holding his hands aloft towards the sky “Arise!”

Adebese’s message was broadcast far and wide, triggering a number of events simultaneously.

“You heard our Brother” Orbison called to his team of technical experts sat before him at a huge bank of computer screens “Begin...”

In central Westminster, despite the explosions and the resulting chaos, the protest march was still going, filing out of Trafalgar Square towards Whitehall.

In among them were a group of twelve men who up until now had kept a low profile amongst the crowd.

At the moment that Adebese made his declaration however, with military like efficiency they suddenly activated, pushing through to the front, shedding off their civilian disguises to reveal military clothing, a dozen members of The Hand’s elite fighters.

“CHAOS RISES!!!” they shouted together in unison, firing automatic weapons into the air for a few moments, sending everyone else in the area running for cover, in fear of their lives.

“Oh hell...” one of the detachment of stationed officers on guard duty outside the wrought iron gates at the entrance to Downing Street remarked as they saw the heavily armed militia heading down Whitehall in their direction.

“Lima Papa Eight Five, urgent assistance requ...” the call to Pegasus Command and Control was suddenly interrupted with the ominous sound of gunfire in the background coming over the speakers.

“Gold Commander” Dent called urgently over his radio headset “Repeat please.”

“Whitehall, active shooters...” came the desperate sounding reply amid the sounds of a gunfight going on before the radio fell silent.

“Oh, dear God...” Pointer remarked in shock as he looked at live CCTV footage from Whitehall, “Looks like Adebesei’s boys have just kicked off a little war down there.”

“Get everyone we can rustle up down there right now, keep the bastards pinned down as best we can” Dent instructed.

“What the hell was that?” the Home Secretary asked as, proceeding down a corridor of the Cabinet Office, he, the Foreign Secretary and their bodyguards paused for a moment upon hearing the fire fight begin outside.

“Whatever it is” the Foreign Secretary responded “I think now would be an exceptionally good time to leave...”

“No argument there...” one of the bodyguards agreed as they picked up the pace only to be stopped in their tracks when gunfire shattered some of the windows ahead of them that faced the street causing them all to duck down for cover.

“Back door Gav?” one of the bodyguards suggested to his colleague.

“Good idea Steve” the other bodyguard quickly agreed.

“All units, this is Pegasus Control Gold Commander” Dent was heard to call over the radio on McWilliams’s belt as she and two close protection officers were escorting the Prime Minister towards the Horse Guards Parade exit “Be aware, terrorists currently engaged in a fire fight in Whitehall adjacent to the Cabinet Office.”

“Let’s move a little faster everyone, the loonies are at the door” McWilliam urged as they picked up the pace, rushing through the doors into the bright sunshine where the helicopter was waiting, rotors whirring, and the doors open ready to receive its passengers.

“Look out!” a voice called out causing McWilliam to look up and see two militia heading towards them.

“Go, go, go, go!” McWilliam urgently called as she and the two close protection officers covered the Prime Minister and bundled her unceremoniously into the back of the helicopter just as the two approaching militia opened fire.

“Right, I’ve just about had enough of these bastards!” a familiar voice remarked as Tracy appeared alongside McWilliam and together they opened fire on the two attackers without hesitation or mercy, striking them numerous times until both their weapons were empty.

“Did you get them?” the Prime Minister tentatively asked, looking out of the door of the helicopter.

“Yeah, we got ‘em” Tracy confirmed as she casually changed the ammunition clip on her weapon before she and McWilliam boarded the helicopter.

“Pegasus Command, this is Griffin One” the helicopter pilot confirmed over the radio as they took off “Everyone is on board, and we are on our way to the nest.”

As the helicopter ascended, Tracy looked down at the park below where hundreds of emergency service workers were on the scene, assisting the injured and securing the area.

Near the smouldering remains of the bridge, The Commander’s body was now covered and what amounted almost to an honour guard of four officers were standing guard.

“Goodbye...” Tracy silently mouthed as they flew away.

“Thank God for that” Dent remarked with a sigh of relief as the safe evacuation of both Tracy and the Prime Minister was confirmed “What about everyone else?” he then asked.

“Everyone is out and on their way except the Home and Foreign Secretary’s who seem to be trapped in the Cabinet Office” Pointer confirmed.

“Guv!” one the bodyguards called over his radio with some sense of urgency, “We can’t get to the north exit, going to go out the back door instead.”

“Roger that” Jennifer Caverner called from the driver’s seat of her specialist VIP car “Rolling to you.”

Quickly she gunned the engine and, looking over her shoulder out of the rear window, reversed at speed down Downing Street towards the Horse Guards Parade end.

In fact, she departed so quickly that the driver of the accompanying marked Security Service car was caught unawares and was forced to play catch up.

As she braked to a sharp stop and got out of the car, Jennifer could hear the shouting, screaming, sirens and gunfire that were echoing throughout the streets in the area.

“Jerry, glove compartment” she called across to her colleague sat in the front passenger seat alongside her who duly reached down, unlocked and opened the compartment and took out two automatic pistols, one of which he passed out to Jennifer along with a couple of spare ammunition clips.

“This is getting well lively boss” her colleague remarked.

“There they are!” Jennifer then called as the Home and Foreign Secretary’s accompanied by their bodyguards appeared and proceeded swiftly towards them.

“Let’s go” one of the bodyguards called as they rushed over whereupon they were both swiftly bundled into the back of the car.

“Right gentlemen” Jennifer then called as she returned to the driver’s seat “Buckle up; this is going to be a bit of a bumpy ride.”

Jennifer drove off at speed with the escorting marked car right behind her, proceeding across the open area of Horse Guards Parade towards The Mall only to run into another group of protestors who appeared from a side street and began to run towards them in the middle of the road.

“Ah hell!” Jennifer exclaimed as something thrown from the approaching mob bounced off the bonnet and clattered to the ground before exploding in a cloud of green smoke.

Moments later the urgent call came through to Pegasus Control.

“Say that again?” Dent called over having only just caught part of the call over the speakers in the Control Room.

“The car carrying the Home and Foreign Secretary’s has run into a mob of protestors near Admiralty Arch” came the confirmation “Apparently they have started lobbing smoke bombs all over the place.”

“Right, that’s it” Dent responded as he reached for the telephone and made a call “Send in everything we have got into Whitehall, I want those arseholes cleared and either dead or locked up within ten minutes.”

“Okay then” Jennifer called with determination as she slammed the gears into reverse “Let us see if we can break the world record for driving backwards towards Buckingham Palace without hitting anything, or anyone.”

“Oh my God...” the Home Secretary remarked as he scrambled to find the seat belt and put it on.

“Get your bloody heads down!” Jennifer then ordered as she looked over her shoulder through the back window as she reversed at speed away from the approaching mob before, as soon as it was clear to do so, she executed a perfect double handbrake turn and then accelerated away around Buckingham Palace where a number of Security Service motorbikes joined her car and escorted them to safety.

“The city is in chaos, the Security Services are in turmoil, the citizens are scared, the lunatics are running amok” Taylor remarked with a very satisfied look as he surveyed live news feeds from a number of national and international broadcasters which were being shown simultaneously across a number of screens on the wall of his office.

“Sir” came a call as a man came into the room bearing a message which he handed to Taylor.

“Why thank you” Taylor politely responded before taking the message and reading it.

The others gathered around behind Taylor looked on anxiously, curious to know what the news was that he had just received.

“Gentlemen” Taylor then called as he turned towards them before smiling broadly, “We got him!”

This announcement duly resulted in many cheers of delight mixed with a little relief as the congratulatory handshakes were exchanged all around the group and a bottle of champagne was opened with a loud pop.

“Gentlemen, gentlemen...” Taylor then asked for a little calm as he received a glass of champagne “It has taken us twenty years but finally, today we can say it, The Commander is dead!”

Further jubilant celebrations duly broke out at this confirmation.

“However...” Taylor then sounded a note of caution, “There is still much work to do, still years ahead of us before we can safely achieve our ultimate goal” he called, “Today has seen the elimination of the biggest hurdle so let us take this time to celebrate for tomorrow, we need to carry on our work as never before.”

Taylor looked on with a great sense of satisfaction as the celebrations continued in the room before raising his glass towards a painting on a wall and then downing the entire contents in one gloriously devoured gulp.

“This is Lima Echo Three One Seven” Lieutenant Eisley called urgently into his radio as the sound of gunfire echoed all around in Whitehall, “If anybody can hear me, we are getting our asses kicked out here.”

“Lima Tango Control” Divisional Commander Appleby responded, “We hear you mate, what’s happening?”

“I think we have a Mexican standoff Sir” Eisley confirmed as a couple of gunshots struck the upended car behind which he and a few others were taking cover, at the Parliament Street end of what was now an armed siege.

“How many gunmen do you think?” Appleby asked.

“The Downing Street guys initially thought twelve but two quickly disappeared and three more are definitely down” Eisley confirmed before noticing an opportunity, quickly popping up and firing off two shots before ducking back down again “Correction, four down” he then added.

“Your two missing ones are probably the pair that went after the Prime Minister’s helicopter a few minutes ago” Appleby confirmed “They won’t be troubling anybody anymore.”

“That is good to know Sir” Eisley agreed.

“Keep this line open” Appleby instructed one of his control room officers who nodded in acknowledgement, “Lieutenant Eisley” he then called “Do you think you can keep them pinned down for five more minutes.”

“I think so Sir” Eisley confirmed “The MoD guys have them covered from the river side and Commander Monroe has the other end sealed off, but his radio is broken so we have resorted to using lamps and Morse code.”

“All right, you hang on in there” Appleby instructed “I have specialist firearms officers and a military team on the way, they should be there inside of five minutes, they are stuck in traffic at the moment.”

“Understood Sir” Eisley responded.

“Whatever happens though, don’t let them escape, especially towards St. James’s Park as we still have emergency crews working on the bomb casualties” Appleby then instructed.

“We’ll do our best Sir” Eisley confirmed, “Lima Echo Three One Seven, out.”

“What’s the situation with transport?” Appleby then called across the Control Room.

“London Underground report that the Jubilee Line is now suspended, Westminster, Piccadilly Circus, St. James’s Park, Green Park and Hyde Park Corner stations are all closed with trains non-stopping, but Victoria is being kept open for exit only to try and get as many civilians away out of the area as fast as possible” one of the Control Room operators confirmed.

“Lima Tango Seven One Seven to Control” came a rather crackly call over the radio.

“Lieutenant Shelby? Is that you?” Appleby responded.

“Yes Sir” Shelby confirmed.

“Where are you Lieutenant?” Appleby then asked.

“I am in St. James’s Park Sir” Shelby replied, “All hell is breaking loose down here, we have got protestors, panicking civilians, loonies, the works down here.”

“I’ve got reinforcements on the way to the area now, they should be with you shortly, but we have an armed situation in Whitehall right now which is still not fully contained” Appleby explained, “Is Jack with you?” he then asked.

“No Sir” Shelby responded, “I haven’t seen him since his patrol car exploded and he is not answering his radio.”

“All right, we’ll just have to hope he is okay, there is nothing else we can do at the moment” Appleby confirmed, “I want you to stay in St. James’s Park for the moment, see if we can get the area cleared of wounded and anyone not directly involved.”

“Will do Sir” Shelby confirmed as his radio transmission began to break up.

“Shelby?” Appleby called but there was no response.

“He’s off the air Sir” one of the Control Room Supervisors confirmed.

Sir Richard was amongst the first of those travelling from central London by car to reach Chequers, driving up towards the main front entrance in his Aston Martin, the wheels scrunching on the gravel surface as he braked sharply to a halt before getting out.

As he and Lieutenant Barrett got out of the car, another car pulled up alongside with James Hewitt, Operations Director of MI6 inside who joined them.

“Afternoon Dickie” Hewitt called as they met and shook hands “Nasty business, very nasty business.”

“On that point we can definitely agree” Sir Richard confirmed as they headed inside where the Prime Minister was waiting for them in the ornate entrance hall.

“Good afternoon gentlemen, Lieutenant” the Prime Minister called “The Home and Foreign Secretaries are going to be a bit late as apparently they ran into some bother on the way” she informed them.

“I heard about that on the radio on the way over” Sir Richard confirmed “It seems that protest march was seeded with Ixion nutters as well as The Hand’s specialist military unit.”

“Do we know what is happening in central London at the moment?” Hewitt asked as they followed the Prime Minister up the stairs to the first floor.

“We are getting regular reports from Pegasus Control at Thames House and from the Transport Division Control Room in Holborn” the Prime Minister confirmed “It sounds like it is a war zone down there.”

“How is Tracy Caverner?” Sir Richard asked with some trepidation.

“She has been on the telephone to the United Nations Security Council” the Prime Minister confirmed “The Council called an emergency special meeting within minutes of the news of the Commander’s death being confirmed.”

“Actually, I think I meant emotionally” Sir Richard then diplomatically suggested.

“Locking it all up I think” the Prime Minister admitted “At some point she is going to let loose and when that happens...”

“Be somewhere else...” Hewitt ominously remarked.

As they proceeded through the large double doors into the main conference room, they were greeted with the sight of Tracy looking out of the ornate window that looks over the extensive manicured gardens to the rear of the manor.

“Hello...” she quietly called as the room began to fill with various officials and representatives and officials.

“Has anyone seen those two ministers of mine yet?” the Prime Minister asked around as she headed towards the seat at the head of the table.

“I think I saw their car heading up the driveway just now Prime Minister” one of the attendees confirmed.

“Right, everyone grab a seat and let’s see if we can get this mess sorted out” the Prime Minister then indicated the huge conference table around which everyone started to take their seats.

“Ah, there you are!” Sir Richard called as the slightly flustered looking Home and Foreign Secretary’s came into the room and joined the others around the table.

“Sorry” the Home Secretary apologised, “We ran into some unfriendly nutters.”

“Right, let us begin, shall we?” Sir Richard started “For those of you who don’t know him, this is MI5 Operations Chief, Christopher Dent, appointed Pegasus Control Gold Commander, joining us from Thames House.”

On the large screen on the wall appeared a live video feed with Dent on the screen.

“Good afternoon everyone” Dent called, his voice coming over the speakers in the room.

“I wouldn’t exactly describe it as good...” Tracy murmured under her breath; a sentiment shared around the room.

“I appreciate that some of you were pretty unceremoniously bundled into cars, helicopters, rickshaws, whatever was available at very short notice” Sir Richard then continued “so for the benefit of those of you around this table who are not fully aware of what has occurred, let me bring you up to speed.”

Everyone around the table settled to listen intently to the briefing, that is except for Tracy who seemed a little distant which, given the circumstances was understandable.

“There have been a number of incidents over the last few days which have been linked to a combined group of religious loons called the Ixion Brotherhood who have linked up with a radical extremist group called The Hand” Sir Richard began.

“Is that the group of military revolutionaries from that little place Mobuto?” the Attorney General asked.

“That’s the chaps” Sir Richard confirmed “Up until a couple of hours ago their activities were relatively low level with only a number of major incidents which we have directly or indirectly attributed to the Ixion Brotherhood’s chief heavy, a particularly talented but violent and nasty piece of work called Adam Reaper” he indicated an image of Reaper now being shown on another screen.

“Most of you no doubt saw the other day’s edition of The Chronicle with its exclusive interview with The Hand’s Commander in Chief, one Emmanuel Adebisi who is currently hiding in the Mobuto Embassy in Delabole Street” Sir Richard continued.

“That sack of shit...” the Foreign Secretary remarked.

“In this article, and if anyone wants a copy it is on the tablets you all have in front of you” Sir Richard indicated the devices in front of each of the persons present “he jabbars on continuously about how The Hand and the Ixion Brotherhood have joined forces to oppose the establishment of law and order and bring a new utopia of chaos.”

“Declaration of war” the Attorney General read from the tablet screen “Rather provocative...”

“Well, what we thought may just be empty words became reality at twelve thirty this afternoon when a substantial explosive device detonated, destroying the bridge over the lake in the centre of St. James’s Park” Sir Richard continued “Christopher” he then addressed Dent “Do we have any up to date casualty figures?”

“The latest report from the Ambulance Service is fourteen dead, over a hundred injuries, several critical and numerous walking wounded” Dent confirmed “plus one of the Royal pelicans was killed by flying debris as well.”

“No prizes for guessing what the Daily Mail will lead with in the morning then...” the Home Secretary sarcastically remarked.

“Thank you, Chris,” Sir Richard responded, “To confirm the rumours some of you may have heard, the target of that bomb was the National Administrator General, Sir Edward Regent.”

“The Commander?” the Home Secretary exclaimed.

“He was confirmed dead at twelve forty two” Sir Richard sadly confirmed which resulted in a moment of stunned silence in the room whilst Tracy just looked upwards at the ceiling as if in search of inspiration.

“Erm...” Sir Richard then continued slightly awkwardly “That first explosion was swiftly followed by two more, one in a vehicle parked outside the Broadway entrance of New Scotland Yard and a third that destroyed a Transport Division patrol car in St. James’s Park.”

“Casualties?” the Prime Minister inquired which caused them all to look towards the main screen with Dent on it.

“The Broadway bomb failed to detonate properly but still did some substantial damage to Scotland Yard, knocking out their power and some communications” Dent confirmed “The Transport Division Control Room at Holborn took over Greater London operations immediately in accordance with defined protocols for this sort of scenario.”

“The third bomb” Hewitt asked, “a Transport Division patrol car you said?” to which Sir Richard nodded in confirmation “Would I be right in thinking its intended target was a specific Transport Division officer?” he ventured.

“The second bomb was almost certainly designed to target the Divisional Commander” Sir Richard indicated discreetly towards Tracy “the third was clearly meant for Lieutenant Jack Regent.”

“Is the little fella all right?” the Home Secretary asked.

“Chris?” Sir Richard turned to Dent once again.

“There is still no word” Dent confirmed “We know he was away from the car when it exploded according to his colleague Lieutenant Shelby but that he disappeared moments later and hasn’t been seen or heard from since.”

“I should be out there looking for him” Tracy insisted.

“Don’t worry Ma’am” Dent reassured her “Both I and Divisional Commander Appleby over at Holborn have every single resource, CCTV camera and pair of eyes we can spare watching out for him.”

“He’s a tough kid” Sir Richard reminded Tracy “He’ll be all right, I am sure.”

“So, what’s the connection with the loons who tried to hijack us?” the Foreign Secretary asked, indicating himself and the Home Secretary.

“Ah yes” Sir Richard responded, “A protest march through central London today seems to have been used as a cover for an armed militia unit of The Hand plus numerous Ixion Brotherhood members to infiltrate and attack.”

“Were they the guys who were approaching my chopper earlier?” the Prime Minister asked.

“That was some of them, yes” Sir Richard confirmed “There seems to have been about a dozen of them, probably the same well organised thugs that blew their way into the country through Shoreham Airport the other day.”

“If I could interject here” Dent called over the live video link “I have had my people comb CCTV from around the area of the explosions and we think we may have a match, this man” he pressed a button on the computer keyboard in front of him and three images of the same or similar individual appeared on the screen.

“Who’s this dodgy looking dude?” the Foreign Secretary asked.

“I think I know” Hewitt responded with a troubled look.

“We are ninety five percent certain that you have the dubious pleasure of looking at one Olivier Torore” Dent confirmed “Second in command of the military operations branch of The Hand.”

“Second in command to...?” the Prime Minister asked.

“Our favourite embassy dweller Sebastian St. John Adebesei” Sir Richard confirmed as he passed a file over to the Prime Minister for her to look over.

“We just got word from GCHQ Africa Section” Dent then called “A spokesman for The Hand, possibly Adebesei speaking via a voice scrambler in an interview on Mobutu National Radio just claimed responsibility for the bombings, warning that this was just the start and there is more to come” he ominously confirmed.

“Now can I round up these bastards and shoot them?” Tracy casually asked.

“All in good time Administrator General” Sir Richard cautioned.

“What is the situation in central London right now?” the Home Secretary called.

“Most of the protestors who have been liberally chucking things at anything vaguely resembling authority have either been rounded up or have discreetly melted away” Dent confirmed “The remaining members of The Hand’s military group who opened fire in Whitehall have got themselves pinned down, surrounded by the Specialist Firearms Unit, they won’t be giving up without a fight.”

“At least they are not going anywhere in a hurry” Sir Richard remarked.

“I am happy to play the long game on that one” Tracy remarked “Let them sit there for as long as it takes, we will see who rusts first.”

“The attacks were targeted” the Home Secretary commented “Specific and planned” he pointed out “so who made the bombs and who gave the orders?” he asked.

“The Bomb Squad has done some initial analysis of the area where the explosions occurred” Dent called “There is not much left to go on from the St. James’s Park or Jack’s car explosions, but the Scotland Yard device has yielded some information” he consulted the reports he had just been handed “Almost certainly the explosive used was type RS232 and the detonator design has the classic signature of Adam Reaper all over it.”

“Reaper doesn’t work without the nod from his boss Orbison” Tracy pointed out as a messenger entered the room and made his way towards the Home Secretary.

“In which case I think the first thing we need to do is arrest this Lord Chaos Orbison or whatever he calls himself and the rest of his organisation as soon as possible” the Prime Minister strongly suggested.

“Err Prime Minister...” the Home Secretary called with a concerned tone as he read the note he had just received.

“Not now Nigel” the Prime Minister warned before continuing “As I was saying, we need to locate and detain him immediately.”

“Prime Minister, really I must insist!” the Home Secretary once again interjected.

“What?!?” she responded tersely, looking him straight in the eye.

“It looks like we may not be able to go after Orbison” the Home Secretary then advised as he passed over the piece of paper that he had received a few moments earlier “His solicitor, Henry Bermann issued this notification to us about ten minutes ago” he passed across the paper which Tracy quickly snatched and examined.

“What the actual fu...?!?” Tracy exclaimed before passing it to Sir Richard who proceeded to look at it with astonishment.

“What is it?” the Prime Minister asked, still none the wiser.

“This is a Public Interest Immunity from Prosecution Certificate” Sir Richard announced with a stunned expression.

“What the hell?” the Prime Minister then asked.

“Holy crap...” the Foreign Secretary responded, “That there is a genuine bona fide Get Out of Jail Free card” he then explained “Which means nobody in this room or any of the law enforcement organisations they represent can so much as breathe the same air in his presence, let alone attempt to arrest him.”

“Where the hell did he get that?” Tracy demanded to know.

“Such a document can only be issued by the Attorney General’s office” the Home Secretary confirmed whereupon they all turned to look at the rather confused Attorney General sat at the far end of the table.

“It’s the first I have heard of it” the Attorney General defended himself, “Believe me I want nothing more than to see that slime ball Orbison go down and get locked up for a very long time.”

“Well, someone high up pulled some strings to get this” Sir Richard remarked, indicating the document.

“Could we pretend we didn’t see this?” Tracy suggested “misfile it, bury it somewhere, lose it down the back of the sofa as it were?”

“Unfortunately not” the Home Secretary confirmed “Bermann has sent copies of it to everyone including every major news media organisation in the country and it’s also now splashed across the Internet.”

“Bugger...” Sir Richard responded.

“Who is protecting this piece of shit?” the Prime Minister demanded to know “Do we know who his highest positioned supporters are?”

“Chris” Tracy called towards the video link screen “Have communications to the Yard been restored?” she asked.

“I think most of the systems are back online now” Dent confirmed “Do you want me to patch you through?” he asked.

“If you could get Simon on the line please, I would appreciate it” Tracy confirmed as everyone else in the room looked on, wondering what she was up to.

A few moments later Fuller appeared on the screen from the unusually dark and silent Control Room at New Scotland Yard.

“Simon” Tracy called.

“Administrator General” Fuller responded, “How are you?” he asked.

“Ask me tomorrow” Tracy evasively responded “Erm, can you access my husband’s secure files at the moment?” she then asked.

“I’ve just got the main computer back online, so it is possible, yes” Fuller confirmed.

“In the deep secure section should be a folder called Pandora” Tracy explained “I need it pulled out and sent over here right away, Sir Richard has the secure printed copy, but we need the electronic version as well.”

“Right...” Fuller remarked “That is Level Two encryption which will require voice authorisation to unlock” he then confirmed.

Everyone in the room looked on in silence for a few moments as Fuller could be seen working.

“Here we go” he then declared “Transferring to the main console over where you are now” he confirmed.

“Computer” Tracy then called as she placed her left thumb on a fingerprint scanner next to the computer console in front of her “Security Clearance access required.”

“Identification...” the computer called in a rather electronic voice.

“Acting Administrator General Tracy Louise Caverner” she duly declared
“Authorisation access Echo Echo Three Two Three, pass phrase Seven Zark Seven.”

“Seven Zark Seven?” the Home Secretary quietly asked aside.

“Wasn’t that the name of the robot in Battle of The Planets?” Hewitt responded back.

“Oh yes, so it was...” the Home Secretary agreed.

“So, what have you got?” the Prime Minister asked as the file Tracy had requested was unlocked and she was able to display it on the screen.

“Orbison’s biggest supporter that we know about” Tracy declared “These files came to light about six or seven months ago, account details which show that shadow companies and various grey accounts were the source of over ninety percent of the funding for the election campaign of none other than our very own Mayor of London, companies and accounts that we can attribute in whole or in part to one part or another of Orbison’s extensive financial empire.”

“Whoa...” the Home Secretary responded; his shock obviously shared by the others in the room.

“This little political time bomb came into my husband’s possession courtesy of some exceptionally reliable sources and has been verified as true” Tracy then continued “He and I immediately made the Mayor aware of this file’s existence and what would happen if he were to continue any kind of links to or support for Orbison, his Brotherhood and their activities.”

“I always knew the Mayor was a slimy little shyster who would sell his grandmother for a photo opportunity” the Home Secretary remarked “but this is something else!”

“Fact number one” Tracy then continued “His political career has been sponsored and funded by the Ixion Brotherhood, funds that are almost certainly the profits of laundering operations for some very unpleasant people worldwide along with Orbison’s extensive business interests in recreational hallucinogenic drugs, hard core pornography, prostitution and other rather unsavoury activities.”

“This is getting interesting...” the Home Secretary commented.

“Fact number two” Tracy carried on “The Mayor was the key driving force behind the special rewards website for all the public sector personnel in the Greater London area, a website we now know resulted in a massive breach of data security and almost certainly allowed the Ixion Brotherhood along with The Hand to target key individuals who otherwise had top secret security and better.”

“The incidents at Carshalton Beeches, King’s Cross, Borough High Street and others?” the Home Secretary ventured.

“Exactly” Tracy confirmed.

“Fact number three” Dent called over the video link “Orbison left his Citadel complex in Kent yesterday evening for the first time in months. His little trip out took him to the home of none other than the Mayor.”

“Fact number four” the Attorney General added “The Mayor was over at my offices late yesterday afternoon and he can under certain circumstances obtain a Public Interest Immunity Certificate if he deems one necessary.”

“Fact number five” Tracy then interjected “That asshole’s Special Events Co-ordination Office failed to notify us about today’s protest march even though they claimed that they told us about it three weeks ago.”

“You know, there is an extremely dangerous conclusion beginning to appear in my mind” Sir Richard remarked with understandable caution “By any chance did either you or The Commander annoy the Mayor yesterday.”

“We popped over and annoyed him late yesterday afternoon as a matter of fact” Tracy confirmed “One thing though, he slipped up, he said something that had not been made public which meant he knew a lot more than he should have.”

“In which case we should consider the possibility that the Mayor may have instigated or at the very least pushed forward today’s events through Orbison, his organisation and The Hand” Sir Richard concluded.

“Can we prosecute him?” the Prime Minister asked.

“On this supposition and with that slippery bastard Bermann likely to be his legal advisor?” the Attorney General summarised “The CPS would throw it straight back in our face before the ink was even dry on the warrant, sorry.”

“Right then” the Prime Minister responded, “In which case I think we should try something a little less subtle” she determinedly reached for the telephone in front of her and picked it up.”

Everyone looked on as the Prime Minister waited somewhat impatiently for her call to be answered, tapping her fingers on the desk in front of her.

“The Mayor please” the Prime Minister demanded as soon as her call was answered but she soon encountered bureaucratic opposition “No, not his deputy, his spokesman, his secretary, his tea lady, his tailor, his brief or his bloody wine merchant, the Mayor, right now!!”

“This is going well...” the Home Secretary quietly remarked aside.

“Thank you!” the Prime Minister then tersely called as the person she was dealing with on the other end of the telephone finally relented and proceeded to put her through to the Mayor after all.

“Prime Minister” the Mayor was heard to respond as she put the call on speakerphone for everyone to hear “I was about to call you to express my deepest...”

“Oh, spare me the usual sycophantic bullshit please” the Prime Minister abruptly interrupted “I will come straight to the point.”

“Yes, I thought you might...” the Mayor responded.

“At this very moment I have a file in front of me which I think you know about” the Prime Minister then began to explain “This would be the one that I am reliably informed by Administrator General Tracy Caverner that her husband obtained and put safely away for a rainy day, you know the one I mean?”

“I think...” the Mayor began to respond.

“Don’t think, yes or no will suffice!” the Prime Minister cut him off in mid-sentence, determined not to let him wriggle off the hook.

“Erm, well yes...” the Mayor then reluctantly admitted.

“Good” the Prime Minister responded, “So here is what is going to happen” she then informed him as she looked up at the antique clock on the wall nearby “the time is now ten to four, you have one hour, until ten to five to publicly announce your immediate resignation from your position whereupon you will disappear from public life under whatever nearest convenient rock is available, never to be seen or heard of ever again.”

There was a nervous silence from the Mayor’s end of the conversation before he responded.

“And if I refuse?” the Mayor then tentatively asked.

“If you refuse to resign as I have instructed” the Prime Minister directly confirmed “then this file gets released to the papers whereupon you can sit back and watch your entire political career, your life and your future get ripped apart in the popular press.”

“Prime Minister, this is preposterous!” the Mayor tried a counter attack in a desperate bid to save both his reputation and his job.

“Shut up!” the Prime Minister abruptly cut him off once again “You can come up with whatever dazzling bullshit story you like to explain your resignation, I don’t care how, I do care when” she reiterated “One hour!!” she then angrily reminded him before slamming the phone down hard and abruptly terminating the call.

“You enjoyed that didn’t you?” Tracy remarked, the first time a hint of a smile that had been seen from her since the death of her husband.

“It gave me a certain sense of satisfaction I will admit” the Prime Minister admitted before turning to Sir Richard and passing him the paper copy of the file.

“What do you want me to do with this Prime Minister?” Sir Richard asked.

“If that lying two faced little shyster has not announced his resignation by five o’clock, see that this file accompanied by a decent bottle of single malt makes its way into the hands of the best connected journalist you have in your Filofax” the Prime Minister instructed.

“And if he actually does do as he is told and resigns?” Sir Richard then asked.

The Prime Minister pondered her options for a few moments before looking around the room in search of inspiration.

“Sod it!” the Prime Minister then exclaimed “Release the file anyway.”

“Consider him well and truly slimed” Sir Richard confirmed with a wry smile.

“Whilst we are waiting for the Mayor to either fall or be pushed onto his sword” Dent called “We have just pulled some interesting CCTV from St. James’s Park which I think you should see.”

“Let’s see it” Tracy urged.

“The first sequence I have for you is one that we just recovered from the dash cam of a taxi that was in The Mall just before the first explosion” Dent began as he pressed a button on the console in front of him which resulted in the video footage being displayed on the large screen in the conference room.

“Oh, hello...” Sir Richard remarked as the footage froze on an image of a man that could be seen standing at one end of the bridge “Is that who I think it is?”

“When we found this” Dent continued “it gave us a little yellow brick road to follow which was when this next bit came up, a much clearer image” he showed a video still from a different angle.

“Yep, as I thought” Sir Richard agreed “Olivier Torore, Adebese’s second in command.”

“There is one other thing that has come up though” Dent then added “the footage we have is a bit hit and miss but it does show Torore disappearing in amongst the people fleeing the area in the immediate aftermath of the explosion, it also shows something else” he played a further bit of footage.

“Well, I’ll be damned” the Home Secretary called; his reaction reflected in the others present as they watched the footage show Torore running away with a uniformed Security Service officer in pursuit.

“Looks like Jack is still alive thank God” Sir Richard confirmed.

“The question is, where the hell is he now?” Tracy responded with a mixture of relief and ongoing concern “and for that matter where is Torore?”

“Lima Echo Three One Seven from Lima Tango Control” Appleby called over the radio as Eisley and a couple of other officers headed across the debris strewn lawns of St. James’s Park where most of the casualties had now been cleared and the area secured.

“Receiving” Eisley called back.

“We just got a call from our friends over at Thames House” Appleby confirmed “Apparently Lieutenant Regent was caught on CCTV possibly in pursuit of a suspect moments after his car got blown up” he explained, “When you are finished there, round up whoever is spare and take a look around towards the north east quadrant of the Park and see if you can find any trace of him.”

“Will do Sir” Eisley responded “Lima Echo Three One Seven out.”

As he put his radio away, Bob and three of his Specialist Firearms Unit arrived, escorting two tall and distinguished undertaker men in black who had a stretcher trolley between them.

“We’re ready to move him” Bob confirmed.

“In which case, let’s get this over with” Eisley called as he then led the way towards the edge of the lake where the body of The Commander was lying, guarded by four officers, and covered by a sheet.

The bustle of activity in the surrounding area including forensic examiners, fire service officers and other emergency service personnel came to a stop and all eyes focused to the central point of attention as the two undertakers respectfully lifted The Commander's body and placed it on the stretcher before, with a full armed guard escort, they proceeded across the grass to the waiting ambulance parked nearby.

Everyone looked on, heads bowed in respect as the body was taken away before the business of searching and investigating the scene resumed.

"Lima Echo Three One Seven to Control" Eisley called into his radio as he watched the private ambulance carrying The Commander's body depart with a full marked Security Service vehicle escort "The Chief is on his way" he confirmed.

"Thank you" came the response.

"Right" Eisley looked around the area "Let's see where you have got to Jack..."

Deep beneath the streets of London there is a myriad of tunnels, many of them disused and forgotten and it was into this dark labyrinth that Jack had pursued Torore from St. James's Park.

Having pursued him into the network of old tunnels beneath the various Government buildings below Westminster Jack had stopped when Torore paused to catch his breath in an alcove just up ahead, unaware that he was being followed.

With no signal available to his radio if it even still worked plus no working mobile either meant he could not call for help and even then, he was unaware of exactly what had happened.

"What are you up to?" Jack remarked to himself as he discreetly peered around the corner and checked that Torore was still there, the tapping shoes just visible protruding from the alcove confirming his presence.

It was then amid the sounds of dripping water and wind whistling that Jack became aware of something moving in the dark behind him.

Carefully Jack retreated further into the old brick lined tunnel and checked his weapon as whoever was approaching drew near.

"Don't move..." he then whispered as he pointed his gun at the head of the person who had appeared, causing them to stop in their tracks.

"Jack?" Eisley called as he found himself pulled back into an alcove.

"Sssshhhh..." Jack quietly remarked.

"There you are" Eisley whispered "Do you know half of London is looking for you?"

“Well, I am looking for that guy” Jack whispered back.

“Err, what guy?” Easley asked.

“Down there” Jack quietly indicated “a senior member of The Hand, set off those two bombs.”

“Three” Easley whispered.

“Huh?” Jack responded.

“You don’t know?” Easley asked, somewhat surprised.

“The last thing I knew was that the bridge over the lake got blown up and then that cheeky bastard blew up my motor” Jack confirmed “and for that I want a quiet word or seven in his shell like.”

“There was a third explosion” Easley explained “Van exploded outside the front door of New Scotland Yard, apparently you and your parents were specifically targeted.”

“Well, he missed” Jack confirmed.

“No, he didn’t...” Easley regretfully remarked under his breath, unsure whether he should tell Jack what had happened to The Commander at that point for fear of what it may prompt him to do.

“Sorry, what did you say?” Jack replied.

“Erm, nothing” Easley responded, “It can wait.”

“Fair enough” Jack agreed.

“Is he armed?” Easley then asked.

“I don’t actually know for certain” Jack admitted “Does it make any difference?” he then asked.

“Probably not” Easley admitted “Shall we?”

“Absolutely” Jack agreed “I think there is another parallel passage around there” he discreetly indicated another dark passage over behind them “If you go down there and wait, I’ll then go off down this side and try to flush chummy out.”

The sound of moisture dripping down off the ceiling of the old tunnels helped mask the two officers’ approach as Torore casually adjusted his boot laces only to suddenly pause and look discretely either side when his senses latched onto something.

Eisley saw the indication that Torore may have become alerted and immediately stopped moving, staying hidden in the shadows and barely breathing but Jack was coming around from the other side and was unaware until he was suddenly startled by the flash of light off a large blade which, with a swish through the air came quickly around the corner towards him.

He managed to duck out of the way just in time as the large blade struck the aging brickwork with a loud clang and set off a spark from the impact.

Before he knew what was happening, Torore had leapt out from his hiding place, struck Jack across the back of the head with his other arm and sent him crashing to the floor.

“You just don’t give up, do you, silly little policeman?” Torore arrogantly taunted as he stood over Jack, the huge military style hunting knife poised menacingly in his hand, ready to strike down.

It was then that Torore suddenly paused when from out of the shadows, a gun appeared, the barrel pressed up against the upper left-hand side of his head.

“Freeze!” Eisley called as he stepped forward.

“You morons really do go around in pairs don’t you” Torore remarked, clearly taken by surprise.

“Drop the ironmongery, slowly...” Eisley then ordered, not taking his eyes or his gun off Torore for a moment.

Torore did as he was ordered, slowly lowering himself down by bending his knees and resting the huge knife down on the ground where Jack quickly kicked it away.

“Nice and easy does it” Jack then called as it appeared that Torore was co-operating but in fact he was just biding his time, waiting for when one or both of his captors let their guard down for just a split second.

“That’s better” Eisley responded, relaxing just a little, unfortunately that was exactly what Torore was waiting for.

“Watch out!” Jack suddenly called as, with lightning reflexes, Torore suddenly lashed out, striking Eisley across the face which saw him drop his gun and stagger backwards.

Jack responded by grabbing the huge knife and attempted to strike out with it but only managed to slash Torore across his back and down part of his left leg as he was attempting to flee.

Despite the superficial injuries he had just received, Torore just kept going, running off down a damp passageway into the darkness.

“Are you okay?” Jack then asked as he helped Easley back up, offering him a tissue to help stem the blood coming from a cut across his cheek.

“Yeah, I’ll live” Easley confirmed before picking up his gun and looking on with determination, “I’m not letting laughing boy there get away with that” he then declared.

“Come on, let’s get him” Jack agreed as he found his own gun and picked it up before they both headed off in pursuit.

“So, what exactly is the hierarchy of this group?” the Prime Minister asked.

“The Hand is effectively an elite paramilitary unit of the People’s Defence Force of Mobuto” Hewitt explained “Their goal has been to spread chaos through force. They began when the now President of that charming little central African country suddenly decided to annexe the entire region from the control of three neighbouring countries and anyone who opposed him got a visit from Adebese and his boys.”

“In a nutshell, mass genocide...” Sir Richard added.

“The United Nations sent in a peacekeeping force, one elite unit of which consisted of Colonel Reaper and his men who Adebese convinced to switch sides” Hewitt continued “When that happened, General Ford issued a Black Flag order on Reaper and his men.”

“What happened?” the Prime Minister asked.

“They missed” Tracy remarked.

“And the other evening Reaper personally took his revenge by executing General Ford in his office inside the Ministry of Defence” Hewitt confirmed, “The little surprise package in the form of the explosive booby trap attached to the inside of the office door was a mere extra decoration, a Reaper trademark.”

“So, let me see if I have got this right” the Prime Minister responded as she tried to get her head around the relationship between the various factors involved “The Hand are just using the Ixion Brotherhood as a sort of support framework and way in?”

“The two groups share the same ideals” Dent remarked over the video link “Chaos, anarchy, opposition to any symbols or institutions of Government, law and order.”

“The link is Reaper and his band of mercenaries” Sir Richard pointed out “He was based out of Mobuto for the thick end of ten years after he and his unit went rogue but at some point, in the last eighteen months to two years, sight unseen he and at least some of his men managed to sneak back into the UK which was when the first signs of a connection with the Ixion Brotherhood emerged.”

“So, this guy Adebese” the Prime Minister asked, “He is, what?”

“Effectively he is the head of the paramilitary wing of The Hand” Dent confirmed
“Nothing happens without his command.”

“And all the time he is under diplomatic protection inside the Mobuto embassy, we can’t touch him” Sir Richard ruefully pointed out.

“Have we tried appealing directly to their Ambassador here?” the Prime Minister then asked.

“Peter Boru, the Mobuto Ambassador to the UK is the President of Mobuto’s brother-in-law” Hewitt confirmed.

“He is also one of the grand total of five registered voters in Mobuto” Sir Richard remarked “which has meant every four years that country’s so called free and democratic presidential elections always get a one hundred percent turnout and a landslide victory every time.”

“Three cheers for democracy...” the Prime Minister sarcastically commented.

“Who does Adebese take his orders from then?” the Home Secretary asked.

“The President of Mobuto is also the spiritual leader of The Hand very much like Lord Chaos, Orbison is the head of the Ixion Brotherhood” Sir Richard confirmed.

“So, if I understand this correctly” the Prime Minister summarised “The President is the head of this Hand movement, Adebese is the Colonel in Chief making things happen, Torore is Adebese’s ground commander carrying out his orders, Reaper is the bomb maker amongst his various other talents and the Brotherhood is the established structure they are using to run their campaign?”

“That is pretty much it, yes” Hewitt agreed.

“So, who set the traps then?” the Prime Minister asked.

“Huh?” the Home Secretary responded, clearly confused.

“Well, I don’t know about you, but it strikes me that someone laid the trap” the Prime Minister explained her reasoning “You” she looked across at Tracy “your husband and Jack were all lured to specific places at an exact time.”

“You know what, that’s a very good point” Tracy agreed.

“If I may inquire” Sir Richard then asked “Were you asked by someone to be somewhere specific at twelve thirty today?”

“Yes” Tracy recalled “Yes I was.”

“Who?” Sir Richard then asked.

“It was a message from our Foreign Office Liaison guy, Grantham” Tracy then recalled, “There was a senior member of The Hand who had made contact via Grantham and wanted to defect, he was scheduled to arrive at New Scotland Yard at 12:30 where he would surrender personally to me.”

“Interesting...” Sir Richard remarked.

“Err, I don’t know if this is relevant at all” Fuller then called “but I did see The Commander talking discreetly to Grantham earlier this morning and I ran that name of the supposed contact you were supposed to meet past a friend of mine over at the South African embassy, they executed and buried the guy fifteen years ago, he no longer exists.”

“Classic set up by the sounds of it” Hewitt remarked.

“Simon” Sir Richard called up to the video link screen “Where is Mr Grantham now as I think we ought to have a word?”

“No idea Sir” Fuller responded apologetically “He was still registered as in the building when the bomb outside went off but after that, what with the evacuation etcetera, he could have gone anywhere.”

“What do we know about your man, Grantham?” the Prime Minister asked the Foreign Secretary directly.

“Erm, university graduate, specialist in Central African politics, our chief negotiator with the Mobuto Government over the Adebesei affair” the Foreign Secretary recalled “Came to the Foreign Office about nine months ago with glowing references.”

“Where was he before he came over to the Foreign Office?” Tracy inquisitively asked.

“The Mayor’s Office” the Foreign Secretary confirmed before realising a potential implication, “Oh...”

“Oh, indeed” Tracy agreed before turning to the video screens “Simon, pull this guy Grantham’s life apart” she instructed “Bank accounts, friends, relatives, pets, the whole nine yards.”

“Already working on it Ma’am” Fuller eagerly confirmed.

“Okay” Tracy then responded, “Let’s get an arrest warrant out on him; at the very least he has questions to answer if nothing else.”

“So, who else can we legitimately feel the collars of?” the Home Secretary asked.

“Working top down” Sir Richard looked over the rather roughly hand drawn organisation chart he had scribbled down a few moments earlier “We can’t touch the President of Mobuto, nor can we nail Adebesei.”

“Olivier Torore has done a runner, possibly with Jack in pursuit” Tracy added.

“Orbison is protected by that Public Interest Immunity Certificate he somehow managed to con out of someone” the Attorney General regretfully pointed out.

“The Hand’s troops are either dead, unconscious or have slipped away amidst the chaos” the Home Secretary added.

“So that leaves Reaper and his merry men” Sir Richard concluded.

“Simon” Tracy returned to the video link screen once again “How are we progressing with tracing Reaper’s unit members.”

“I can’t be absolutely certain until I get the mainframe here back online” Fuller replied, “but at the last count we had possible locations on nine, confirmed locations on a further eight and five more either in jail somewhere in the world or dead.”

“I presume you would like warrants for them as well Administrator General?” the Attorney General asked.

“Just give me a pre-stamped pad of them and I will get them to fill their names in when I have nicked them” Tracy determinedly confirmed.

“In crayon most likely...” Sir Richard remarked.

Torore was running as fast as he could through the maze of old tunnels, conduits and caverns when he slipped and fell through a hole and landed awkwardly in another damp musty tunnel below.

Rolling over onto his opposite side, Torore could see that he had lacerations to his left leg and his military medical knowledge told him his left ankle was almost certainly fractured if not completely broken.

“Give it up fella!” called a voice from above, causing Torore to look up and see both Jack and Eisley looking down at him through the hole he had fallen through moments earlier.

“All right silly little Policemen” Torore finally conceded, his hands held up.

“See, told you we would get him” Jack remarked as, with Eisley’s help, he lowered himself carefully through the hole into the old tunnel below.

“I have rights and I will exercise them” Torore informed the two officers through gritted teeth from the pain of his injuries.

“Give me some light here mate” Jack then called.

“Coming up” Easley confirmed as he produced his torch, turned it on and trained its beam on Jack as he searched Torore, removing a gun and a flick knife from his person.

“Oh, very naughty” Easley remarked as he took the knife off Jack and looked at it “You really shouldn’t play with knives you know.”

“Left hand” Jack called to Torore as he proceeded to handcuff him.

“I have diplomatic immunity as a duly designated representative of the People’s Democratic Republic of Mobuto” Torore declared.

“You have the right to remain silent” Jack reminded Torore “So why don’t you do us all a favour as it has been a hell of a day and give it a rest, all right?” he strongly suggested.

“So, now what?” Easley then asked.

“Get the hell out of here” Jack confirmed as he and Easley looked up and down the abandoned old tunnel they had managed to find themselves in, its Victorian cast iron rings that formed the structure dripping with water and decades of accumulation of stalactites hanging down.

“The question is, where is here?” Easley then remarked.

Orbison looked up from his desk over the top of his small reading spectacles with a look of mild amusement when the big double doors flew open and Grantham stormed in with Henry Bermann following, having some trouble keeping up with Grantham’s swift pace.

“What the HELL do you think you are doing?!?” Grantham angrily demanded to know as he paced up and down.

“Reading classical literature, enjoying a glass of fine wine, eating some cheese” Orbison calmly responded, raising his glass momentarily as if to emphasise his point “I would have thought that much was obvious old chap” he remarked.

“You’ve killed The Commander!!!” Grantham exclaimed with a sense of both despair and disbelief.

“Technically...” Orbison replied as he calmly topped up his glass “and I am sure my learned friend and legal counsel Mr Bermann here will agree with me on this point of law, my associate and his considerably talented team of precision demolition experts did” he confirmed before proffering the bottle “Chardonnay? It’s a lovely vintage.”

“I need something stronger if you don’t mind” Grantham responded, only now beginning to show the merest hint of calming down a little as he went over to the side and proceeded to pour himself a very large glass of scotch which he then downed almost in one gulp.

“It’s a pity we only got one of them though” Orbison continued “I had high hopes we would get all three of them, so near and yet so far” he philosophically concluded “Still, we got the most important one.”

“You used me” Grantham responded, “They aren’t daft you know; they will soon work out who it was who laid the traps for them to walk into and when that happens, my neck will be on the line.”

“Given her previous record which, by the way, I have studied fastidiously” Bermann commented “I would say it was probably more likely that it is your kneecaps that are in the most danger.”

“What matters most is your dedication and commitment to the cause, the Brotherhood and the goal of our Great Utopia of Chaos” Orbison informed him, almost with a sense of pride.

“With respect gentlemen, I don’t think you quite grasp the seriousness of your situation” Grantham responded as he helped himself to another whisky “You and your little trigger-happy buddies didn’t kill an average run of the mill patrol officer, you killed The Commander.”

“And this is supposed to be of concern?” Orbison calmly asked.

“Let me put it this way” Grantham tried to explain, “I strongly suggest that you make sure you leave the phone number of your dentist available because when Tracy Caverner and the entire law enforcement and secret security services of this country find you, by the time they have finished with you, your dentist will be the only one able to identify what little of you will be left!”

“Please do not fret” Orbison responded, on the outside at least seemingly not in the least bit fazed by the stern warning of his potential fate, “We are covered, aren’t we?” he looked across at Bermann who confidently smiled and nodded in agreement.”

“You may not be worried, but I am!” Grantham retorted “I want a new identity and a one-way ticket to a non-extradition country, preferably one that only ever appears as a very obscure answer on daytime TV quiz shows and I want it right now” he demanded.

“Already taken care of my friend” Orbison confirmed with a smile as he picked up a small hand bell from his desk and delicately rang it whereupon a moment later Reaper arrived in the room.

“My Lord” Reaper reverently called.

“Would you mind taking care of our mutual friend here please” Orbison politely instructed.

“By your command, my Lord” Reaper confirmed whereupon he suddenly grabbed Grantham with an arm around the neck.

Orbison looked on with a smile as Reaper instantly tightened the grip of his arm, twisted Grantham’s head sharply and snapped his neck as if it were a twig before letting his now lifeless body fall to the floor.

“May the blessing of The Brotherhood go with you into eternity” Orbison declared as he peered over the front edge of his desk at the body lying in a twisted heap on the rug “To Life Immortal..”

“Your orders My Lord?” Reaper asked.

“Go forth and create as much chaos, fear and destruction as you can” Orbison confirmed “oh but before you go” he indicated towards the floor “take him away with you? He’s bleeding on my Axminster deep pile.”

“Prime Minister, you are live in ten seconds” the television news producer confirmed through her earpiece as she looked down at the hastily sketched statement she was about to make to the nation.

The director on site indicated silently the last few seconds until the camera, directed ahead at the Prime Minister stood behind her rostrum displayed a red light indicating she was now on the air and addressing the nation and indeed, the world.

“Good afternoon” the Prime Minister called, a look of sadness, indeed almost one of shock apparent.

“I address you this afternoon in circumstances that I can only describe as shocking and tragic in equal measure” she announced, “Today has truly been a dark day for this country.”

“An hour ago, this nation came under direct attack from terrorists who seek to destroy our way of life, deprive us of our freedom and democracy and commit acts of cold bloodied murder against us” she began.

“Over the last week or so, a number of incidents attributable to an extremist terrorist group called The Hand, working in league with another group under the so-called teachings of the Ixion Brotherhood have occurred, resulting in a number of deaths and serious injuries.”

“Just over an hour ago, this Group committed further terrorist acts of an increased nature of death and destruction.”

“The first of these occurred at exactly twelve thirty Greenwich Mean Time when a large explosive device was detonated in the centre of St. James’s Park in central London, destroying the bridge over the lake and sending debris over a wide area.”

“Sixteen people have now been confirmed dead as a result of the first explosion, dozens have been seriously injured, some critically and there are believed to be hundreds of minor injuries and walking wounded.”

The Prime Minister paused at that moment before delivering the next part, the hardest news to announce of all.

“It is with a heavy heart that I can confirm one of the fatalities in the first explosion was its probable intended target, the National Police & Security Service Administrator General Sir Edward Regent, The Commander...”

She tailed off at that moment and the room fell silent as did the many places both across the country and beyond who were watching and listening to the broadcast.

It took a few moments for the Prime Minister to compose herself once again, clear her throat and then resume.

“A second explosion in the form of what we believe to be a bomb in a parked vehicle in Broadway, outside the main entrance of New Scotland Yard, detonated approximately one minute later” the Prime Minister then continued “At this time it appears that this second device did not detonate correctly so despite quite a bit of damage to property, there were no fatalities, just a few serious and minor injuries for which we must be thankful.”

“A third explosion occurred almost simultaneously when a car bomb detonated in The Mall, not far from the location of the first device, destroying a National Police & Security Service patrol car, fortunately without any further loss of life.”

“A further incident in Whitehall a few minutes later involved a dozen armed men believed to be from The Hand group who attempted to intercept myself and other senior members of the Cabinet as we were being evacuated from Westminster” the Prime Minister continued “Fortunately thanks to the brave and valiant efforts of a significant number of Security Service officers and military personnel, these individuals were neutralised.”

“A spokesman for The Hand organisation has claimed responsibility for these cowardly and bloody attacks and we are in a position at this time to confirm these claims to be correct” she then confirmed.

“All security and law enforcement agencies both domestic and foreign have already joined forces and launched a full investigation into these brutal acts of cold blooded murder and attempted murder” the Prime Minister then stared directly at the camera “To those who committed these acts, you will be found, you will be tried, and you will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law that you clearly show so much contempt and disrespect for.”

“As the evening draws in on what has been a terrible, terrible day for the nation” she then continued “I must ask all of you to remain calm and stay alert. Those of you in the centre of London right now are asked to remain in your homes, if you are working in or are visiting the City, you are advised to proceed home as soon as possible.”

The Prime Minister’s speech was also being broadcast on the vast electronic screens around Piccadilly Circus where an audience of tourists, workers and other passers-by had gathered to hear her sad announcement.

“Whilst there have been no further incidents since this afternoon” she continued “we must not be complacent, nor must we assume that these terrorists will only target London, so I ask all of you across the nation to be mindful, look out, report anything suspicious and stay safe.”

“My Lord” Reaper called as he entered Orbison’s private chapel and bowed in reverence “We’ve found it.”

“You’ve found it Brother?” Orbison leapt to his feet, barely able to contain his excitement “Well, what are you waiting for? Bring it in!”

Reaper looked back behind him towards the open door and merely nodded formally whereupon a Facilitator approached with something held in front of him, covered in a black silk cloth.

The Facilitator bowed and presented the covered object towards Orbison who in response, rubbed his hands in ecstasy before carefully lifting the cloth to reveal a ceremonial sword.

“By the blessings of our God Ixion and all his dark servants” Orbison offered his thanks “This is truly a blessed day!”

Orbison passed the cloth to Reaper before delicately taking the sword in both hands and taking it from the Facilitator who immediately stepped back, his head still bowed.

“Behold my friends; to the victor go the spoils!” Orbison then cried out as he brandished the sword aloft, thrusting its blade into the air in triumph.

At that moment Bermann came into the room as his natural instinct for investigation meant he had to see what all the fuss was about.

“That’s a nice little trinket you got there” Bermann remarked as he watched Orbison practically dance around the room in delirious delight, swishing the sword about with little concern for his or anyone else’s safety.

“Trinket Mr Bermann?” Orbison responded, stopping his celebrations, and then swiftly bringing the tip of the sword around to just an inch away from Bermann’s chest, “Trinket?”

“Well, it’s just a sword, isn’t it?” Bermann then inquired, totally unaware of its significance.

“Just a sword?” Orbison was astounded by Bermann’s indifference “This isn’t just a sword Mr Bermann; this is *the* sword, the sword of The Commander, the late great Sir Edward Regent himself.”

“Oh...” Bermann responded, feigning interest.

“What was once his is now mine” Orbison continued triumphantly, “the pride of my collection” he confirmed as he proceeded to a side room and opened it to reveal his collection of bizarre memorabilia celebrating and commemorating crime and crime fighting over almost two centuries.

Bermann and Reaper looked on as Orbison carefully placed the sword on a specially made stand that was already waiting, prepared for its arrival.

To its left was displayed a similar sword, this being the matching ceremonial sword belonging to Tracy whilst to the other side stood another identical display stand, still empty.

“Two down, one to go” Orbison then proudly declared.

“Sir” Bermann politely interrupted with a discrete cough “If you will excuse me?”

“Ah yes, still work to be done” Orbison confirmed “Go forth and create legal chaos” he then requested.

“By your command...” Bermann agreed before discreetly leaving the room.

Orbison meanwhile could not resist picking up The Commander’s sword one more time.

“Victory!!!” he cried out, thrusting the sword up into the air once more before laughing manically, the sound being carried ominously throughout the corridors and passageways of the Citadel.

“So far so good...” Appleby remarked as over the various CCTV feeds that he was looking at in the Holborn Control Room, he could see crowds of people at numerous mainline railway stations heading for trains out of the city as they followed the Prime Minister’s advice to evacuate central London as soon as possible.

“Reports from the main line terminal stations says there is a steady flow of people heading out pretty much across the city” one of the operators confirmed.

“Let’s just hope nothing else goes wrong then” Appleby commented, “Any word from The Yard on when they will be back up and running again?” he then asked.

“Latest from New Scotland Yard is that they expect to have their mains power back up in about an hour and then probably another hour, hour and a half to get their operations systems back online” came the confirmation.

“I guess we will have to keep running the fort for a bit longer then” Appleby concluded.

The streets of Central London were noticeably quieter than usual as Lieutenant Shelby drove across London Bridge over the River Thames.

Although, apart from an exclusion zone around Westminster and St. James’s Park, the City was still predominantly open, many in the City had already taken it upon themselves to leave the area in the wake of the attacks and the remainder had swiftly headed home upon hearing the confirmation of the news from the Prime Minister and her evacuation request.

“Any Lima Tango units in the vicinity of London Bridge, respond please, over” came the general call from the Transport Division Control Room at Holborn.

“Oh aye...” Shelby remarked to himself as reached for the radio “Control, this is Lima Tango Seven One Seven” he called “I am just crossing London Bridge headed north now.”

“Cheers Shelby” Divisional Commander Appleby called “Can you make your way to the construction site in Arthur Street, off King William Street, we have had a report from a tube driver on the Northern Line of lights and movement in tunnels that shouldn’t be there plus site security have also called, reporting hearing voices in the lower levels of the site.”

“Will do Sir” Shelby confirmed “ETA one minute.”

“It’s probably nothing but the site is closed this evening so there shouldn’t be anyone there and with everything else that has been going on today...” Appleby explained.

“Understood Sir” Shelby confirmed “I’ll call back when I have found something. Lima Tango Seven One Seven, out.”

Shelby pulled into the side of the road a short distance from the narrow and acutely curved Arthur Street which was all closed off whilst it was being used as an access point for construction work on the Northern Line tube tunnels deep below.

The site security office located adjacent to the main gate was where Shelby immediately proceeded to, being met by a uniformed private security guard.

“Lieutenant Shelby, Transport Police” he called as the two men met.

“That was quick!” the Security Guard remarked, clearly impressed.

“We aim to please” Shelby replied, “I gather you may have some uninvited guests in the basement?”

“I heard voices echoing up from the old tunnels they have opened up whilst they are doing the modernisation work” the Security Guard explained as he escorted Shelby to an access gate nearby “and given how crazy things have been today plus the fact that I don’t believe in ghosts, I thought I should give you guys a call.”

“Very wise” Shelby agreed “Through here?” he then indicated an access door ahead.

“Yes” the Security Guard confirmed “There is a set of stairs leading down to the lower levels.”

“All right, stay here” Shelby instructed “I’ll check this out.”

With care, Shelby made his way down the metal staircase the wound its way around the side of the vast access shaft that had been temporarily sunk into the ground, leading down to the tube line tunnels deep below.

Despite a lot of background noise from various bits of air filtration equipment plus the sound and accompanying turbulence of passing Northern Line trains blowing up the shaft, Shelby could indeed make out distant voices filtering up from somewhere deep below.

As he reached the works level, a large hollowed out chamber adjacent to the tube tunnels, the voices became louder.

Drawing his firearm, Shelby looked around and quickly identified an old looking unlit passageway curving off to his left and cautiously proceeded down it.

The voices were definitely becoming louder as he made his way slowly along the dark tube-shaped passage but paused when, having rounded a corner he realised that whoever was approaching was now only just around the corner.

“Security Service!” Shelby called out as he leapt forward and brought his gun and torch to bear on the source of the voices.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa!” Jack quickly responded, “It’s cool.”

“Jack?” Shelby called with understandable surprise as he lowered and holstered his weapon.

“...and friends” Jack confirmed “This is Lieutenant Eisley, Lieutenant Shelby” he introduced the two officers to each other “and this sack of shit” he then hauled the handcuffed Torore out of the shadows and brought him forward “is under arrest for wrecking my motor!”

“Do you know half of London has been looking for you all afternoon?” Shelby asked as he led the way back to the construction area.

“It’s nice to be missed” Jack responded.

“I haven’t told him yet” Eisley warned Shelby as they reached the stairs that led back to the surface.

“You mean something’s happened?” Jack asked.

“I am afraid so mate” Shelby confirmed.

“Oh my...” Torore remarked with a belly laugh that echoed almost menacingly around the construction site and up through the access shaft.

“All right” Jack then asked as they finally reached street level and exited the construction site “What am I missing?”

“You really don’t know do you, silly little policeman?” Torore taunted as he was put into the back of Shelby’s car where Eisley got in alongside him.

“The Commander is dead” Shelby confirmed “Killed by the St. James’s Park bridge bomb and chummy back there led him right into the trap.”

“And what about his bitch?” Torore continued to taunt.

“Right, that’s it, come here!” Jack lost his normal calm sense of control, grabbed Torore and hauled him up out of the car and onto his feet.

“Bad news asshole” Eisley responded as he and Shelby acted quickly to keep Jack from attacking Torore “She survived.”

“In which case” Jack released his grip on Torore and took a step back “I am happy to let justice take its course, for now...”

“No court in the world will ever have the strength to oppose us, we are The Hand of anarchy and chaos, and our time is here!” Torore loudly declared.

“Oh, do shut up!” Jack dismissively replied as Shelby and Eisley put Torore back in the car “Anyway, I just want to be ringside when Tracy kicks your arse.”

“Could be a sell out that one” Shelby remarked as they all got in the car, and he started the engine “Where are we taking this asshole - sorry - the prisoner?” he then asked.

“West End Central” Jack, now sat in the front passenger seat confirmed.

Almost six thousand miles south of London is the city of Johannesburg in South Africa.

In the bar of the Hilton Hotel there, the Barman had just served one of the guests his drink as the television in the background was showing the international news headlines.

As the Barman placed the drink on the bar, the Guest lowered his newspaper revealing it to be James Garforth, The Commander's older brother.

It was as he thanked the Barman and began his drink that, out of the corner of his eye, something on the television screen caught his attention.

"What the...?" Garforth remarked before attracting the attention of the Barman again "Err excuse me, sorry, could you turn that up please?" he politely requested.

The Barman obliged and raised the volume so that the broadcast, the live rolling news programme on the BBC World News Channel was now clearly audible.

"Oh my God..." Garforth responded with a sense of shock as the main news story, the terrorist attacks in Central London, the death of The Commander and the Prime Minister's address to the nation and thence to the world played out in front of him.

"Erm, I am sorry to be a bother again" Garforth called to the Barman once more "Can I borrow a telephone please, oh and a fresh one of these too I think would be a good idea as well" he indicated his now empty glass.

The Barman nodded in understanding, producing a telephone from beneath the bar and placing it in front of Garforth before taking away the empty glass and preparing the fresh drink.

Garforth picked up the handset and quickly dialled a number he knew very well.

The destination of that telephone call was back in the situation room at Chequers where a mobile began to ring on a desk.

"Hello? Sir Richard Crowthorne's phone" Lieutenant Barrett answered as she was the nearest person to it in the conference room.

"Lizzie?" he called, somewhat surprised by who had answered "It's James Garforth."

"Oh, hi!" Barrett replied, "Are you looking for the old man?"

"Err yes" Garforth confirmed as he received his fresh drink and silently thanked the Barman "Is he there?"

"Yes, he is" Barrett confirmed "Just a moment" she called before discreetly walking around to where Sir Richard was standing over by the window in conference with the Home Secretary and a number of others.

"Sorry to interrupt Sir" Barrett quietly apologised "Important call for you, James Garforth."

“Oh right, thank you” Sir Richard quickly responded, taking the telephone from her “If you will excuse me ladies and gentlemen for a few moments, I have to take this” he then requested before leaving them and heading off into a vacant side room, closing the door discreetly behind him.

“James, good to hear from you” Sir Richard called “Where are you?” he then asked.

“In a hotel bar in Johannesburg watching the BBC World News Channel” Garforth confirmed “What’s the hell is going on?” he asked.

“Ah, then you will have heard” Sir Richard responded with sadness “I was going to call you with the news myself, but all hell is breaking loose here, and I didn’t know for certain where you were.”

“Is it true?” Garforth asked, “Little Eddie? Dead?”

“Yes, I am afraid so” Sir Richard regretfully confirmed “Three large explosive devices in the space of less than a minute targeting your brother, Tracy and even young Jack” he explained “and then we had the streets swarming with flash mobs of Ixion Brotherhood nutters lobbing missiles at any semblance of authority or command. Central London is looking like a war zone at the moment.”

“Are Tracy and Jack both okay?” Garforth asked.

“The New Scotland Yard bomb targeting Tracy failed to detonate properly and Jack was targeted with a car bomb when he wasn’t actually in it thank God so it’s just injuries there but the St. James’s Park device, well it is currently eighteen dead at least, plus sixty or seventy seriously injured as well as a couple of hundred walking wounded and counting” Sir Richard grimly summarised the toll so far.

“All sounds a bit over sophisticated for those Ixion muppets” Garforth suggested.

“I agree” Sir Richard confirmed “Unfortunately the Ixion Brotherhood have hooked up with an extremist group calling themselves The Hand.”

“Isn’t that the militia group loyal to the President of Mobuto, something like that?” Garforth recalled.

“Very good” Sir Richard complimented Garforth on his knowledge.

“I read about them in an in-flight magazine once” Garforth explained “Isn’t their military leader supposed to be holed up in an embassy somewhere?”

“Right here in London in fact” Sir Richard confirmed “Emmanuel St. John Adebese, brother-in-law of the President of Mobuto and also the cousin of the Mobuto Ambassador to the UK which, with diplomatic and political connections like that means, we can’t touch him.”

“Hmmm” Garforth mused.

“Even from this distance, I can hear the cogs whirring...” Sir Richard remarked.

“Huh? Oh, I was just contemplating doing some sightseeing” Garforth explained “I’ve always wanted to go on safari and see Zebras in the wild.”

“I think I understand” Sir Richard responded, “Do you need anything for your travel plans?” he then asked.

“An understanding boss and a suitcase of goodies?” Garforth suggested.

“Leave it with me and I’ll see what I can do” Sir Richard agreed “Have a nice trip and I will call you in the morning.”

“Thank you, Sir,” Garforth responded “Goodnight.”

Having put the telephone down, Garforth thought for a few moments, sipping his drink, looking around and then observing the television screen again where the news broadcast was playing eyewitness footage of the St. James’s Park explosion followed by an official photograph of The Commander in his best dress uniform.

“Barman?” he then politely called “Sorry to bother you yet again, could you possibly let Reception know I will be checking out right away and to have my bill ready please?” he requested.

“Of course, right away Sir” the Barman confirmed as Garforth picked up the telephone handset once again and dialled a number.

“Hello, this is James Garforth, access code Echo Echo Five Zero Seven” he declared as soon as he was connected “I need a private jet, fully fuelled and ready to go from Lanseria Airport in forty-five minutes please” he requested “I will give the pilot the flight plan when I get on board, thanks.”

“Reception is preparing your bill now” the Barman confirmed as he took empty glass away.

“Thank you” Garforth called as he handed across some cash, far in excess of the cost of his bar bill “Keep the change” he instructed with a smile before leaving.

The conversation among the various officers and civilian personnel at West End Central Security Service Station had been of little else than that day’s dramatic events for most of the afternoon.

There was a sense of shock apparent throughout, even more so when the Prime Minister’s broadcast approximately an hour ago now had formally confirmed what many knew or had suspected, that their Commander in Chief was dead.

With the remaining protestors having been processed long ago and with central London effectively deserted in the wake of that day's events, the custody suite was unusually quiet.

"Here it is skip" an officer called as she entered the custody suite bearing that evening's special extra final edition of the London Evening Standard newspaper, hot off the press which she passed over to the Duty Custody Sergeant.

"I still can't quite believe it" the Custody Sergeant remarked as he looked at the front page which featured an official photograph of The Commander taken at some point in the last year, standing in front of the famous three-sided rotating sign outside New Scotland Yard, dressed in his full formal ceremonial dress uniform.

At that point, his attention was called away by the sound of a patrol car, its siren sounding, pulling up outside.

"Hello, sounds like we got customers skip" the young officer remarked.

A few moments later the door opened and in walked Jack, Eisley and Shelby, escorting the limping Torore.

"Good evening Sergeant" Jack called as he produced his warrant card "I am Lieutenant Jack Regent, this is Lieutenant Connor Shelby, both Transport Division based at Holborn and this is Lieutenant Eisley, Metropolitan Division based at Bow Road."

"Welcome to West End Central" the Custody Sergeant responded, "And who do you have for me?" he then asked, looking up at Torore.

"Go on, tell him your name" Shelby prompted Torore.

"I am The Hand of chaos, anarchy and vengeance!" Torore called out.

"Better known as Olivier Torore" Jack confirmed.

"And the charge is?" the Custody Sergeant then asked as he began to enter the details onto the computer system.

"Conspiracy to cause explosions, murder, attempted murder, criminal damage, trespass, membership of a banned or restricted organisation, destruction of Security Service property, assault, possession of a deadly weapon..." Jack reeled off the charges.

"So just throw the book at him then?" the Custody Sergeant suggested.

"That'll suit me" Jack readily agreed, "If you could make it a nice heavy one with sharp corners, that would be even better."

"Do you have anything to say?" the Custody Sergeant asked Torore who leaned forward to look him right in the face.

“I demand my lawyer and my phone call Mr Policeman!” Torore confirmed.

“John!” Sir Richard called as he tried to make his way through the busy corridor towards John Hewitt, the Head of Operations for MI6.

“Sir Richard, where have you been hiding for the last hour?” Hewitt asked as they met and shook hands.

“Oh, I have just been checking in with an old friend” Sir Richard evasively answered, “letting him know what’s been going on.”

“Yeah, nasty business all around” Hewitt agreed “So, what can I do for you.”

“Sorry to ask this of you what with everything else that is going on, but I need a couple of favours” Sir Richard asked, “Firstly I need to borrow back one of my guys who is currently on secondment to you.”

“If it is who I think it is, and assuming he is probably going to attempt what I think you might not be suggesting anyway then I don’t see a problem” Hewitt readily agreed “and the other favour?” he then asked.

“My man needs a few travel essentials for his African safari holiday” Sir Richard explained “A suitcase of goodies, little mementos from home, essential supplies if you get my drift.”

“Overnight via the diplomatic bag with no questions asked?” Hewitt suggested.

“Indeed” Sir Richard confirmed “If you have anyone in the vicinity of my man’s destination who could act as postman it would be helpful?”

“Just as long as you, I and anyone else knows nothing about anything if it all goes proverbially pear shaped” Hewitt warned, “I want full deniability.”

“For my man, this is something personal rather than business” Sir Richard reassured him “If he is going to do it anyway, there is no harm in providing a little logistical support that if it does go pear shaped, is indeed suitably deniable?”

“All right” Hewitt readily agreed “I will handle the arrangements myself, no need to involve anyone else I think.”

“Thanks” Sir Richard responded as they shook hands “It will all be worth it in the end.”

“Yes!” Pointer jubilantly called out as he put the phone down.

“Good news?” Dent asked on hearing his deputy’s reaction.

“No less a mortal than one Lieutenant Jack Regent just walked into the custody suite over at West End Central nick ten minutes ago with Olivier Torore, in handcuffs” Pointer gleefully confirmed.

“Nice one Jack...” Dent responded with what was probably the first smile he had managed since the explosions earlier.

“That lad is good, isn’t he?” Pointer remarked.

“Not half” Dent readily agreed.

“My Lord” one of the Facilitators called as Orbison arrived in his Command Centre and looked on with a sense of pride.

“Speak Brother” Orbison responded.

“My Lord, one of our brethren has reported that Brother Torore has been captured by the authorities” the Facilitator confirmed.

“Hmm...” Orbison paused, hands together as if in prayer for a few moments.

“Very well Brother” Orbison then called “Find out as much detail as you can.”

“By your command...” the Facilitator confirmed.

“And get me Brother Adebese on the video link please” Orbison then requested.

A few moments later, the face of Adebese appeared on the central screen at the front of the room, a live video call from the Mobuto Embassy.

“Brother Adebese” Orbison called.

“Brother Chaos” Adebese responded “To Life Immortal.”

“To Life Immortal” Orbison reverently replied.

“This is truly a blessed day” Adebese remarked with a sense of pride readily apparent “Please pass on my congratulations and warmest thanks to Brother Reaper for his excellent work on the devices.”

“I am sure he will be honoured by your generous gratitude Brother” Orbison responded, “and the day isn’t over yet.”

“Indeed Brother” Adebese agreed “Our Crusade of Chaos still has a long way to go yet.”

“Brother, I wanted to advise you that Brother Torore has been captured by the Security Service” Orbison then advised as a Facilitator passed him a piece of paper with further details written on it “Ah, I should have guessed...” he then remarked as he read the information he had just received.

“What is it Brother?” Adebese asked.

“Seems the arresting officer was Lieutenant Jack Regent” Orbison confirmed.

“From what I understand, not entirely unsurprising” Adebese responded.

“We know where our Brother is being held” Orbison remarked “It is entirely possible that we could retrieve him from his incarceration?” he suggested.

“Brother Torore knew the risks” Adebese replied “He is a true devotee and servant of the Cause and will bide his time, besides, his incarceration may in fact prove useful to the greater cause.”

“I was thinking Brother whether it was time for Phase Three?” Orbison then suggested “Now that everything has quietened down out there since our tremendous victory earlier, the time feels right.”

“Indeed Brother” Adebese agreed “but what about the two remaining members of the unholy trinity?” he then asked.

“Divisional Commander, sorry, Administrator General Caverner is almost certainly out of reach at this time” Orbison summarised “Too well protected but she will collapse and fall out of the game as soon as the adrenalin wears off and the true shocking realisation that her husband is dead finally sinks in.”

“That just leaves that little bastard to deal with” Adebese remarked.

“Indeed” Orbison agreed “A tenacious little sod, I think he is deserving of some personal attention and I have just the man for the job.”

“Let it be done” Adebese confirmed “To Life Immortal...”

“To Life Immortal” Orbison replied before the video call ended and he turned to the Facilitators in the room.

“Phase Three my Brothers” Orbison then called “Start making phone calls” he instructed.

The Facilitators quickly got to work at their computer terminals as Orbison looked on before beckoning another Facilitator stood nearby over.

“Brother” Orbison called “Locate our Brother Reaper for me please and ask him to meet me in my personal sanctuary in fifteen minutes.”

“By your command, My Lord.”

“Here, have you seen this?” one of the news desk journalists on the London Evening Standard newspaper called across the main editorial newsroom to the Assistant Editor, Kevin Williams “The Mayor has just announced his immediate resignation.”

“Ha!” Williams remarked as he read the press release with a disbelieving tone “Must be a scandal involved otherwise why announce it now?” he commented.

“With The Commander dead, it’s a very good day to bury bad news” the journalist added “That crafty sod will know most of the media will either ignore it or shove it in the deepest recesses of page twenty-eight or such like.”

“...spend more time with my family” Williams read from the official press release “That old lame excuse, it stinks, there has got to be some sort of scandal somewhere” he remarked as the telephone on his desk began to ring.

“Williams” he then answered.

“Kevin, it’s Sir Richard Crowthorne” he called.

“Tricky Dicky himself!” Williams responded, “I won’t ask how your day has been.”

“Quite...” Sir Richard agreed “Tell me, have you heard about the Mayor resigning?”

“It came through just a couple of minutes ago” Williams confirmed “Smells of a buried scandal trying to sneak through undetected using the old tried and tested ‘good day to bury bad news’ technique to me.”

“I am sending a dossier over to your secure inbox” Sir Richard then called “Strictly unattributable you understand but from extremely reliable sources.”

“Give us a second old friend” Williams responded as he accessed his computer “Yep, got it” he then confirmed.

“Feel free to publish the contents as you see fit” Sir Richard instructed “Suffice it to say that the unofficial request from the highest level is that the now ex Mayor is to be suitably burned.”

“To see that slimy toad go down, it will be a pleasure” Williams readily agreed.

“Oh God, he’s off again...” the Home Secretary called as a live surveillance camera feed on one of the screens in the Situation Room showed Adebese on the balcony of the Mobuto Embassy, beginning another of his loud speeches.

“Servants of chaos I salute you as we mark our great victory in our mighty crusade of anarchy” Adebese proudly announced.

“Prat...” the Foreign Secretary commented just as Sir Richard entered the room.

“Huh?” Sir Richard responded.

“Oh no, not you” the Foreign Secretary apologetically explained “Him” he indicated the screen.

“Oh...” Sir Richard replied as he understood the meaning of the Foreign Secretary’s somewhat terse remark.

“We have struck at the very heart of the establishment but there is still so much more to do” Adebese continued “I call upon my Brothers to rise up and fight, bring down the ivory towers of democracy, justice, law and order.”

“I so what to kick that guy’s ass into the next century...” Sir Richard commented.

“I think you might have to take a number and get in line” Hewitt remarked
“Administrator General Caverner I think has called first dibs on that honour.”

“Arise all mighty chaos, arise!” Adebese then theatrically called, his arms held aloft.

“Now...” Orbison called to his Facilitators.

At his instruction, a number of computer-controlled telephone calls were made, connecting to a significant number of mobile devices located across central London...

At West End Central Security Service Station, Jack, Shelby and Eisley had retired to the canteen and were talking to the Duty Commander (operations), Commander Monroe.

“I would wager that regardless of whatever unpleasantness we or the likes of Special Branch or even MI5 throw at him” Jack remarked “Torore won’t give anything up.”

“Except more of his zealous drivel unfortunately” Shelby remarked.

“Quite” Commander Monroe agreed “Another coffee or tea anyone?” he then asked around.

“Thanks, but I really should be going” Jack admitted as he checked the time “My Guvnor will be wondering where the heck I have got to.”

“I’ll give you a lift back seeing as you don’t have a car anymore” Shelby confirmed as they all got up from the table.

“Oh yes, I had forgotten about that” Jack remembered “I seem to have lost rather a lot today” he then mournfully added.

“You should go home and get some rest” Monroe strongly suggested “We have all had a busy day, but I think you have been busier than most of us.”

“Come on” Shelby then encouraged “Do you want dropping off anywhere mate?” he then asked Easley.

“No, I am good thanks” Easley confirmed “I can book off here and head straight home in half an hour.”

“All right then, take care mate” Jack called.

“You too, guys” Easley confirmed as the two Transport Division Lieutenants left.

“All right, how are you really feeling?” Shelby asked as, a few moments later they emerged into the gloom of early evening and headed towards the patrol car parked nearby.

“If I am honest, I don’t know” Jack admitted as he opened the front passenger door but then paused in thought before intending to get in, “I really don’t know.”

At that moment, their conversation was suddenly interrupted by a very loud noise from out in the street a short distance away.

“Oh, for crying out loud, now what?!” Shelby called out as he and Jack instinctively ran through the gates and out into the street where, amid screaming and scenes of panic they found the source of the sound, the shattered remains of a public waste bin that had exploded, enveloping the surrounding area in a cloud of choking thick green smoke that was drifting up among the buildings on either side of the street.

Moments later, a second similar explosion was heard in the distance, setting off car and building alarms and resulting in more screams and panic.

“Just as you thought things couldn’t possibly get any worse...” Jack remarked as he reached for his radio whilst Shelby, now joined by several officers who had emerged from the West End Central building, proceeded to see to the shocked and injured whilst the surrounding area was immediately evacuated and sealed off.

“Lima Tango Nine Nine Three to Pegasus Control, urgent message, over” Jack urgently called.

Almost simultaneously at over thirty different locations across central London, devices were being remotely detonated in rubbish receptacles and telephone boxes, all resulting in the same effect, a loud explosion, a shockwave and a thick choking cloud of green smoke that served to further terrify and disorientate anyone in the immediate area.

Some of the explosions could be heard inside the Pegasus Control Room at Thames House and the reports quickly came flooding in from across the city.

“How many is that now?” Dent asked as, amid the sound of much activity in the room, he tried to put together an accurate assessment of the ongoing situation.

“Allowing for multiple reports, I would say at least twenty five Sir” Pointer confirmed “All seem to be smokers but there are reports coming in of injuries from flying debris plus apparently there is a Westminster Council dustcart spewing out green smoke near Trafalgar Square, looks like they inadvertently picked up a device before it detonated when they emptied the bins.”

“This is getting out of hand” Dent remarked, “Get me the Administrator General on a secure line” he then requested.

In the situation room at Chequers, the telephone was quickly answered.

“Administrator General, Pegasus Control on the priority line Ma’am” came the call across the room, causing Tracy to pause and reach for the telephone.

“Chris” Tracy then responded.

“Administrator General” Dent called “We have a significant number of smoke based small explosive devices detonating across central London.”

“Bloody hell!” Tracy cursed, “How many?” she then asked.

“Currently counting thirty six, actually now thirty nine devices detonated so far in the last four minutes” Dent confirmed as more locations of explosions appeared on the map being displayed ahead of him.

“One moment Chris” Tracy then requested before looking across the room, “Prime Minister!” she then called loudly.

“Yes?” the Prime Minister responded.

“I have got small explosive devices going off all over central London” Tracy explained, “I need an executive order to evacuate central London and I need it now.”

“You’ve got it” the Prime Minister swiftly agreed.

“All right Chris” Tracy returned to the telephone “The P.M. has just given the nod; use whatever resources you need and get everyone out of the central London as fast as you can.”

“We’re on it” Dent confirmed who clicked his fingers towards one of his officers in the room.

Within moments, the Emergency Broadcast System, a special contingency that had lain unused for decades was brought into use.

From every public announcement system speaker, on every radio and television channel and also from the public address systems of Security Service patrol cars on the streets, an ominous official recording began to play.

The voice in the pre-recorded announcement was calm in tone but authoritative, the sort that would once have graced the serious news broadcasts of the BBC World Service many decades earlier.

“Your attention please, this is the Emergency Broadcast System for Central London.

“All citizens residing and working within the Central London area are requested to evacuate immediately, proceed directly home without deviation.

“Once you are home, you must remain until the situation has been declared over, do not leave your home for any reason except in an emergency.

“If you witness or hear anything you deem suspicious, do not approach, or interfere, instead you must inform the Security Authorities immediately.

“This message will be repeated every twenty minutes until the emergency situation is over.

“Thank you for your co-operation.”

The words of the Emergency Broadcast System announcement echoed around the already nearly deserted streets of central London where, through a combination of being evening and the events of earlier in the day, many had heeded the advice and had gone home already.

Those few that remained were to be seen swiftly making for stations and buses to travel home as fast as possible as sirens continued to echo through the streets with the Security Service stretched beyond the limits as the number of reported explosions passed forty.

“Okay Steve” Fuller called over a radio “Fire it up!”

As Fuller shown his torch around the dark and unusually silent interior of the main New Scotland Yard control room, there was a sudden whirring as the power was restored, lights came on and the computers began to boot back up.

“Let there be light...” Fuller remarked with a mixture of relief and pride as he turned off his torch and proceeded to a side room where the banks of computer servers, cabling and associated equipment were located.

Here too, the stacks of equipment were coming alive once more with much attendant whirring and blinking of mostly green lights.

It was as Fuller walked down one section of servers though that his ears caught a noise that did not sound right, causing him to double back and then kneel down in an attempt to identify the source.

After a minute or so of searching, Fuller managed to narrow down the location from which the sound was coming to somewhere behind one particular set of equipment which, having clambered around on his hands and knees, his pen light torch beam illuminated something quite well hidden in the shadows.

“Hello there...” Fuller remarked as he identified a small black box, discreetly connected to the mainframe by a couple of cables and only detectable now as restoring the power supply had triggered a fault alarm on the mystery device.

Carefully, he withdrew and looked on the tool belt around his waist for something suitable with which to grab hold of the object as he attempted to disconnect it.

A long pair of pliers proved suitable and manoeuvring them carefully through the narrow gap available, he was able to get a grip on the object and pull it towards him.

“Gotcha...” Fuller then exclaimed as he successfully managed to disconnect the device and retrieve it.

Looking at it in his hands revealed it to be a small dark grey metal casement, no bigger than an old style tobacco tin with a couple of connection sockets, some sort of aerial and a couple of indicator lights.

“Now, what are you and how did you get in here?” Fuller remarked as he looked over the mystery device before carrying it through into the control room where the systems were almost all back online and the staff had returned to their posts, carrying out tests.

“New toy darling?” Jennifer asked having snuck up behind her husband unseen thanks to his intense concentration on the object, causing him to be momentarily startled.

“To be honest, I am not entirely sure” Fuller admitted “I just found this attached to our mainframe in a place where it was not easy to find if it weren’t for the power being turned off.”

“It’s not going to go bang, is it?” Jennifer cautiously asked.

“No, I think we are all right” Fuller reassured her “besides, I think we have had quite enough explosions for one day thank you very much!”

“I’ll second that...” Jennifer mournfully agreed.

“Sir!” one of the Control Room officers called across “All systems check out okay, we can go back online whenever we are ready.”

“All right, thanks” Fuller responded before picking up a radio headset, putting it on and pressing a button on the desk in front of him.

“Lima Tango Control, this is Lima Alpha” Fuller then called.

“Lima Tango Control, receiving” came Divisional Commander Appleby’s voice from the Transport Division Control Room over at Holborn “Good to hear from you again.”

“Like wise Lima Tango” Fuller responded, “We are up and running again and ready to take back operations control at your discretion.”

“Roger Lima Alpha” Appleby confirmed “Transferring Greater London operations command over to you in, five, four, three, two, one...”

At that moment, the screens all reactivated, and the status monitors became active again whilst the familiar background of monitored radio chatter also filled the room once more.

“Lima Tango, this is Lima Alpha” Fuller then called “We have received control” he confirmed.

“Good luck everyone and have a safe night” Appleby responded.

“You too” Fuller agreed “Goodnight.”

“Tariq, let Pegasus Control know we are back on the air” Fuller then called to the night shift duty supervisor as he came on duty.

“Yes Sir” he confirmed.

“It’s quiet out there” Jennifer remarked as she and Fuller left the Control Room “Even allowing for the explosions and the emergency evacuation order, it’s quiet.”

“By the looks of things, hostilities seem to have ceased, for tonight at least” Fuller confirmed as they went through into his office where it was noticeable that one of the windows was cracked from the explosion shock wave earlier.

“I think the city is in a state of shock” Jennifer admitted.

“I think we all are” Fuller replied, “It’s only because I have had so much to do since it all started that has meant I have not had any time to stop and think about it.”

“I wonder how Tracy is feeling?” Jennifer remarked.

“Gutted, angry, ready to tear the place apart, keeping super busy in an attempt to pretend it isn’t real, take your pick” Fuller replied.

“Well, I will find out soon enough” Jennifer remarked “Emma is staying with my parents tonight; I have to pick up Jack and his girl and transport them over to Chequers.”

“He’s had a busy day by all accounts too” Fuller admitted.

“I had better go” Jennifer then confirmed before they kissed “I’ll leave you to study your new friend” she indicated the device now on Fuller’s desk “but make sure you get some decent food and some sleep.”

“I will” Fuller agreed.

“Lima Romeo One Five from Control” came the call over the radio on the bridge of the Thames River Division Patrol Vessel ‘Ruth II’ as it was proceeding on routine patrol up river, approaching Grosvenor Bridge, just south of London Victoria main line railway station.

“Lima Romeo One Five, receiving” the commanding officer of the ‘Ruth II’ duly responded.

“We have just had a report from a Metropolitan Division officer near Chelsea Bridge that she thinks she has seen a body in the water a couple of minutes ago” Thames River Division Control at Rotherhithe confirmed.

“We are just down river from there” the commanding officer confirmed “We’ll go and take a look.”

A few moments later, the powerful twin engines of the ‘Ruth II’ roared into life at full throttle as it headed up river with its powerful searchlights trained upon the surface of the water.

“That looks like something” one of the crew called across to the commanding officer as they approached Chelsea Bridge where someone was waving a torch from side to side from the parapet, trying to get their attention.

“Slow down Clive” the commanding officer called across to the helmsman “That looks like one of our guys up there.”

“Down there!” the officer on the bridge shouted, using her torch to indicate a specific area of the river, close to a couple of moored cargo barges.

“Hard to port and slow up” the commanding officer called across whereupon the helmsman duly turned the patrol boat to the left and slowed right down.

“Got it Sir!” came the call from the officer out on the bow of the patrol vessel who was operating the powerful searchlight.

In the beam of the light could be seen a human body, lifeless and face down in the water where only the fact its left leg had become entangled in the cargo barge mooring ropes had prevented it from being carried further down river and potentially out to sea by the strong currents.

It took four officers using sheer bodily strength and a couple of boat hook poles to disentangle the body and haul it aboard where they laid it respectfully on the deck whilst the patrol vessel moved to the river embankment.

The Metropolitan Division officer who had called in the report along with a colleague were waiting at the water's edge as the patrol vessel docked whereupon they were helped aboard to inspect the body.

"Got a wallet here" the female officer called as she searched the jacket pockets which was when one of the patrol vessel officers noticed something unusual.

"What's that?" he asked, indicating the chest area of the body.

"Looks like writing" the male Metropolitan Division officer commented "Like someone has handwritten a message on this guy's shirt."

"Control from Lima Sierra Six Two Five" the female Metropolitan Division officer called into her radio "With regards to that body in the Thames" she remarked "We've got it out of the water, identification says he is one Ian Grantham, works for the Foreign Office and he has a Scotland Yard security pass on him as well."

"Look at this" the male Metropolitan Division officer showed his colleague the area around the throat.

"Jesus..." the female Metropolitan Division officer responded.

"Looks like you have got a suspicious death I would say" the commanding officer remarked.

"Control, further to previous message, it looks like someone snapped this guy's neck and he has something in Latin scrawled across his chest" the female Metropolitan Division officer then called, "Ut vitae immortalis."

"There you are" Jennifer called as she met Jack and Megan in the reception area of the Transport Division headquarters in Holborn.

"Hello" Jack responded, somewhat surprised "What brings you here Auntie Jenny?"

"I am your chauffeur for the evening" Jennifer confirmed "Both of you."

"Oh, where are we going?" Megan asked.

"Chequers" Jennifer explained "Honoured guests of the Prime Minister."

"Wow..." Megan responded, suitably astonished.

“The food is supposed to be pretty good there” Jack confirmed “and after a day like today, a decent hot meal and a shower sounds like a winner.”

“You two off then?” Divisional Commander Appleby asked as he joined them.

“Seems so Sir” Jack confirmed.

“You make sure he gets plenty of rest young lady” Appleby then instructed Megan “He has had an extremely busy day.”

“Oh, I intend to, don’t you worry about that Commander Appleby” Megan confirmed as she took Jack’s arm in hers.

“And Jack” Appleby then added “Good work today, really good work.”

“Thanks, Guv” Jack responded before the couple left, being shown into the rear of Jennifer’s ministerial escort car parked immediately outside.

“All right you two” Jennifer called over from the driver’s seat as she started the car “Snuggle down in the back and enjoy the ride.”

Appleby watched as the car disappeared off into the distance before putting on his long overcoat and proceeding out into the street where he hailed a black cab which appeared very rapidly from a nearby side street.

He looked around discreetly, wanting to ensure nobody saw him leave before getting in the back and shutting the door whereupon the taxi departed.

“You sent for me My Lord?” Reaper called as he entered Orbison’s personal sanctuary, illuminated very spiritually by a multitude of candles giving out a glowing, almost ethereal light.

“Brother” Orbison called “Do come in, have a seat.”

“Thank you, My Lord,” Reaper responded.

“A drink?” Orbison then proffered his bottle of wine.

“No thank you My Lord” Reaper confirmed “I have always felt it important to keep a clear head for the task ahead.”

“And pray tell my Brother, what is this task ahead that troubles your soul?” Orbison then inquired.

“Unfinished business” Reaper responded with deeply felt seriousness “Revenge...”

“Hmm...” Orbison mused as he took a sip of the wine “I am wondering if we have a mutual issue here, one that could serve both our overall cause as well as your personal one?” he ventured.

“I have few enemies left” Reaper explained “but one still remains despite today’s efforts and that individual is also responsible for the capture and imprisonment of our Brother, Torore.”

“Indeed...” Orbison agreed “What did you have in mind my Brother?” he then asked.

“A simple trap” Reaper confirmed “Lure in the target, hold him and then use him as a bargaining chip for the return of our imprisoned Brother.”

“An interesting proposal” Orbison responded after giving the idea a few moments of careful consideration “but I don’t see any revenge element to this idea of yours or am I misreading your true intentions Brother?”

“With respect My Lord, I have always believed that true intentions are best left kept to oneself until the time is right” Reaper replied, “When that time comes, the target will find out what fear, pain and revenge truly is in the most explicit terms.”

“In which case My Brother I think it is time to retire for the night” Orbison declared “It looks like tomorrow will be a remarkably busy day.”

“And the Gods of Ixion willing, a very productive one My Lord” Reaper agreed.

Tracy had managed to keep herself busy with meetings, conferences and discussions pretty much constantly since she had arrived at Chequers earlier in the day but now, with the onset of late evening and the streets of London returning to a tense but peaceful sense of quiet, many had retired for the night, leaving her alone with just her thoughts for the first time since The Commander had died.

The lights throughout the building had now been dimmed and Tracy found herself alone pretty much for the first time that day as she walked slowly along the corridor of the upper floor guest accommodation wing where she had been allocated one of the best rooms in the building to stay overnight.

She was just about to open the door to her room when she became aware of approaching footsteps which caused her to pause and look up.

“There you are!” Jennifer called as, with Jack and Megan close behind; she approached her identical twin sister.

“Oh, am I glad to see you Sis” Tracy called as they embraced before turning to Jack “and you, too, you little rascal” she added, hugging him as well.

“I feel like I am intruding somehow” Megan almost apologetically remarked as she took a step back.

“Nonsense” Tracy insisted, reaching out and bringing her into the huddle “You are family.”

“Thank you” Megan responded.

“You had us all worried for a while” Tracy informed Jack “I think I had half the Security Service plus MI5 on the lookout for you.”

“So I have been told” Jack confirmed “I was rather busy pursuing that Torore guy.”

“Most important thing is that you are still alive” Tracy replied.

“I did get him though...” Jack then added.

“Yeah, you did” Tracy confirmed with a look of pride in his achievement.

“Is there anything to eat around here?” Jack then asked, “I don’t know about anyone else but I’m starving!”

“I think the mess room is closed now but you can order food in from your room” Tracy confirmed.

“That’s good to know” Megan remarked.

“You two should get some rest” Tracy then suggested “I think we are going to have a lot of work to do in the morning, there is one job in particular that I would like you to accompany me on if you are able.”

“Of course,” Jack agreed, seemingly already aware of the task to which Tracy was referring.

“Goodnight guys” Tracy then called.

“Goodnight” Jack and Megan responded before turning to leave.

Tracy and Jennifer watched as the young couple disappeared from view, leaving the identical twins alone.

“Err” Tracy began, somewhat awkwardly “This is me” she indicated the door next to her “You want to join me for a drink?”

“Sounds like a good idea to me Sis” Jennifer readily agreed as she followed her sister through the door before closing it behind her.

“So, what will you have?” Tracy then asked, already sensing that this was going to quickly develop into an awkward conversation.

“Let’s start with the truth, shall we?” Jennifer strongly suggested “How are you? Really?”

“Ah...” Tracy responded as her senses were duly confirmed, “That...”

“Yes, that” Jennifer retorted.

“I’m okay” Tracy evasively confirmed but her sister was having none of it.

“Oh, that is a load of old bollocks, and you know it!” Jennifer strongly dismissed her reply, almost with a hint of anger, “Come on Trace, just in case you had forgotten, apart from different colour eyes and the fact one of my feet is now made of plastic, you and I are identical” she pointed out “That means I know how you think, how you feel and what makes you tick.”

“Yeah...” Tracy responded before turning away to look out of the window but only seeing her own reflection in the glass with her sister over her shoulder in the background.

“If you keep this all bottled up” Jennifer ominously warned “At some point it will all come out in one big painful moment and when that happens, anyone anywhere near you is going to feel the full force of it.”

“All right, all right!” Tracy tersely replied, turning back towards her sister again “You win, as usual” she then conceded “What do you want me to say?”

“Something that proves you are still human?” Jennifer suggested “You know, the sort of person who has feelings, emotions, that sort of stuff rather than an automaton hiding behind a uniform, rules and duty?”

Tracy took a deep breath and looked upwards; contemplating her answer to a question she had hoped she would never have to answer.

“All right, you want to know how I feel?” Tracy responded, “I feel like I have had a huge piece of me torn off, chewed up and spat out!” she exclaimed, “Will that do you?”

“It will do for now” Jennifer agreed.

“But for now, I have to remain strong, keep a cool head and run the show” Tracy then added “There will be time to grieve later.”

“Hmm...” Jennifer responded with a somewhat disbelieving tone.

“I know at some point I am going to have to stop, take a deep breath and deal with this but now is not the time” Tracy added.

“Right...” Jennifer nodded “You should get some sleep though.”

“Sleep? What’s that?” Tracy semi-jokingly asked, managing a meek smile.

“That’s better” Jennifer responded, “Seriously Sis, try and get at least some sleep, you need it, and we can talk again in the morning.”

“Okay” Tracy slightly reluctantly agreed “I’ll try.”

“Good” Jennifer replied, “I will see you in the morning.”

“Now then my little friend, let’s see what you are shall we?” Fuller remarked as he placed the object that he had discovered earlier attached to the New Scotland Yard mainframe on his desk and began to examine it.

The object itself was quite simple in appearance, a black box approximately four inches long, two inches wide and one inch deep.

On the leading edge of the box were two cable connection ports which he had already deduced were for the connection to the host system and to attach some sort of secondary connection to access the device.

In addition, there were two LED lights, one red and one green set into the side adjacent to the two ports whilst on the top was the port where an aerial was attached which Fuller had already removed to avoid any unintended transmissions from the device to whoever it was that had created it.

“Okay, time to take a look inside” Fuller then declared as he took a small fine Philips screwdriver from his extensive tool kit and proceeded to loosen and then remove the four screws that held the lid of the case in place.

Opening it revealed the interior to be unexpectedly complex with a very advanced circuit board taking up much of the bottom, attached to which were several components and ribbon type cables.

“Hmm...” Fuller remarked to himself “A complicated little box of tricks.”

Carefully he examined the components one by one with an expert eye and being careful not to touch or disturb any of them unnecessarily.

Fuller spent a good five minutes conducting his detailed survey before concluding it was safe to proceed with the next stage of his investigation.

It took a bit of rooting around in a drawer but Fuller soon found two suitable cables which he proceeded to connect between the device and a standalone laptop that had no online connections in order to prevent any potential impact on the New Scotland Yard mainframe network or beyond.

“Ah, we have a heartbeat” Fuller then remarked when he made the connections, and the device awoke once more.

Using the software on the laptop, Fuller proceeded to access the software interface on the device, a diagnostic display appearing on the screen which he studied carefully.

“Oh, you are a clever bit of kit, aren’t you?” Fuller remarked, almost in admiration at what he was seeing on the screen.

He continued to assess the information scrolling away on the screen in front of him, making some notes before pausing and putting his pen down.

“Oh, there you are” Fuller then declared as he found what he was ultimately looking for “That explains a few things.”

For a few more minutes, he continued to analyse the information being displayed on the screen and made more notes.

“Well, I must say” Fuller then remarked “I would dearly like to meet the person who created you because whoever it is, they are a very clever person.”

It came as little surprise that Tracy could not sleep, indeed so confident was she of this, she did not even bother to take off her uniform other than her tunic which, unusually for her, she had casually discarded over the back of a chair.

As the clock ticked past two in the morning, she had resigned herself to sitting in an antique leather armchair, holding a glass of brandy that she had managed to make last over two hours now as she sat, alone in the dark with just her thoughts and memories for company.

In a room down the other end of the accommodation wing, Jack could not sleep either.

Unlike Tracy, he did manage to make it into bed but since Megan, snuggled up beside him had fallen asleep sometime just after midnight, he had lain there; eyes open, staring out into the darkness.

In his mind, he was replaying a number of key events in his life over and over again with two in particular being most prevalent.

The first was the two explosions in St. James’s Park that had killed The Commander and so nearly claimed his life too.

The other was Reaper’s ominous words he called out after Jack had arrested him some seven months earlier.

“You are a dead man Jack” Reaper ruthlessly and calmly warned.

“Yeah, whatever” Jack casually dismissed the threat “Because of the seriousness of the charges, you will not be permitted bail, you are entitled to legal counsel during all interviews, and you have the right to remain silent at all times.”

“When I get out of here little boy” Reaper then reinforced his threats “I am going to watch as you die slowly and painfully.”

“In your dreams mate” Jack replied “Take him away” he then ordered.

“You are a dead man Jack!!!” Reaper called loudly as he was dragged back to his cell “Dead you hear me, dead!”

With those words of pure hatred, vengeance and anger still ringing in his ears, Jack carefully got up so as not to disturb Megan and went through to the en-suite bathroom where he switched on the small light over the mirror before washing his face.

Looking at his own reflection in the mirror, it seemed to Jack that the image he could see of himself was somehow subtly different, as if the version of himself looking back at him was a reflection of his soul or conscience rather than his actual self.

“I have to do this, don’t I?” Jack quietly asked himself before looking back over into the bedroom to see Megan still peacefully sleeping “If only to protect her” he added before resuming his gaze at his own reflection.

“Yes, that is what I thought you would say” he then remarked to his reflection as if in answer to his own visual response.

Jack dried his hands and then turned off the lights before returning to the room where, not wanting to disturb Megan, he elected to sleep on the couch over to one side, if that is, he could ever actually get to sleep though.

From the outside it was a non-descript old wooden door, dark red paint peeling away to reveal decades of previous coats of paint in several areas, nothing whatsoever to make anyone think it was of any significance whatsoever.

It was three o’clock in the morning and the rain was starting to fall in significant quantities when, along the poorly lit narrow cobble surfaced back street came a traditional black taxicab which came to a stop immediately outside the door.

The sole passenger in the back leaned forward and paid the driver before emerging from the taxi, pulling his long black overcoat and hat tighter over himself to try and keep out the worst of the rain.

As the taxi turned in the narrow street and departed back the way it had arrived, the man in the long overcoat and hat turned towards the light that shone down on the red door, revealing it to be Reaper who proceeded to knock three times before stepping back.

A discreet security camera that was pointing towards him blinked into life, evidenced by the small red light illuminating alongside the lens before there was a discreet buzzer sound and the door lock was released, allowing Reaper to enter.

Inside with the door closed again, a young woman took Reaper's hat and coat before escorting along a dark corridor to a room at the far end.

In the room was a smoke-filled atmosphere, the stench of tobacco impregnated into every surface and hanging thick in the air. In the centre of the room, lit by a single light suspended from the ceiling was a large and battered round wooden table around which were sat several individuals, their facial features barely visible in the gloom.

Significant quantities of fine quality liqueurs and spirits were being consumed as a serious game of poker was in progress, playing for real money as evidenced by the large amounts of cash both in the centre of the table as a hand was played as well as in front of the various individual players, some more than others.

"Ah, Colonel Reaper!" one of the men at the head of the table called in greeting "A pleasure to meet you at last" he called, rising from his seat, and approaching.

The man greeting Reaper was very tall, almost as tall as Reaper himself, a slim build, an expensive looking tailored suit, and large cigar signified his extreme importance, power, wealth and influence in the group.

"Mr. Taylor, likewise" Reaper confirmed as the two men shook hands.

"Deal you in Colonel?" Taylor suggested, showing him a vacant seat.

"Absolutely" Reaper readily agreed as he duly sat down, nodded in acknowledgement at the greetings he received from the other men around the table and then produced a significant amount of cash in notes that he placed on the table in front of him.

"You have had a busy few days Colonel" Taylor then remarked as the Dealer commenced another hand, dealing out two cards to each player in turn around the table.

"It has been quite satisfying I must say" Reaper confirmed as he checked his two cards and casually placed a twenty pound note down in the centre of the table.

"Indeed" Taylor agreed "After ten years we have finally got rid of The Commander, the Security Services are in disarray and our plans to undermine the very fabric of the political structure of the country are well underway."

"I presume that Lord Chaos is still blissfully unaware of our little arrangement?" Reaper asked as he placed another twenty pounds in the centre of the table as the hand continued.

“He still thinks he is running the show, the centre of the wheel, the man at the top” Taylor confirmed as he folded his hand and the winnings were passed over to Reaper “As far as Mr. Orbison is concerned, the arrival of The Hand and his subsequent unification with them was all his doing, we were just did the introductions and a bit of management consultancy.”

“Ah, thank you” Reaper responded as the scantily clad young woman whom he had met when he first arrived passed him his drink before leaving again.

“With The Commander gone” Taylor then continued as the dealing of the initial cards for another hand commenced “the delightful Ms. Caverner will no doubt have some sort of grief driven emotional crisis I expect which will see her out of the picture in the not too distant future which is when we can start to manipulate people more appreciative of our cause into key positions in the Service.

“It was a shame we missed her” Reaper remarked as he folded his hand in this time “Looks like there was a fault with the detonator on the Broadway van bomb, it didn’t go off properly.”

“Sometimes these things just happen” Taylor reassured him “and anyway, I suspect an emotionally damaged Ms. Caverner may even prove to be more useful than a dead one.”

“Losing the Mayor wasn’t part of the plan though” Reaper pointed out as the remaining moves of the hand were played amongst some of the other players.

“Yeah...” Taylor admitted as he rechecked his hand and raised the stake once more “That was unfortunate, but we still have people in the Mayor’s Office who we can utilise, the damage is minimal.”

“Where is he?” I was expecting him to be here” Reaper commented as the hand ended with Taylor winning the pot.

“Oh, he is upstairs at the moment enjoying the company of one of the young ladies I believe” Taylor confirmed “Although, given the mood he is in I suspect she is not enjoying it anywhere near as much as he is...”

Reaper smirked in response as a new hand commenced and he looked at his two cards again.

At that point the door opened once more, and the scantily clad young woman showed another guest into the room.

“Hello old friend” called the man as he sat down alongside Reaper “It’s been a long time.”

“General Adebese” Reaper responded as the two men briefly hugged and warmly shook hands “It certainly has” he confirmed.

“Did you have any trouble slipping out of the Embassy, Major?” Taylor asked as the scantily clad young woman returned once more, this time with a drink for Adebesei as well as a fresh one for Taylor and Reaper.

“None whatsoever” Adebesei confirmed with a wry smile “It’s like as you English say, popping out for a bottle of milk?” he suggested.

“Getting rid of the nosy neighbours the other day probably helped I expect” Reaper remarked.

“Absolutely Colonel” Adebesei agreed.

“So, gentlemen, what is next?” Reaper asked.

“Remember that our goals are something we are aiming to accomplish with great care, methodically and without creating too much unwanted attention” Taylor announced, “We are in this for the long term, indeed it could be another four or five years before all our goals are achieved.”

“In the meantime, we simply encourage Orbison and his army of imbeciles to keep on going” Adebesei added “Attracting the attention away from the real revolution, our revolution in the background.”

“And by the time Lord Chaos or the authorities realise that all is not what it appears” Taylor added “It will be too late for them to do anything about it.”

“There is one small concern on my mind gentlemen” Reaper then warned “A certain young Lieutenant of the Security Service has become somewhat of a proverbial thorn in the side, both personally to myself and also potentially to our group.”

“Hmm, yes” Taylor responded in complete agreement “Whilst we had predicted and planned for almost everything that has occurred up to and including today, the arrival on the scene of the tenacious Lieutenant Jack Regent and his not inconsiderable skills and determination has proved somewhat unexpected.”

“My issue with the Lieutenant is strictly personal” Reaper confirmed with sincerity “but I believe it would serve all our purposes if he were dealt with, quickly.”

“I agree Colonel” Adebesei responded “It appears he was the officer responsible for the detention of my second in command earlier today.”

“He’s got Olivier?” Taylor asked to which Adebesei nodded in confirmation “Oh dear, I was unaware of this.”

“The Security Service has not publicly released the news of his arrest” Adebesei explained “They seem to have adopted a policy of keeping it off the radar but thanks to sympathisers in the right places, we know what they think we don’t know.”

“Very well, Colonel, deal with him” Taylor formally instructed “but make it look like our Brotherhood friends are responsible then we can chuck a few more of their supporters on the proverbial bonfire of justice and let them cook.”

“It shall be done” Reaper confirmed “First however, I have to find him.”

“We can help with that” Taylor responded, “Stay by the phone, you will be contacted.”

Thirty minutes later, another black taxicab arrived outside the door once again whereupon Reaper, dressed once more in the long overcoat and hat, emerged and got in the back before it drove away.

In a disused office building on the other side of the street, Reaper’s departure was observed by someone lurking in the shadows of a dusty cracked window on the second floor.

The clicking of a camera shutter followed Reaper as he departed before it was trained on the windows of the building opposite from which he had just left.

Further photographs were taken as evidenced by the rapid sound of the camera shutter clicking away once more as the photographer focused on some activity visible through one of the windows on the upper floor where the former Mayor could be seen in a room with a young woman where over the last half an hour he had been observed and photographed repeatedly having sex with her.

The lights of the room immediately adjacent then came on and the cameraman moved across to see what was visible in there, his eyes looking through the viewfinder with great interest as Taylor and a couple of other well dressed gentlemen were seen gathering.

The photographer was careful and patient to ensure he got photographs of the faces of all the men present in the room before swinging back to the former Mayor who could be seen dressing himself.

A few moments later the photographer took more photographs as the former Mayor left the girl in the room and proceeded through a door to join Taylor and the others.

“Gotcha...” the photographer remarked as he managed a shot of all four men together in the same picture, their faces all clearly visible.

A few moments later, the curtains of the room under surveillance were drawn and it was no longer possible to see what was going on which is when the mysterious photographer proceeded to do one last scan of the area out of the window before dismantling his equipment and placing it in a professional protective case.

Before closing the case, the man extracted the memory card from the camera which contained the images he had captured both in the preceding hour and on other occasions in other places related to this investigation he had been carrying out in total secrecy.

The memory card was placed in a special dedicated plastic pouch mounted inside a file folder which also contained a significant quantity of printed materials, computer disks and newspaper clippings.

When closed, it revealed that the file was labelled with an old blue manual Dymo Tape type label which in its white impressed letters in the plastic read just one single word,

“CATO”

A couple of minutes later, the mysterious observer appeared from a discreet innocuous looking door set into the wall of a building diagonally opposite and proceeded in the shadows to the archway between buildings that led through into the main road beyond.

Stopping in the shadow of the archway briefly, the observer took out a cigarette and proceeded to light it, the illumination from the lighter’s flame revealing two things, firstly that the individual was in fact Divisional Commander Appleby, the second was the traditional City of Westminster street sign mounted on the wall just inside the archway revealing the name of the street he was in.

Cato Street.

“Morning sleepy head” Megan called across from the bed towards Jack who woke with a start from the couch where he had finally dozed off at about three in the morning.

“Oh, err...” Jack was somewhat disorientated for a few moments before refocusing, helped by the beautiful sight of Megan lying on the bed, smiling at him.

“Come back to bed love” Megan encouraged which Jack readily agreed to by coming over and climbing back in, cuddling up to her under the duvet.

“What time is?” Jack asked.

“About half five I think” Megan confirmed “You were up half the night I would wager?”

“Lots on my mind” Jack admitted “Flashbacks, dark thoughts...”

“You are going to go after him, aren’t you?” Megan asked, “After that Reaper guy?”

“Yes...” Jack honestly admitted “Are you going to talk me out of it?” he then asked.

“No” Megan answered, “Don’t forget, I have met him too and as they say, first impressions count.”

“Really?” Jack responded, “You believe that sort of thing?”

“It worked with us” Megan pointed out “There you were, this slightly dishevelled looking boy, clever, witty, brave, maybe a bit shy but I just knew that one day we would be together and well, here we are.”

“Indeed...” Jack agreed before they passionately kissed for a few moments.

“So, my brave young officer of the law” Megan then asked, “How are you going to find our old friend Mr Reaper?” she asked.

“Actually, I was thinking that he may come and find me” Jack admitted “I have just got to work out a few details and try and set it up so that he ‘randomly’ finds me in a place and time of my choosing.”

“You’ll get him” Megan reassured him “I just feel it.”

“You should stay here where it will be safe” Jack then commented “Keep it simple, just him and me.”

“I would rather be going with you if I am honest, but I understand” Megan confirmed “In the meantime there is an hour until we have to get up so why don’t we...?” she suggested.

“Absolutely” Jack agreed before they resumed their passionate kissing once more.

One of the large dining halls in the building had been set up as a cafeteria for the many dignitaries, officials and support staff who were on site, and it was here that Jennifer made straight for as soon as she had arrived back at Chequers.

Entering the vast dining room, she saw that the catering staff had just started serving breakfast and that so far only one person had arrived before her.

Sitting at a table near the window was Tracy with a large mug of tea and a full breakfast which she was proceeding to eat with much enthusiasm.

“Someone is hungry this morning” Jennifer remarked as she approached the table.

“I have only just realised that bar a couple of biscuits I managed to steal from the Home Secretary’s briefcase last night, I have eaten nothing since yesterday morning” Tracy explained.

“Shock and trauma can do that to you” Jennifer confirmed “Believe me, I’ve seen it before.”

“Aren’t you having anything Sis?” Tracy then asked.

“Yeah, why not” Jennifer agreed before turning towards the servery “Hello?” she then called over “Can I get a tea and a full English?” she asked.

“Another round here for me as well please” Tracy then added.

“Right you are!” the catering manager confirmed.

“One thing I have always liked about being at Chequers” Tracy responded, “Decent grub!”

“Oh, thanks” Jennifer then called as the catering manager brought over their orders and placed them on the table “Put it on the Prime Minister’s tab” she then added with a wry smile.”

“Blimey I am famished” Tracy remarked as she began her second breakfast.

“So then” Jennifer tentatively asked, “Get much sleep?”

Tracy looked up, pausing in mid chew for a moment and then smiled meekly.

“I’ll put that down as a no then...” Jennifer then concluded.

“Well...” Tracy responded, “I might have dozed off for a bit about four I think.”

“Has anyone sorted out a change of clothes for you?” Jennifer then asked, seeing the unusually unkempt appearance of Tracy’s uniform.

“Err no, not yet” Tracy confirmed “Simon is supposed to be coming over in a little while and he is bringing one of my uniform sets from the office at the same time.”

“Ah, I wonder if he is bringing his new friend along?” Jennifer wondered.

“Huh?” Tracy responded.

“He found this little box, gizmo, whatever you want to call it, attached to the New Scotland Yard mainframe when he restarted the systems last night” Jennifer explained “I believe he spent until quite late into the night trying to work out what it is.”

“Sounds intriguing” Tracy remarked “I wonder if it has anything to do with our radio communications failing yesterday?” she speculated.

“So, what’s your plan for today?” Jennifer then asked.

“Finish breakfast, attend yet another meeting then go out there and kick some arse...” Tracy determinedly confirmed.

“Anyone in particular you want to forcibly insert your steel toe caps up the jacks of or are you just going to try random chance?” Jennifer then inquired.

“Hmmm...” Tracy pondered her response “I think I will start with the Mayor, or rather the ex Mayor...”

To describe the destination of Garforth’s specially chartered small jet plane as a remote airstrip would have been a dramatic overstatement.

What it did consist of was a flattened length of sandy soil and a few near derelict outbuildings which dated back to the Second World War and had seen little if any major use since.

The comparatively quiet remote semi-desert location was then disrupted as the small dark green private jet came into land, swirling up a cloud of sand and dust before coming to a stop near the old buildings whereupon the combined door and steps in the side of the fuselage opened and deployed.

“Thanks Mike” Garforth called to the pilot as he headed down the steps, carrying a small holdall and putting on a pair of sunglasses.

“Do you want a pickup when you have finished?” Mike asked.

“Err no, it’s all right thanks” Garforth confirmed “I’ll drive back across the border when I am done and pick up a commercial flight back home, I have to be back in London for the end of the week.”

“Visiting the family?” Mike casually asked.

“Sort of” Garforth sadly admitted “Family funeral.”

“Ah, I see” Mike responded, “I’ll see you back in London then” he then called back “Take care!”

Garforth stood back and watched as the aircraft turned around and proceeded to take off before disappearing into the distance leaving him all alone.

He took a moment to look all around him before he made his way to one of the old outbuildings where its door was secured by a brand-new chain and padlock.

Producing a key from his pocket, he unlocked the padlock, removed the chain, and opened the doors to reveal a battered looking old 1960’s vintage open top Land Rover.

Getting into the creaky leather driver’s seat, Garforth then reached across and opened the glove compartment, taking out a satellite phone, semi-automatic handgun, spare ammunition clips and a package of local currency banknotes in significant quantity.

“That will do nicely” Garforth remarked to himself before starting the engine and then driving off out into the open air and away, sending up a dust cloud in his wake.

“Oh dear...” Sir Richard remarked as he emerged from his room.

“By heck, you look rough” Dent remarked as he met Sir Richard in the corridor
“Didn’t you get any sleep last night?” he asked.

“I was all right until about half five but then I was woken by some knocking and moaning noises” Sir Richard explained “I think it was coming from next door.”

“Dodgy plumbing?” Dent suggested but then the door of the room next to Sir Richard’s opened whereupon Jack and Megan appeared, giggling to themselves.

“Hmmm, probably not” Sir Richard confirmed with a knowing smile.

“Whoops...” Jack remarked aside to Megan.

“A tad embarrassing...” she whispered under her breath in response.

“Good morning Sir Richard, Mr Dent” Jack then called “I wondered if it was possible to run something past you, get your opinion a bit later” he then asked.

“Yes, certainly” Sir Richard agreed “Shall we get together after we have had some breakfast?” he then suggested.

“That works for me” Jack confirmed “Now, where is the canteen in this place?” he asked.

“Come on, I’ll show you the way” Sir Richard responded as he led the way with Jack, Megan and Dent all following his lead.

By the time they had reached the cafeteria, it was significantly busier, and they had to squeeze through to find a free table that happened to be right next to where Tracy and Jennifer were still sitting.

“Morning all” Tracy called as cheerily as she could under the circumstances.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I bring greetings from the very tired staff of MI5” Dent announced as he and the others sat down “I also bring good news and bad news” he then added as he placed a report on the table in front of them.

“Is this likely to put me off my breakfast?” Sir Richard inquired.

“Entirely possible” Dent confirmed.

“Go on then, good news first” Sir Richard then prompted.

“We have found our missing Foreign Office Liaison Officer, Ian Grantham” Dent confirmed.

“At last, now we are getting somewhere” Tracy responded, “Where is he being held? I want some serious words with him.”

“Erm, that’s where the bad news comes in, I am afraid” Dent then continued “Rotherhithe Morgue, Thames River Division pulled him out of the water near Chelsea Bridge in the early hours of this morning, identity confirmed, neck professionally broken before he was thrown in and for the icing on the cake, the words *ut vitae immortalis* scrawled across his chest.”

“Ut err what?” Jack asked.

“Latin, isn’t it?” Megan remarked.

“Very good young lady” Dent confirmed “It translates as...”

“To Life Immortal” Tracy, Sir Richard and Dent all spoke in unison.

“Drat...” Jack responded.

“Exactly” Dent agreed “All the evidence is pointing towards the late Mr Grantham being a plant for the Ixion Brotherhood who was tasked with leading the targets to the bombs.”

“I guess he must have outlived his usefulness then?” Megan suggested.

“They will have known that we would probably have been on to him pretty quick” Tracy confirmed “Once that happened, he would have ceased to have become an asset and been demoted to the level of liability.”

“Whoever broke his neck was a professional” Dent continued “Initial reports from the Service Medical Examiner confirms it was brutal and quick.”

“And definitely done before he hit the water?” Sir Richard sought clarification.

“Definitely” Dent confirmed “No signs of drowning whatsoever, he was well and truly dead when they chucked him in.”

“Anything come up in his background search?” Tracy asked, her interest suitably piqued.

“All very ordinary until about six months ago when a new bank account was opened in his name at a private investment group in The City which was receiving ten grand a month in cash yet nothing going out, well until yesterday that is.”

“Huh?” Sir Richard remarked.

“Someone cleaned the account out in cash yesterday lunchtime about ten minutes before the first explosion” Dent then explained.

“Another dead end then...” Sir Richard mournfully remarked.

“Not necessarily” Dent added “I want to dig around a little more, try and trace the source and destinations of the cash that went through it.”

“Are you going to give his drum a spin?” Tracy suggested.

“Already planned” Dent confirmed “I think the late Mr Grantham may yet have a few things to tell us from beyond the grave.”

“Erm...” Sir Richard nodded sideways towards Tracy.

“Oh, erm sorry” Dent then profusely apologised “I didn’t mean to...”

“It’s all right Chris” Tracy responded slightly exasperated, “Really, it’s fine, you can all stop treading on eggshells around me, I will be all right.”

“Of course...” Sir Richard responded supportively but deep inside he knew this was actually, far from the case.

“Commander Simon Fuller, Scotland Yard” he formally introduced himself to the staff at the main entrance, showing his warrant card and identification “I am expected” he confirmed.

“This way please” the member of staff on the door confirmed as he showed him inside.

The interior was a bustling place with many people rushing about and the constant ringing of telephones and conversations echoing all through the corridors as Fuller was escorted through to Briefing Room Number Two at the end of the corridor.

“Good morning everyone” Fuller called as he entered the room where he was greeted by the sight of Sir Richard, Dent, the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary gathered around the table whilst Tracy was stood over by the window looking outside.

“Come in Simon” Sir Richard prompted “A little bird told me you found something.”

“Indeed I did ladies and gentlemen” Fuller confirmed almost with a sense of pride as he placed his briefcase on the table, opened it and took out the mystery device he had found the previous evening, placing it on the table so everyone could see it.

Everybody in the room leaned forward for a closer look at the device including Tracy who came over and took the seat next to Sir Richard.

“Do you know what this is?” Fuller then generally asked around the room.

“It’s...a box...” Tracy concluded semi sarcastically.

“Yep, I concur” the Home Secretary agreed “Definitely a box.”

“Oh, this is so much more than just a box” Fuller responded almost in admiration
“This is, in terms of counter surveillance technology, a work of art.”

“Well, I am glad you like it” Dent remarked, still none the wiser “What is it?” he then asked.

“This little gem is the reason why our radio network went down yesterday, why we have been on the back foot with The Hand since the day they first appeared and probably the reason why the Service has been all but ripped apart in the last twenty four hours” Fuller explained “Someone has been tapping into our systems for at least the last six months.”

“How come this has only come to light now?” the Prime Minister asked.

“This was hidden in a place where it would be extremely difficult to find” Fuller confirmed “if it weren’t for the power outage following the bomb going off outside which resulted in this device’s back up battery low power warning alarm sounding then I may never have found it.”

“I think we had better do a full deep clean and sweep of all Security Service and Government agency mainframe systems” Dent suggested “and quickly.”

“I can organise that” Fuller confirmed “I can put a reliable team together and get moving straight away.”

“Do it” the Prime Minister ordered.

“So where did this come from?” Tracy asked, indicating the box “It doesn’t look like the sort of thing you can pick up in Dixons.”

“Custom made to the highest standard” Fuller confirmed “There is probably only two or three techies in the World who have the skills to manufacture something this good.”

“What about you, could you make something like this?” Sir Richard asked.

“Oh, I have made similar devices for the likes of MI5, even the CIA in the past but this is the next level, really top drawer stuff” Fuller replied.

“All this technology stuff is beyond me” the Home Secretary admitted “I am so old I once bought a black and white television in Rumblelows, that’s how far back I go.”

“I am guessing this is not the sort of thing we would expect from the Ixion clowns?” Tracy asked, “Or The Hand’s meat heads for that matter.”

“You must be joking!” Dent exclaimed “The Ixion Brotherhood may have the cash but there is no way they could get their hands on this sort of technology even if they could afford it.”

“The Hand then?” the Home Secretary suggested.

“Strictly a good old-fashioned bombs and bullets operation” Sir Richard confirmed “They are up front, in your face, subtlety is most definitely not their style.”

“That means its source is either, another security agency...” Dent began to speculate.

“Doubtful...” Fuller remarked.

“...or else there is another player on the field, one we have not met yet” Dent then concluded.

“I think for the time being we keep this strictly between those here in this room” Sir Richard strongly advised to nods of agreement all around “If this does represent some unknown threat then we don’t want to alarm them until we have found out exactly who or what we are dealing with, what they want and where they are.”

“I agree” Tracy confirmed.

“I’ll get onto the sweeps” Fuller confirmed “continue my analysis of this too” he then indicated the device.

“Make sure you file all reports through me” Sir Richard formally requested “The less paperwork we have circulating around concerning this matter the better.”

Once the meeting had ended and its participants dispersed, Sir Richard retired to the outside balcony overlooking the finely tended gardens and took out one of his mobile phones and then checked discreetly over his shoulder to ensure he would not be overheard before making a call.

Almost three and a half thousand miles away in Central Africa the satellite phone located on the front passenger seat of the battered old open top Land Rover began to ring.

Garforth was a short distance away when the ringing began, watching some Zebras in the distance through his binoculars before turning and looking towards the Land Rover.

The ringing continued as he approached, sat down on the creaky old driver’s seat, and picked up the satellite phone.

“Hello?” Garforth called as he answered the phone.

“James” Sir Richard called.

“Dickie, you old rascal!” Garforth responded, “I had a feeling you might be calling.”

“I thought I would check in as I was just wondering where you were?” Sir Richard asked.

“Oh, I am just driving around, paying a visit to central Africa, checking out the sights, the wildlife, romp around in a rather tired old Series One Land Rover, that sort of thing” Garforth admitted.

“I thought you might say something like that” Sir Richard agreed “I am assuming your travel plans involve taking in the delightful scenic vistas and archaeological heritage of Mobuto City?”

“Now, it’s funny you should mention that actually...” Garforth confirmed with a wry smile.

“In which case there should be a little present waiting for you, some useful holiday accessories” Sir Richard explained “It left here last night in the diplomatic bag so you should be able to pick it up from the British Consulate in Mobuto City by about lunchtime, just mention my name at the desk and they will take it from there.”

“No problem, thanks” Garforth confirmed as he started the rough sounding engine of the over half century old Land Rover.

“Have a pleasant trip” Sir Richard called before hanging up.

With the call concluded, Garforth proceeded to drive off down the rough dirt track which is what passed for a main road in that part of the continent and disappeared into the distance in a cloud of sandy dust.

“Sir Richard?” Jack called as he headed down the corridor “Can I have that word now if I may?”

“Yes, of course” Sir Richard agreed before looking around “We can talk in here” he then proceeded into an unoccupied office with Jack and Dent following before closing the door.

“Okay, I am intrigued...” Dent remarked, unaware of what this was about.

“All right Jack, the floor is all yours, you have five minutes” Sir Richard declared.

“Right...” Jack paused as he composed himself, “I have had what could be classified as a really bad idea.”

“Define bad” Dent prompted “Only I see a lot of ideas in my line of work, particularly recently and ‘bad’ covers quite a range of potentially calamitous outcomes.”

“It’s one of those types of bad ideas that if it goes pear shaped then I am then next one booked in for an appointment with the marble slab appreciation society” Jack confirmed.

“Hence why you have been careful to avoid mentioning anything to Tracy” Sir Richard concluded.

“She would go mad if she found out about this and put an immediate stop to it” Jack confirmed “but the reason as I see it is that I and indeed we don’t have any other choice.”

“Who is to know about this?” Dent inquired.

“You two, myself obviously, Megan and I will need a wing man” Jack confirmed “Perhaps Lieutenant Eisley, he’s a good officer; I have worked with him before.”

“Okay” Sir Richard provisionally agreed “So, what is this really bad idea you have had?”

“Basically, it’s Reaper” Jack began to explain “Throughout all of this he has been the rigger and the trigger, the guy who has done the wet work, manufactured the bombs, probably installed some of them as well and we need him out of circulation if we are even to think about bringing this whole sorry mess to a peaceful end.”

“Sounds reasonable so far” Dent agreed “So, what did you have in mind?” he then asked.

“The way I am working it is like this, Reaper has been playing two parallel agendas” Jack continued “On the one side he is providing paramilitary resources for the Ixion Brotherhood and The Hand, and on the other side he is running his own personal little vendetta.”

“Ah, revenge” Sir Richard remarked “One of the oldest motivations in the book.”

“We already know he has blown away his assigned Probation Service officer, his former military commander who tried to have him killed off when he and his unit went rogue, and he came after me with the car bomb which missed me only by sheer luck.”

“Are you sure Reaper specifically targeted you and not just generally as part of the Ixion/Hand operation?” Sir Richard cautiously suggested.

“No, this is personal, I am sure of it” Jack confirmed “When I arrested him seven months or so ago, he issued specific death threats directly to me and he strikes me as the kind of guy who always collects on his debts.”

“So, your reckoning is that you are still high on Reaper’s hit list?” Dent asked.

“As far as I can tell I am the only one of his specific enemies who is still breathing so, yes” Jack admitted.

“All right...” Dent thought carefully about the matter “If we agree to a course of action, how do you plan on finding him? He is not exactly in the phone book you know.”

“I don’t think I need to” Jack confidently replied, “I think he will find me.”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa...” Sir Richard cautiously called “Are you saying we set up a trap, use you as the bait and then hope that when or even if Reaper shows up, you survive long enough to bring him down?”

“In a nutshell, yes” Jack responded.

Both Dent and Sir Richard were silent for a few moments as they looked at Jack and then at each other, contemplating the implications of what was being discussed.

“The way I see it we don’t have any other choice and certainly no other bait available to us” Jack then added.

“All right...” Sir Richard slowly agreed with some obvious reluctance because, despite his reservations he could see that, regretfully, Jack was right in his conclusions “What do you need to make this work?” he then asked.

“Total secrecy, a tracking device, half a dozen armed bastards in an unmarked van no more than one minute away from my location at all times” Jack responded “Oh, and some way of slipping away from the Administrator General, back into public circulation without her realising.”

“You do know there is a very good chance you won’t survive this don’t you?” Dent ominously warned.

“I know...” Jack regretfully confirmed, “but I can’t keep looking over my shoulder for the rest of my life and then there is Megan’s safety to consider. If he does not get me, he could go after her and I simply cannot allow that.”

“All right” Sir Richard called “You go with the Administrator General later this morning when she attends The Commander’s formal identification at Westminster Central Mortuary then slip away; I will have Lieutenant Eisley meet you at the rear service entrance when he will brief you on the plan.”

“Understood Sir” Jack responded.

“Good luck young man” Sir Richard then called after Jack as he turned to leave “You are going to need it.”

“You two with me” Pointer called to two of his agents as they approached the apartment building in Canary Wharf where Grantham lived “You two” he then indicated two further agents “Check the bins, the rest I want you looking around the building, kicking over rocks, knocking on doors, harassing the neighbours.”

“I guess we are ditching the subtle approach then Sir?” one of the agents asked.

“Absolutely” Pointer confirmed as they then split up, he then leading his two nominated officers through the main entrance and, breezing past the surprised concierge, heading straight up the stairs to the third floor.

“Second on the left boss” one of the agents confirmed to her superior officer whereupon they headed directly to the innocuous looking door, blue in colour like all the others in the corridor and bearing, in brass numerals the apartment number, three hundred and two.

“Okay, check the lock” Pointer called “and be careful, we don’t want any surprises” he then warned.

It was with careful and swift efficiency that the two agents checked that the door was not booby trapped in any way before unlocking it.

“Nice work” Pointer compliment as he drew his firearm “All right, let’s do this” he then declared.

He led the way through the door and immediately the three officers split up, searching the modern spacious apartment comprehensively.

“Clear!” came the call from both agents to which Pointer, now stood on the outside balcony duly agreed and holstered his firearm.

“Nobody’s home” Pointer confirmed as his two agents re-joined him “All right then, don’t disturb anything until we have photographed every inch of the place, then get the team in here and tear it apart.”

“Yes Sir” the two agents confirmed.

“As soon as you have them, get the photos off to Pegasus Control and report anything you turn up, no matter how insignificant it may seem” he then instructed “I am going to be out of contact for a while though, I have another little errand to run...”

“I always had a recessed fear that, one day this day would come” Tracy admitted to Sir Richard as they travelled in the back of her official car.

“It pains me to admit the same feeling” Sir Richard agreed.

Tracy's officially designated driver, Commander Terry Kinderley was steering them through the streets of central London whilst Jack was in the front passenger seat keeping a look out.

"Just coming up on it now Ma'am" Kinderley called back "It looks like there is a welcoming committee though" he ominously remarked.

"Oh great..." Tracy responded as she looked up ahead "Journalists..."

The area around the immediate vicinity of the main entrance of Westminster City Mortuary was a bustling scene with a significant number of journalists all being held back by barriers who tried to surge forward for a better view when they saw the Administrator General's official car with its four marked Security Service motorcycle escorts.

"Looks like someone tipped off the press that we were coming" Jack commented.

"Just ignore them" Sir Richard advised as Kinderley brought the car to a stop, perfectly positioned in front of the entrance "Even if you did say something to them, they will just write what they want anyway."

Terry was the first to get out and proceeded to open the rear nearside passenger door whereupon Tracy duly emerged onto the pavement.

As Jack and Sir Richard joined her, this was the cue for a barrage of questions and flashes from cameras.

Tracy led the way up the short flight of steps, holding her head up high but choosing not to engage with the journalists whilst Sir Richard merely nodded to acknowledge their presence whilst Jack looked around at them as he passed, he wanted to ensure someone knew he was there.

Inside the entrance, the quiet and sombre mood was restored with the closing of the doors, shutting off the noise and hub bub of the press outside.

They were met by a short stout man in a clinical white coat.

"Administrator General, Sir Richard, Lieutenant Regent" he formally greeted them "I am Doctor David King, Chief Pathologist" he introduced himself "All of us here wish to extend to you our deepest condolences."

"Thank you, Doctor" Tracy gratefully responded.

"If you would like to follow me, please?" King then showed them down a corridor.

Sir Richard watched Tracy carefully as she walked down the corridor, a short distance behind Doctor King, he was looking for some sort of visual indication as to how she was emotionally, but she was giving nothing away.

“Through here please” Doctor King then called as they reached a set of double doors that, having inserted his security identification card, he opened and allowed them inside.

It was then that Tracy paused in the doorway, looked ahead at the examination table on which was lain a sheeted over body and took a sharp intake of breath before stepping forward.

Doctor King stood by the head of the body and waited for Tracy to nod her head before lifting the sheet back.

Tracy bit onto her bottom lip when she saw the familiar face of The Commander lying there, eyes closed and with some scratches and abrasions.

“We err cleaned him up as best as we could after the examination” Doctor King explained “Most of the injuries were to the lower two thirds of his body including the severing of his leg just below the knee.”

Tracy gave the Doctor a brief look which said she really did not want to know that.

“Right, erm sorry” Doctor King then apologised “We did find evidence of five bullets or parts thereof in various locations, but I believe that his records show these as historical.”

“Yes” Tracy nodded in confirmation “Although I thought it was only four?”

“He got one in the Priory Park incident” Sir Richard explained “It all descended into a bit of a diplomatic balls up which is why all trace of it got quietly erased from official records.”

“Ah...” Tracy responded before returning to the Doctor “Could I have a few moments alone please?” she then requested.

“Yes, of course...” Doctor King agreed before stepping away over to the other side of the room.

Jack and Sir Richard also stepped back and discreetly watched as Tracy, still just about managing to hold back her tears, said her final farewell to her husband.

They both remained respectfully silent for a couple of minutes before Tracy carefully lowered herself and kissed The Commander’s forehead and then stepped back.

“Thank you, Doctor” Tracy then called before reluctantly turning away and walking out of the room.

With Tracy now outside, Jack and Sir Richard stepped forward to take one last look at The Commander.

“Is it me or is he smirking just a little?” Jack asked.

Sir Richard turned his head and looked at The Commander's face before raising an eyebrow in surprise.

"I do believe you are right young man" Sir Richard agreed "He is probably kicking in the pearly gates right now with a warrant I expect."

"It's time, isn't it?" Jack then remarked as they turned away whereupon Doctor King replaced the sheet back over The Commander's face.

"Yeah..." Sir Richard confirmed "Lieutenant Eisley is waiting in an unmarked car out the back."

"Right..." Jack responded, looking back towards The Commander's body for a moment.

"He has your instructions and equipment" Sir Richard informed him "I'll cover for you and Christopher Dent will be your control on a dedicated channel."

"Thanks" Jack replied as he and Sir Richard shook hands "For everything..."

"Good luck..." Sir Richard called after him as Jack left the room by an alternative exit.

Lieutenant Eisley was waiting outside the rear entrance of Westminster Mortuary in an anonymous looking unmarked Ford Focus saloon car.

As Jack emerged from the building, he started the engine before leaning over and releasing the passenger side door lock.

"Thanks mate" Jack called as he got in the car.

"Are you okay?" Eisley asked as he proceeded to drive off.

"I have had better weeks if I am honest" Jack admitted as they headed off towards the main street.

"We have fed a few lies into the system to cover your absence" Eisley confirmed "As far as New Scotland Yard is concerned you have returned to Holborn for a debrief with your Guvnor and as far as Holborn is concerned you have been summoned to Scotland Yard for some sort of conference which hopefully should keep you off their respective radars for a couple of hours."

"Sounds good" Jack responded "So, what's the plan?" he then asked.

"Commander Fuller is going to feed some false information into the New Scotland Yard mainframe concerning your whereabouts and see if Reaper and or his minions pick up the trail" Eisley explained "In the meantime you will be appearing to be back on Transport Division duties within a controlled environment."

“So, all the time Reaper thinks he has got me cornered on my own, the cavalry will be waiting in the wings” Jack summarised “Okay, what about communications?”

“Chris Dent over at MI5 will be your man on the other end of the line working out of a secure control centre over at Thames House” Eisley confirmed “One of Dent’s best field agents will be on the plot watching over you with a specialist shadow team wherever you go.”

“Let me guess” Jack took a discreet look in the rear-view mirror “Green Transit van about two cars back?” he asked.

“Yeah, I reckon that’s them” Eisley agreed, “Glove compartment” he then nodded down towards Jack’s feet.

“Oooh, new toys!” Jack remarked with a wry smile as, upon opening the glove compartment, he discovered a brand new semi-automatic handgun and four clips of ammunition along with a discrete earpiece communications device.

“Oh, a Walther” Eisley commented on seeing the weapon as Jack took it out and checked it thoroughly before holstering it inside his tunic “Very James Bond...”

“I’ll be fine as long as no grey suited henchmen with white cats turn up” Jack responded “I’m allergic to cats...”

“Oh dear...” Eisley responded with a chuckle “You are a right one, aren’t you?”

“One hundred percent unique my friend” Jack confirmed “one of a kind.”

“You all tooled up?” Eisley then asked.

“Yeah, I think so” Jack replied as he inserted the communications device inside his right ear “Lima Tango Nine Nine Three, is anybody there?” he called out.

“Yeah, go ahead Jack, we can hear you” Dent responded.

“Where are we inviting our friend Colonel Reaper to meet me this fine afternoon?” Jack then asked.

“Still working on that at the moment Jack” Dent confirmed “Initially if you could proceed to King’s Cross Underground Station and then act as if you are on normal Transport Division patrol, we’ll take it from there.”

“Roger that” Jack confirmed.

“Heading north” Eisley responded as he turned left at a set of traffic lights on route to King’s Cross, “ETA about ten minutes in this traffic” he then confirmed.

“Do you know, it’s just occurred to me that I have known you for a while now and I still don’t know what your name is” Jack then remarked.

“What, me?” Eislely replied, slightly taken by surprise.

“Yeah, well I know your last name is Eislely, but I presume your first name isn’t Lieutenant?” Jack then explained.

“Oh, right” Eislely responded “Erm, well it’s a bit of a mish mash of different long since dead relatives’ names, sort of a family tradition you see.”

“Uh huh...” Jack remarked.

“Massimo” Eislely then declared.

“Wow...” Jack commented.

“But my friends just call me Mos” Eislely then confirmed.

“Mos Eislely” Jack then concluded before a brief pause for thought and a realisation, “Mos Eislely as in the place in Star Wars, the...”

“...wretched hive of scum and villainy?” Eislely continued “Yeah, exactly.”

“Hmm, no wonder you joined The Force” Jack then amusingly remarked.

“Where to Ma’am?” Kinderley asked as he showed Tracy into the back of her official car whilst Sir Richard got in the other side.

“Back to New Scotland Yard please Terry” Tracy confirmed as Kinderley returned to the driving seat which was when she looked around having realised something.

“Err, where’s Jack?” she then asked, noticing for the first time since leaving the Mortuary that he was no longer present.

“Oh, he got recalled back to Holborn” Sir Richard explained “Debrief with Divisional Commander Appleby I believe.”

“Ah, I see” Tracy responded, not entirely convinced by Sir Richard’s explanation but for now, keeping her thoughts to herself.

After the tumultuous events of the previous day, the officers of West End Central Security Service station were relieved to have had a quiet morning, routine inquiries, minor incidents and only the one arrest to be processed through the custody suite.

“How is our star guest Lieutenant?” Duty Commander Monroe asked as he entered the custody suite and looked over the logbook and the computer.

“Hasn’t said a word since the veracious Lieutenant Regent marched him in here yesterday afternoon, Sir” the Duty Custody officer confirmed “Not even the Special Branch heavies could make him talk.”

“Has he eaten?” Monroe asked.

“We’ve offered him whatever he wants Sir” the Duty Custody Officer confirmed “Wouldn’t even so much as have a cup of tea.”

“Eighteen hours without food or drink” Monroe commented “I don’t like it; he is up to something.”

“Here, have you seen this?” another officer commented as he came in through the door where the sound of a commotion could be heard filtering in from outside.

“What the hell...?” Commander Monroe responded as he headed towards the door to take a look outside.

The scene that greeted him outside was one of chaos as a large group of gaudily coloured protestors, waving placards and shouting were coming up the road, following a large black Mercedes which pulled into the side of the street immediately in front of the door.

From the Mercedes emerged a group of five smartly dressed people carrying briefcases who proceeded straight to the main entrance of the Station and marched directly into the reception area whilst the big group of protestors gathered around in a throng outside in the street, being held back by a hastily deployed line of officers.

“Officer” called the leading man of the group as they confronted the duty reception officer “My name is Henry Bermann QC and my associates here are my legal support team” he introduced himself and presented his official card “I wish to speak to a senior officer in charge straight away.”

“Yes Sir” the officer behind the counter confirmed as he pressed a button that sounded a buzzer in the distance behind him “If you could wait here for a few moments, I’ll fetch the Duty Commander for you.”

“Thank you” Bermann responded.

Out in the street, Monroe was trying to install some sense of order and get the protestors held back when another black Mercedes saloon arrived from which emerged a group of individuals with cameras and handheld recorders.

“What the hell is this?” Monroe called as the people from the car approached with cameras clicking and recorders.

“When are you releasing the political prisoner Olivier Torore who is being detained illegally by your Government?” one of the reporters asked, practically thrusting his recorder in Monroe’s face.

“Get that thing out of my face!” Monroe angrily responded before gesticulating to more officers emerging from the station to push the journalists back as well.

“Sir!” came a call from the yard gate nearby “Some legal big wig and his minions are in Reception; they want to talk to you straight away.”

“Right...” Monroe tersely responded, tearing himself away from the noisy and chaotic scene and heading back inside the Station “Get that lot under control before I lose my temper” he then instructed as he passed through the corridors and reached the Reception desk where Bermann and his four associates were waiting patiently.

“Ah...” Bermann remarked as Monroe arrived.

“I am Duty Commander Operations Monroe” he announced, “What seems to be the problem gentlemen?” he then asked.

“I am Henry Bermann QC, legal representative for Mr Olivier Torore” he announced, presenting his business card “You will release my client without charge immediately.”

“Excuse me?” Monroe scoffed in response “Is this some kind of sick joke?” he then demanded to know.

“Deadly serious Sir” Bermann reiterated as he produced a document “My client has been illegally detained, the charges that may or may not be brought against him are at best spurious and at worst completely unsubstantiated plus, from what I understand, you have denied him food and drink.”

“Your client has refused all offers of refreshment” Monroe explained “He has been read his rights and all procedures from his arrest onwards have been absolutely by the book.”

“Well, that depends on how you read ‘the book’ as you so eloquently put it” Bermann remarked “At this moment there are a considerable number of sympathisers to Mr Torore’s political plight and cause who would disagree with you” he then pointed out.

“That would be the circus you brought with you I suppose?” Monroe asked.

“Freedom campaigners, political prisoner support groups members, civil liberties campaigners” Bermann pointed out “all with one aim, the same aim, justice, peace and fairness for politically persecuted illegally imprisoned people like my client.”

“That is a load of crap, and you know it!” Monroe angrily responded.

“You are entitled to your opinion of course Commander Monroe” Bermann commented “However I am sure you would feel different were I to invite in the specially selected representatives of the free liberal press currently outside to witness and report this little discussion of ours.”

“Your client was arrested fairly and without prejudice after he escaped from the scene of three terrorist incidents that resulted in the deaths of almost twenty people and the injuring of hundreds more” Monroe firmly pointed out “He is a member of a known terrorist organisation and features prominently on virtually every most wanted list in the civilised world.”

“One man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter Mr Monroe” Bermann casually pointed out.

“Oh, don’t you even think of pulling that old one Mr Bermann!” Monroe angrily responded as the tension in the room began to increase alarmingly fast “As far as I and the National Police & Security Service is concerned, your client is being charged with numerous offences under the Terrorism Act along with pretty much every other bit of legislation on the books and we fully intend to see this through to the point where a jury sends him down and we get to throw away the key.”

“Hmm...” Bermann considered his response “I appreciate that this is an emotional subject at an emotional time what with the tragic accidental death of your senior commanding officer and all...”

“Accidental?!?” Monroe scoffed.

“...but all the evidence you have against my client, in what can only be described as a travesty of justice, is nothing more than circumstantial and supposition” Bermann continued “and as such we will be pursuing a High Court injunction within the hour.”

“Oh, really?” Monroe replied, crossing his arms and clearly unimpressed.

“In the meantime, the order to release my client still stands and I will be taking this up with higher authorities if you see fit not to co-operate” Bermann then warned.

“In which case as you have no further business here Mr Bermann” Monroe replied “Please feel free to make use of the door. You will find it over there...”

“We’ll be back” Bermann coolly responded “and justice will be done.”

“Up yours you fat bastard!” Monroe quietly remarked under his breath as Bermann and his associates duly departed.

Divisional Commander Appleby was trying to make some headway in clearing the backlog of paperwork on his desk when the telephone rang; forcing him to stop what he was doing to reluctantly answer it.

“Appleby, go...” he simply answered.

“There is a what downstairs?” Appleby then responded, seeking clarification “Oh, a lawyer” he then realised “What does he want?” he then asked.

Appleby rolled his eyes upwards as he received his answer.

“All right” Appleby then tersely replied “Tell him to keep his hair on; I will be down in a minute.”

With that, Appleby put the telephone down quite hard and got up, taking his uniform tunic off the hook on the back of the office door and leaving.

Out in the corridor he met Shelby coming the other way.

“Connor, are you busy?” Appleby asked.

“Err...” Shelby began to reply but was swiftly cut off.

“Good, come with me” Appleby then prompted which caused Shelby to quickly put down his half drunk cup of coffee and follow his commanding officer at quite a pace to the lift.

“What’s happening Sir?” Shelby asked as he and Appleby entered the lift, the doors closed, and it began a rapid descent to the ground floor.

“I need you to keep me in line” Appleby rather oddly explained “I am about to encounter one of my most severe of pet hates.”

“Spiders Sir?” Shelby asked.

“Worse than that son” Appleby responded as the lift doors opened at the ground floor “Lawyers...”

“Oh...” Shelby remarked in realisation.

“Divisional Commander James Appleby?” a smart and young looking man in a finely tailored suit called as they approached the reception desk.

“That’s me” Appleby formally confirmed.

“My name is Timothy Croft QC from Bermann & Associates Law” he presented his official business card.

“Okay Mr Croft” Appleby responded having looked at the business card before casually passing it to Shelby for him to take a look at “What can I do for you?”

“I have a number of court papers to serve you Sir” Croft confirmed as he opened his very expensive looking designer briefcase and extracted a pile of official papers.

“What?” Appleby responded, slightly taken aback.

“This is a court order instructing your Division of the Security and Police Service to cease and desist all active investigations into our client Olivier Torore, any organisation he represents or other members thereof” Croft began handing files over one by one.

“This is a copy for your reference of the legal injunction currently being served by my colleagues over at West End Central ordering the immediate dropping of all charges against and release of the aforementioned Mr Torore” Croft continued as he handed over more paperwork.

“This a notice of intent to prosecute your Department as a whole entity for wrongful arrest” further files were handed over “plus individual complaints for the same and other related offences directed at yourself and also a Lieutenant Jack Regent along with individual injunction orders banning you or he from any investigative actions in this matter.”

Appleby looked at the pile of files he had been handed before casually placing them on the Reception Desk.

“Anything else Mr Croft?” Appleby then dismissively asked.

“Oh yes” Croft remembered “A copy of Mr Michael Orbison’s Public Interest Immunity Certificate for your reference and also a copy of the injunction order that we, on behalf of our clients are also serving imminently on the Acting National Administrator General” he confirmed, passing yet more paperwork over.

“Who gets the short straw delivering that one?” Shelby asked.

“Not me fortunately” Croft honestly admitted “If you could just sign and date here to confirm receipt of these legal documents Divisional Commander?” he then formally requested.

“Tell me something Mr Croft” Appleby asked as he signed the formal receipt document with little care or respect “Does your mother know you are out and about playing lawyers?”

“I’m just the messenger Sir” Croft confirmed.

“And we all know what proverbially happens to messengers from time to time” Appleby responded before thrusting the signed receipt documentation into Croft’s hand.

“Well, erm...” Croft began.

“Lieutenant” Appleby then called to Shelby “Show the gentleman out...” he requested with a definite hint of menace in his voice.

He watched as Shelby showed Croft to the door and out into the street before leaning across the desk and picking up the telephone.

“Appleby here” he then called “Get me a secure line to the Administrator General please.”

The exterior of New Scotland Yard on the Broadway side was still looking battle scarred from the van based bomb the previous day as Tracy’s official car was allowed past the barriers blocking off access from Victoria Street as there was still considerable damage to the road surface and forensic examination of parts of the scene was still continuing.

Numerous windows were still cracked and shattered across the face of the building although a start had already been made on repairs with significant amounts of scaffolding going up all around.

It was as Kinderley brought her official car to a stop that Tracy looked out of the window at the scene before her.

She chose not to wait for Kinderley to open the door, instead electing to get out straight away and look around.

The numerous Security Service officers and civilian personnel on the scene all stopped and stood still in respect when they saw Tracy had arrived.

“Carry on everyone” Tracy then called “Thank you” she declared before heading towards the main entrance where the doors were locked open as they were jammed as a result of the explosion.

“Ma’am” Janice called from behind her somewhat hastily patched up reception desk “Welcome back.”

“Thank you, Janice” Tracy meekly responded “I am going to head upstairs” she then informed her.

“The lifts are out below the third floor I am afraid” Janice then informed her.

“That’s all right” Tracy remarked “I could use the exercise.”

With various functions and sections of the Service temporarily relocated away from the building to other sites across London, there were far less personnel on site than there would normally have been and as a result, no one saw Tracy make her way up to the top floor.

It was a lonely walk, the whistling of wind through some of the cracked windows on the stairwell about the only sound apart from her footsteps on the cold hard surface of the steps as Tracy ascended.

When she reached the landing of the top floor, she paused at the door, putting her hand on it, and momentarily looked down before taking a deep breath, looking up, opening the door and proceeding inside.

On the top floor there was a scene of much bustling activity with people rushing back and forth, telephones ringing and a general air of intense activity and determination.

Tracy could only stand there in the doorway and watch until someone actually noticed her which was a few moments later when a young Lieutenant Commander suddenly stopped and looked on, startled.

“Administrator General” the Lieutenant Commander called.

Immediately, like a shock wave running down the corridor, everyone else stopped, turned and looked on at Tracy before they all immediately stood to attention in unison.

“At ease everyone” Tracy responded, slightly taken aback by the reaction to her arrival “It’s only me” she reassured them.

“Welcome back Ma’am” another officer responded, breaking the somewhat awkward silence that had descended on them.

“Thank you, Lieutenant,” Tracy replied, managing a weak smile “Carry on everyone, much to do and all that” she then urged whereupon everyone returned to their work, all be it with her return now the main topic of much hushed discussion.

Remaining where she was for a few moments, Tracy observed the busy hubbub of the Command Floor return before making her way straight to the Special Operations Control Room at the far end of the corridor.

As she entered the room, Fuller was taking a call and immediately raised his hand towards Tracy to attract her attention.

“Ma’am” Fuller called “Divisional Commander Appleby on Line Two for you.”

“Oh right, thank you” Tracy responded before picking up the telephone handset in front of her and pressing a single button to connect the call “Jim, how are you doing?”

“Sorry to trouble you Administrator General but I have just had a visit from one of Mr Bermann’s minions” Appleby confirmed “We just got served with a pile of cease and desist orders, complaints forms and gawd knows what else.”

“Seems to be a pandemic of lawyers all of a sudden” Tracy confirmed “Commander Monroe over at West End Central just had Berman himself march in and demand the immediate release of Torore.”

“Over my dead body!” Appleby immediately replied.

“Give them enough motivation and I fear that could be easily arranged” Tracy reminded him.

“Yeah...” Appleby regretfully agreed.

“Meantime I now have West End Central nick under siege from human rights protesters who are trying to claim Torore is a political prisoner would you believe?” Tracy added.

“Given the way the last couple of days has gone” Appleby admitted “nothing much is surprising me anymore.”

“I know how you feel” Tracy was forced to agree.

“One thing mind you” Appleby then continued as he looked at one of the documents he had received “Poor old Jack just got his first ever complaint summons” he confirmed “Bermann’s lot acting on behalf of that toe rag Torore want to sue him, me and the entire Service for wrongful arrest!”

“What did Jack say when you told him?” Tracy asked, out of curiosity.

“Huh?” Appleby quizzically responded.

“When you told him, how did he react?” Tracy asked again.

“Well, I haven’t told him, he’s not here” Appleby explained.

“What?” Tracy responded, somewhat confused.

“I haven’t seen him since he and Megan left for Chequers last night” Appleby confirmed “I was told he was over there at the Yard on a debrief.”

“That’s odd” Tracy replied, “I was told he was over at Holborn having a debrief with you.”

“So, where the hell is he then?” Appleby wondered.

“That is a very good question” Tracy agreed “and one I intend to find the answer to right away.”

“I’ll get my Control Room Supervisor to try and raise him on the radio” Appleby confirmed.

“Let me know the moment you hear from him” Tracy instructed “In the meantime I will try ringing around; somebody must know where he is.”

“Gareth!” Dent called as he passed down the corridor at quite a swift pace, using his finger to indicate to his deputy to follow him to his office right away.

“Boss?” Pointer responded as entered Dent’s office.

“Shut the door” Dent then formally requested.

“Something wrong Sir?” Pointer asked once he had shut the door and observed that from his frantic searching of his desk drawers and filing cabinet that his superior was clearly anxious about something.

“I am about to commence a field operation” Dent explained “It is a Closed Room job.”

“Yes Sir” Pointer responded, “What do you want me to do?” he then asked.

“Keep well away” Dent replied.

“Sir?” Pointer responded, understandably confused.

“This is a sensitive one” Dent explained as best he could without revealing anything “If it goes pear shaped, I don’t want you anywhere near it, just myself and those in the room will go down in flames.”

“Are you sure Sir?” Pointer asked.

“Given recent events I am not really sure about anything anymore to be honest” Dent admitted.

“I know that feeling Boss” Pointer agreed.

“So, for your sakes and my peace of mind, I don’t want you involved” Dent reiterated “Go for a nice long walk along the river or something, just be somewhere else.”

“Right Sir” Pointer responded, still a bit confused.

“Here” Dent then pressed a twenty pound note into his deputy’s hand “Get a round in on me and I will join you when it’s over.”

“And then you will tell me what this is all about?” Pointer suggested.

“Assuming that I am not having a very unpleasant conversation with the Director General, yes” Dent agreed.

“Good luck Sir” Pointer called as he turned to leave.

“Thank you” Dent replied.

A few minutes later, Dent was in one of the lower basement levels of Thames House where he proceeded to an anonymous looking grey metal door which required him to swipe his identification card in a reader next to it before it opened and allowed him to enter.

Inside was a specialist operation control room, four desks with an array of computer terminals, communications equipment plus a series of large screens across the front wall.

In each of the four seats sat an officer, carefully selected, and vetted for this operation by Dent himself.

“Ladies and gentlemen” Dent formally called, getting their immediate attention “This is a Code Three Closed Room Operation” he declared “Nothing concerning this operation leaves this room, you will speak of it to no one from now until the day you die. Is that understood?”

“Yes Sir” the four officers immediately responded.

“Good” Dent declared “In which case, boot everything up and let’s get to work.”

On his instructions, the four officers proceeded to start up the systems in the room in readiness before Dent asked for their attention once again.

“This is an entrapment operation ladies and gentlemen” Dent proceeded to explain “Only us five in this room and five people outside know about this and that is the way we need it to stay due to the potential sensitivities involved.”

He proceeded to load a disk into the console in front of him before continuing.

“This is our target” Dent then announced as a series of photographs and accompanying information appeared on the screens “Former British Army Colonel Adam Reaper.”

Dent paused for a moment to allow his officers to view the information they had just been presented with.

“Make no mistake ladies and gentlemen, if there was a Kingdom of hard bastards, this guy would be king” Dent ominously warned “He is a rogue operative, a mercenary of at least twenty years experience, an expert in weapons, tactics, explosives and how to use them to deadly effect.”

He could tell from the looks on his agents faces that they were pretty stunned by what they were hearing and reading.

“We believe that Colonel Reaper here is directly involved with the death of his former commanding officer and mentor General Ford in the Ministry of Defence building earlier this week as well as designing and constructing the explosive devices which have detonated at Carshalton Beeches, St. James’s Park and Broadway, the smoke bomb devices we have been seeing all over the City and quite possibly, the car bomb that killed my predecessor Dave Collins over seven months ago” Dent continued “So I am sure you understand why we want this maniac in custody as soon as possible.”

“What is the plan Sir?” one of the agents then asked.

“The plan is to lure Reaper out of the shadows at a place and time of our choosing” Dent explained “To do that we need bait and that is where our willing volunteer comes in” he then pressed a button on the console which resulted in Reaper’s pictures and details moving off to one side of the screen to be replaced with a Security Service personnel file and official photograph.

“Ah...” one of the agents remarked as he realised the significance.

“For those of you who don’t know” Dent continued “this is Lieutenant Jack Regent of the National Police & Security Service Transport Division, call sign Lima Tango Nine Nine Three, the only law enforcement officer to ever successfully arrest Reaper and as such is most definitely on the former Colonel’s hit list.”

“Isn’t that...” one agent began to remark.

“Tracy Caverner and The Commander’s adopted son, yes” Dent quickly confirmed “Also the target of the car bomb yesterday, except it missed.”

“Would I be right in thinking that Acting Administrator General Caverner is unaware of this operation?” another agent tentatively inquired.

“Correct” Dent confirmed “and we need it to stay that way. Our job here is one, keep Jack alive, two, lure Reaper out of hiding and then three, roll in the cavalry and grab this bastard before he does any more damage.”

“Yes Sir” the four agents responded in unison once more.

“All right” Dent then proceeded to get things running “Lieutenant Regent will be identified as Roadrunner, our target is Coyote and the rest of the call signs are on your screens.”

“Control, this is Routemaster” the voice of Lieutenant Eisley was heard to call over the speakers in the room “Roadrunner has been delivered, should be on the plot in two minutes.”

“Thank you Routemaster” Dent responded before indicating towards one of his agents “Let’s get all the area CCTV diverted to here and alert the watchers.”

Jack looked back and watched for a moment as Eisley drove away before he proceeded across the road towards the main Euston Road entrance of King’s Cross Station.

Pausing briefly to await the change of lights at the pedestrian crossing, Jack soon arrived at the entrance to the mainline part of the station, dominated by the huge vaulted overall roof where he was forced to momentarily stop to avoid colliding with an individual who was coming out of the station at the same time that he was heading in.

“Control, this is Wolfhound One” a report came over the radio earpiece that Jack was wearing “Roadrunner is in the station, just bumped into a clumsy commuter who wasn’t looking where she was going but seems okay.”

“Hmm...” Jack smiled to himself as he crossed over through to the more modern western concourse before heading to the Underground Station entrance over near the St. Pancras side exit.

“All right all watchers” Dent called over the radio “Roadrunner is following the plan, heading down into the main booking hall, don’t crowd him, it has to look like he is just on routine patrol” he then reminded everyone.

“There he goes” one of the control room agents remarked as the live CCTV feeds from the Underground Station showed Jack passing through the ticket barriers before giving a wink towards the camera up to his right.

“Cheeky sod...” Dent commented with a wry smirk.

Jack duly headed straight for the escalator that leads down to the deep level platforms of the Northern, Piccadilly and Victoria tube lines and as he descended, he was watched by Dent and his team via the CCTV the whole way.

As Jack reached the bottom of the escalator, the two undercover agents on the scene shadowing him proceeded to begin their descent from the top, it was at this point though, just as Jack disappeared from their direct line of sight that the escalators all suddenly stopped, the lights failed, and all the CCTV feeds went blank.

“What the...?” Dent called out as he saw all the images on the screens before him suddenly disappear, leaving blank screens.

“This is Wolfhound Two” came a frantic call over the radio “The whole Underground Station has been plunged into a power cut of some kind and we have lost our eyeball on Roadrunner.”

“Get down to platform level and find him!” Dent urgently called.

On the scene it was utter chaos as members of staff and the public throughout the Underground Station’s complex network of passageways, stair and escalator wells and tunnels tried to see where they were in the darkness.

Not only had the mains power failed but the backup battery operated emergency lights had not worked either. Many were relying on the torch functions of mobile phones plus emergency handheld torches being utilised by the station staff to see where they were going with many clambering towards the exits amid much screaming, panic and confusion.

In amongst the confusion, Jack remained perfectly calm, using the darkness and chaos around him to slip unnoticed through an anonymous looking door in one of the cross passageways between the Piccadilly and Northern Line platforms.

Once inside and with the door closed discreetly behind him, Jack took a device out of his pocket and pressed the small red toggle switch on it up.

Moments later the power was restored to the entire station complex and the situation began to rapidly calm down.

Through the door Jack could hear the sighs of relief going up before smiling to himself and then heading off into the darkness of the old access passageway.

There was further chaos and confusion moments later though as dozens of plain clothed and uniformed officers of various agencies quickly ran down into the Underground Station and proceeded to move swiftly through the maze of passageways, platforms and service tunnels.

“Somebody talk to me please?” Dent called over the radio, his demeanour becoming one of increasing concern.

Despite a swift and extensive search, no trace of Jack could be found, a confirmation that soon made its way back to Dent in the Control Room.

“Call up all the CCTV you can find, we must have missed something” Dent then demanded before something occurred to him “What about that commuter he bumped into on the way into the station?” he then asked.

“Checking King’s Cross CCTV now Sir” one of the agents confirmed.

“On the main screen please?” Dent then requested.

A few moments’ later two different angles of the meeting point where Jack had bumped into the other person were being simultaneously played on the main screen.

“Our mystery guest looks female to me” Dent then commented “Let’s follow the CCTV of her, see where she comes from, where she goes to and a shot of her face if possible.”

It took a minute or two to retrieve and assemble the sequence of footage.

“Here we go Sir” another of the agents in the room confirmed “Running in reverse from the meeting point.”

Everyone watched as the footage from several camera views were replayed in reverse, showing the mystery woman’s progress through the station building.

“Interesting” Dent then commented as the last footage played out showing her point of origin “Isn’t that...?”

“The doorway into the Security Service Transport Division office at King’s Cross, yes Sir” came the confirmation.

“Okay, let’s assume this wasn’t random coincidence but deliberate” Dent continued
“What would be the reason?”

“Looks like a classic passing drop to me Sir” one of the agents commented.

“Yeah” Dent agreed “but dropping what?”

“Sir!” another agent then called “Got a face here.”

“Show me” Dent then instructed.

“This starts from as she was leaving the scene” the agent explained as she showed the slowed down footage to him “Whoever she is, she was careful to avoid showing her face towards any cameras but just as she got to the street, she slipped up and there you go” she then froze the frame at just the right moment that the mystery woman showed her face.

“Magnify” Dent requested before leaning forward for a closer look but then taking a step back with a look of realisation.

“Do you know who she is Sir?” the agent asked on seeing his reaction.

“Oh yes, I do” Dent confirmed as he reached for the telephone and quickly dialled a number.

A few moments later his call was connected.

“Sir Richard” Dent called “Lieutenant Commander Lizzie Barrett is on your Section Fourteen payroll I believe so you would you mind telling me what she was up to at King’s Cross about five minutes ago?”

Mobuto City, the capital of the country of the same name is a typical bustling African metropolis which whilst there were a few modern buildings, still retained a lot of its old colonial charm from another age whilst the scars of decades of armed conflict remained if you knew where to look.

Dominating the centre of the city is the grand palace of the President of Mobuto, a building over opulent and by far and away grander than the surrounding streets and the city’s population should really warrant.

Located approximately a mile away from the Presidential Palace is the United Kingdom Consulate, another old building whose facade was a little tired and reflecting the long-gone days of the old colonial British Empire.

Garforth parked his Land Rover in the street just around the corner, grabbed his bag and proceeded to the ornate front entrance of the Consulate where two British Army officers on duty opened the door and allowed him to enter.

Inside the main hallway Garforth went up to the reception desk and proffered his British passport.

“James Garforth, Crowthorne Industries” he announced, “I believe you have a package for me?” he then asked.

“One moment please Mr Garforth” the Receptionist confirmed as she picked up the telephone and made a call.

A few moments later a gentleman in a suit and tie appeared from a side door and approached.

“Mr Garforth?” the man called to which James nodded in response “This way please” he then indicated the room from which he had just emerged whereupon they both went inside.

Once inside the room and with the door closed, the formality was dropped, and the conversation took on a more informal tone.

“On behalf of the UK Government, welcome to Mobuto” the man remarked.

“Good to see you Lucas” Garforth responded as they shook hands and embraced for a moment “It’s been a while.”

“Five years I think” Lucas confirmed “I just wish our reunion had come about under better circumstances; we are all devastated by the news about The Commander.”

“My little brother” Garforth confirmed with a tinge of sadness.

“We even put the flag on the roof at half mast for him” Lucas nodded upwards, referring to the large Union Jack flag that is on the roof of the Consulate Building.

“Never really got the impression that my brother was much of a flag person” Garforth admitted.

“I agree” Lucas confirmed “but the flagpole is in full view of the President’s personal balcony, so we thought why not rub his face in it a bit?”

“I like your style” Garforth remarked.

“I’ve got your little travelling gift from Sir Richard here” Lucas picked up a silver metal suitcase and handed it over “Came via the diplomatic bag overnight.”

“Ah, great” Garforth took the case and laid it on a table before opening it.

“So, what has Sir Richard sent you?” Lucas asked.

“Just a little care package” Garforth confirmed “Biscuits, some decent tea bags thank God, a few other essential supplies.”

“Yesterdays’ Evening Standard” Lucas remarked seeing the newspaper in the case with its main lead story prominent on the front page “Ah, there he is, the old rascal” he then commented on seeing the photograph of The Commander.

“There we go” Garforth then declared as he took out a box from inside the case and opened it.

“Now that is an interesting little holiday souvenir” Lucas remarked as Garforth opened the box and the contents were revealed.

“Just a little present from an old friend which I am passing on to a well deserving recipient” Garforth confirmed.

“When are you going to be making your delivery?” Lucas then asked.

“Later this afternoon” Garforth confirmed as he closed the box again “and then afterwards, I think I will try that rather nice-looking cafe just across the street.”

Fifteen minutes after he had slipped away from King’s Cross, Jack was holed up in a long since disused part of Euston Underground Station a short distance away.

The turbulence and rumbling sounds from passing Northern Line tube trains rushed through the old tunnels at frequent intervals as he sat on an old bench inside the former transfer ticket office which still had its original ornate tiled ticket serving window despite the fact no fare paying passengers had passed through this part of the station in over a hundred years.

Even without the decades of undisturbed dust everywhere, it was gloomy down there, just a few cobweb covered bulkhead lights providing a little illumination mostly for engineers access to the extractor fan equipment down the corridor in the old disused lift shafts.

Suddenly, in between the sound of passing trains, Jack heard a squeaking noise that was almost certainly an access gate being opened somewhere nearby before noting the approach of hard soled boots.

Jack stood up, stepped out into the old passageway, and proceeded to face the direction from which the audible footsteps were approaching.

He duly adjusted and straightened his uniform before taking out his six-shot revolver, emptying the shells from it and placing it on the ledge of the old ticket office window next to him.

“I must admit, I was somewhat surprised by your invitation” boomed a familiar voice echoing all around the old passageways whereupon Reaper appeared from the shadows, “it’s not every day that someone deliberately seeks out their nemesis.”

“And yet here we are” Jack responded as the two men met in the light cast by one of the dust covered bulkhead lights.

“You do know only one of us is going to walk away from here, don’t you?” Reaper ominously warned.

“We are both professionals” Jack pointed out “I am an officer of the law, you are a soldier and mercenary but this here, right now, you and I, this is personal.”

“Indeed” Reaper readily agreed, the two men not taking their eyes off each other even for the briefest moment.

“So, here is the deal Colonel” Jack then continued “Our business, whatever axes to grind with each other we both have ends here, but know this, no matter what happens, no matter which one of us walks away from here, that’s assuming one of us even survives, this is just you and me, Megan my girl is not to be harmed in any way, leave her out of this, she is not an officer or has any connection to any of this other than I love her.”

“Hmm...” Reaper considered the situation.

“I am here, you can have your revenge, and your pound of flesh if that is what you seek but leave my girl out of it” Jack reiterated.

“All right, as one officer to another, I agree to your terms” Reaper conceded “I have got to hand it to you young man, Lieutenant, you have balls...”

“Thanks...” Jack responded although he was not entirely sure how he was supposed to really take this compliment from the man standing before him who had every intent on killing him.

“So, how does this work?” he then asked.

“You die and I walk away a happy man” Reaper honestly responded.

“Right...” Jack replied as he turned slightly to his right before suddenly swinging around and bringing a length of timber that he had secreted next to him, hidden in the shadows, up and towards Reaper’s head.

Jack’s attempt was however stopped when with lightning-fast reflexes, Reaper caught the end of the piece of timber and deflected it away.

“Not bad Lieutenant” Reaper commented almost in admiration as both men adopted a defensive pose, facing each other “but you will have to do better than that.”

Sir Richard turned the key in the lock and opened the door.

Proceeding into his apartment situated in a very well-appointed part of Mayfair, he noted that it was dark inside, all the lights were off, and the curtains drawn.

“Hmm...” Sir Richard pondered as he took off his long overcoat and hung it on the antique coat stand in the hallway before turning on the lights and shutting the door.

As he went through to the front room, he paused to check the intruder alarm control panel before heading over to the drinks cabinet near the window.

Turning on the lamp first, Sir Richard proceeded to open the crystal decanter but paused when he heard the distinctive click of a firearm being set somewhere behind him in the shadows.

“Is the condemned man at least permitted a last drink?” Sir Richard casually asked.

He did not need to turn around to know who his mystery guest was as Tracy emerged from the shadows, gun drawn and pointed ahead, aimed straight at him.

“You had better make it a double” Tracy sternly suggested as she approached.

“Thank you” Sir Richard responded as he resumed pouring his drink before sitting down in one of the deep leather armchairs.

“Now” Tracy then formally called as she sat down directly opposite Sir Richard, the gun still being aimed towards him “Where is Jack?” she then asked directly.

“Ah...” Sir Richard remarked before taking a sip of his drink and then carefully placing the glass on the table beside him “I presume that you have found out he isn’t where you had been told he was?”

“Unfortunately for whatever ruse you and he had devised to cover for him” Tracy explained “Divisional Commander Appleby rang up looking for him assuming he was over at the Yard and thus your little bullshit story fell apart.”

“Yeah...” Sir Richard responded somewhat despondently.

“So, do you want to enlighten me as to what the hell is going on?” Tracy then asked.

“The truth?” Sir Richard responded as he took another sip of his drink.

“He is all I have left so if you would be so kind” Tracy prompted.

“Okay, the truth it is then” Sir Richard agreed “Jack came up with a plan to capture the elusive Mr Reaper using himself as the bait in the trap.”

“Brave and foolish in equal measure” Tracy commented as she put her gun away “Go on...” she then prompted.

“He approached Dent and I with the idea earlier this morning” Sir Richard continued, “His reckoning was that as he was probably the only person still breathing on Reaper’s personal revenge list, all he needed to do was wait for him to come calling.”

“And of course, he kept me out of the loop knowing full well I would put a stop to this little scheme you three had cooked up before it had even had a chance to take its first breath” Tracy concluded.

“That’s pretty much it, yes” Sir Richard confirmed.

“All right then, where is he?” Tracy asked once again.

“Erm, we don’t know” Sir Richard admitted “For some reason known only to himself, Jack gave us the slip at King’s Cross when there was a complete power failure in the Underground Station, and we have not seen or heard from him since.”

“Oh God...” Tracy responded.

“I guess he wants to face Reaper one on one, alone” Sir Richard concluded “It’s what I would have done if I were young, foolish and in his position” he then admitted.

“You did conduct a thorough search I presume?” Tracy then asked.

“Chris Dent was running the closed room operation” Sir Richard explained “The moment Jack’s communications went dark and he disappeared, he had upwards of a hundred personnel down that station in a matter of moments, they took the place apart, nothing, not a trace of him.”

“You had better hope that nothing has happened to him” Tracy ominously warned “otherwise you really will be facing the final drink of the condemned man.”

“Your coffee Sir” the waitress announced as she placed the cup and saucer on the table outside the Colonial Cafe, located on the opposite side of the street from the British Consulate.

“Thank you” Garforth responded with a smile as he handed across some money in payment and then returned to the Evening Standard where he had been working on the crossword.

A short distance away up in the Presidential Palace, the President of Mobuto was celebrating with his closest advisers, jubilant at the success that his team of men in the United Kingdom had had with their operation.

“We rise jubilant amidst chaos and anarchy!” the President loudly declared, arms aloft, a glass of champagne in his hand from which he then took a swig.

A short distance away in the cafe, Garforth was enjoying the coffee and continuing to work on the crossword.

“Seven down, four letters” he mused on the next clue “Massive financial up swelling...”

At the same time in the Presidential Palace nearby, the President finished his champagne and put the glass down.

“Now if you will excuse me my friends” he declared “Even great men have to pee!”

The others watched as the President left the room and headed for his own personal private bathroom located in the high central tower of the Palace where he opened the door and stepped inside the huge room, ornately decorated in gold and jewels throughout.

There was something in the room that was out of place however, a box sitting on the shelf behind the gold-plated wash basin, neatly wrapped with a ribbon and bow, a small card placed on the top personally addressed to The President himself.

“What is this?” The President asked as he looked at the package with a surprised smile before taking the card and turning it over to read the message written on the other side.

‘With compliments...’

“Ah...” Garforth then remarked as he realised what the answer was to the crossword clue, “Boom...”

At that moment there was a huge explosion which instantaneously destroyed the upper central tower of the Presidential Palace sending burning debris in all directions amid a ball of green flames.

Garforth looked up at that moment and smiled, remaining perfectly calm as all around him there was screams and panic in the streets, armed forces personnel running around and a scene of chaos and confusion.

“Oh dear...” Garforth then casually remarked as he held his newspaper over his cup to prevent the dust from contaminating his coffee.

As the streets were filled with the sounds of shouting, alarms and even some random gunfire from the Palace guards who were opening fire thinking that they were coming under attack, Garforth calmly finished his coffee, picked up his paper and stood up.

The waitress was looking up towards the burning wreckage of the Presidential Palace as Garforth prepared to leave.

“Here, keep the change” he then handed her a large denomination banknote before joining her in looking towards the scene of the explosion, “Probably dodgy electrics” he then suggested with a wry smile before departing.

Deep underground in the old, abandoned passageways of Euston Station, the fight between Jack and Reaper intensified, with military training and experience versus dogged determination.

Even though he had already been hit repeatedly, Jack continued to fight on as best he could, lunging forward once again at his stronger opponent only to be pushed back in agony as Reaper responded by rapidly punching him in the chest several times in quick succession, breaking at least one rib in the process.

Despite the pain, the adrenalin kept Jack in the fight as he lunged forward once again, headfirst into Reaper’s midriff forcing him back flat against the wall.

“You never give up do you?” Reaper remarked, almost in admiration at his opponents dogged determination.

“No...” Jack responded, suddenly swinging a left hook at Reaper, striking him squarely in the jaw “No I don’t!”

“Bad idea” Reaper responded as he threw Jack off, sending him crashing into a pile of old metal gratings, the resulting crash echoing all around the deserted old tunnels.

“I am beginning to agree” Jack gingerly responded as he slowly extracted himself from the pile of wreckage as Reaper looked on, eager to continue the fight.

“You want some more?” Reaper aggressively taunted.

Jack looked up at Reaper towering over him which was when he saw his chance.

“Not particularly, no” Jack admitted.

“Where’s your fighting spirit, young man?” Reaper then called.

“Oh, it’s around here somewhere...” Jack remarked as he apparently struggled to get up.

Suddenly Reaper found himself falling to the ground when Jack swiftly swung a huge metal pole around and smashed it into his artificial leg, causing it to disconnect and fly across the corridor.

“Arrgh!” Reaper cried out.

“Give it up; you haven’t got a leg to stand on...” Jack called as he used the pole to get back on his feet.

Despite being on his back and in considerably pain, unable to get back up with his artificial leg off, Reaper still tried to lash out at Jack as he stood over him.

“You’re nicked!” Jack then called, suddenly striking Reaper firmly in the face, knocking his opponent’s head against the hard surface of the floor and rendering him unconscious.

With everything that had occurred over the last week across the city, most of the people using the extensive London Underground network that afternoon had become pretty much immune to unusual or extreme occurrences.

Even still, many in the main ticket hall of Euston Underground Station gasped when the lift doors opened and a battered looking Jack, his uniform torn and bloodied emerged, valiantly dragging the semi-conscious Reaper behind him with one hand whilst holding his damaged artificial leg in the other.

“You have the right to remain silent, the right to legal representation and... God you are heavy!” Jack remarked as he then lifted Reaper up onto a seat and proceeded to handcuff him to it before placing the artificial leg on the seat next to him.

“Bloody hell, are you all right?” the Station Supervisor called as he approached.

“I feel like I have been run over by a bulldozer if I am honest” Jack gingerly admitted as the adrenalin was starting to subside and the pain that he was in became even more apparent.

“And him?” the Station Supervisor then nodded towards Reaper, slumped in the chair next to Jack.

“Oh, he’ll be all right” Jack confirmed “You couldn’t do me a favour could you and call the cavalry?” he then asked, “Only I don’t think I can drag this lump any further.”

“You got it” the Station Supervisor confirmed, reaching for his radio “Alpha One to base, can you get the Security Service guys and an ambulance crew to the main ticket hall pronto please.”

“Right...” Jack remarked to the barely conscious Reaper “You just sit there, relax, transport is on the way and, as I am feeling generous, I’ll spring for coffee when we get back. Can’t say any fairer than that can I?”

Reaper merely moaned in a semi-conscious response.

A matter of moments later, several Security Service officers and medical staff arrived.

“There you are!” Easley remarked as he sat on the bench alongside Jack and then looked across at Reaper “I see you got laughing boy then?”

“Oh yes, this guy is a barrel of laughs...” Jack retorted.

“Control, this is Routemaster” Eislely then called over his earpiece radio.

“Control receiving, go” Dent was heard to respond.

“I am in the main ticket hall of Euston Underground Station” Eislely confirmed
“Roadrunner is alive, and we have Coyote.”

“Oh, thank you, God,” Dent responded, looking up in the air and letting out a huge sigh of relief.

“The fact remains you old rascal” Tracy remarked to Sir Richard as, having returned to New Scotland Yard, they headed towards the Special Operations Control Room “if this had gone pear shaped then Jack would have been dead, Reaper would still be on the loose and I would be using your balls for ping pong practice” she pointed out, “It would do you good to bear that in mind in future before agreeing to any more off the book operations you *think* I don’t need to know about.”

“Yes Ma’am...” Sir Richard agreed as Tracy then stormed off, still seething.

“Someone is in trouble...” Appleby remarked aside to Sir Richard as they stood together and watched Tracy walk around the room.

“Yeah...” Sir Richard honestly admitted.

“Good thing Jack survived then” Appleby then commented “Else I would have been after your hide as well, that is if Administrator General Caverner had left anything tangible for me to have a go at of course.”

“Woof, woof” Sir Richard responded to a slightly quizzical look from Appleby, “In the doghouse” he then explained.

“Ah, speak of the devil...” Appleby then remarked as he checked a message he had just received “The boy wonder is on his way here right now” he confirmed as he turned to leave.

“How is he?” Sir Richard then asked as he walked with Appleby out of the room and into the corridor.

“Three cracked ribs, possible concussion, basically he should be signed off duty, but I suspect he won’t go” Appleby confirmed.

“Maybe best not to tell the Administrator General the true extent of his injuries” Sir Richard then tentatively suggested.

“Keep you out of the doghouse for a little while longer?” Appleby then asked as they reached the lifts and he entered.

“Something like that, yes” Sir Richard admitted remorsefully.

“I’ll think about it” Appleby agreed before the lift doors closed, and he descended to the ground floor.

“Oh God, I am going to feel this in the morning” Jack admitted as he gingerly got out of the Metropolitan Division patrol car outside the main entrance of New Scotland Yard.

“You really should be resting you know?” Easley strongly advised.

“Probably” Jack reluctantly agreed “but you know me, I have got to see this thing through, then I will rest.”

“All right” Easley called across from the driving seat “But for God’s sake be careful and try to keep out of trouble.”

“I’ll try” Jack confirmed as he walked around to the driver’s side of the car and shook Easley’s hand “Thanks mate, I owe you one.”

“Take care, I’ll see you around I expect” Easley responded.

“When all this is over, first round is on me” Jack agreed.

“That’s a deal!” Easley confirmed as he started the car “See you later.”

Jack watched from the pavement as Easley’s patrol car headed off up Broadway and then disappeared from sight as he turned into Victoria Street and away.

“Right, time to face the music...” Jack remarked to himself as he turned and headed towards the main entrance doors which were in the process of being repaired as he passed through them.

“Well Lieutenant, as ideas go, that was both brave and stupid in equal measure” Appleby remarked as he met Jack in the main reception of New Scotland Yard.

“Erm, thanks Guv, I think...” Jack responded.

“So, do you want the bad news or the good news?” Appleby then asked him.

“I think I will take the bad news first” Jack admitted.

“Henry Bermann QC and his associates have filed official complaints against the entire Security Service as a whole as well as you and me individually for alleged wrongful arrest concerning Olivier Torore.”

“What?!?” Jack responded with an incredulous and disbelieving look.

“Congratulations Lieutenant” Appleby confirmed with a wry smile, “You have been in the job less than a year and you have already notched up your first major complaint.”

“Great...” Jack responded despondently although his injuries did not exact help his mood.

“The good news is that Administrator General Caverner, the Home Secretary, the Attorney General and I have gone into bat on your behalf, seeing as you were somewhat busy this afternoon and told that fat odious Bermann and company officially where they could shove it, politely worded of course.”

“But of course” Jack agreed.

“Meantime, I am taking you off active duty for a while...” Appleby then began.

“But Sir...” Jack began to protest.

“Let me finish Lieutenant” Appleby responded, raising his hand to stop him, “You have another assignment” he then produced a file which he handed across to him.

“What’s this?” Jack asked as he took the file and opened it.

“I am delegating to you a sub-section of the Pegasus Protocol” Appleby explained “I think this is something that should suit your talents nicely.”

“Oh...” Jack remarked with a look of some surprise as he read the main heading on the first page inside the file.

“I thought you would like it” Appleby commented with a wry smile.

“Yes Sir” Jack readily agreed “Indeed, I’ll get right on it.”

“I’m heading back to Holborn; do you want a lift?” Appleby then asked.

“Erm, no it’s all right Sir” Jack confirmed “I want to check in upstairs first.”

Jack took the opportunity to read the file he had been given more thoroughly as he ascended in the lift, up to the top floor.

“Hmm, I think I can handle this” he remarked to himself as the lift slowed before the doors opened and he exited out onto the landing.

“Bloody hell, you look like you have been through a war!” Sir Richard remarked as he happened to meet Jack in the corridor and, even though Appleby had informed him of some of the details of Jack’s injuries, he was still somewhat taken aback by the state of him, his uniformed badly battered and torn and his face all grubby.

“Just a normal evening rush hour on the Northern Line” Jack jokingly responded, managing to raise a bit of a smile.

“Come with me” Sir Richard then called “I’ve got someone who wants to see you...”

“Oh...” Jack responded with a slightly worried expression as he followed Sir Richard down the corridor to the Special Operations Control Room and opened the door.

Jack’s expression soon changed to one of delight when he saw Megan in the room.

“Hey!!!” Megan called as they ran towards each other and hugged tightly, causing Jack to wince with pain from his injuries but still continuing on regardless.

“Ah, isn’t that sweet?” Sir Richard remarked to Fuller as they looked on at the happy and relieved couple, reunited once more.

“There you are!” Tracy called as she entered the room at that moment “When you have finished crushing each other, a word Lieutenant?” she ominously requested, waving her left index finger at him, gesturing him over.

“She didn’t call you Jack” Megan quietly pointed out.

“Yeah...” Jack reluctantly agreed “which probably means I am in trouble...”

“So...” Tracy began with a serious look as Jack came over to her “Have you got a death wish or something?” she asked.

“He’s still alive, isn’t he?” Sir Richard pointed out in Jack’s defence.

“Only by pure luck I would say” Tracy responded, “Slipping away from your protection, deliberately setting up a face-to-face confrontation with one of the most dangerous individuals imaginable, alone at that.”

“Got to hand it to him, that power cut cover at King’s Cross was inspired” Sir Richard commented.

“All right” Tracy admitted “That was quite good.”

“I got him, didn’t I?” Jack responded.

“Yes, you got him” Tracy agreed “but for Christ’s sake, you could have been killed! This guy wants you dead, remember?”

“I know” Jack honestly admitted “but I figured if I didn’t confront him then he would go after Megan, and I couldn’t allow that.”

“Hmm...” Tracy mused, “Well, you got away with it this time, try not to make a habit of it.”

“That you can count on” Jack agreed “Meanwhile I have a more benign assignment to do.”

“May I?” Sir Richard asked as he discreetly slid the file out from under Jack’s arm and opened it.

“Erm, by all means...” Jack responded, quickly realising that he did not really have a choice.

“Hah!” Sir Richard then remarked as he read the file “You’ve got your work cut out here I reckon.”

“Tell me about it” Jack agreed as Sir Richard handed him back the file.

“What have you got?” Tracy asked more out of curiosity than anything else.

“Just a simple exercise in logistics” Jack admitted.

“Ma’am?” came a call from the other side of the room “Prime Minister for you on the green scrambler.”

“Oh, joy...” Tracy unenthusiastically responded, “If you will excuse me?” she then called to which Jack merely nodded in respectful understanding.

As Tracy took the call, Megan joined Jack, taking his arm in hers and offering him some much needed moral support.

“Time to leave them to it I think” Megan suggested.

“A very good idea” Sir Richard agreed.

“Yeah, I think it’s time to step back” Jack finally admitted.

“Come on” Megan then prompted “You can give me the guided tour whilst we are here.”

“Okay everyone” Tracy called as she hung up the telephone “Not you Jack” she then indicated “Pack up your stuff, we are being recalled to Chequers, the Prime Minister wants a full debrief...”

“Oh, wonderful” Sir Richard rather dejectedly responded.

“...over dinner” Tracy then finished.

“Oh, that’s more like it” Sir Richard then remarked with renewed enthusiasm.

“You changed your tune pretty quick” the Home Secretary commented.

“You know me” Sir Richard explained as he grabbed his overcoat “Anything for a free meal!”

“May I remind you Sir Richard that there is no such thing as a free lunch?” Tracy rather ominously warned.

“Oh, I’m willing to take the risk” Sir Richard confirmed.

“Well, you certainly know how to put the cat among the pigeons” Lucas remarked as he joined Garforth on the second-floor balcony of the United Kingdom Consulate building and together, they watched the chaos and panic of the Mobuto City citizens in the streets below, “It’s like the fall of Rome down there.”

“A very noisy cat amid some very rancid and mangy pigeons” Garforth commented, “Best shot of them I reckon.”

“No argument there mate” Lucas readily agreed, “Word from my reliable sources on the street is that not only is the President dead but the blast also wiped out almost his entire top table of crony’s, senior military commanders and several notable others.”

“Hopefully, it will give the country and its people an opportunity for a fresh start” Garforth remarked.

“Wheels already in motion apparently” Lucas confirmed “The freedom party opposition are moving quickly thanks to, ahem, an anonymous tip off if you get my drift.”

“I do indeed” Garforth smiled in response.

“Things are likely to get a bit spicy around here over the next few hours” Lucas then warned “There are still pockets of the old regime and The Hand devotees who have run for cover now that the proverbial head of the snake has been cut off.”

“Which suggests it is probably a good time for me to make a discrete exit” Garforth remarked.

“Here you go” Lucas handed over a brown envelope “Usual drill, clean passport, visa, travel documents, a little extra spending money.”

“Thank you old friend” Garforth responded as he took the envelope and briefly looked inside before putting it in his inside jacket pocket “Take care” he then advised as they shook hands before he turned and left.

With many of the senior personnel having departed for Chequers, the top floor of New Scotland Yard was noticeably quieter as Jack and Megan made their way towards the lifts.

Megan was suddenly taken by surprise when Jack stopped and turned back, looking towards the outer office door of The Commander's office.

"What's wrong?" Megan asked, sensing that Jack was deep in thought about something.

"I just want to take a look in the old man's office one last time before the removal men clear it out" Jack confirmed whereupon, still arm in arm, they proceeded to the outer office door and stepped through it.

"Oh, hello Jack" the Commander's Personal Assistant called, somewhat surprised to have visitors under the circumstances.

"Hello" Jack responded, "I know this is going to sound a bit weird, but can I take a look in his office, just for nostalgic reasons?"

"Hmm, I don't see why not" the Personal Assistant agreed "Just don't touch anything though" she advised.

"Thanks" Jack responded before, with a slight hesitancy, he proceeded through the inner door into The Commander's office whilst Megan remained outside.

"Is he okay?" the Personal Assistant asked with understandable concern.

"Let me put it this way" Megan ruefully admitted "My Jack has had the proverbial seven shades smashed out of him, both mentally and physically in the last thirty odd hours and he is doing a surprisingly good job of hiding it."

Inside the office, Jack looked around with an almost anticipatory sense, still half expecting The Commander to come through the door and ask him what he was doing in his office even though he knew that would never happen now he was gone.

The office was exactly as The Commander had left it the previous morning, unfinished paperwork on the desk, uniform overcoat over the back of the chair behind the desk, the latest issue of the Railway Modeller magazine lying on top of the official files in the In Tray and a smattering of biscuit crumbs next to an empty coffee mug.

On the wall still stood the 1950's green and white British Railways station platform totem type sign from Lewisham whilst the silver photo frame with Tracy and The Commander's wedding photo was proudly on display on the desk next to a model locomotive.

He knew he probably should not, but Jack found it impossible to resist sitting in the chair behind the desk that belonged to the most powerful law enforcement position in the country.

Sitting in the high-backed swivel chair, Jack looked all around the silent empty office, wondering at all the meetings, conferences, debates and moments of incredible tension that had occurred in there over the years.

“If walls could talk...” he remarked to himself before giving into the urge to open the top desk drawer where, to no real surprise whatsoever, he found a half eaten packet of milk chocolate digestive biscuits.

Looking across at the wedding photograph on the desk, Jack pondered what The Commander would say at that point.

“Well, we can’t let them go to waste, can we?” Jack remarked towards the photograph with a bit of a smile before discreetly picking up the packet of biscuits and putting them in his tunic pocket and then closing the drawer again.

It was the model steam locomotive at the front edge of the desk, displayed on a little wooden plinth with its own railway track that next caught Jack’s attention. Sitting back in the seat, something suddenly occurred to him which made him lean right forward and take a much closer look at the model before looking up again with a thoughtful expression.

“I wonder...” he then remarked to himself before taking out the file Appleby had handed him earlier, opening it and flicking through the pages until he found what he was looking for.

A few moments later as Megan and the Personal Assistant were talking, Jack returned, respectfully closing the inner office door behind him.

“I have just had an idea” Jack declared.

“Uh oh...” Megan responded, remembering very clearly the result of the last idea he had come up with and fearing more of the same kind of result.

“Oh” Jack responded, quickly realising Megan’s concern “It’s nothing like that, it is to do with this assignment Divisional Commander Appleby has given me” he indicated the file.

“Thank God for that” Megan responded with obvious relief.

“Marion” Jack then turned to the Personal Assistant “You are the font of all knowledge around here; I need to get hold of the Chief Curator of the National Railway Museum in York,”

“Huh?” Megan remarked, clearly confused.

“Erm, right” the Personal Assistant responded “I think I can find a number if you give me a few moments” she confirmed.

“I know I am going to regret asking this” Megan commented “but why do you need the National Railway Museum?” she then duly asked.

“I need to ask them for a big favour” Jack explained without actually explaining anything.

“Right...” Megan responded, still none the wiser, “How big a favour?”

“Oh...” Jack paused for a moment in thought “About a hundred and twenty eight tons?”

“Thanks for the lift by the way” Hewitt remarked to the Foreign Secretary as they travelled in the back of the official ministerial car with Jennifer driving at high speed with a full escort through the west end of London.

“Not a problem Sir” Jennifer confirmed.

“What happened to your car then?” the Foreign Secretary asked out of curiosity.

“It was parked next to one of the bins that went bang yesterday” Hewitt explained “It’s going to be in the garage for a week and my official driver is in hospital for a few days too.”

“Ouch...” the Foreign Secretary responded.

“It’s all right, he is a bit shaken up, flying glass cuts, that sort of thing but otherwise okay” Hewitt confirmed.

“I know the guy” Jennifer remarked as she continued to drive safely at high speed almost to the point where the motorcycle escorts were having trouble keeping up.

“Now who the hell can that be?” Hewitt then remarked as his mobile began to ring which prompted him, all be it a little reluctantly to reach inside his jacket and take it out.

“Probably your wife” the Foreign Secretary commented.

“Actually, not this time” Hewitt confirmed with a slightly concerned look “It’s the office, and they were under strict instructions not to call me unless something serious had occurred.”

“Uh oh...” the Foreign Secretary remarked under his breath.

“John Hewitt, go...” he called before listening intently.

The Foreign Secretary watched as Hewitt’s expression changed from one of deadly seriousness and intense concentration to one of surprise, almost delight.

“Really?” Hewitt responded with clear interest “What, now?” he then asked, looking at his watch with obvious urgency.

Jennifer was still concentrating on driving but her years of experience escorting senior Government and security services personnel around had already told her that a change of plan was in the offing.

“Right, get a team in a van and haul ass down there now” Hewitt then ordered “and see if any local Transport plod are available to provide some back up.”

“Here we go...” Jennifer remarked as her feelings were looking increasingly right.

“Don’t do anything until I get there though” Hewitt then warned “Get Air Traffic Control to issue some bullshit excuse to delay the plane if necessary, hell, get the Met Office to issue a dodgy weather forecast if you have to!”

“It’s not like they are accurate the rest of the time...” the Foreign Secretary commented.

“Right, I am on my way, out” Hewitt confirmed before hanging up.

“Where to?” Jennifer asked, already slowing down ready to change direction.

“Heathrow Airport, VIP & Diplomatic Terminal, as fast as you can” Hewitt requested.

“You got it, hold onto your hats!” Jennifer duly confirmed before suddenly performing a perfect high speed handbrake turn and heading off in the opposite direction, leaving the motorcycle escorts scrambling in her wake.

“What’s going on?” the Foreign Secretary asked.

“Something is rumoured to have happened in Mobuto and their Ambassador to the UK, Peter Boru has been immediately recalled” Hewitt explained as he and the Foreign Secretary were forced to brace themselves quite tightly against the forces they were being subjected to as Jennifer drove at high speed through the traffic with lights and sirens in full cry and the motorcycle escorts only just managing to keep up.

“I want him collared before he has a chance to leave the country” Hewitt continued “however, as that is likely to lead to a bit of a diplomatic mess, it needs to be someone senior who makes the arrest.”

“Where do I fit into this?” the Foreign Secretary asked, slightly confused.

“You are just along for the ride Adrian” Hewitt confirmed “Just sit back, relax and enjoy the show because I am certainly going to enjoy this...”

“Where is Hewitt?” Sir Richard asked quizzically, as he looked around the Chequers Briefing Room where everyone was gathering prior to the arrival of the Prime Minister.

“Where is the Foreign Secretary now I come to think of it?” Dent then asked, “they should have been here by now I would have thought.”

“I think they were travelling up together from what I understand” Sir Richard responded as a discrete nod was given in their direction that the Prime Minister was on her way, and everyone began to take their seats.

“Got them!” Fuller called, having checked his laptop “For some reason their car seems to be heading towards Heathrow Airport.”

“Perhaps they fancied a holiday?” Dent wryly suggested.

“Ladies and gentlemen” the officer on the door formally called “The Prime Minister.”

At that point, everyone stood up and observed as the Prime Minister came hurrying into the room and put her distinctive red dispatch box containing her official papers down on the desk before looking round.

“Be seated everyone, let’s get this over with quickly” she prompted before she noticed a couple of empty seats, “Where are Adrian and John?” she then asked with concern.

“Prime Minister” Fuller called across “According to the tracker in the official car they are supposed to be travelling together in, they seem to have just diverted off course and are now heading in the direction of Heathrow Airport.”

“Find out what is going on” the Prime Minister then urged but that answer was already on its way into the room as a messenger arrived who made his way straight to Dent.

“Interesting...” Dent remarked as he read the message.

“Something we should know about?” Tracy asked.

“Peter Boru, the Mobuto Ambassador to the UK has been immediately recalled to Mobuto and is on his way to Heathrow to catch a flight right now” Dent explained.

“Hewitt must be on his way to nab him before he gets on the plane I would have thought” Sir Richard concluded.

Dent quickly picked up the telephone on the desk in front of him and swiftly dialled a number, his call being equally as swiftly answered.

“Gareth!” Dent called as soon as Pointer, his Deputy answered “Hewitt is on his way to Heathrow Airport to try and grab Peter Boru before he gets on a plane out of the country” he informed him, “wake up our local team at the airport and get them to provide whatever assistance he needs, no questions asked” he ordered.

“I wonder what that is all about?” the Home Secretary asked, a question that was also on the mind of many in the room.

“I guess we will find out soon enough” the Prime Minister remarked “Meanwhile, where do we stand on the whole Ixion/Hand debacle?” she then asked.

“Reaper is back in custody” Tracy confirmed “and currently being interviewed over at Paddington Green by Alan Harding and his Anti-Terrorist Squad guys but, true to form he is saying nothing.”

“Who arrested him?” the Prime Minister asked.

“Jack did” Sir Richard confirmed “Got three cracked ribs and a shed load of bruises for his trouble mind.”

“Damm, that Jack is one tough cookie” Dent commented in admiration.

“I’ll see if we can get him at least a formal mention in dispatches” the Home Secretary suggested “I think that is the least we could do.”

“I agree” the Prime Minister agreed “Make it happen.”

“We now have positive locations on about seventy five percent of Reaper’s unit known as the Soldiers of Ixion” Tracy continued “All of them are under discrete round the clock surveillance and as soon as the word is given and the ink is on the warrants, we can pick them up anytime” she confirmed.

“I somehow doubt they are going to come quietly” Dent warned.

“I am up for a fight” Tracy responded, “Believe me, I am well in the mood for some serious Grade A ass kicking.”

“Forward me the details and I will personally sign all the warrants you want, blindfold” the Attorney General confirmed.

“Good” the Prime Minister agreed “Round them up, lock them up.”

“I’ll set the wheels in motion as soon as we are finished up here” Tracy confirmed.

“Erm, if I may interrupt” Fuller apologetically cut in, raising his hand “Something has come up which may explain the Boru situation.”

“What have you got?” Sir Richard prompted.

“The BBC International Monitoring Service at Caversham Park picked this report up from Mobuto National Radio about ten minutes ago” Fuller explained before pressing buttons on his laptop which provided a written transcript on the big screen for everyone to see.

“The People’s Democratic Republic of Mobuto regrets to announce the death of the country’s President, saviour and spiritual leader in a tragic accident earlier this afternoon when it is believed he was killed by the accidental detonation of stored munitions inside the Presidential Palace in Mobuto City.”

“Blimey” Sir Richard remarked “and I thought our Government wrote such dazzling bullshit!”

The Prime Minister glowered in Sir Richard’s direction in response.

“BBC Monitoring report goes on to state it is believed that most of the senior top brass of the Mobuto Government and Military were also killed in the so-called accident” Fuller continued to read “and that the opposition freedom party is already moving to secure the Parliament and the Country as soon as possible to ensure stability and security.”

“So presumably Ambassador Boru may be recalled to Mobuto to help sort out the mess?” Dent suggested.

“If these reports that we are seeing are correct” Fuller concluded as further snippets of information came through to his computer and he continued to analyse them “it is not entirely beyond the bounds of possibility that, with the exception of Adebesei, Boru is one of the last surviving members of the late President’s inner circle.”

“In which case, let’s hope John Hewitt is not too late getting to Heathrow Airport” the Prime Minister suggested.

“Get out of the bloody way!” Jennifer called to the security guard on the gate that led to the private VIP & Diplomatic Terminal at Heathrow Airport as, despite having lights and sirens at full cry, she was forced to dramatically slow down as the barrier was not immediately raised.

“Oh dam...” the security guard exclaimed as he suddenly realised what was happening, dropped his newspaper and rushed out of the booth to raise the barrier.

“Wake up Malcolm!” Jennifer called as the barrier was raised and she then accelerated through, swiftly followed by two more vehicles.

“Sorry Jenny...” Malcolm meekly apologised even though by then her car was well away.

Moments later she was pulling up to the main entrance to the VIP & Diplomatic Terminal where, barely had she stopped when Hewitt was out of the car with the Foreign Secretary following closely behind.

They were quickly joined by a team of MI5 officers led by Pointer who, moments after Hewitt's arrival had decamped from a blue Ford Transit van having themselves headed over at high speed from central London.

"Afternoon Gareth" Hewitt remarked as they headed towards the door together "What brings you and your guys here?" he then asked even though he was pretty certain of the answer.

"We come with the compliments of my boss Christopher Dent" Pointer explained "Anything you need, we are here to help."

"Lovely" Hewitt responded "Join the party" he then prompted but paused when a black Lexus saloon car parked nearby caught his attention.

"Aye, aye" Pointer remarked "Diplomatic plates" he indicated the registration number on the front of the car before reaching for a mobile and quickly making a call "Hello, it's Gareth" he then called "Can you get me the details on a diplomatic plate carrying black Lexus, registration number Three Four One Delta Four Zero Eight please?" he requested.

"Three Four One is the country code for Mobutu" Hewitt confirmed "Which means Boru is already here."

They swiftly proceeded inside the building where their attention was immediately drawn to a commotion occurring over near one of the departure lounges.

"I am a diplomatic representative of a sovereign nation, and I am getting tired of these constant delays and the ridiculous excuses you keep feeding me as to why my plane is not ready yet" a distinctly African dialect voice called loudly.

The airport official who was receiving the brunt of Boru's complaints was in fact one of Hewitt's own officers who looked up as he saw his superior approach whereupon Hewitt merely nodded in confirmation.

"Ah, Ambassador" the official responded, "It looks like your plane is now ready for boarding, apologies for the unfortunate delay."

"About time you officious buffoon!" Boru responded insultingly before taking the arms of the two young ladies standing either side of him and heading towards the bridge which led to the door of the aircraft.

"Excuse me Ambassador" Hewitt then politely called as he caught up with him.

"What do you want?!?" Boru angrily called, turning around to face the tall dominant figure of the man from MI6 who remained calm and unfazed by the Ambassador's defiant protestations.

“Good afternoon Ambassador” Hewitt politely responded “John Hewitt, UK Military Intelligence, Section Six” he formally introduced himself, proffering his official identification, “Under the Diplomatic Relations Act I must officially request that you remain in the country pending formal investigation.”

“Go away you silly policeman!” Boru immediately protested, “I am a duly appointed diplomatic representative of a sovereign independent nation and I do not answer to you!”

“Charming...” Pointer remarked as, standing just a little behind and to one side of Hewitt, he observed the conversation with interest.

“Ambassador, I must insist...” Hewitt then politely reiterated but once again was abruptly cut off.

“Get out of my way or my bodyguards will be ordered to remove you by force!” Boru warned before pushing his way past and on towards the doorway that led to the waiting aircraft.

“Shouldn’t we...? Pointer began to ask.

“All in good time my young friend” Hewitt mysteriously replied, “All in good time.”

At that point, the doors ahead opened, and a group of half a dozen men appeared from the aircraft.

“Uh oh, looks like the Ambassador has friends” Pointer remarked as he and Hewitt looked on.

“I wouldn’t jump to conclusions just yet” Hewitt then knowingly reassured him.

The leader of the group of men who had just disembarked from the aircraft was another very tall African man who approached the Ambassador directly until they both stopped, facing each other directly.

“Ambassador Peter Boru?” the tall African man formally asked.

“Yes” Boru duly confirmed, still confident but not entirely sure what was now happening.

“I am National Security Chief Aiden Almoglu” the tall African man introduced himself, “Under the emergency security powers act and in the name of the People’s New Free Democratic Republic of Mobuto, I am placing you under arrest.”

“This is preposterous nonsense!” Boru quickly responded in protest, “I am a diplomatic Ambassador, get out of my way!” he then demanded.

“Mr Boru” Almoglu insisted “Your diplomatic service has been terminated effectively immediately” he informed him as two of his associates moved around, escorted the two ladies that Boru had either side of him away and then stood one on each side of him.

“I have a plane to board so please take away your nonsense and your goons and let me pass” Boru demanded once again “I am returning to Mobuto tonight.”

“Actually, yes you are” Almoglu confirmed as he discreetly nodded towards the two men stood either side of Boru “but erm, not in Executive Class” he then informed him as he took Boru’s travel documents off him.

“How am I travelling then?” Boru demanded to know but at that point one of the two men stood just behind him produced a syringe and quickly injected him in the arm whereupon, a moment later Boru collapsed unconscious, being caught by the two men before being unceremoniously dragged away towards the waiting aircraft.

“In cargo actually...” Almoglu confirmed with a satisfied look.

“Hello old friend” Hewitt called whereupon Almoglu and he shook hands warmly “It has been a long time.”

“That it has” Almoglu agreed “Good to see you after all this time.”

“We were at Oxford together” Hewitt explained to Pointer who then realised the connection.

“Such a long time ago” Almoglu confirmed.

“Congratulations on your promotion” Hewitt then remarked “We are opposite numbers now I guess?”

“We are indeed” Almoglu agreed “It’s been quite a busy few hours since the, ahem, tragic accidental death of our former President and his senior team” he explained, “So much to do, starting with a major clear out of the old corrupt regime, a chance for a fresh start.”

“What actually happened?” Hewitt asked, just out of curiosity even though he knew about certain parts of it.

“It seems, officially that is, that our former President went to the bathroom and then accidentally tripped over a case of grenades that had been carelessly left lying around and they went off” Almoglu explained.

“Now that is what I call dazzling bullshit” Pointer remarked, barely able to avoid smiling.

“It is rather, isn’t it?” Almoglu agreed with a hearty laugh.

“So, what is going to happen to our old friend Mr Boru then?” Hewitt asked.

“Bad things...” Almoglu confirmed “As pretty much the last surviving member of the old regime, he will be put on trial and probably never see daylight again.”

“It couldn’t happen to a more deserving fellow” Hewitt agreed.

“Well, I would love to stay and chat, reminisce and have a look around the country but regrettably I must immediately return to Mobuto” Almoglu confirmed with obvious regret.

“Erm, what about your lodger in the UK embassy?” Hewitt then asked.

“Ah yes, Mr Adebese, I almost forgot about that little worm” Almoglu responded “Our new Ambassador to the UK is already on his way to the Embassy and I think you will find him far more accommodating than his predecessor.”

“Couldn’t be any worse...” Pointer remarked.

“Please pass on a message to your National Administrator General, Ms Caverner” Almoglu then requested “Send her our sincerest apologies and condolences and ask that she please remain by the telephone as I expect her to receive a call of extreme interest sometime tomorrow afternoon once our new man is settled in.”

“I will” Hewitt confirmed “Good to see you, when things have calmed down, we should have a chat and compare notes.”

“I look forward to it” Almoglu readily agreed as they shook hands again “Take care old friend.”

“You too” Hewitt confirmed before, with a friendly wave, Almoglu turned and left, heading back towards the aircraft.

Megan came into the front living room of the apartment that she and Jack had moved into together a few months earlier to find him slumped, fast asleep in the armchair, head back and gently snoring.

“What a romantic picture that makes...” Megan remarked to herself with a smile.

Jack had been on the go for well over fourteen hours without a break that day and even with the severe discomfort of his injuries, he had managed to fall asleep, still in his battered and torn uniform almost the moment he had sat down.

The television was on, showing the BBC News Channel where the main story was still the explosions the previous day and the sad news that the death toll had now risen to nineteen after another critically injured member of the public had died in hospital that afternoon from their injuries.

Other news items concerned the resigned Mayor; including new revelations that heaped still more pressure on him after the news about his financial connections to the Ixion Brotherhood had been printed in the papers earlier that morning.

Megan decided to leave Jack as he was; he was hurting, tired and asleep and had more than earned the rest so she took the half drunk mug of now cold tea away before getting a blanket and carefully laying it over him.

She was about to return to the kitchen when there was a knock at the door, and she diverted to the front hallway to answer it.

Looking through the security spy hole in the door, Megan was somewhat surprised by who was standing outside and in response, she quickly opened the door.

“Evening Megan” Divisional Commander Appleby called “Sorry to disturb you.”

“No, no, it is quite all right” Megan apologetically confirmed “Come on in” she then urged.

“Thank you” Appleby responded as Megan took his coat and hung it up “Erm..” he awkwardly began “I was just passing, no actually I wasn’t but I was hoping to talk to you as it happens.”

“Me?” Megan responded with some confusion as she showed Appleby through to the kitchen where he noted Jack fast asleep in the living room as he passed the door and smiled.

“Yes” Appleby rather awkwardly confirmed as Megan offered coffee to which he nodded in thanks.

“If you want to speak to Jack then I am afraid he is out for the count” Megan confirmed as she poured Appleby his coffee and then handed it to him.

“Thanks” Appleby responded as he took the mug “Yes I saw just now” he then confirmed “Let him rest, he’s earned it.”

“So, what can I do for you Sir?” Megan then asked.

“Call me Jim” Appleby then requested before he began to explain, “It’s about this” he then produced a USB memory stick from his uniform tunic pocket and held it up.

“Or presumably what is on it?” Megan ventured.

“Well, yes” Appleby confirmed “This is the only copy of all the files relating to a little project I am working on” he then went on to explain “and what I need you to do for me if you would be so kind is to look after it for me, keep it secure and if anything untoward happens to me, see that Jack receives it, but not before.”

“Am I permitted to know what is on it?” Megan asked, more out of curiosity than anything else.

“It is probably best for all concerned if you didn’t” Appleby responded rather ominously “It is encrypted but if anything does happen to me, measures are in place to ensure Jack receives the information he needs to unlock it when the time is right” he confirmed as he carefully placed the memory stick in the palm of Megan’s left hand and folded her fingers closed over it.

“Okay” Megan agreed “I think I know the perfect hiding place.”

“Thank you” Appleby replied.

“You can trust me Sir” Megan confirmed as they were interrupted by the telephone ringing.

“I’ll let you get that” Appleby remarked as he finished his coffee “Thanks for this” he then indicated his now empty cup which as Megan left the kitchen, he kindly proceeded to rinse out in the sink before putting it to one side.

“Megan Thorpe” she answered the telephone.

Appleby’s attention was caught when he overheard Megan’s response to the message she was receiving.

“Really?” Megan responded, “All right, I’ll have to wake him up and tell him, goodbye.”

“Problem?” Appleby asked as he joined Megan in the hallway as she hung up the telephone.

“Some guy from the Anti-Terrorist Branch calling from Paddington Green, erm” she tried to recall the name “Adam Harling?”

“Harding, Divisional Commander Alan Harding, SO13” Appleby confirmed as he checked his watch “What on Earth does he want at this time of night?” he then asked.

“Apparently they have been interviewing or rather trying to interview that Reaper guy” Megan explained, still not really certain, “It seems he will speak to nobody except Jack.”

“Did someone mention my name?” Jack called as, yawning and stretching; he came through from the living room having only apparently just woken up.

“Oh, hello Sir” Jack then called as he was surprised to see his superior officer in his own front hallway “What brings you here.”

“I was just passing by and popped in to see how you were both coping” Appleby explained.

‘Ding, ding, ding...’ Jack remarked but this time only in his head to himself.

“I just got a phone call from a Divisional Commander Harding over at Paddington Green” Megan explained, “Apparently your old friend Reaper is refusing to talk to anyone except you” she informed him.

“Me?” Jack responded in utter surprise “I would have thought I would have been the last person he would want to see given our recent history.”

“Why don’t you freshen up, get a clean uniform on and I will run you down there?” Appleby suggested.

“Err yeah...” Jack agreed as he gingerly took off the battered remnants of his uniform tunic that Megan willing took off him for immediate disposal “Give me ten minutes” he confirmed before heading off to clean up and get changed.

“He will be all right, won’t he?” Megan asked Appleby with understandable concern.

“Of course he will” Appleby reassured her “He is a tough lad, many would have crumpled and folded under the pressure of what he has been under but not Jack and besides, Paddington Green is the toughest Nick in the whole of the country, designed to hold and process the worst of the worst which means he will definitely be all right.”

It was the first time since her husband’s death that Tracy had returned home to her apartment.

Turning the key in the lock and entering the hallway, she instinctively hung up her uniform tunic on the coat hook as she always did before looking across at the nearby chair where The Commander usually casually slung his own tunic when he got home.

Except of course this time he was not there, and the back of the chair remained empty.

“Yes” Tracy remarked to herself, “let’s put the kettle on.”

Going through to the kitchen, she filled and switched on the kettle before automatically reaching for two mugs from the cupboard.

It was as she was about to place the second mug, the one The Commander always used to use down on the counter that she realised her mistake.

“Oh, silly me...” Tracy quietly remarked to herself as she looked at the mug in her hand and for the first time since her husband’s death, the realisation really began to sink in.

It was then that her normally stoic and firm manner finally began to crumble, her lips trembled, and she collapsed to the kitchen floor, sobbing her eyes out uncontrollably, wailing and clenching her fists so tight as she rolled up into a ball that her fingernails impacted into her skin almost to the point of drawing blood.

Tracy had no idea how long she lay huddled within herself on the kitchen floor for, even after her tears had ceased, it was probably a good twenty minutes or so before she gradually got her composure again and got back on her feet.

“Tracy...” she remarked to her own reflection in the window in front of her “If anyone ever asks, that never happened.”

Still a bit sniffly, Tracy put The Commander’s mug away, back in the cupboard and put the kettle on again.

As she watched the steam start to percolate from the kettle’s spout, the doorbell rang.

“Arrgh, you couldn’t make it up!” Tracy wryly admitted before heading back into the hallway and looking through the spy hole in the door where she did a surprised double take before opening the door to reveal Sir Richard standing there.

“I thought I would come and see how you were my dear” Sir Richard explained “With everything that has happened in the last couple of days, it seems no one has actually asked how you personally are.”

“I think we have all been too busy focused on the task at hand” Tracy admitted “Do come in” she then stepped aside to allow him to enter.

“Thank you” Sir Richard responded before going through to the lounge.

“I’ve got the kettle on if you want tea?” Tracy then suggested.

“Sounds like a good idea” Sir Richard readily agreed.

A few moments later Tracy reappeared with a teapot and a couple of fine bone china cups and saucers on a tray.

“I thought considering you are our honoured guest I would use the good stuff” Tracy explained as she put the tray on the coffee table in front of them.

“Interesting” Sir Richard remarked, picking up on what Tracy had just said “You said ‘our’ and not ‘my’ just now.”

“My husband is still here in spirit; I can feel it” Tracy explained.

“So, have you had the mandatory good old cry yet?” Sir Richard asked as he proceeded to pour the tea.

“Erm...” Tracy reluctantly began.

“That will be a yes then...” Sir Richard then calmly concluded to which Tracy sheepishly nodded her head, “He was your husband; he was my Godson as well.”

“Do you know I had forgotten about that” Tracy admitted “Speaking of which, has my husband’s brother and sister been informed of what has happened yet?” she then asked.

“The UK Ambassador to New Zealand has contacted the New Zealand Navy to get a message through to his sister” Sir Richard confirmed “James is currently in Africa on secondment to MI6, I spoke to him not long after it happened, John Hewitt has already agreed to releasing him from his current assignment so that he can return home although he did have a little errand to run for me on the way back.”

“I am sure I don’t want to know anything about that...” Tracy knowingly remarked.

“Probably for the best” Sir Richard admitted.

“There is something I have been giving some very serious consideration to” Tracy then declared “About what happens when this is over, where I go from here.”

“Your permanent appointment as National Administrator General is merely a formality” Sir Richard confirmed “Just a case of the paperwork being rubber stamped by the United Nations Security Council and countersigned by the Prime Minister.”

“I am not sure I want it” Tracy then admitted “Well, not right now that is.”

“I see...” Sir Richard responded thoughtfully, “What did you have in mind if I may ask?”

“I was thinking that once this business is settled and when a new Metropolitan Division chief has been appointed, I could stand down and go on a sabbatical leave for a while” Tracy explained her provisional plan.

“Compassionate leave is certainly not beyond the realms of possibility” Sir Richard agreed “as long as no further major crises arise that your expertise would be needed to handle. How long were you thinking of taking extended leave for?” he then asked.

“A year, maybe two” Tracy confirmed “and possibly indefinitely if I can.”

“So, in effect” Sir Richard concluded “you would be resigning but retaining your rank and leaving the door open for you to return if, and presumably only if the circumstances were right.”

“I thought maybe I could move out of the city” Tracy continued “Find a nice little rural cottage somewhere, grow vegetables and fruit in the garden, keep my hand in helping out the local Security Service Division, something along those lines.”

“I have to admit that does rather sound quite idyllic” Sir Richard remarked “Almost wish I could join you, but I am a city boy, I could never leave London or stop doing what I do.”

“What exactly is it you do?” Tracy then asked out of curiosity “I mean, you always seem to be everywhere and into everything, like some sort of omnipresent spirit.”

“As I said to Her Majesty when she landed the Royal bread knife upon my shoulders many years ago, I am happy to serve my country to the best of my ability” Sir Richard confirmed without really revealing anything at all.

“Oh, I don’t know” Tracy then remarked after a pause during which Sir Richard poured them both some more tea “I’m not sure what I want really, my head is a mess of operations, procedures, facts, figures, demands and Christ knows what else” she admitted.

“A lot has happened in the last week” Sir Richard agreed “In fact it has been a pretty hectic few years if I am honest.”

“Then there is Jack to consider” Tracy added “If I leave, who will look after him?”

“I think you will find that the young man in question is more than capable of looking after himself” Sir Richard reassured her “He is a very tough, resourceful and dedicated officer and a gentleman of whom you should feel proud.”

“I am...” Tracy confirmed, managing a smile.

“And if it is of any reassurance to you in the coming months and years ahead” Sir Richard continued “I shall keep an eye on him, make sure he doesn’t get into any trouble that he cannot get out of.”

“Thank you” Tracy responded.

“So, have you told anyone else of your proposed plan?” Sir Richard then asked.

“You’re the first” Tracy confirmed.

“I’m honoured” Sir Richard replied, “May I be permitted to make a small suggestion?”

“Of course” Tracy prompted.

“Don’t make any firm decisions until after all this” he suggested.

“You mean after the funeral?” Tracy responded with a slightly despondent look.

“Well, yes” Sir Richard confirmed “Then when you have had time to consider carefully what you want to do, I would be happy to support and represent you when you have that little awkward conversation with the Prime Minister.”

“She isn’t going to like it is she?” Tracy asked.

“I reckon she probably won’t stop swearing for at least six months” Sir Richard wryly admitted before pausing for thought, “Actually, given how potty mouthed she can be, we may not actually notice any difference if I am honest.”

“Yeah, I can believe that!” Tracy mused in response.

“All I will say for now is take your time” Sir Richard then honestly advised, “Don’t rush into any rash or radical decisions just yet as we need you here and we would miss you.”

Tracy rolled her eyes upwards for a moment before taking a deep breath in and exhaling.

“All right” she then agreed “I’ll stay, but just for a while, no promises” she then reiterated.

“It’s a deal my dear” Sir Richard agreed.

Paddington Green Security Service Station in the west end of London, could never be described as an architectural gem of the city, it was at best functional with its brutalist 1960’s stark concrete structure which served a purpose and little more.

This is the place where over the years, the worst of the worst including terrorists, mass murderers and other perpetrators of serious crime have been brought to be interviewed, investigated, and secured.

That evening, the high security cells in the basement of the building had one particular high-profile prisoner, Adam Reaper.

For the last three hours, numerous attempts had been made by Divisional Commander Alan Harding and his team from section SO13, the Anti-Terrorist Squad to interview him but he remained solidly and defiantly silent.

It was only as the evening effectively became night that Reaper had finally said anything other than to confirm his name and it was what he had said that meant Jack had been asked to attend.

“Are you sure you want to do this?” Appleby asked as he parked the car outside the main entrance of Paddington Green and stopped the engine.

“Sure? No” Jack responded “Actually have to do this? Unfortunately, yes” he confirmed as he reluctantly opened the car door.

“I could come in with you if you want” Appleby then suggested “Give you some moral support?”

“Err, thanks Sir but I think this is one journey I will have to make alone” Jack admitted.

“All right” Appleby relented “but be careful” he then warned “Reaper may be locked up here but that doesn’t mean he is no longer a danger to you or indeed anyone else.”

“I’ll bear that in mind Sir, thanks” Jack agreed.

“Okay Lieutenant” Appleby called as he started the car again “Irrespective of what time of night it may be, call me if you need me, even if it is just for a chat” he advised.

“Will do Sir, thank you” Jack called before closing the car door and then watching his superior officer drive off into the night.

Turning smartly on his heels, Jack then proceeded up the short flight of steps and into the main reception area where he was met by Divisional Commander Harding.

“Oh, hello Jack” Harding called as he arrived and shook hands “Good of you to come.”

“I would say Sir that it is a pleasure to be here, but I would be lying” Jack admitted.

“I know how you feel, believe me” Harding readily agreed.

“How is he?” Jack asked, more out of curiosity than concern for Reaper’s welfare.

“That is the interesting bit” Harding responded, “When he first got here, we could not get a word out of him, it was as if his mind were not even in the room.”

“The K200 effect?” Jack tentatively suggested to which Harding nodded in agreement.

“It seems that green stuff old Lord Chaos cooks up has some interesting properties including the ability to influence the consumer of it on a sub conscious level and vastly enhance their key skills which in Mr Reaper’s case is the application of pain, torture and death” Harding then summarised.

“Interesting...” Jack commented.

“In order to maintain the influencing effect, according to the Porton Down boffins who have been analysing this stuff for the best part of a year now” Harding continued “it has to be constantly administered.”

“And for the last five hours or so he has been cooped up in here, effectively cold turkey” Jack concluded.

“Which would explain why he now seems a lot calmer and more willing to co-operate” Harding agreed, “Doesn’t explain why we didn’t see this change when he was originally arrested and imprisoned seven months ago though.”

“I expect the Ixion Brotherhood probably had someone on the inside keeping the supply going” Jack remarked “They seem to be everywhere.”

“So, are you ready?” Harding then asked.

“Before I go in there, I am going to need a few things” Jack requested as he and Harding proceeded through to the inner part of the building.

“Give me a list and I will see what I can do” Harding confirmed.

Reaper had been left alone in a high security interview room, the solitary light source illuminating him in a chair with a table in front of him. Apart from that, the room was bare and darkly inhospitable.

His highly trained and experience senses alerted him when he heard someone coming, a sense that proved correct when a few moments later, he heard a code being input into a keypad security lock outside whereupon the door was released and opened.

“Evening” Jack casually called as he entered the room carrying a box that he placed on the floor whereupon a custody suite officer followed him in with a chair that he put down around the opposite side of the table before he withdrew from the room.

The door closed, leaving Jack and Reaper alone in the room whilst a couple more lights came on, improving the lighting conditions considerably.

Watching the encounter via a number of CCTV camera feeds was Harding and his SO13 team.

“If Reaper so much as hints he is going to attack” Harding warned “I want that room flooded with armed bastards in the blink of an eye.”

“There you go” Jack then called as he reached into the box that he had brought with him and took out two mugs of freshly made coffee, one for himself and the other which he placed on the table in front of Reaper.

“Oh...” Reaper responded, somewhat taken aback as he picked up the mug and took a sip, “Erm, thanks.”

“I did say that I would make sure I got you a decent cup of coffee when you were arrested” Jack reminded him “and I never, if I can help it renege on my promises.”

“Oh, here...” Jack then took out a pack of cigarettes and offered one which Reaper, having put his coffee down again, gladly accepted.

Leaning forward, Reaper then lit the cigarette by way of the lighter that Jack proffered before he sat back and inhaled from it deeply.

“Been a while?” Jack wryly asked on seeing how much Reaper was enjoying the cigarette.

“Yeah...” Reaper agreed with a firm nod of the head, “One of the things about Lord Chaos’s K200 shit is that it has a very adverse effect if nicotine is also present in the bloodstream, kind of makes you go psychotic...”

“That explains a few things...” Jack remarked before remembering something else and reaching into the box again.

Reaper looked on with some curiosity and then understandable surprise as Jack produced an artificial limb which he passed over.

“Here, you may need this” Jack then advised.

“My leg?” Reaper asked, almost with a sense of shock.

“Yes” Jack confirmed, “A couple of bits had snapped but I managed to repair it” he then explained as Reaper reached down and reattached it to the stump of his upper leg, “I’ve always been quite handy with a screwdriver” he admitted.

“Thank you” Reaper responded, the words seemingly difficult to say as he was normally someone who never said thanks to anyone for anything.

“So, now that you have a leg to stand on as it were” Jack asked, “What shall we talk about and erm, if you do not mind me asking that is, why me?”

“Second question first” Reaper responded, “You are the only person who has defeated me, not once but twice” he explained “and I think, after all we have both been through, I am confident in saying you have my respect.”

“Blimey...” Jack replied, somewhat taken aback.

“We both chose in our own way to serve” Reaper continued between further sips of coffee “You as a Security Service officer and a damn good one from what I have seen whilst I initially chose to serve my country until I was shown a more attractive path that I, and I admit this freely, willingly took and allowed it to dominate my life for the thick end of twenty years.”

“Uh huh...” Jack responded.

“I freely admit to numerous counts of human rights breaches in Mobuto and elsewhere” Reaper then honestly admitted, “the training of individuals for The Hand, the Ixion Brotherhood and other radical groups across the world in military hardware, its acquisition, usage and deployment as well as the construction of numerous explosive devices for the purposes of terrorist acts.”

“That is a hell of a big admission” Jack commented.

“Furthermore, I freely admit to the murders of Ian Grantham, Robert Slade, Ian Moran and General Ford” Reaper continued.

“May I just clarify at this point that you still do not wish to have any legal representative present, solicitor, duty brief, etc?” Jack asked.

“There’s no point really, is there?” Reaper responded “I am looking at not ever seeing the outside world ever again other than for the sentencing hearing, aren’t I? The only way I am leaving prison is horizontally in a wooden box.”

“Quite probably” Jack agreed.

“The one charge I will deny is anything to do with the death of the National Administrator General, The Commander” Reaper then stated clearly and directly “The devices used in the three explosions were almost certainly built by me, I don’t deny that, but they were deployed by a third party not directly connected to either myself or the Ixion Brotherhood.”

“What about The Hand?” Jack ventured.

“They were a guiding light and I am happy to drop that asshole Colonel Olivier Torore into the meat grinder for being the lead and the trigger that killed The Commander” Reaper happily confirmed “and I can also confirm that the whole operation was overseen and directed by Emmanuel St. John Adebese via secure communications channels linked directly to his quarters in the Mobuto Embassy but there is another party involved, pushing the buttons in the background, deliberately manipulating events and people for an as yet unidentified purpose.”

“Interesting” Jack remarked “Does this mysterious third party have a name by any chance?”

“I have only ever heard one word in connection with them” Reaper responded, “but whoever they are, they are patient, this is all part of a much longer term goal that may be years away rather than days like the Ixion and Hand guys.”

“So, what is the word?” Jack asked.

“I am aware that this conversation is being monitored, watched and recorded but this is for your ear only young man” Reaper confirmed “I will whisper it to you if I may.”

Jack paused and thought for a moment before standing up, pushing his chair back and going around the table to Reaper who proceeded to lean forward and with hand cupped over his mouth, whispered a single short word in his ear.

“Hmmm...” Jack mused as he returned to his seat again before continuing, “Who else knows about this may I ask?”

“As far as I am aware, outside of a central group who you will never get even remotely near, two or maybe three others” Reaper explained “There was another, but he is dead now, he got too close.”

“I see” Jack responded, “And of the others?” he then asked.

“I believe that the journalist from The Chronicle, Moran may have stumbled across something connected to them which was why the kill order was issued on him which also served other purposes for the likes of the Ixion Brotherhood and The Hand” Reaper continued “Also it was feared from what I understand that The Commander knew as well, which was why his elimination was moved up the timetable considerably.”

“I would very much like to meet these people” Jack remarked.

“I wouldn’t” Reaper quickly replied “but I am willing to bet that one day, maybe not for a few years they will come calling and that is something I think you should be prepared for” he ominously warned.

“Message received and understood” Jack confirmed.

“There is one other matter” Reaper continued “One of my former unit, now the Soldiers of Ixion is on the payroll of this err, third party I think we shall continue to call them for now.”

“They are all being rounded up in the morning all being well” Jack confirmed.

“Well, be careful” Reaper warned “If my theory is correct, one of them will be far more resistant to be taken alive than the others and that one will be your man who planted the bomb specifically to kill The Commander.”

Twenty minutes later, Jack emerged from the interview room where Harding was waiting for him in the corridor.

“So, what was that all about?” Harding asked.

“A warning I think” Jack admitted “but we have his admission so locking him up for the rest of his life is now just a formality” he confirmed before preparing to leave.

“Oh, Jack?” Harding called after him as he was departing “What was the word he told you?” he then asked.

Jack turned slowly around to face Harding down the corridor and smiled meekly,

“If I told you, I would have to kill you Sir” Jack admitted “and I think we have had quite enough violence for now, don’t you think.”

At that moment Harding could do nothing else other than look on as Jack shrugged his shoulders, turned and left.

Being late November, the sun had barely even begun to rise over South London when Tracy strolled down the street towards an anonymous blue Ford Transit van parked in a side street near Selhurst Railway Station where she knocked discreetly on the rear door before opening it and climbing inside.

“Good morning Ma’am” Cassini called as she joined the Covert Surveillance Unit personnel inside the van where their attention was concentrated on live hidden camera feeds to a number of screens mounted down the inside wall of the vehicle.

“Morning all” Tracy responded, “Don’t mind me, just carry on.”

“Yes Ma’am” Cassini confirmed before reaching for a radio, “Iggy, you there?” he called to his Deputy who was in another similar vehicle parked a mile and a half up the road towards Thornton Heath.

“Receiving boss” came the response over the radio.

“Good grief, he speaks” Tracy remarked with some surprise.

“Only when he has had breakfast though” Cassini confirmed with a wry smile before returning to the radio, “Any sign of activity your end Iigs?” he then asked.

“Nothing boss” Iggy confirmed “They are still safely tucked up in their pits by the looks of it.”

“And the others?” Tracy then asked.

“All the same, I reckon if we move now, we should get the lot without too much bother” Cassini remarked.

“Suits me” Tracy agreed “The warrants have been signed, sealed and delivered so whenever you are ready, the floor is yours” she declared.

“All right ladies and gentlemen” Cassini then called over the radio “Game time!”

Upon his declaration, several units consisting of numerous plain clothed and uniformed Security Service officers secreted inside unmarked vehicles parked at several key locations across the southern half of Greater London began to ready themselves.

“Where are our guys?” Tracy then asked.

“Third floor of that rather nondescript brick-built block of flats over there” Cassini pointed out through the front windscreen of the van.

“Okay...” Tracy responded as she drew and checked her firearm before holstering it again.

“Are you joining us Ma’am?” Cassini asked.

“Try stopping me” Tracy confirmed.

“Wouldn’t even dare try Ma’am” Cassini responded with a wry smile.

“I am just along for the ride so as far as I am concerned, this is your show” Tracy then informed him, “Just tell me where you want me.”

“The plan is to knock on everyone’s door simultaneously so as soon as I have confirmation that everyone is in position, on my word we go in” Cassini explained “

“Sounds like a plan” Tracy agreed.

“All right ladies and gentlemen” Cassini then returned to his radio and announced, “Everyone to their positions please and then confirm when they are ready.”

“Guv” one of Cassini’s officers called as he passed his superior his MP7 semi-automatic firearm before they all discreetly got out of the van and initially proceeded across to some semi-derelict garages in the shadow of the target block of flats.

At the same time that Cassini was leading his team, including Tracy out to their planned position, the other teams across the southern half of Greater London were doing the same, moving silently and unseen down side streets, alleys, over back gardens, allotments and fences to reach their assigned initial target areas.

Cassini brought his group to a stop at the far end of the row of garages before he looked around the corner of the wall and up towards the target flat above and ahead of them.

Over his earpiece radio he then received confirmation from all the other units that they too were in position.

“Okay everyone, move to target doors” Cassini then ordered “Quiet as a mouse please ladies and gents, we don’t want to wake the neighbours, well not yet anyway.”

The sound of a train rattling through the nearby Selhurst Railway Station was helpful in masking Cassini and his group as, on his signal they headed out from their hiding place and across to the external stairs of the block of flats.

As silently as possible with Cassini leading and Tracy close behind, the group of six officers headed up the stairs and onto the external landing of the third floor.

“Second one from the end, blue door” Cassini whispered to which Tracy and the others nodded in understanding.

One of the officers then produced a red Enforcer type battering ram that he passed up to Cassini.

“Do you know how to use one of these things Ma’am?” Cassini then asked Tracy.

“Oh yes, I did the course” Tracy confirmed with a smile.

“In which case, would you like the honour?” Cassini offered the ram over which Tracy duly took and brandished, clearly relishing the chance to put it to use.

“Okay, let’s move into position” he then quietly called before they proceeded silently along the landing walkway and then set themselves up, three either side of the door.

“All units from Cassini, we are all set, confirm please” he quietly called.

Confirmations were quickly received from the other units that they too were ready to go in once the word is given.

“Right then” Cassini remarked, nodding to Tracy to get ready whereupon she braced herself and placed the head of the battering ram in front of the lock of the door, ready to strike.

“Go! Go! Go!” Cassini then called.

“Knock, knock!” Tracy remarked as she swung the battering ram back before bringing its full force down on the door lock which saw it break and splinter like matchwood.

One further strike from the ram saw the door give way fully and they rushed inside.

“ARMED POLICE, NOBODY MOVE!!” Cassini, Tracy and the other officers loudly called as they rushed through the flat.

“DO NOT MOVE!” came the call from the front living room where Cassini found two of the targets who had been asleep on the couch and armchair until their sudden rude awakening.

The rest of the flat was searched in a matter of seconds where initially at least, no one else was found.

“Don’t even think about it mate” Cassini warned one of the two men they had found who followed his colleague’s example and instantly surrendered, the intimidating sight of four firearms pointed up close at them being more than enough to persuade them to give up.

“All right Nigel, search them and cuff them” Cassini requested.

“Rest of the flat is clear” Tracy remarked as she and another officer joined the others in the front living room where the two detainees were being hauled to their feet to be taken away.

“Well, we got two of them” Cassini confirmed “These two characters were on our list, but I could have sworn there was supposed to be three in here.”

As the four other officers led the two prisoners out of the flat, a Security Service prisoner van arrived outside to take them into custody.

“I know we should be grateful for small mercies” Tracy remarked “but did that seem just a little too easy to you?” she asked.

“Yeah...” Cassini reluctantly admitted, “Perhaps another look around is in order” he then suggested.

“I agree” Tracy confirmed before she led the way through to the kitchen.

“Well, nobody could hide in here” Cassini remarked as they looked around the shabby and unkempt kitchen “unless they are the size of a can of beans that is.”

As they moved on through from the kitchen and back towards the two bedrooms of the flat, Tracy suddenly heard something creak ever so slightly.

Cassini heard it too; indeed, he temporarily muted his earpiece radio so that he could get a better fix on the possible source of the sound.

“Up there...” Tracy silently mouthed, pointing with her firearm towards the ceiling above and in front of them.

“Attic space I guess” Cassini very quietly responded.

Tracy indicated to Cassini to go through into the first bedroom whilst she took the second.

In the semi-darkness it was difficult to make out any real detail in what was a dingy and dark flat in broad daylight, never mind the darkness of a cold November morning.

Casting her gun around the room, concentrating on the upper half towards the ceiling, Tracy scanned all around the interior but could find nothing to indicate where, potentially a person could be hiding.

Suddenly there was the sound of an almighty crash and a shout from the other bedroom which caused Tracy to quickly run out, down the corridor and into the room to see Cassini trapped under the wreckage of the ceiling and a wardrobe that had just collapsed on top of him.

“Look out!” Cassini suddenly called whereupon Tracy quickly swung around and looked up to see a huge well-built man in his mid to late forties leap down from the roof space, through the hole in the ceiling and land perfectly on the bedroom floor.

Before Tracy realised what was really happening, the man had used a bit of timber to smack her over the head, sending her crashing to the ground and allowing him to escape.

“Cassini, are you all right?” Tracy asked as she felt the back of her head which fortunately was not too severely injured.

“I’ll be okay, that was Forrester, the bomb planter” Cassini confirmed as he tried to extract himself from the wreckage.

“I’m going after him” Tracy responded, “You call the cavalry.”

Grabbing her gun, Tracy swiftly left, heading out of the flat and onto the external walkway where she looked all around to see if there was any sign of Forrester.

“Gotcha!” she then called to herself as she spotted him appear from the bottom of the stairs and then run off in the direction of the nearby main London to Brighton railway line.

Her feet were almost a blur as Tracy ran down the stairs and then out onto open ground, crossing the grass and then through the garages area where she could see in the light of the streetlamps Forrester running in the shadows some distance ahead.

“Angel One to any units in the vicinity of Selhurst Railway Station” Tracy called urgently into her radio as she continued to pursue, “I am in pursuit on foot of a well-built tall IC1 male in a green T-shirt, jeans, currently on Dagnall Park Road, heading south” she declared, “Suspect is believed to be armed and extremely dangerous.”

A couple of miles further south in the local Security & Police Service Station in Croydon, the Area Control Room picked up Tracy’s call.

“Bloody hell, that is the Administrator General!” the Duty Control Room Supervisor called with astonishment before spinning around in his chair and consulting the area map on the wall.

“Suspect has now turned left, left, left into Edith Road” Tracy was then heard to call, the message being broadcast loud and clear over the speakers in the Control Room.

“Mike” the Duty Control Room Supervisor then called, “get everything we have got in the area over there right now, Code One” he urged “and you had better call the Transport Division guys as well, the suspect is heading right towards the main line station.”

“Yes Sir” Mike confirmed.

“Angel One from Zulu Delta Control” the Duty Control Room Supervisor then called over the radio “Message received and understood Ma’am, backup is on the way.”

“Now where the hell have you gone?” Tracy asked herself as she stood in the middle of Edith Road where it turns fairly sharply round to the right to follow the back side of Selhurst Station.

Suddenly her attention was drawn by a clattering of masonry falling nearby whereupon Tracy looked up and saw Forrester clambering up a wall a short distance ahead.

“Oh no you don’t!” Tracy then determinedly called as she resumed her pursuit, reaching the wall just as Forrester’s feet disappeared over the top of it.

She was forced to holster her firearm in order to free up her hands and then climb up after him, the old crumbling Victorian era brickwork meaning that there were plenty of hand and foot holds which allowed her to climb up with relative ease.

Clambering over the wall to the other side, Tracy looked down at the platform surface of the lesser used London bound fast lines platform of Selhurst Station itself and then carefully lowered herself down.

No sooner had her feet touched the ground however than she was forced to rapidly duck behind the brick structure that housed the subway entrance as automatic gunfire rang out from somewhere further down the platform, bullets ricocheting off various surfaces.

“Ah hell...” Tracy remarked as she grabbed her radio once again as a fast Gatwick Express train came flying through the station only feet away.

“Angel One to any units” she then called as she resumed her pursuit down the platform upon seeing that Forrester had used the cover of the train passing to head down into the station subway, “Suspect confirmed armed and dangerous, shots fired, currently in Selhurst Station, and continuing pursuit” she then confirmed.

Down in the subway, the fast line platforms were normally shut off from the rest of the station by a gate as they usually saw little if any use during normal running.

The locked gate halfway along the subway that runs beneath the platforms and tracks proved no problem for Forrester as, just as Tracy reached the bottom of the steps from Platform Four, he used his automatic weapon to shoot the lock to pieces and then kick the gate open.

The sound of the gunfire echoed loudly throughout the station and the small number of people around on that cold early Saturday morning screamed, panicked, and ran from the scene as quickly as they could as Forrester, waving his gun around menacingly came through to the main entrance hall and in one leap, vaulted over the ticket barriers.

Moments later Tracy appeared by which time, the ticket barriers had been opened by the attendant using the emergency button which meant that she thankfully did not need to go to such athletic excess to get out.

Outside the station, Forrester stopped in the middle of the road on the Zebra type pedestrian crossing and looked in both directions to see distant Security Service vehicles approaching at high speed, blue lights and sirens in full cry and converging on his location.

“Hold it right there!” Tracy called loudly, gun aimed directly at Forrester who reacted simply with a volley of shots in her general direction, forcing her to jump clear whereupon bullets struck the front of the station building, shattering several windows and lights.

With options for escape becoming limited, Forrester headed to the opposite side of the road and in through a large gateway that led to the Selhurst Train Maintenance Depot where he did not hesitate to open fire on the security office situated next to the main gate before forcing his way through onto the huge site.

“Oi!!” Tracy called as she rounded the corner just in time to see Forrester head through the gates, but it did not deter him, he merely kept running up the access road that leads to the main repair sheds on the vast depot site.

“Are you all right?” Tracy asked the site security guard as she reached the gate.

“I’ll live” the shaken but fortunately unhurt security guard confirmed with a hesitant thumbs up.

“Get onto the Depot Supervisor and get the traction current turned off” Tracy then instructed before heading through the gate herself, continuing the pursuit.

Some miles away, Jack was at home, just finishing his first coffee of the morning when his mobile rang.

“Hello?” Jack answered.

“Jack? It’s Connor” Shelby called, his voice being accompanied by the distinctive background sound of sirens and a car being driven at high speed “Are you at home?” he then asked.

“Yes, I am mate” Jack confirmed “What’s going on?”

“No time to explain” Shelby responded, “Get your uniform on, I will meet you outside your drum in about thirty seconds.”

“Erm, okay...” Jack replied but by then Shelby had already terminated the call and the siren of his car approaching could be heard outside getting ever closer already.

“What’s occurring love?” Megan sleepily asked as she joined Jack in the hallway moments later as he was putting on his uniform tunic whereupon she helped fasten the buttons down the front for him.

“Something happening apparently” Jack confirmed, as equally in the dark as she was, “I guess railway related though which puts it in my jurisdiction although quite why I am being summoned in a hurry, I have no idea” he admitted.

“All right, stay safe” Megan strongly advised.

“I will love’ Jack confirmed before they kissed and then he headed out of the door just as Shelby arrived in a brand new, fully marked Transport Division patrol car and screeched to a halt immediately outside.

“Morning...” Jack remarked as Shelby got out of the car “Hang on, is that my new motor?” he then asked.

“Yes, it is” Shelby duly confirmed, tossing Jack the keys whereupon they both got in.

“Right” Jack responded, catching the keys, and immediately getting in the driver’s seat, “So, where are we going?” he then asked.

“Emergency situation at Selhurst” Shelby explained as Jack started the car and proceeded to drive off at high speed whilst Megan watched them depart, “Armed suspect escaped from an early morning door knocking job and the last report we got was that he was randomly shooting stuff whilst making good his escape with an officer in pursuit.”

“One of our guys?” Jack asked with understandable concern.

“Err, not exactly...” Shelby hesitantly responded.

“Where the hell are you?” Tracy asked herself as she surveyed the vast swathe of rolling stock sidings to the south side of Selhurst Depot where, with the sun rising, everything was bathed in an ethereal orangey pink glow.

The sound of a train’s depot whistle caught her attention as a ten-coach train of Southern operated Class 377 passenger multiple unit stock approached at less than fifteen miles an hour whilst shunting within the confines of the Depot.

Tracy wisely stepped back and acknowledged the driver’s whistle before deciding to head off down from where the train had just pulled out of and look for Forrester down there.

Her hunch soon proved correct when she caught a glimpse of movement in among some shrubs and line side vegetation just ahead and then instinctively ducked down against an adjacent stabled train when she heard a click just before another volley of automatic gunfire rang out.

“Arrgh!” Tracy cried out in pain and shock as, although she was not directly hit, one of the shots ricocheted off the stone ballast of the track bed and struck the side of her right leg, leaving a hole in her trouser leg and some bleeding but fortunately, nothing worse.

“Ha, ha!!” came a cry from a manic voice, Forrester goading her from his hiding place.

“Oh, now I am pissed...” Tracy responded with grim determination as she managed to haul herself back onto her feet where she discovered that, thankfully her injuries were not as serious had she had initially feared and at least she could still walk.

Forrester looked on with some disappointment as he could see Tracy was still very much in pursuit and decided to move on quickly so that by the time a few moments later she had reached the point where he had been hiding and brought her firearm to bear on the location, he was gone.

“Dammit!” Tracy exclaimed as she looked around once again and realised that both her and her quarry were now getting dangerously close to the main running lines that take some of the busiest commuter trains in the country between East Croydon and London Bridge.

Back at the Depot main entrance there was a scene of confusion and chaos as a considerable number of Security Service vehicles were now gathered both in the main Selhurst Road and also the wide gateway of the Depot itself.

A paramedic crew were attending to the site security guard who, although physically unhurt, was understandably shocked at having been indiscriminately fired upon.

Jack drove his patrol car with sirens and lights in full cry at high speed down the Selhurst Road before turning into the gateway and getting out.

“Morning all” Jack called as he got out of the car “What’s the S.P. then?” he asked.

“We just got a radio call from a driver saying she just saw two people, one of them a female uniformed Security Service officer, the other a well-built male in a green t-shirt heading across towards the Field Sidings, shooting at each other” an officer confirmed.

“The Field Sidings, they are over on the south side, aren’t they?” Jack sought clarification.

“Yeah” the Depot Supervisor confirmed as he joined the discussion.

“Right, get all train movements within Depot Limits stopped right away” Jack instructed to understanding nods from the Depot Supervisor “and get all your people, train crew, engineers, the lot, out of the way until we give you the all clear.”

“You got it” the Depot Supervisor readily agreed as he picked up his radio.

“Best get the power turned off as well” Shelby added.

“A very good idea” Jack agreed “The last thing we need right now is someone ruining our day by getting seven hundred and fifty volts of live direct current up their backside!”

“Officer!” the Depot Supervisor came back to them a moment later “They are definitely over by the field sidings” he confirmed.

“Right, we’ll head over there and try and cut the gunman off from the south side” Jack suggested.

At that point further Transport Division officers arrived on the scene.

“Ah, reinforcements” Shelby thankfully remarked.

“Okay” Jack responded before turning to this fellow Transport Division officers who had just arrived “Morning everyone” he then called, “Can you secure the Depot, make sure nobody escapes by doubling back and for God’s sake be careful, this guy is armed. We also have one officer on the scene, the light is poor, and she is probably not wearing any high-vis vest so watch out,”

“No problem” one of the Transport Division officers confirmed before they deployed through the main Depot gate and onto the site.

“Where are we going?” Shelby asked as Jack returned to the car and he quickly followed.

“If we are quick, we can get around to the other side and maybe cut this guy off before he either shoots someone, something or gets himself electrocuted” Jack explained as he looked back over his shoulder and swiftly reversed the car back out into the street before heading off in a south westerly direction, beneath the main railway line.

“I hope you are right” Shelby remarked as Jack drove as fast as he could, lights and sirens in full cry and traffic moving very swiftly out of the way to allow the car to pass safely without delay.

“Just out of interest” Jack then asked as he navigated his way towards his intended destination “Who is running around on my railway this fine morning?”

“The suspect is believed to be a man called Daniel Forrester” Shelby explained “He escaped from a raid conducted at about six this morning on a flat believed to be containing three members of a group possibly connected to your old friend Reaper.”

“Ah...” Jack responded in realisation, “and the officer in pursuit?” he almost was afraid to ask as he sensed he already knew the answer.

“The National Administrator General, your mother” Shelby answered with understandable reluctance.

“Why am I not surprised?” Jack responded.

“Extensive experience?” Shelby suggested.

“Probably” Jack agreed, “Probably...”

It did not take long before Jack found the side road he was looking for and, with a perfect handbrake turn, swung sharply to the left into the feeder road that led into a rather uninspiring looking industrial estate of 1980's style sheet metal buildings housing various small and medium sized businesses.

"Have you got your keys on you?" Jack asked as he accelerated towards the far end of the narrow road before screeching to a halt in front of a slightly battered looking wire mesh gate.

"Here you go" Shelby confirmed as he passed over a set of keys before Jack got out and proceeded to unlock the industry standard railway padlock and throw open the gates.

"Thanks" Jack responded as he returned to the car and handed the keys back before driving on through the gate and onto a rough dirt track that snakes around and beneath the myriad of diverging and converging railway lines in the area to the north of East Croydon.

"Oh hell!" Shelby remarked as the car bounced up and down on some of the potholes and ruts in the road.

"It's a tad bumpy" Jack admitted as he skilfully drove over the rough dirt track before bringing the car to a stop in the middle of what seemed to be a wild wilderness of vegetation, weeds and old railway workings debris in the area in amidst the various railway lines, effectively cut off from the outside world.

"All right, here we are" Jack confirmed as he and Shelby both got out of the car and looked all around.

"Can you see anything?" Shelby asked as they both looked all around the vast area which was crossed by numerous different railway lines with a number of trains in the area slowly snaking their way through.

"No" Jack admitted "but standing here in these regulation high visibility vests and with a fully marked up cop car, I can safely say everyone else for miles around can see us."

"What about up there?" Shelby indicated up a weed strewn slope towards one of the railway lines.

"Worth a try" Jack agreed as they proceeded to clamber up the embankment only for something to make them stop suddenly.

"Was that what I thought it was?" Shelby cautiously asked as he instinctively drew his firearm from its holster and checked it.

"Yeah..." Jack confirmed "A gunshot, from somewhere over that way I think" he indicated over towards the east side of the area.

“Look!” Shelby then called out, pointing directly ahead where in the distance, a man wearing a green t-shirt could be seen running along the lines in a southerly direction.

“Oh hell, they are on the running lines” Jack responded and immediately looked around before making his way to a signal a couple of metres away.

They were too far away to do anything except raise the alarm which Jack duly did using the Signal Post Telephone located in front of the signal.

As soon as he opened the small grey box containing the telephone and picked up the handset, his call was automatically answered.

“Three Bridges Panel 1b” came the formal response.

“This is an emergency call” Jack called “Am I speaking to the Signaller? Over.”

“This is the Signaller” the confirmation came, “go ahead with your call, over.”

“My name is Lieutenant Jack Regent, Transport Division, National Security and Police Service, badge number Lima Tango Nine Nine Three” he confirmed “I am calling from the signal post telephone located at signal number Tango Eight Six on the Up Victoria Slow Line.”

Shelby continued to watch as Forrester ran on down the tracks and then noticed that Tracy was still in pursuit some distance behind whilst Jack continued the emergency call.

“We have an armed suspect loose heading south west adjacent to the....” Jack paused and looked towards Shelby.

...Down London Bridge Slow” he confirmed.

“...Down London Bridge Slow Line” Jack then continued “with a uniformed officer in pursuit. I require an emergency switch off and all lines blocked between Selhurst, East Croydon, West Croydon and Norwood Junction, over.”

Another couple of gunshots echoed across the area as Tracy could be seen to pause her pursuit, take aim and fire at Forrester but missed as he continued, offering a couple of casual shots from a handgun he also had with him generally in her direction.

“This is getting bloody dangerous!” Shelby remarked as Jack finished his emergency call and replaced the handset back in its cradle.

“You can say that again” Jack readily agreed “Come on, there is no way we are going to get across over there even with the trains stopped” he then headed back to the car with Shelby close behind.

Tracy was still bleeding from her right leg where the shot had grazed her earlier in the pursuit, but a combination of adrenalin and determination was spurring her on as she attempted to keep Forrester in her sights only to suddenly trip and fall over a section of old abandoned rail that was hidden in the undergrowth alongside the line.

The fall was not serious, and she quickly recovered but in doing so, failed to notice that when she tumbled, she lost her spare ammunition clips and damaged her radio.

It was as she continued to pursue Forrester that she noticed that all the trains in the area at what should have been a busy time of the morning, had stopped and all the signals in the area were now showing red aspects indicating that someone had sensibly called in a blockage of the lines, something which in the heat of the moment had never occurred to her.

“Ah, there you are” Tracy remarked as she saw the bright green t-shirt of Forrester some distance ahead, passing beneath a bridge and approaching the north end of the platforms of East Croydon Station.

“Angel One to all units in the vicinity of East Croydon” Tracy then called into her radio but then realised that it had been damaged and was now useless.

Forrester offered some more shots in her direction that struck the running rails a few metres away but were otherwise harmless.

“It’s just like being an ordinary beat copper again” Tracy remarked to herself as she picked up her pace, carefully crossing the numerous interwoven lines over towards the opposite side and, despite being relatively confident that the power was now switched off, still avoiding touching the normally live third rail.

Forrester by contrast was randomly jumping across tracks and line side equipment with no regards for safety or even basic common sense, just desperation to get to the large station in the distance with its six platforms divided between three islands, all connected by an extensive footbridge at the London end and the main station building at the far end.

As soon as he reached the end platform ramp of platform’s one and two, the first thing Forrester did was show his intentions, opening fire in the air which caused a panic among the passengers on the platform who in response, fled quickly.

Not far away in his patrol car, Jack was driving quickly through the centre of Croydon, swerving around one of the green and white Croydon Trams and then heading up George Street towards the station in the distance.

“All units from Zulu Delta Control” came a general call over the radio in the car “Be aware, reports received of gunfire at the north end of East Croydon Station.”

“Exactly what I was afraid of” Jack confirmed.

On the station platforms, people ran from the scene using every exit available as Tracy reached the platform ramp and continued her pursuit, now made much easier by being on a proper flat surface.

Forrester tried to board the train that was sitting in platform one without success as the doors were locked, its driver taking the sensible precaution when he saw what was happening, to lock the carriages and prevent the gunman from escaping by train.

That mistake by Forrester allowed Tracy to catch up and she was now just a short distance away, gun aimed squarely in front of her at the target.

Unfortunately, Forrester saw her coming and made off, his passage being made easier as many of those who had been on the platform moments earlier had now managed to escape.

He managed to make it to the wide ramp at the far end of platform's one and two when Tracy finally got him in her sights.

"Hold it right there!" Tracy demanded in her determined voice that was usually feared and respected by all "Drop your weapons, put your hands on your head and turn around!" she ordered.

"Oh, I don't think so..." Forrester responded with a distinctly evil tone as he turned around, still fully armed with a semi-automatic pistol brandished in one hand and the automatic firearm in the other.

"Last chance..." Tracy warned once again.

Forrester just laughed, more so when he looked down the ramp at Tracy standing there which was when he noticed the blood soaking through her right trouser leg and trickling down onto her boot and now onto the brick surface of the platform.

"The Revolution is coming" Forrester then declared "and you are not invited."

"Fine by me" Tracy remarked as she opened fire with a single shot but, as her blood loss was now starting to affect her, she missed and the gun barrel slide set back, indicating she was now out of ammunition, this being the moment that she also realised her replacement clips, even if she could have loaded one in time which was doubtful, were also missing.

"Oh dear..." Forrester responded unsympathetically as he took aim, Tracy responding to what she seemed as the inevitable by standing up straight and tossing her empty gun away.

"Go on then..." Tracy called.

At that moment Forrester appeared to shoot as gunshots rang out ominously throughout the station and then a silence descended.

Tracy had closed her eyes, accepting her fate, but it was not to be.

Instead, Forrester collapsed to the ground and then rolled down the ramp revealing Jack standing behind him, a gentle wisp of smoke coming from the barrel of his six-shot revolver where he had just shot Forrester three times.

Opening her eyes again, Tracy initially looked on confused but then glanced down at Forrester's body lying at the bottom of the pedestrian ramp just in front of her before then turning to see Jack approaching, still with his gun trained on the body just in case he was still alive.

"Nice of you to drop by Jack" Tracy remarked "I thought I was a goner then" she then admitted as Jack kicked the weapons clear of Forrester's body just as the station began to fill with many more officers.

"Yeah, so did I for a moment" Jack agreed, "I would have shouted a warning first before opening fire, but I figured there wasn't time."

"Ah well, it's done now" Tracy confirmed before looking down again "Welcome to the revolution..." she then teased towards Forrester as she stepped over his body before taking her weapon back as it was passed to her by Jack and then heading up the pedestrian ramp towards the main station building.

Jack watched Tracy as she headed up the ramp, a noticeable limp on her right leg before turning back to Forrester's body and kneeling down.

"Is that our man?" Shelby asked as he joined him.

"That's him" Jack confirmed "Do me a favour will you mate" he then asked, "Make sure the Administrator General gets seen by a paramedic before she leaves, I know how stubborn she can be."

"Yeah, no problem" Shelby confirmed before departing, leaving Jack with the body.

"Right, let's have a look at you my friend" Jack then remarked as he proceeded to put on a pair of latex gloves before carefully examining the deceased, taking out his possessions and laying them down carefully on the ground.

"Having fun are we Lieutenant?" Divisional Commander Appleby called as he arrived on the scene.

"Oh, yes Sir" Jack responded somewhat sarcastically "It's been a laugh a minute."

"Who's the stiff? Appleby then asked, nodding towards the body which was still bleeding all over the platform surface.

"One Daniel Forrester" Jack confirmed which made Appleby look on with a little realisation as he clearly recognised the name but said nothing, "One of Colonel Reaper's rogue unit, apparently he took exception to being raided this morning hence why he did a runner and how he came to wind up here."

“I look forward to reading your report” Appleby remarked.

“Rest assured Sir, it will make for riveting reading” Jack confirmed.

“Right then” Appleby slightly hesitantly responded “I’ll erm, just go and check the station is clear and sealed off whilst you carry on.”

“Yes Sir” Jack confirmed, not giving anything away that he had twigged that his superior officer was acting a little out of character and trying his best to hide it.

Jack watched Appleby head off back up the pedestrian ramp towards the main station building.

“What the hell is going on boss?” Jack quietly remarked to himself before looking back down at the body, “I bet you know, don’t you?” he then asked the deceased “Trouble is, dead men can’t tell tales.”

Jack continued his search of the pockets when he found something of notable interest which caused him to do a little double take.

“Then again, maybe they can...” Jack commented with a concentrated interest.

“Can what?” Shelby asked making Jack almost jump out of his skin.

“Eh?” Jack responded, looking up.

“You were saying something about dead men telling tales I think” Shelby explained.

“Oh, that” Jack responded, “I was just saying to my very expired friend here that it is normally accepted that dead men don’t tell tales, however, looking through his effects, maybe he has something to tell me after all.”

“Such as?” Shelby asked, still none the wiser.

“I don’t know yet” Jack honestly admitted as he stood back up, “Bag please” he then requested to which Shelby found a plastic evidence bag in his uniform tunic pocket.

“There you go” Shelby responded as he opened it and held it for Jack to then drop the items that he had recovered from the body into it.

“Thanks” Jack called as he then took the bag and sealed it.

“What about his guns?” Shelby then motioned towards the two firearms still lying on the platform surface nearby.

“Ah yes, the deceased individual’s tools of the trade” Jack remarked as he took out a handkerchief and then stooped down to pick the weapons up, placing each one in its own clear plastic evidence bag that Shelby produced for him.

“Hmm, I don’t know much about guns, but these look pretty snazzy” Shelby remarked as looked through the clear plastic of the evidence bags at the firearms inside.

“Probably standard military issue like the rest of Reaper’s unit’s kit I expect” Jack confirmed, “I’ll run them past the firearms guys later; I have seen enough guns for one day.”

“Yeah, I know how you feel” Shelby admitted.

“Oh, what is the S.P. on the Administrator General?” Jack then asked as they both headed back up the pedestrian ramp.

“Paramedic crew managed to persuade her to at least let them patch her up and she is on her way back to New Scotland Yard where she has promised to go straight to the Medical Centre on arrival” Shelby confirmed as they reached the top of the ramp and headed towards the main row of ticket barriers.

“Dave!” Jack then called to one of the high visibility dressed Network Rail supervisors who were now on the scene.

“Lieutenant” Dave the Mobile Operations Manager responded, “I should have known this was one of your efforts.”

“Yeah, you can usually see where he has been” Shelby cheekily remarked.

“We will have to keep platform’s one and two sealed off until our guys have scraped the deceased off the floor and cleaned up the mess but apart from that, you can have your train set back again” Jack confirmed.

“That is very kind of you” Dave replied with a smile “Of course the morning peak is ruined you know.”

“Nothing new around here” Jack honestly responded.

“You are probably right” Dave agreed.

“Right then, it’s all yours” Jack then confirmed whereupon Dave and his team headed off to see about the reopening of the railway and attempt to return the system to some sort of normality.

“Where to?” Shelby then asked.

“Back to the office I guess” Jack admitted “but on the way we need to find something with utmost urgency.”

“Answers?” Shelby ventured as they headed out of the main station entrance and back to the patrol car parked outside among numerous other emergency service vehicles on the scene.

“No, breakfast...”

Tracy had relented and as promised, proceeded directly to the Medical Centre on the third floor as soon as she had arrived back at New Scotland Yard.

The fact she was intercepted by Sir Richard at the front entrance, and he had all but forced her to go was the final push she needed to see sense and seek proper medical attention.

“Ah, Administrator General” the Security Service Duty Medical Examiner called as Tracy entered the Medical Centre examination suite, “Have a lie down on there and let us get you fixed up.”

“I am sure I am all right Doctor Colson” Tracy responded as she eased herself onto the medical table whilst Sir Richard looked on with understandable concern.

“Oh, I wasn’t aware you had medical qualifications Administrator General” Doctor Colson remarked as she put on a pair of blue rubber gloves.

“Ha, ha...” Tracy sarcastically responded.

“Let’s have a look at that ankle” Doctor Colson then motioned towards Tracy’s right leg, the torn and blood-soaked trouser leg plain to see.

Tracy winced a little as the Doctor carefully cut away the material of her trouser leg and exposed the wound which was in a terrible mess with a lot of dirt and debris having become stuck to it amid the coagulated blood.

“Eurgh...” Sir Richard remarked.

“I’ve had worse” Tracy reminded him as the Doctor began to clean and treat the wound.

“Well, yes I know” Sir Richard admitted “but even still, it looks nasty.”

“May I ask Administrator General, when was the last time you had a tetanus shot?” the Doctor inquired.

“Oh, God knows” Tracy admitted.

“Best give you a booster then when we are done” the Doctor then advised to a slightly dejected look from Tracy “All that clambering around railway embankments, you could have picked up any kinds of nasties which could cause an infection.”

“Does that mean a needle?” Tracy hesitantly asked.

“I am afraid so” the Doctor confirmed as she began to bandage the wound.

“Just as you think things couldn’t possibly get any worse” Tracy wondered to herself.

“All right Administrator General” the Doctor then confirmed as she finished off the bandaging “It’s done but you must keep it clean and dry for at least a couple of days” she then warned.

“Got it” Tracy agreed.

“Really I should be suggesting you take some time off but as my grandmother used to say, I would probably be wasting my breath on the desert air” the Doctor remarked,

“Your grandmother was very wise” Tracy complimented.

“Right, let’s get that tetanus shot done” the Doctor then confirmed as she went over to the large medicine cabinet on the far wall and prepared the injection.

“Oh, I can’t look...” Sir Richard then turned away at the sight of the needle approaching.

“Don’t tell me, you of all people are afraid of needles?” Tracy then asked with amazement.

“Long story...” Sir Richard sheepishly admitted, “Your husband was not exactly a fan either if I recall.”

“Oh yes” Tracy recalled as the Doctor administered the shot in her arm “There was a time back in Haychester when he had his annual medical which for him usually took place on average every six years as he was very good at accidentally missing them, the Doctor took a blood sample from him, and he absolutely screamed the place down.”

“Yeah, that sounds like him” Sir Richard remarked with a smile.

“Half a dozen armed officers kicked the Medical Room door in thinking from the noise that someone was getting stabbed!” Tracy recollected which made her smile properly for the first time in days.

“You know what, I can believe that” the Doctor remarked as she finished up, “Okay Administrator General, you are good to go” she then declared.

“Thanks Doc” Tracy responded as she pulled her sleeve back down and refastened the cuff buttons.

“Anytime” the Doctor confirmed.

Sir Richard followed Tracy out into the corridor and towards the lifts where he instantly noticed something.

“You are still limping” he pointed out as they reached the lifts, and he pressed the call button.

“I think, given recent events that a bit of a limp is the least of my worries, don’t you?” Tracy honestly remarked as the lift doors opened and they entered.

“I see your point” Sir Richard conceded as the lift began its ascent to the top floor.

A minute later they were heading for the Special Operations Control Room.

“Well, you can cross off another bad guy!” Tracy semi-cheerfully announced as she came into the Room and hung her blood-spattered uniform tunic over the back of a chair before sitting down.

“That the East Croydon guy?” Fuller asked as he looked up from his computer workstation.

“Indeed” Tracy confirmed, “one Daniel Forrester, Reaper’s right-hand man supposedly.”

“In which case I will tick him off the list” Fuller happily responded whereupon on the main screen a moment later a big red X appeared across Forrester’s profile among the identified members of Reaper’s old army unit.

“The ones in blue” Sir Richard asked as he studied the details on the main screen “Are they the ones we have managed to round up in this morning’s raids?”

“That’s them Sir” Fuller happily confirmed, “most of them were taken by surprise when we knocked on their doors this morning, a few tried to escape, the only really troublesome one was your man Forrester.”

“Don’t remind me...” Tracy responded, “If it weren’t for Jack and his advanced driving skills, I would have been done for” she honestly admitted.

“Where is he by the way?” Fuller then asked, “Divisional Commander Appleby has been looking for him.”

“I left him at East Croydon clearing up the mess” Tracy confirmed, “He has probably stopped off for breakfast I expect” she remarked.

“Full English and be generous with the bacon please” Jack called to the lady behind the counter of the Selhurst Station Cafe immediately adjacent to the railway station of the same name where normality had been restored following the events of earlier that morning.

“Ah hell, I’ll have the same” Shelby then added.

“I thought you were on some sort of healthy food plan?” Jack remarked as he got his wallet out.

“I am, but after the last couple of weeks I seem to be slipping” Shelby admitted.

“Here, I got this” Jack then insisted, paying for both of their breakfasts.

“Take a seat guys, it will just be a couple of minutes” the lady serving them confirmed as she handed Jack his change and two big mugs of freshly made tea.

“Thanks” Jack responded before he and Shelby found a vacant table near the window which looks out onto the main road outside with the train care depot directly opposite.

“All right my young friend, what’s going on?” Shelby asked.

“You think something is going on?” Jack suggestively responded.

“You forget, I am on a retainer from Sir Richard Crowthorne” Shelby reminded him, “we have not returned to the office, there was your strange reaction to whatever it was you found in Forrester’s pockets and to top it all, you have blown the moths out of your wallet and sprung for breakfast.”

“That was the big giveaway I take it?” Jack mockingly remarked.

“Well, it is unusual it must be said” Shelby confirmed as the waitress delivered their huge breakfasts.

“Here you go guys” the Waitress confirmed as she passed them their breakfasts, “If you want any more tea just shout and it will be on the house.”

“Thanks” both Jack and Shelby responded before the Waitress left them alone.

“Dig in” Jack then prompted “and whilst we enjoy this magnificent feast, let me tell you a story...”

“Oh, I am all ears” Shelby confirmed as he duly got stuck into his breakfast whilst Jack did the same.

“Let me start this tale with a question for you” Jack then continued, “Do you think Divisional Commander Appleby is up to something?”

“What do you mean?” Shelby sought clarification.

“Acting strangely, seeming a bit distant or distracted” Jack explained.

“Well, maybe” Shelby replied, “but then again, we have all been through the proverbial mill this last couple of weeks, some more than others.”

“True” Jack agreed “but Appleby is different. Take this morning for example, as soon as he heard Forrester’s name and saw the items, I had in the evidence bags, he suddenly started to sound a bit awkward and promptly scarpered off like a scalded rabbit.”

“Actually, now you come to mention it, considering that there had been a major firearms incident at a main railway station, it did seem a bit odd that he just went away and left us front line officers to get on with it” Shelby admitted.

“There’s more” Jack then continued “I think our Chief has some sort of personal little side-line or project on the go, strictly on the QT of course.”

“Business or pleasure?” Shelby asked.

“Business I reckon” Jack remarked, “Okay, it is not unusual for senior officers of the Security Service to go off script and do a little personal investigating off the books, hell even I have done it on occasion but you and I both know him and whatever it is, it has got him rattled which is completely out of character.”

“All right” Shelby responded thoughtfully “Let us suppose your suspicions are correct and that Divisional Commander Appleby is, as you put it ‘up to something’, what is your evidence?” he then asked.

“Hunches, theories, wild imaginations and a number of unexplained odd occurrences” Jack confirmed.

“Such as?” Shelby pushed further.

“Well, take yesterday evening for example” Jack continued, “I fell asleep as soon as I hit the couch which given how the day had been was hardly surprising, when I was asleep, Appleby visits but it is not me he wants to see but Megan.”

“Here, she is not one of Sir Richard’s minions watching over you, is she?” Shelby jokingly suggested.

“Don’t be silly” Jack responded, “Megan thought I was still asleep but in fact hearing Appleby and her talking in the hallway when he arrived actually woke me up but as soon as I heard it was her that he had come to see rather than me, I pretended to still be asleep and eavesdropped.”

“Sneaky...” Shelby complimented, “Do go on” he then prompted.

“It wasn’t too clear unfortunately, but I think Appleby gave Megan something for safekeeping that is only supposed to be handed over to me if something happens to him” Jack then explained.

“Do you know what it was he gave her?” Appleby asked.

“No” Jack confirmed “and with this morning’s sudden shenanigans, I have not had the chance to look around the flat and see if there is anything obvious.”

“Okay, so we have our very own Divisional Commander handing something secret to your girlfriend to be only passed onto you if something happens to him” Shelby summarised, “That is odd for a starter, what else have you got?”

“The evening before last, I tried to get hold of him” Jack continued “According to his online diary he was supposed to be at Holborn all day and into the evening. I saw him when Megan and I were picked up from Holborn by Jennifer Caverner at nine thirty to be transferred to Chequers and he was supposed to have followed but he never appeared.”

“He could have gone home” Shelby suggested.

“Yes, he could have but he didn’t” Jack responded, “His official driver said he was told that he would no longer be required at nine thirty five and was sent home and there is no record of Appleby leaving Holborn at all yet he was not there all night, nor was he at home either.”

“It does rather sound like he has been engaging in a little extracurricular activity” Shelby was forced to agree.

“Yeah, that is what I reckoned” Jack confirmed, “Now, if it is perfectly legitimate, safe and doesn’t involve treading, jurisdictionally speaking, on anyone’s toes then that is all well and good, but if it is something more risqué then our Guvnor could find himself in very hot water very fast.

“What do you propose?” Shelby then asked.

“We keep an eye on him” Jack responded, “Ensure we have got his back but without him knowing about it unless it looks like he is in immediate danger.”

“And I presume we keep this strictly between us two?” Shelby then asked.

“Indeed” Jack confirmed, “As far as anyone else is concerned from the Administrator General to the Holborn Office Tea Lady, this conversation never happened.”

“So, if this conversation is not actually happening” Shelby mused “That means it is still your turn to pay next time.”

“Nice try mate” Jack responded with a wry smile.

“By the almighty power of my God, Ixion I call to thee to direct me on the next stage of our glorious journey” Orbison quietly prayed in front of the main black altar in the centre of the main chamber of the Citadel complex, “Send to me your divine wisdom and let me see the path ahead, To Life Immortal, Amen.”

Orbison had assumed he was alone in the main Citadel chamber as there was nothing due to be preached or broadcast from there until the evening, but he was wrong.

He was being observed from the shadows by someone who had been allowed into the Citadel complex discreetly and, apart from the Facilitator who had let him in, completely unobserved.

“Praying to whatever God you worship won’t help you know, preacher man” came a haunting voice that echoed all around the chamber followed by a hearty laugh which caused Orbison to look around almost in shock.

“Asshole...” Orbison then responded in jest as Taylor emerged from the shadows, the ever-present cigar in his mouth, where they met in the centre of the chamber and warmly shook hands.

“Always a kind welcome from you Brother” Taylor remarked with a smile.

“For you, always my Brother” Orbison confirmed.

“So, how are things in the Brotherhood?” Taylor asked as he then proceeded to walk around and look at his surroundings.

“A few bumps in the road but otherwise we are still on track” Orbison confirmed, “Losing Brother Reaper was a bit of a blow mind.”

“That tenacious little Lieutenant again I understand?” Taylor asked.

“According to our people inside the Security & Police Service, it appears so yes” Orbison replied.

“Don’t worry about him” Taylor reminded Orbison cautiously “He is young and remember that we are playing a long game on this one, there are still a few years to go before we achieve our goals.”

“I’ve never really been one for patience” Orbison admitted.

“Nonetheless” Taylor warned in response, “we must be cautious, careful and not show our hand until we are ready to move. There is still a lot to do before we get to that stage.”

“I guess he can wait” Orbison slightly reluctantly agreed “but rest assured, I want him finished off along with the rest of them when the time comes.”

“You have my word Brother” Taylor confirmed “When our glorious day of victory arrives, assuming he is still breathing, I will personally ensure that Lieutenant Regent is the first against the wall.”

“Can we get Brother Reaper out?” Orbison then asked.

“I don’t think so” Taylor remarked “It seems he has given in, talking like a canary according to one of my contacts reports.”

“I’ll need a replacement” Orbison then requested “Someone as good if not better than our lost Brother.”

“Leave it with me” Taylor replied “I am sure in my filodex of hard bastards there is a suitable candidate to fill the role. Fortunately, as we are currently in a holding period of the plan, we will not need their services for a little while yet which gives me time to source out a suitable individual.”

“There is still some tidying up and general housekeeping required though” Orbison warned, “Administrator General Caverner for one.”

“I wouldn’t worry yourself about her Brother” Taylor reassured him “She will deal with herself once the ‘National Crisis’ is seen to be over, but we do need to toss her a bone to keep her off the scent.”

“Hmm...” Orbison thought carefully for a few moments before reaching into an inside pocket and retrieving a small tape recorder which he held up before pressing the ‘Play’ button, “What about this?” he asked.

Taylor listened intently as the tape played, broadcasting the conversation that took place between Orbison and The Mayor the night before the St. James’s Park bombings.

“I have got into the habit of recording important conversations” Orbison remarked as he stopped the tape “You never know in this day and age when something said in a darkened room somewhere may come back to bite you on the ass.”

“Very prudent Brother” Taylor agreed “but you do realise that tape also implicates you in the murder of The Commander and others?” he then warned.

“That’s covered thanks to a friendly lawyer who could get Jack the Ripper off on a technicality and my personal Get Out of Jail Free card” Orbison confidently responded, “Brother Reaper is lost as he has already confessed, The Hand are all but finished now that the President of Mobuto has died and their militia in the UK were decimated by the Security Service the other afternoon which just leaves the now ex-Mayor still out there to take the rap.”

“So, we throw him to the wolves?” Taylor asked.

“I was more thinking of throwing him to the lioness actually” Orbison responded, “and I reckon the new Mobuto Government will probably give her Adebisi as well with any luck.”

“All neatly tied up and leaving us to rest before the next phase...” Taylor mused.

Orbison went and got a decanter and poured a couple of drinks, one of which he passed to Taylor.

“A toast” Orbison then called enthusiastically “To the next phase...”

“The next phase...” Taylor responded with a big smile as the clink of their glasses coming together echoed around the chamber.

“Err, Jack where are we going, I thought we were heading back to Holborn?” Shelby asked as, upon reaching the roundabout at the north end of Lambeth Bridge, he unexpectedly turned left before pulling into the side of the road a short distance ahead.

“I’ll be ten minutes” Jack responded as he got out of the car, taking the evidence bags with him, “Wait here, and turn on the heater if you are getting cold.”

“Where are you going then?” Shelby then asked.

“I just want to check out a hunch I have had” Jack evasively explained, “Won’t be long.”

“Oh God...” Shelby remarked to himself as he watched Jack disappear from view through the main entrance of Thames House, the MI5 headquarters building located on the north bank of the River Thames, “Jack’s had a hunch, we are in trouble now.”

“Good morning” Jack called as he produced his formal identification to the uniformed security man on duty in the foyer, “Lieutenant Jack Regent, Transport Division.”

“What can I do for you Lieutenant?” The security officer asked once he had looked carefully at Jack’s identification before handing it back.

“Is Operations Chief Christopher Dent available please?” Jack formally requested.

“One moment please Sir” the security officer responded as he stepped back to his little desk located in the corner of the massive foyer area and picked up the telephone.

Jack watched as the security guard made a brief call, nodded in understanding and then, having replaced the handset, duly returned.

“He is Sir” the security guard then confirmed, “he will be down in a moment, if you could wait here, please?”

“Yes certainly, thank you” Jack agreed whereupon the security guard returned to his watchful position.

Jack looked all around the impressive foyer, its high vaulted ceiling and ornate decoration being more than fitting for an organisation of such importance.

“Jack” came a voice whereupon he turned around to see Dent approaching “This is a surprise, welcome to Thames House.”

“Thanks” Jack responded as they met and shook hands.

“I heard about your little bit of excitement at East Croydon earlier” Dent remarked, “So is this a social call or are you here on business?” he then asked.

“Business I am afraid” Jack regrettably confirmed “but if there is any tea and biscuits going that would be nice.”

“Come with me, I will see what I can find” Dent confirmed as he proceeded to escort Jack down a corridor leading off the foyer and to the lifts.

“Don’t I need some sort of visitors pass or something?” Jack asked as he followed Dent into one of the lift cars.

“Nah...” Dent casually responded as he used a set of keys attached to a chain on his belt to unlock the lift controls and select the fourth floor “I think it is pretty safe to say we all know who you are by now.”

“I’m honoured, err I think...” Jack remarked as the lift rapidly ascended.

As the lift doors opened, Dent and Jack exited out into the main corridor which was bustling with people going up and down but in an orderly, quiet and calm manner.

“You’ve never been here before, have you?” Dent asked as he showed Jack down the corridor towards a large black double door at the end.

“Err no” Jack admitted.

“In which case” Dent called as he is used his electronic identification card to unlock and open the huge double doors “step into my office.”

“Blimey, you are on a bigger budget than us Transport plod” Jack remarked as Dent escorted Jack across the floor of what the MI5 personnel in Dent’s section refer to simply as ‘The Grid’, the main operations room for various ongoing missions and investigations as well as being the base for the various agents in that Department.

“Gareth!” Dent then called across to his Deputy, Gareth Pointer who was consulting with one of the personnel over on the opposite side of the room.

Pointer looked up on hearing his superior calling and was surprised to see Jack standing there as he came over.

“You know Jack, Lieutenant Regent, don’t you?” Dent asked.

“Of course, good to see you” Pointer confirmed.

“Likewise,” Jack agreed.

“Shall we go through to my office?” Dent then suggested whereupon he led the way to his own separate office screened off from the rest of The Grid by a glass wall.

As soon as the three of them were inside, Dent closed the door which cut off all sound from outside before closing the blinds.

“Have a seat” Dent then encouraged which Jack and Pointer duly did before he sat down himself behind his very modern looking black glass desk.

“What brings you here then?” Pointer asked, his curiosity suitably peaked.

“The thick end of two hours ago, I shot and killed one of Reaper’s rogue unit who had escaped from the little dawn door knocking exercise that my colleagues at the Metropolitan Division launched this morning” Jack explained “The gentleman in question escaped onto railway property, hence why us Transport guys got called in to try and capture him.”

“I have had a sneak peek at the preliminary reports” Dent confirmed “Sounds like it nearly went pear shaped.”

“In a manner of speaking, yes” Jack agreed, “The Administrator General herself pursued this man onto railway property and all the way to East Croydon Station.”

Jack passed across a piece of paper containing a brief summary of the details.

“Daniel Franklin Forrester” Dent read from the paper before passing it over to Pointer for him to look as well “What’s his story then?”

“Records seem to show he is, sorry, was a master planner, particularly adept in the installation of explosive devices and associated weaponry for maximum effect against the enemy.”

“So, it would be reasonable to assume that whilst Reaper designed and built the explosive devices used in the St. James’s Park explosions, this guy Forrester was the installer?” Pointer ventured.

“A reasonable assumption based on what we know” Jack agreed “The interesting bit is what happened at East Croydon though.”

“Erm, you shot him” Dent responded, somewhat confused.

“Well, yes” Jack admitted slightly uncomfortably, “What you won’t see in the report is that when Administrator General Caverner finally caught up with him at the bottom of the pedestrian ramp which leads up from platforms one and two at the station, she was out of ammunition, she had lost her spare clips somewhere whilst clambering about the line side.”

“So, it was either him or her?” Pointer ventured.

“Yeah...” Jack grimly confirmed “Anyway, the Administrator General looked like she was resigned to her fate, tossed her gun away and basically told Forrester to get on with it.”

“That’s not good, not good at all” Dent remarked, concerned like the others in the room at this possible indicator of Tracy’s true state of mind.

“But instead of the whole Ixion Brotherhood claptrap about ‘To Life Immortal’ and so forth, Forrester said something else instead” Jack continued “The Revolution is coming, and you are not invited.”

“The Revolution is coming?” Dent asked, “What Revolution?”

“Search me” Jack admitted, “Anyway, that was when I shot him before he shot Tracy, there wasn’t any time to ask questions or argue.”

“Fair enough” Dent responded.

“Then there is this” Jack then produced the two clear plastic evidence bags containing the weapons found on Forrester that he had brought with him from the East Croydon scene and placed it on the table.

“Oh, now that is a nice gun” Pointer remarked almost in admiration as he picked up the bag containing the semi-automatic pistol and looked at it closely.

“Up until now all the various Hand and Ixion morons, meat heads and associated goons have been tooled up with identical weaponry, almost like a signature and almost certainly all from the same source as the two grenades you guys traced from the remaining spoons at the Delabole Street explosion” Jack continued “All run of the mill domestic weaponry, easily obtainable if you know who to ask and yet this Forrester guy has a completely different set of kit.”

“I’ll say” Dent responded as he looked at the other weapon.

“This is a Glock based special custom” Pointer, an expert on firearms of the world commented, “Specially made for a specific customer at very great expense I would wager with very specific grip, sights, weight distribution, barrel rifling, the whole lot for the use of just one person.”

“I would say that this is a custom job as well” Dent agreed as he continued to look at the other weapon.

“There are maybe two, possibly three gunsmiths in the world who do this kind of work to this high-quality specification outside of specialist Government Agency technical departments” Pointer added.

“I would wager that even a Government Agency unit would not turn out this high a specification though” Dent pointed out “and it is certainly unusual to find a mercenary like Forrester in possession of such quality weaponry unless he stole it off one of his victims.”

“It wouldn’t be useable though” Pointer pointed out “Custom made for a specific person would render it at best difficult if not impossible to use by anyone else.”

“Indeed, it would” Dent was forced to agree.

“Do you notice anything else?” Jack then asked suggestively.

“Err...” Dent looked all around the firearm in his hands seeking something that was out of place.

“Hang on, no serial number” Pointer then realised.

“Oh yes, same here” Dent agreed, “Filed off?”

“No damage to the surfaces on either weapon” Jack responded, “Which means they were never there in the first place.”

“Oh, you’re right” Pointer remarked with a look of keen interest mixed with amazement.

“That means these were quite probably issued by a Government Agency or similar” Dent confirmed “and, unless the Ixion Brotherhood just got nationalised, then it potentially means there could be another group on the plot.”

“That is basically what I was thinking” Jack agreed “which is why I wanted to run it past you guys and see if anything goes ping.”

“Not so much ping and bloody great alarm bells” Dent responded, “You were right to bring this to my attention.”

“Presumably, the Forrester case is all but concluded?” Pointer asked.

“Bar the writing up of the report and probably turning over his gaff, his bank accounts and anything else that can be traced to him, yes” Jack confirmed.

“In which case I suggest that for now what with everything else that is going on, we keep this little concern, matter, call it what you will, strictly between us for now” Dent then suggested “It may turn out to be nothing but if it isn’t, I don’t want all and sundry knowing we might have got wind of it before we are in a position to do something about it.”

“Sounds like a plan” Jack agreed “If you take the weapons and give them your usual expert attention, I will forward Forrester’s personal effects and anything else that turns up as soon as I have got the report completed and filed.”

“When you do file your report, make sure you bury it sufficiently somewhere where it won’t attract attention” Dent remarked “Accidentally filed in amongst the daily traffic offences reports is usually a good spot.”

“Consider it done” Jack confirmed as he and Dent got up.

A few minutes later, Dent and Pointer were back downstairs in the main foyer, showing Jack to the front door.

“Keep in touch” Dent called as Jack turned to leave.

“Oh, don’t worry, I will” Jack confirmed “Thanks again guys” he then called before leaving, the door closing behind him as he descended the steps back to the street outside.

“Gareth” Dent remarked aside to his Deputy as they watched Jack through the door window cross the street and get back into his patrol car.

“Sir” Pointer responded, already knowing where this conversation was heading.

“I hope to God I am wrong, but I fear that young Jack may have just put himself in harm’s way without realising it” Dent then remarked.

“I agree Sir” Pointer nodded.

“We had better ensure he gets a discreet watch put on him effective immediately” Dent then instructed “Take care of it personally, strictly off the books, no written records.”

“I’ll get right on to it Sir” Pointer confirmed.

“If whoever our mystery third party is, if they even exist ever realise that the Lieutenant may be onto them there is no telling what they could do to him, and we cannot allow that to happen” Dent continued “Is that understood?”

“Absolutely Sir” Pointer readily agreed as they watched the patrol car drive off out of sight.

“Special Ops Control Room, Commander Fuller speaking” he responded on answering the ringing telephone on the desk in front of him whereupon he quickly scabbled around for a pen and something to write on and then hastily scribbled some notes.

Lieutenant Commander Barrett looked up from her computer when she saw how furiously Fuller was writing notes and immediately wondered just what was going on.

“Got it” Fuller then confirmed to his caller “and this is confirmed, yes?” he then asked.

“What’s going on?” the Home Secretary asked as he came into the room, initially looking for Tracy but also becoming interested in the call Fuller was receiving.

“I don’t know Sir” Barrett responded, “But whatever it is, it certainly seems to have got Commander Fuller’s undivided attention.”

“Beautiful!” Fuller then exclaimed “Yes, send it right over and copy in the Attorney General personally as well, he will need to see it too.”

“What’s going on Sir?” Barrett then asked, her curiosity and indeed that of the others in the room becoming increasingly difficult to contain.

“Well...” Fuller began as he replaced the telephone handset and then thought carefully about his next choice of words “It seems that the former Mayor just got a whole load of fresh mud slung at him.”

“Couldn’t have happened to a more deserving guy” the Home Secretary wryly remarked.

“It’s coming through to my terminal now if you want to take a look” Fuller then confirmed “If you will excuse me, I need to alert the Administrator General” he then remarked before swiftly leaving the room.

“Whoa!” Sir Richard remarked as he met Fuller swiftly departing as he was arriving in the room, where they only just averted a collision.

“Sorry, can’t stop!” Fuller called apologetically as he continued down the corridor.

“What’s going on?” Sir Richard then asked generally around the room where he noticed that everyone was now gathered around one computer terminal.

“I think you should see this” Barrett called Sir Richard over “and make sure you are sitting down.”

“This must be good” Sir Richard remarked as he put on his reading glasses and the others allowed him through to sit at the computer screen where he began to read the details scrolling across the screen in front of him.

“Good God...” Sir Richard then remarked.

Up the other end of the corridor, Fuller had reached the outer door of Tracy’s office and tentatively knocked.

“Come in” the Administrator General’s Personal Assistant then called whereupon Fuller entered the outer office.

“Hi Simon, what can I do for you?” the Personal Assistant then asked.

“I need to see the boss, right now” Fuller confirmed with obvious urgency.

“One moment please” the Personal Assistant then responded as she picked up the telephone.

Fuller looked on slightly anxiously as the Personal Assistant made a call through to the inner office and relayed Tracy the news of his arrival before nodding in understanding and replacing the handset again.

“You can go in” the Personal Assistant then confirmed much to Fuller’s relief.

“Thanks Marion” Fuller responded before going up to the inner door, knocking politely and then entering where he found Tracy stood in front of the large window behind the desk, looking out across the vista of London before her.

“This had better be good” she called; only briefly looking back at Fuller before resuming her survey of the view outside.

“Oh, it’s better than good Ma’am” Fuller confirmed “In fact it is positively, eye wateringly astounding.”

“All right” Tracy responded, turning back from the window, and returning to her desk, sitting down in the large leather swivel chair before leaning forward to look Fuller directly in the eyes.

“I have just had a contact from a verifiable and reliable source” Fuller proceeded to explain “No names you understand of course.”

“Of course...” Tracy agreed.

“Apparently the Chronicle received a package about twenty minutes ago which, fortunately for us was taken in by our contact working undercover at the paper” Fuller continued “In it is a number of transcripts and recordings of no less a mortal than the former Mayor of London, Alfred Oscar”

“Now you have my full and undivided attention” Tracy responded.

“The transcripts were sent over straight away whilst the recordings are downloading to our system right now” Fuller continued, “One of the recordings shows the former Mayor in a hotel room with a teenage prostitute, a girl that we believe to be from Orbison’s stable and it is fairly safe to say that he is not talking to her about city policy on recycling, that is for certain.”

“Well, we can burn him with that for a starter” Tracy was practically relishing the prospect.

“That isn’t the good bit” Fuller then warned.

“I am not sure how it can possibly get any better than clear evidence of that scumbag banging a teenage prostitute, but I am willing to be open minded” Tracy remarked, “Do go on” she then prompted.

“The other recording of interest seems to have been made sometime on the night before the St. James’s Park explosions” Fuller continued, building up to an obviously significant revelation “It is a recording of a conversation possibly taking place in the Mayoral Residence itself between the then Mayor and Michael Orbison, our very own Lord Chaos himself.”

“More rope...” Tracy commented, liking where this was going very much.

“I need to check the actual recording itself” Fuller continued “but it seems to demonstrate that The Mayor himself used the Ixion Brotherhood and The Hand to carry out the assassinations of The Commander, Jack and you by way of explosive devices.”

“Right...” Tracy grimly responded.

“In effect, he was the one that ordered your deaths” Fuller concluded.

“Where is the Alfred Oscar now?” Tracy then asked as she reached for the telephone on the desk with a determined look.

“Possibly at his family home in Epsom I think” Fuller responded thoughtfully.

“Looks like whomever his puppet masters were, they have cut the strings and hung him out to dry” Tracy commented.

“It would seem that way” Fuller agreed, “A sacrificial lamb.”

“Get me the Attorney General please, ultraviolet priority” Tracy then called urgently into the telephone before putting it down and then standing up and grabbing her uniform overcoat and heading for the door with Fuller quickly following behind.

In the outer office, Marion the Personal Assistant looked up as Tracy appeared.

“Marion, the moment the Attorney General calls I want him put through to the Special Operations Control Room” Tracy instructed as she passed through the outer office with a noticeably determined look.

“Yes Ma’am” the Personal Assistant confirmed.

Once in the corridor, Tracy made straight for the Special Operations Control Room with Fuller following close behind.

“Are you all right Administrator General?” Fuller asked as they approached the double doors at the end of the corridor.

“Just in the mood to get up close and personal with the bad guys” Tracy determinedly confirmed as they passed through the door where Lieutenant Commander Barrett was taking a telephone call.

“Ma’am” Barrett called, holding the telephone handset aloft “The Attorney General on Line Three for you.”

“Thank you” Tracy eagerly responded and took the handset before speaking, “Neil, thanks’ for calling back” she called.

“Administrator General” the Attorney General responded from his office located just across the road from New Scotland Yard in the shadow of Westminster Abbey “I had a hunch you might be calling” he admitted.

“I take it you have seen the explosive evidence that has just shown up concerning the former Mayor?” Tracy asked.

“Indeed, I have Administrator General” the Attorney General confirmed “and I think it is safe to say he has been a very naughty boy, hasn’t he?” he commented.

“Oh yes” Tracy readily agreed, “What sort of charges can we make stick do you think?” she then asked, “I want to make sure there are no slip-ups and that he gets everything that is legally coming to him.”

“To start off with we have conspiracy to cause explosions, commit and or abet terrorist acts, murder and attempted murder” the Attorney General effortlessly reeled off the list of potential charges, “You can probably throw in affiliation, membership or support of a banned organisation as defined by the Terrorism Act and sprinkle on your choice of a selection of delights plucked from the Official Secrets Act whilst you are at it.”

“That will do for a starter” Tracy responded, “I think I will leave the engagement of a prostitute and any related sexual offences for the popular press to mull over.”

“Should make for some interesting headlines in the Sunday papers” the Attorney General agreed, “So, how would you like to proceed Administrator General?” he then asked.

“Nick him, cuff him, bin him” Tracy determinedly confirmed, “I’ll need an....”

“...arrest warrant?” the Attorney General finished the sentence and then pressed a button on the computer keyboard in front of him, “On its way to your fax machine right now” he then confirmed.

“Thank you” Tracy responded as she looked over towards the fax machine where Barrett and Sir Richard were watching the lengthy document appear in front of their eyes.

“Just sign and date it and then you have my personal blessing to go get him” the Attorney General confirmed.

“Thank you, Neil, I owe you a drink” Tracy replied.

“Just ensure that snivelling little git never darkens my door every again and we will call it evens” the Attorney General responded, “Good luck” he then called.

“Thanks” Tracy replied before hanging up.

“Christopher Dent just called from Thames House” Sir Richard called across the room “I think he anticipated your next question; Alfred Oscar is confirmed as being currently located at his family manor house on the outskirts of Epsom.”

“Excellent” Tracy responded as Sir Richard brought the document over from the fax machine and passed it to her whereupon she looked at it.

“Here” Sir Richard passed Tracy his best gold pen which she then took and proceeded to sign and date the warrant documentation with obvious enthusiasm.

“Right, if we are going to do this, I want it done right and by the numbers” Tracy then declared, “Simon, track down Bob and tell him to get a small team together, meet me outside the front door in ten minutes” she then instructed.

“Yes Ma’am” Fuller confirmed.

“Somebody get me the...” Tracy then began only to be interrupted.

“...Prime Minister?” Barrett asked as she passed the telephone over again having already anticipated Tracy’s request and made the call.

“Nice...” Tracy remarked as she took the telephone, “Prime Minister” she then formally called.

“Please tell me this is good news for a change” The Prime Minister remarked with a rather depressed tone.

“I just thought it proper to inform you Ma’am that I am about to execute an arrest warrant on Alfred Oscar, the former Mayor of London” Tracy confirmed.

“Oh right, okay...” the Prime Minister responded but did not initially realise exactly what it was she had heard, “Hang on, say that again?” she then requested.

“I am about to go around to the former Mayor’s place and nick him for every single offence I can cram onto the warrant that the Attorney General has just very kindly provided” Tracy explained.

“Ah, well” the Prime Minister then replied, “Erm, in which case be my guest, couldn’t happen to a more deserving slime ball” she confirmed, “Actually, what is it he has supposedly done by the way?” she then asked, blissfully unaware of the extraordinary revelations that had emerged in only the last few minutes.

“Colluded with, supported and encouraged banned terrorist groups, usage of prostitutes and the icing on the cake, personally authorised the assassination of my husband and the attempted assassinations of both Jack and I” Tracy explained, “So you can probably understand why I am extremely interested in having a little chat with him.”

“Well, err yes I can” the Prime Minister sympathetically responded, “Just do me one little favour though Administrator General” she then requested, “When you do arrest him, make sure that you drag him out of the front door, kicking and screaming in front of the press?”

“Consider it done Prime Minister” Tracy confirmed with a smirk.

“Oh hell, I think the painkillers are starting to wear off” Jack remarked as he gingerly eased himself into the chair behind his desk back in the Transport Division main headquarters in Holborn.

“I am still in occasional pain from the gunshot in the knee I got from our old friend Reaper seven months ago” Shelby admitted as he sat down at the desk directly opposite Jack’s and rubbed his leg carefully.

“We are turning into a right pair of old crocs, aren’t we?” Jack asked.

“Yeah...” Shelby agreed “I could have sworn someone said the Transport Division was all run of the mill safe fluffy work compared with the mighty all singing and dancing Met Division!”

“Who fed you that load of old cobblers?” Divisional Commander Appleby asked as he came into the office.

“Erm actually, you did Sir” Shelby cheekily confirmed.

“Oh...” Appleby replied “Yes, you are right, I probably did.”

“What’s this?” Jack then remarked as he looked through the backlog of messages on his desk, “What do I want seven of them for?” he then asked, reading one message with a confused look.

“Seven what?” Shelby asked out of curiosity.

“Carriages” Jack explained but Shelby looked on, still none the wiser, “This little project I have been generously handed?” he then held up the dossier that Appleby had given to him at New Scotland Yard the previous afternoon.

“Oh right” Shelby then realised.

“I only need four plus a van” Jack confirmed.

“How is your special assignment coming along?” Appleby asked.

“Progress so far has mainly consisted of lots of telephone calls which has in turn prompted much scouring of sheds up and down the country” Jack responded, “and I am still waiting for confirmation of the largest part of the plan.”

“I’ll see if I can put in a word, grease the wheels, err literally” Appleby confirmed.

“Thanks Guv, I would appreciate it” Jack replied.

“Commander Fuller rang from the Yard looking for you just before you got back” Appleby then called “Apparently the Administrator General is about to go out and arrest the ex-Mayor in the next hour, it seems he is responsible for commissioning the St. James’s Park bomb attacks.”

“Oh, did he now?” Jack exclaimed in response.

“All got caught on tape supposedly” Appleby explained, “Anyway; Commander Fuller thought you ought to know in case you wanted to join the party.”

“Erm, I think I will give this one a miss” Jack admitted “In the last week or so I think my brain has been writing cheques that my body has found increasingly difficult to cash.”

“Hmm, probably wise” Appleby agreed.

“Anyway Sir” Jack continued “I have a lot on with this little assignment” he then confirmed.

“I guess I am writing the report on this morning’s excitement then?” Shelby asked as he started up the computer on his desk.

“In my day it was all manual typewriters, carbon copy paper and a couple of thousand gallons of Tipp-Ex on standby” Appleby fondly recalled, “You youngsters don’t know you are born really.”

“On the contrary Sir” Jack remarked as he felt his sides “I have three badly bruised and cracked ribs right now that are reminding me that I most definitely was born.”

“At least you are still alive” Shelby pointed out.

“Yeah...” Jack admitted “No thanks it seems to that two faced slime ball who wanted me dead.”

“Don’t worry, he is about to get a rather unwelcome knock on the door” Appleby confirmed “and assuming he is still breathing after that, then Special Branch can give him a good going over.”

“Hmm, nice little place” Tracy remarked as she looked out of the front passenger window of the Metropolitan Division patrol car being driven by Lieutenant Eisley as they pulled up outside the ornate gateway, the gates themselves being open which allowed a good view of the late seventeenth century manor house set behind.

“Wife’s side is the one with the money” Sir Richard, sat in the back seat advised. “Made the family fortune in property and manufacturing just after the second World War, he on the other hand came from a family of seven crammed into a two up, two down in deepest darkest Deptford.”

“Looks like the press got here before us Ma’am” Eisley nodded ahead down the road where a small group of journalists could be seen gathered in the shadow of a large oak tree directly opposite the former Mayor’s house which also happened to double as the outdoor seating area of the local pub.

“Oh dear...” Tracy sarcastically remarked, “Ah well, I guess the ex-Mayor will have one final appearance in front of the press, just this time in handcuffs.”

“How did they find out about our little visit?” Sir Richard then asked as they got out of the car.

“A little birdie must have told them” Tracy responded all innocently.

“Ah...” Sir Richard then responded knowingly.

“Where do you want us Ma’am?” Bob called from his vehicle parked just behind where his small team of specialist armed support officers were gathering.

“Lieutenant Eisley, Sir Richard and I are going to go in the front door, you and the rest of your team go around the back and secure the perimeter, make sure our target doesn’t do a runner” Tracy formally instructed.

“Yes Ma’am” Bob confirmed before turning back to his team and assigning them their tasks.

“Right then, Lieutenant” Tracy turned to Eisley and handed him the arrest warrant documentation “You have the honour young man.”

Eisley was understandably surprised as he took the document. “Err, if I may ask Ma’am, why me?” he then inquired.

“Objective independence” Tracy responded, “I read about it in a report once” she then tried to explain, “Basically you have no previous business with the subject of the operation plus you come highly recommended by all the right people and I didn’t want Jack getting involved any further.”

“He has had rather a busy week Ma’am” Eisley agreed “In fact I think we all have one way and another.”

“Unlike young Jack however, all your ribs are still intact” Tracy then pointed out.

“The day is still young...” Sir Richard unhelpfully remarked to a momentary look of scorn from Tracy.

“Zulu One to Angel One, we are all in position” Bob’s voice came over the radio in confirmation.

“Okay, thanks Bob” Tracy then responded, “Stay put, no one is to move unless I say so, is that understood?” she then asked.

“Understood Ma’am” Bob confirmed “Zulu One, out.”

“All right then, let’s go and ruin his day” Tracy then declared as she indicated to Eisley to go ahead through the gates towards the house with her and Sir Richard following closely behind.

“Do you think his wife knows about his fondness for hotel rooms and teenage prostitutes?” Sir Richard mused as they reached the bottom of the ornate stone steps that led up to the front door.

Suddenly they all instinctively ducked when there was a loud crash whereupon something came flying through the now broken upper floor window nearby and landed on the ground amidst shards of glass nearby.

“YOU BASTARD!!” came the sound of a very angry woman’s voice through the broken window from inside the house.

“I think she might” Tracy admitted as they then proceeded to hurry to the door whereupon Eisley began to knock rapidly whilst she tried the doorbell.

The loud sounds of shouting could still be clearly heard when a large flat screen television came flying out of the window and smashed into the ground nearby.

“Security & Police Service!” Eisley urgently called, continuing to knock hard on the door “Open up, we have a warrant to search these premises!”

“Whoa!” Sir Richard exclaimed as another window, this time almost directly above them shattered and shards of glass along with the badly damaged remnants of what appeared to be a bedside table complete with lamp and alarm clock, crashed to the ground only a couple of feet from where the three of them were standing.

“Bob!” Tracy called urgently into her radio “You and a couple of your guys go in the back way quickly; it’s raining televisions and furniture out the front here!”

“Allow me young man” Sir Richard then remarked as he moved Eisley aside before proceeding to kick the door down.

“Oh, very sprightly” Tracy remarked as the door gave way easily.

“Oh, not really” Sir Richard confirmed as they proceeded inside, “It wasn’t actually locked.”

“Move!” Eisley suddenly called, causing all three of them to quickly duck out of the way as from the balcony above, amid more shouting, a chair came flying down, crashed through the glass chandelier and the whole lot crashed on to the floor.

“Bloody hell!” Bob remarked as he came into the hallway with two of his own officers just in time to see the chandelier and chair impact.

“This is getting bloody dangerous!” Tracy remarked as she drew her gun and looked up towards where the continuing loud arguing of a man and a woman were still coming from, “Come on” she then urged.

Eisley and Tracy led the way up the stairs and more items were seen to be thrown from one doorway on the upper balcony level.

“I would cut your balls off, but you have probably worn them out on your little harem of scrubbers!” the woman’s voice then called as they approached the door cautiously.

“I think they have run out of things to throw at each other” Sir Richard tentatively suggested.

“Let’s hope that they don’t move onto throwing each other off the balcony” Tracy then remarked as they reached the door.

“If it wasn’t for me, you would have NOTHING!” Oscar shouted back loudly.

“Oh, I am terribly sorry; did I come at a bad time?” Tracy sarcastically remarked as she calmly walked into the room with Eisley and Sir Richard whilst Bob and his officers stood guard outside on the balcony.

“Oh, great...” Oscar angrily responded as he turned around and saw Tracy standing there “Why aren’t you dead yet you bitch?”

“Sorry, I don’t do requests” Tracy coolly responded as she looked around the large bedroom which had been all but destroyed whilst Oscar himself was now sporting a split lip, a black eye and torn clothing.

In the opposite corner of the room stood the angry figure of Oscar’s wife, Tabitha who was holding a large ceramic vase in her hand.

“Are you okay?” Tracy then asked of her.

“Yes, I’m fine” she confirmed before looking down at the vase in her hands “Ming Dynasty apparently, very expensive, about the only thing in this house that bastard of a soon to be ex-husband of mine actually owns.”

“Perhaps” Sir Richard tentatively suggested “you should put it down?”

“Actually, did you say it was his?” Tracy asked to which Tabitha nodded “Well, in which case...”

“NO!!” Oscar suddenly cried out in horror as Tabitha tossed the vase into the air towards Tracy who then caught it safe and sound.

“It’s all right” Tracy confirmed before deliberately letting it slip from her grasp whereupon it smashed into pieces on the floor.

“Whoops...” she then sarcastically called, “Do you know what, I rather enjoyed that, it doesn’t make up for losing my husband thanks to your conniving and plotting but it will do for a starter.”

“Nice...” Tabitha agreed whereupon Tracy indicated towards the door and Bob came in.

“Bob, take care of the lady please and ensure she receives any medical attention required” Tracy then instructed.

“Certainly Ma’am” Bob confirmed “If you would like to come with me please Miss” he then gestured towards Tabitha who duly followed him out of the room but not before she had accidentally on purpose stood on Oscar’s foot as she went past.

“What the hell do you want you bitch?” Oscar then demanded to know.

“Lieutenant?” Tracy turned to Eisley who duly stepped forward.

“Alfred Winston Oscar” Eisley then formally called “I have a warrant for your arrest” he then presented the paperwork “You do not have to say anything unless you wish to do so, anything you do say will be taken down and may be used in a court of law.”

“Shove it up your...” Oscar began to respond only for Sir Richard to lay his hand upon his shoulder whereupon he wisely decided to stop talking.

“As I was saying Sir, you have the right to remain silent and the right to legal counsel at any time during your detention” Eisley continued “Do you understand the caution Sir?”

“This is bullshit!” Oscar desperately protested “What are the charges?” he then demanded to know.

“I am so glad you asked” Tracy responded, abruptly handing him another document whereupon he scanned the page.

“All this lot?” Oscar responded in disbelief.

“Oh, that’s just the first page Sir” Sir Richard pointed out “There are another two pages after that.”

“Basically, you are in deep shit” Tracy summarised, “Just be thankful that I am not going to staple gun you by your dangly bits to Nelson’s Column and use you for target practice because, believe me I so want to....”

A few minutes later, the press looked on with much anticipation and excitement as Oscar, struggling between two of the largest officers of Bob’s unit he could muster dragged him out of the front door in handcuffs, screaming at anybody who would listen.

“This is a fit up!” Oscar called out “Police harassment, brutality!!”

“Harassment? Brutality?” Tracy quietly remarked as she watched from the shadow of the front door as Oscar continued to resist as he was bundled towards a waiting patrol car, “Oh, I haven’t even begun yet you snivelling little bastard...”

“Arrgh!!” Oscar then called out as his last attempt at trying to wriggle free saw him unceremoniously face planted into the bonnet of the patrol car.

“Ouch, that’s got to hurt, hopefully” Sir Richard remarked with false sympathy as he looked on where Oscar was now being pushed into the back of the car as the cameras of the press were recording the whole unfolding dramatic events live.

“How is the wife?” Tracy then asked.

“On her way to hospital now” Sir Richard confirmed “a few minor cuts and bruises from flying objects mostly.”

“I think she more than gave as good as she got” Tracy remarked.

“Lucky shots on Oscar’s part I reckon” Sir Richard commented, “That pathetic creature couldn’t fight his way out of a wet paper bag if you ask me.”

“Aye...” Tracy agreed, “At least she will be rid of him now.”

“I have already given her the number of a very good divorce lawyer” Sir Richard remarked with a smirk as amid the flash of cameras, the car taking the Oscar away departed through the gates and out of sight, “If he ever does see the outside world again in maybe forty or fifty years time, he will have nothing except the prison issue clothes he is standing in.”

“Ah, Lieutenant” Tracy then called as Eisley returned “Is everything secured?” she then asked.

“All done Ma’am” Eisley confirmed, “the prisoner will be kept at Paddington Green under the Terrorism Act and the Attorney General has just confirmed he is willing to convene a hearing of the Supreme Court first thing tomorrow morning to hear the charges.”

“On a Sunday?” Tracy responded with surprise, “I am impressed.”

“I think we all want swift and proper justice on this one” Sir Richard confirmed “and we can throw in Olivier Torore into the dock whilst we are at it now that the delightful Mr Bermann has been politely and officially told where he can shove his injunctions.”

“Right then Lieutenant” Tracy then called “Get hold of the local boys and tell them I want this place searched from top to bottom, particularly concentrating on any personal workspaces that the former Mayor used to use, I want them turned inside out, upside down and back to front.”

“Yes Ma’am” Easley confirmed “Right away.”

“I’ll get Commander Fuller to freeze his accounts and start going through them with his usual finesse” Sir Richard then added, “If there is any financial dirt, we still don’t know about yet, he will find it.”

“I so want to do the interview, but I know I can’t” Tracy then remarked as she and Sir Richard headed down the steps and back to her car.

“Let the Special Branch guys work their magic on him” Sir Richard strongly advised “They know their stuff, well they should do anyway, I trained most of them.”

“I thought you might have wanted a crack at him yourself?” Tracy asked as she and Sir Richard got back in the car.

“Hmm...” Sir Richard mused, “You have to remember that The Commander was a trusted colleague and a good friend and that puts me too close personally to all this” he warned, “Face to face in an interrogation room with the man who through his own vanity, desperation or mania ordered his death, and yours, I may have no control over my own actions and then justice would never prevail.”

“Yes...” Tracy reluctantly agreed before silently indicating to Kinderley to drive on as Sir Richard rubbed his eyes and sighed heavily.

“I have buried too many good people over the years, now it is getting to the stage where every time another one falls, a little piece of me dies with them” he then honestly admitted.

“I think we need a drink” Tracy then suggested.

“Best idea I have heard for weeks” Sir Richard then readily agreed.

“Where to Ma’am?” Kinderley asked.

“The nearest decent single malt and don’t spare the horses Terry” Sir Richard called with enthusiasm.

The Foreign Secretary, Adrian Wright was in the middle of the daily Foreign Office briefing when his Personal Assistant interrupted him.

“Marjorie, this had better be good” the Foreign Secretary called.

“Urgent call, Umberto Almolgu, green diplomatic scrambler phone Sir” Marjorie explained, pointing towards the rarely used distinctive green dial telephone located over on the far side of the desk.

“Who?” the Foreign Secretary responded, somewhat puzzled as he reached for the telephone, inserted a key which he produced from his pocket into the lock on the side, turned it and then picked up the handset.

“He is the new UK Ambassador for Mobuto” Marjorie confirmed, “He wouldn’t say what it was about though.”

“Right, thanks” the Foreign Secretary responded before proceeding to take the call, “Adrian Wright, UK Foreign Secretary speaking.”

Marjorie watched on as the Foreign Secretary listened to the Ambassador.

“Really?” the Foreign Secretary then responded with obvious surprise, “Err, no that is quite all right, not a problem at all” he then confirmed, practically beaming with delight, “If you could let me have the details” he then requested, scrabbling for a pen and paper which Marjorie quickly supplied herself.

“Yes, I got it” the Foreign Secretary then confirmed “Five o’clock, I look forward to meeting you Sir, goodbye.”

“Something exciting Sir?” Marjorie asked, sensing the feeling of delight.

“I, along with a number of notable others have been invited by the new UK Ambassador of Mobuto to a little drinks party later to celebrate his arrival and whilst we are there, deal with a mutual problem our two countries have” the Foreign Secretary proceeded to explain, “Where do you think Sir Richard Crowthorne might be at the moment?” he then asked.

“Well Sir” Marjorie looked at the clock on the wall nearby “It’s Saturday lunchtime so wherever it is I am willing to bet it involves the consumption of significant quantities of fine quality alcohol.”

“To, erm...” Sir Richard awkwardly began as he, Tracy and Kinderley raised their glasses.

“...absent friends” Tracy concluded.

“Absent friends” Sir Richard responded.

“Absent friends” Kinderley agreed as their glasses met with a chime.

“I don’t know where I am right now” Tracy admitted.

“The Saloon Bar of the Elcott Arms, Thornton Heath?” Sir Richard wryly suggested which brought a bit of a smile to Tracy’s face.

“You know what I mean...” Tracy responded.

“Of course...” Sir Richard humbly admitted.

“How do you keep going?” Tracy then asked Sir Richard, “I mean throughout the years you have been around; you must have lost so many friends and colleagues along the way, how do you cope with that.”

“As per the unofficial Secret Service survival handbook and as taught by my old Guvnor” Sir Richard then indicated his glass “High quality alcoholic spirits in carefully measured proportions.”

“I should have guessed really” Tracy then admitted.

“Not a road I recommend though” Sir Richard then warned.

“I can vouch for that Ma’am” Kinderley agreed as he drank his orange juice.

“Indeed, and so can my liver” Sir Richard confirmed, “I reckon probably half of the personnel in the various Secret Service agencies are either borderline or full-blown alcoholics.”

“I think after I have finished this glass, I will stick to coffee” Tracy admitted, “It’s not like I sleep anymore anyway.”

“It may not seem like it to you at the moment, but it does get better, trust me” Sir Richard reassured her.

“I hope so...” Tracy replied.

“If I may ask, just out of curiosity you understand” Sir Richard then inquired, “When did you first meet Eddie?”

“Funny you should ask me that as we were discussing this the other day” Tracy admitted, “Officially we met when I got transferred to Haychester as his new Deputy, however it transpires we actually met for the first time, all be it momentarily a few years earlier when we bumped into each other whilst he was knee deep in that Priory Park fiasco.”

“Ah yes, that...” Sir Richard recalled.

“I remember that” Kinderley remarked, “I was a Traffic Division officer at the time on patrol somewhere near Dorking if I remember when we got a call to a Secret Service vehicle involved collision where one of Haychester’s patrol cars had been deliberately rammed off the road.”

“No prizes for guessing who was driving?” Tracy asked.

“Indeed Ma’am” Kinderley confirmed.

“Did he keep writing his journals after you two got together?” Sir Richard then asked.

“Oh yes” Tracy confirmed “Except for the very last entry, the day he died which is still unfinished” she admitted sadly.

“A little job for this evening perhaps?” Sir Richard tentatively suggested “Bring about some closure to all this.”

“Hmm, yes...” Tracy thoughtfully responded.

“Is there a Mr Crowthorne here?” came a shout from the bar that caused Sir Richard to look around at hearing his name being called.

“Your bar bill must have finally caught up with you” Tracy wryly remarked with a smirk.

“Very droll my dear” Sir Richard responded, “Over here” he then called back.

“Phone call for you Sir” the Barman explained, holding the handset up.

“I’ll be right over, thanks” Sir Richard confirmed as he got up and then headed over towards the bar.

“Best drink up Terry” Tracy advised, “I have this instinctive feeling we are about to get our marching orders.”

“Foreign Office for you Sir” the Barman confirmed as he handed over the telephone, “Sounded urgent.”

“It usually is these days” Sir Richard remarked, “Thanks” he then took the telephone.

“Crowthorne” he then formally called.

“Ah, there you are Sir Richard” the Foreign Secretary called, “I’ve been ringing around half the pubs in South London looking for you.”

“Adrian, they have invented these things called mobiles you know?” Sir Richard remarked.

“It’s switched off” the Foreign Secretary responded which prompted Sir Richard to reach for his mobile to check it.

“Ah, battery is flat” he then confirmed, “Mind you, given the last few days I can honestly say I am not that surprised.”

“Well anyway” the Foreign Secretary continued “Is Administrator General Caverner with you by any chance? This is for her benefit too.”

“Yes, she is with me” Sir Richard confirmed, looking over his shoulder towards Tracy sat nearby, “What’s going on?” he then asked.

“We just had a call from the new Mobuto Ambassador to the UK via the Diplomatic Green telephone” the Foreign Secretary explained, “You, the Administrator General and Lieutenant Jack Regent have been formally invited to a little soiree at the Embassy later today.”

“Black tie?” Sir Richard remarked with some surprise.

“Indeed, also handcuffs, a warrant and a Black Mariah” the Foreign Secretary confirmed.

“Huh?” Sir Richard responded, understandably confused.

“It’s a whole new ball game over in Mobuto” the Foreign Secretary explained, “They want their unwelcome house guest removed from the premises pronto and the good Lady Caverner can have the honour.”

“In which case we would be happy to accept the new Ambassador’s kind invitation” Sir Richard duly confirmed.

“I’ll let him know right away” the Foreign Secretary responded, “Formal written invitations should be on their way to you, personally delivered within the hour and I will see you there.”

“Are you are coming as well?” Sir Richard asked.

“Try stopping me, I wouldn’t miss this for the world” the Foreign Secretary enthusiastically replied, “Besides, I am a sucker for Ferrero Rocher.”

“What’s going on?” Tracy asked as she joined Sir Richard at the bar just as he was hanging up.

“We have been invited to dinner at the Mobuto Embassy” Sir Richard explained, “The new Ambassador would like to meet us and while we are there, take care of their little problem currently residing in the guest quarters.”

“Now that sounds like an invitation I simply cannot refuse” Tracy responded with a smile.

“Vermillion?!” Jack exclaimed over the telephone at his desk in Holborn, “What am I supposed to do with a carriage in vermilion?” he then asked.

“Huh?” Appleby commented as he looked around the office door at just the right moment to hear Jack’s conversation.

“Apparently he is having some problems sourcing a van or something Sir” Shelby explained as best he could.

“Oh, I see...” Appleby replied although in all honesty he was still none the wiser.

“All right, get it down to Wolverton and crack the paint pots open then” Jack then urgently instructed, “Tell them they have got just nine days to get it sorted.”

“So, you have a van?” Shelby asked as Jack concluded the call and hung up.

“I have a van” Jack declared, “It’s the wrong colour and currently sitting in a yard in Crewe but, unlike the last one they offered, this one does actually have some wheels on it this time.”

“Someone is having fun by the sounds of it” Appleby remarked.

“You wouldn’t think that putting this together would be that difficult, would you Sir?” Jack replied, indicating the assignment file open on the desk in front of him amid numerous scribbled notes and other documents.

“Have you got everything now?” Appleby then asked, seeking reassurance that Jack was still okay with his assignment.

“I think so Sir” Jack confirmed “Admittedly it is coming together from four different places and there is no guarantee that when they are all coupled together that they will actually still work but I am getting there.”

“Well, you had best leave that for now, your presence has been requested” Appleby then informed him.

“Oh...” Jack responded, slightly dejectedly.

“It’s all right” Appleby then reassured him, “You have been invited to a soiree at the Mobuto Embassy this evening by their new Ambassador to the UK, it is going to be quite a star studded bash apparently.”

“Oh, err right...” Jack replied, looking down at his uniform tunic and then attempting to dust it down.

“Don’t worry, Megan is on her way over with you best tuxedo” Appleby confirmed.

“I don’t have a tuxedo” Jack responded, somewhat confused.

“You do now, black tie and Megan is invited too” Appleby explained “All being well you get to mingle and party whilst the Administrator General drags Adebese out of hiding, in handcuffs all being well.”

“Sounds a lot more exciting than my plan for this evening” Shelby commented, “Microwave toad in the hole ready meal and catching up on a week’s worth of Coronation Street.”

“I’ll save you some Ferrero Rocher” Jack remarked.

“Thanks” Shelby replied, gratefully.

“So, what am I required to do at this little doo?” Jack then asked.

“Look smart, dance with your girl, drink champagne, network the room and eat canapés” Appleby confirmed “All the excitement will be down to the Administrator General, Mobutu has had a massive change of regime and Adebese is being thrown out, she has been given first refusal at removing him from the premises.”

“Nice!” Jack responded.

“And so, another sacrificial lamb is tossed on the proverbial bonfire” Taylor remarked as he sat back in the huge reclining leather armchair that, along with the equally large and opulent antique desk it was behind, dominated his office.

He was studying the latest intelligence reports and information that had been brought to him by his various well connected and positioned sources, some part of his secretive group, others not but either sympathetic to his groups aims or innocent and completely unaware that they had been contributing to their efforts.

When he had finished reading the extensive number of reports, he carefully laid them down on the desk and stood up.

Taylor then proceeded to a curtain mounted on the side wall of the office that when drawn back, revealed a door hidden behind that he then opened before proceeding inside.

Turning on the light revealed the room behind the door to be without windows, an enclosed space no more than a couple of metres across and about the same deep, furnished with an ordinary office chair and a large table which was pushed up against the far wall and had laid out on it a number of old-style leather coated filing drawers, each with a little metal frame on the front face in which was a small handwritten card label.

Sitting down, Taylor put on his reading glasses and proceeded to take five of the drawers out of the cases and place them neatly in a row on the desk in front of him.

From the first drawer marked with the label 'IXION' he took out a number of files, each one had a photograph on the front of it and a number of details of the person concerned handwritten on the cover.

The first file had a photograph of Orbison on it which Taylor looked at with a little disdain.

"You my strange and insane friend, you can stay where you are" Taylor confirmed, returning the file to the draw and then picking up the next file which showed a photograph of Reaper on the cover.

"You alas are no longer in the game" Taylor then remarked with some regret before writing 'CANCELLED' across Reaper's file and then reassigning it to a black in-tray over to his left.

"Regrettably, you are gone too" he then remarked to the photograph on the next file, a rather old picture of Forrester, the mercenary who was killed at East Croydon earlier, "You would have made a perfect replacement but alas...."

Taylor proceeded to write 'KILLED IN ACTION' across Forrester's file and then consigned it to the black in-tray.

The next drawer of files were labelled 'SCOTLAND YARD' and the first file to be taken out was a considerably large file with three photographs on the front of it this time, the photograph being of The Commander when he was a young boy, again not long after passing out as an officer of the Service as witnessed by the distinctive edifice and spire of Haychester Cathedral in the background and finally one of him in full dress uniform as National Administrator General, stood in front of the famous New Scotland Yard three sided revolving sign.

"Goodbye Commander" Taylor then remarked, practically salivating as he wrote 'DECEASED' across his file cover and consigned it with quite a loud thud as it landed in the black in-tray, "and good riddance!"

"You, you can stay, for now" he then remarked at the next file, Tracy Caverner's although he did pause to update her official status from Divisional Commander to National Administrator General before returning it to the draw.

The next drawer was marked 'TRANSPORT' and the first file from it was Divisional Commander Appleby's which Taylor took the opportunity to open and study some of the contents more closely.

"You are trouble" Taylor then commented "We will have to keep an eye on you but for now you can stay" he then remarked before adding the ominous comment 'Maintain surveillance and prepare to terminate if required' to the file and then return it to the drawer.

“And as for you, young man, well...” Taylor then disparagingly commented as he looked at the next file, that of Jack, illustrated with a surveillance photograph of him on the cover “We will definitely have to keep a very beady eye on you, won’t we?” he asked before marking the comments section with the words ‘DANGEROUS - Priority subject of concern’ and then returning the file to the draw.

The next drawer was marked ‘POLITICAL’, and the first file out was, appropriately that of the Prime Minister, Jayne Grey.

“We need to get you out of the way for a while I think” Taylor remarked “We are not ready to deal with you yet...” he then proceeded to write the words ‘Flag for possible removal for operational requirements’ on her file.

The next file was the former Mayor of London, Alfred Oscar.

“You have not ceased to be useful to us just yet” Taylor then commented “Your time will come, your phoenix like rise and revenge will serve us just as much as it will serve you” he then remarked before marking ‘RETAIN FOR FUTURE OPERATIONAL REQUIREMENTS’ on the cover.

“See you in about seven or eight years I reckon” Taylor then smirked before consigning the former Mayor’s file to a red in tray over to his right.

“What are you doing in there?” Taylor then remarked to the photograph on the next file that, that of Sir Richard Crowthorne, “Actually, where are you supposed to be; now I come to think of it?”

After a few moments thought, Taylor wrote a quick note in Sir Richard’s file before relocating it to a different drawer, labelled ‘MISCELLEANEOUS’.

The last drawer on the desk was marked ‘HAND’ from which Taylor took out all the files inside, some dozen or so.

Several, including Olivier Torore and Adebesei were quickly processed with ‘DELETED’ scrawled across them, another file, that of the former Mobuto Ambassador to the UK, Peter Boru was marked ‘REMOVED’ and the file of the now deceased former President was also marked ‘ASSASSINATED’.

“You served your purpose, goodbye” Taylor declared as all bar one of the Hand files were confined to a black box on the floor below the desk.

“You on the other hand, you might come in useful” Taylor then remarked towards the last remaining Hand file, that of one of Adebesei’s Militia troop, one Corporal Alain Delfont, whose experience and skills, which were considerable were detailed in great detail and caused him to study them carefully.

“Yes, you can stay” Taylor then confirmed, writing ‘FOR RECRUITMENT - MONEY NO OBJECT’ across the file along with an allocated code name.

He then removed the 'HAND' label from the now empty draw and replaced with a new one that he carefully wrote by hand using the antique fountain pen.

The new label said just one word, the code name that Taylor had allocated to this individual a few moments earlier, 'THISTLEWOOD'.

His work now completed, Taylor proceeded to return the five drawers to their correct places before putting his pen away, pushing his chair and standing up.

"And so, the pieces of my little puzzle start to fall into place" Taylor remarked with a sense of pride before proceeding to the door, turning off the light and then leaving.

"Now whilst I don't mind a fish and chip supper now and then, this is much more like it" Megan remarked as Jack escorted her up the steps leading to the main entrance of the Mobuto Embassy.

"Well, it is not very often we get invited to one of these posh soirées so I think we should make the most of it" Jack suggested.

Jack was dressed in an exceptionally fine tailored black dinner jacket and bow tie while Megan had borrowed a striking sequined evening dress from her older sister especially for the occasion.

"Good evening Sir, Madam" the man on the door formally greeted them as they entered, "May I check your invitation please?" he then politely asked.

"Yes, of course" Jack confirmed as he reached inside his jacket pocket and produced the official invitation which he then handed across for inspection.

"Thank you, Sir, Madam" the doorman confirmed, handing back the invitation card before letting them pass, "Have a pleasant evening" he then called.

No sooner were they standing in opulent entrance hall that had been specially decorated for the occasion than a waiter appeared and offered them both a tall glass of champagne from a large silver salver which they gratefully accepted.

"I do hope this is going to become the norm for our evening dates in future" Megan quietly remarked "What with you being a fully qualified and decorated officer now."

"Have you seen the photographs from the last Transport Division Christmas piss up?" Jack responded, "The Holborn guys don't really do sophistication."

"Ah, there you are young man" a familiar voice called whereupon they both turned around to see Sir Richard approaching, making his way through the throng of distinguished guests, "and the lovely Megan too" he then took her hand and kissed it which made her blush a bit.

“Ah, a gentleman” Megan responded with delight, “I hope you are taking notes dear” she remarked to Jack.

“Good evening Sir Richard” Jack replied as he looked around.

“You know what Jack; a dinner jacket rather suits you” Sir Richard complimented.

“It’s borrowed” Jack admitted, “Both my Guvnor and my good lady here insisted I leave the uniform at home for a change.”

“Very wise” Sir Richard agreed.

“So, where is the guest of honour?” Jack then asked.

“She is due to arrive shortly” Sir Richard confirmed as he checked the time.

“I can’t seem to get my mobile to work” Megan remarked with a slightly frustrated frown.

“Simon Fuller has thrown a communications blackout over the whole area” Sir Richard explained, “We don’t want Adebese to get wind of our little surprise and do a runner.”

“Oh, I see” Megan responded and put her mobile away again.

“Well, this is all very lavish, isn’t it?” Jack then remarked as the three of them moved on through to the large room where an extensive buffet had been provided for the hundred or so specially invited guests to indulge in.

“Welcoming bashes for new Ambassador’s generally tend to be quite spectacular affairs” Sir Richard agreed, “I remember the one in the Russian Embassy a few years back, took three days for the hangover to clear.”

“Is it my inexperienced imagination, or is this a goon convention?” Megan remarked as she looked around.

“Indeed, it is” Sir Richard confirmed, “There are quite a few familiar faces around here this evening.”

“I can see Ben Nathaniel from Israeli Intelligence over near the string quartet” Jack motioned over towards the far side of the room where Nathaniel could be seen whereupon he and Sir Richard exchanged distant greetings through mutually raised glasses.

“John Hewitt is around here somewhere too” Sir Richard added, “Probably getting his ear bent by the Foreign Secretary I would imagine.”

“There is Christopher Dent coming out of the toilets” Jack then observed.

“Oh, isn’t that erm, oh what’s his name” Megan then indicated over the other side of the room whereupon Jack and Sir Richard turned around to see for themselves.

“Oh yes, Adam Barwell, our local man from the CIA” Sir Richard confirmed.

“Is there any international security agency that is not represented here tonight?” Jack asked.

“Probably not” Sir Richard confidently answered, “Adebisi is an extremely popular chap, and a lot of people want their pound of flesh.”

“Good evening everyone” Dent remarked as he joined them.

“Christopher” Sir Richard responded, “You still look uncomfortable in a tuxedo” he then commented.

“Now you know why I signed on with MI5 and not MI6” Dent remarked.

“Ah, Sir Richard my old friend” called a deeply African accented voice.

“Umberto” Sir Richard called, “It has been a long time.”

“Let me guess, you were at Oxford together?” Jack wryly remarked as the two old acquaintances greeted each other warmly with handshakes and embraces.

“Err, something like that” Sir Richard then evasively admitted, “Let me properly introduce you, this is Umberto Almoglu, the new Ambassador to the UK for the, err what is it called now?”

“The People’s New Free Democratic Republic of Mobuto” Almoglu triumphantly announced, “You must be the talented young man I have heard so much about.”

“Lieutenant Jack Regent, National Security & Police Service, Transport Division and this is my better half Megan Thorpe” Jack formally confirmed.

“A pleasure to meet you both” Almoglu responded, “I hoped I would get the chance to personally thank you for your sterling work in this whole sorry affair.”

“It’s what I do best Ambassador” Jack admitted.

“Look sharp everyone, she’s arrived” the Home Secretary called as he approached.

“Ah, excellent” Almoglu responded.

A few moments later, the string quartet paused playing and all heads turned towards the entrance when Tracy arrived, resplendent in full ceremonial dress uniform.

The Ambassador stepped forward to formally greet her.

“Administrator General” Almoglu called as he approached reverently “I am so glad you accepted our invitation.”

“Thank you, Ambassador,” Tracy responded, “It was an invitation I couldn’t possibly refuse” she then admitted.

“On behalf of the people and the Government of the People’s New Free Democratic Republic of Mobuto, may I offer my sincerest condolences on your tragic loss” Almoglu then remarked.

“Thank you, I really appreciate it” Tracy confirmed.

“Our unwanted guest remains in his quarters at the rear of the building” Almoglu confirmed, “He is still unaware of his change in diplomatic status so please feel free to personally deliver him the bad news and take him away at your leisure.”

“Oh, I fully intend to Ambassador, believe me” Tracy readily agreed.

“I’m sorry I am late” the Foreign Secretary then called as he rushed to join them.

“Ah, there you are Adrian” Sir Richard remarked, “I was beginning to wonder if you were ever coming.”

“I had to swing by the Attorney General’s Office and pick up this” he indicated the file in his hand, “The last piece of the jigsaw before we can safely and most importantly, legally escort Mr Adebese off the premises.”

“Thank you, Adrian” Tracy responded as she took the file and quickly checked the documentation inside before closing it again.

“Can we offer you a drink?” Almoglu asked.

“Maybe later Ambassador, thank you” Tracy politely replied.

“Indeed, you are on duty of course” Almoglu remarked as Jack and Megan joined the group.

“You two look fabulous I must say” Tracy remarked in admiration.

“Thank you” Megan responded, “I insisted on Jack getting a proper tuxedo and thankfully he took the suggestion on board.”

“I could get used to this sort of shindig” Jack then admitted.

“Somehow dear, I don’t think you are really cut out for the diplomatic service” Megan advised, “You don’t exactly do subtle...”

“She has a point” Sir Richard agreed to which Jack duly nodded in acceptance.

“Oh, don’t mind if I do” Megan remarked as a waiter offered around a tray of Ferro Rocher nut chocolates.

“Before your arrival Administrator General, we held a little round table discussion with the various other security agency representatives who are here tonight” Sir Richard announced, “Although Mr Adebesei has committed crimes in numerous other jurisdictions worldwide, we have agreed, in light of recent events and out of renowned respect for your late husband that you in your capacity as head of the United Kingdom National Security & Police Service may have the honour of taking him into custody.”

“They are all here to watch his downfall and for the free feed” the Foreign Secretary added knowingly.

“Thank you all” Tracy responded humbly, “so, where do we find our mutual friend?” she then asked, eager to get down to business.

“Follow me please” Almoglu called before placing his glass down on a waiter’s tray and proceeding to lead the way up the ornate main staircase with Tracy, the Foreign Secretary and two Embassy Security Staff following closely behind.

“Should I go up as well?” Jack asked as they watch them disappear from sight.

“You are off duty young man” Sir Richard advised, “Enjoy yourself” he instructed.

“I’ll tell you what, you two talk shop whilst I find the little girl’s room” Megan remarked with a smile before leaving them.

“Such an understanding young lady” Sir Richard complimented to Jack, “She’s a keeper.”

“Oh yes...” Jack readily agreed.

On the third floor of the Embassy, the Ambassador led Tracy and the others to the door of the guest quarters suite which had been home to Adebesei in his isolation for almost eight months now. Two of the Embassy’s internal security guards stood on duty either side of the door and stood to attention, saluting as the party arrived.

“Stand down gentlemen” the Ambassador called whereupon with a respectful small bow, the two guards stepped aside.

The Ambassador then stepped aside himself and silently indicated the door to Tracy who stepped forward and then knocked three times.

“Who is it?” a clearly agitated voice called from behind the door.

“Room Service...” Tracy quietly remarked before raising her voice so she could be heard through the door, “Mr Adebesei, we need to talk to you on a matter of the utmost urgency” she then called.

“What are you talking about?” the voice behind the door angrily called as footsteps could be heard approaching before the lock was released and it opened to reveal Adebese standing there.

“I was just in the neighbourhood and thought I would pop in” Tracy sarcastically remarked.

“Go away you bitch!” Adebese responded in protest “You have no jurisdiction here, I am an honoured hero and guest of the Republic of Mobuto, I have diplomatic immunity and you should be dead!”

“Yeah, about that” Tracy remarked before stepping forward and entering the room whereupon Adebese stepped back “Erm, what was it you said?” she then asked.

“I do believe he was declaring diplomatic immunity, Administrator General” the Ambassador confirmed.

“They put you in charge?” Adebese scoffed “They must be desperate!”

“I believe it is this document you are referring to Sir?” Tracy produced a piece of paper from the file which she then passed to the Ambassador.

“Ah yes” the Ambassador confirmed “Diplomatic immunity certificate signed by my predecessor and authorised by the former President of Mobuto.”

“What are you talking about?!?” Adebese demanded to know.

“Ah, of course” Tracy then mockingly responded “You have been cooped up in here so long you probably haven’t had the chance to read the papers” she then produced a copy of a newspaper and dropped it onto the coffee table in front of her whereupon Adebese could clearly see the headline about the death of the former President and the revolution that had resultantly taken place.

“Fake news!” Adebese dismissively replied, shoving the paper away.

“Sorry, I am afraid not” Tracy continued “It seems that the President was tragically killed when he tripped over a box of live hand grenades he had carelessly left lying around his bathroom” she confirmed.

“Impossible!!” Adebese continued to protest.

“Oh, it’s true I am afraid” the Ambassador confirmed, “We don’t even have enough of him to bury, there are little pieces of him all over the place apparently.”

“I am still under diplomatic immunity, and I will not submit to this comical attempt to deprive me of my rights!” Adebese continued to protest although he was starting to look a little less confident than a few moments earlier.

“Ambassador, I believe you have the honour?” Tracy then called back over her shoulder towards Almoglu.

“Indeed” the Ambassador confirmed as he casually proceeded to tear up Adebese’s diplomatic immunity certificate into small pieces before tossing them into the air with a smirk on his face.

“Oh dear...” Tracy mockingly remarked as the shreds of paper came floating down around them.

“This is an outrage!” Adebese protested once again.

“This is justice” the Ambassador called “As of this moment your diplomatic immunity is terminated, your citizenship of the People’s New Free Democratic Republic of Mobutu is now null and void and your presence in this building is now classified as an act of trespass.”

“Ambassador, do I have your permission to proceed?” Tracy then formally asked.

“You do Administrator General” the Ambassador confirmed.

“Mr Wright, as the duly designated representative of the UK Government, will you bear witness to this confirmation?” she then asked of the Foreign Secretary.

“I do Administrator General” the Foreign Secretary formally confirmed.

“In which case” Tracy turned back “Sebastian St. John Emmanuel Adebese” she formally called “I am placing you under arrest.”

“Get your hands off me you evil bitch!” Adebese angrily swiped Tracy’s hand away just as she was about to grab him, “I am innocent of everything except my devotion to my cause.”

“Yeah, whatever” Tracy casually dismissed this statement “You have the right to remain silent...”

“Oh, please do take that one up...” the Ambassador remarked aside at that point.

“...the right to consult a solicitor which will be provided if you do not have one of your own” Tracy continued, “Do you understand the caution?” she then asked, staring him straight in the eyes.

“What are the charges?” Adebese demanded to know.

“This could take a while...” the Foreign Secretary quietly commented.

“Conspiracy to cause explosions, murder, manslaughter, attempted murder, membership of a banned terrorist organisation, assault occasioning actual bodily harm, trespass, the list is endless quite frankly” Tracy responded.

“I am a free man; a devotee of chaos and I will never bow down before your insignificant courts!” Adebese continued to defiantly protest “Now, go away, all of you!” he then demanded.

“Sorry pal, it doesn’t work like that” Tracy responded as she reached for her handcuffs and stepped forward to formally detain him.

Adebese however was waiting for that exact moment as with lightning-fast reflexes he stuck out, kicking Tracy in the stomach, and sending her crashing into a coffee table.

The Foreign Secretary bravely responded by making a lunge at Adebese only to be smashed in the face and sent back against the wall before he slumped down onto the floor.

At that moment, the two security guards who were stationed outside, stormed in with guns drawn in response to the noise but found Adebese stood in the centre of the room, his left arm tightly wrapped from behind around the Ambassador’s neck and a long sharp knife held to the throat with his right hand.

“One move, he dies” Adebese simply declared, madness and desperation in his eyes.

The Ambassador indicated to the two guards to drop their weapons which they proceeded to do slowly before stepping back and allowing them through, the tip of the knife constantly pressed up against the Ambassador’s throat.

Tracy scrambled to her feet just in time to see Adebese and the Ambassador heading out of the door into the corridor.

“Are you okay?” she then asked the Foreign Secretary, seeing him sprawled across the floor, blood streaming from his nose.

“Yeah...” he groggily confirmed with a thumbs up, “Go get him” he then called.

It was only moments later that Adebese and the Ambassador reached the balcony overlooking the grand foyer below where the party was continuing, its guests blissfully unaware of the drama unfolding three storeys above their heads.

Sir Richard was in conversation with a group of people when they all looked up on hearing a scream.

“Oh my God!” Sir Richard exclaimed as he and the others present saw the Ambassador pushed off the third-floor balcony where, more by luck than judgement he managed to grab the balustrade.

“Let’s go” Ben Nathaniel called whereupon he, Sir Richard and Hewitt headed for the stairs and ran up them as fast as they could.

There were further screams when a gunshot rang out from somewhere in the building, echoing all along the various corridors which caused Sir Richard and the others to momentarily pause and duck before continuing upwards.

“What the hell is going on?” Jack asked as he emerged from the dining room upon hearing the commotion to see the others speeding past him whereupon he joined them heading upstairs.

“Quick, grab him!” Sir Richard called “He’s slipping”.

Nathaniel and Hewitt raced to the balustrade and managed to grab an arm each before hauling the Ambassador back over to safety.

“Is he going to be all right?” Tracy asked as she joined them, somewhat winded.

“I will be all right, thank you” the Ambassador confirmed as he tried to get his breath back.

“Adebesi has escaped, he is on the loose in here somewhere” Tracy then grimly confirmed.

“This place is a rabbit warren; he could be anywhere” Hewitt remarked.

“I have got a body here!” Jack was then heard to call from nearby whereupon Tracy, Nathaniel and Sir Richard came over.

“One of the Embassy guards, he’s dead” Jack confirmed “and his weapon is missing.”

“All units from Angel One” Tracy called into her radio “Seal the building, be aware that the target is loose, armed and dangerous” she instructed “Get all the guests to a secure room and lock them down, now.”

“What’s that?” Sir Richard then asked as he thought he heard something in the far distance.

“Screams” Nathaniel responded, “He’s heading down the servant’s corridors.”

“Come on” Jack then encouraged as he set off with the others trying to keep up behind him.

“All units from Angel One” Tracy called into her radio as they headed down the corridor towards the rear of the vast building “Our man may be headed via the servant’s access to the basement, get a team down there right now and cut him off.”

“Preferably at the neck...” Hewitt then suggested.

Down in the basement, Megan was checking her makeup in the mirror. Her search for the toilet had taken her somewhat off course and she had wound up down in the lower levels by mistake, but a suitable facility was down there, so she decided to make use of it anyway.

Having finished and closed her small handbag, Megan headed for the door but paused when she thought she could hear some sort of commotion in the distance which prompted her to only open the door just enough to see what was going on.

In the far distance there appeared to be a fight in progress between two men as the catering staff scattered in all directions, some screaming, all running for their lives.

“Oh hell...” Megan remarked to herself before looking around.

Thinking quickly, she ducked straight across the corridor to the large kitchen area located on the opposite side where some of the catering staff had wisely decided to hide, crouched down on the floor behind the stainless-steel food preparation counters.

Megan remained in the doorway and cautiously looked down the corridor to see the attacker finish fighting by dealing with the embassy security guard who had been trying to stop him by way of a sharp blow to the neck followed by the butt of his gun rammed hard into the Guards' lower spine.

Further voices could be heard approaching from some distance away closing in on Adebese and so he took to his feet again, heading off down the kitchen corridor straight towards where Megan was hiding in the shadows of the doorway.

“Quick, pass me that!” Megan whispered to one of the catering staff cowering nearby and indicating something on the preparation surface just above his head.

“There he is!” came a shout whereupon Adebese looked around to see Jack and Sir Richard appear at the far end of the corridor and then continue to pursue him.

By way of reply, Adebese opened fired, sending off a couple of shots behind him which forced his pursuers to quickly duck down.

Seeing them scramble for safety, he duly resumed his run only to be suddenly stopped when Megan emerged from the kitchen doorway and smashed a large solid silver serving tray across his face with extreme force.

The hard blow sent Adebese crashing to the ground, dazed and confused but not totally stopped which was when Megan thought quickly, grabbed the nearest thing to hand, a full and still sealed bottle of champagne, smashing it over the back of his head whereupon he fell flat to the floor unconscious.

“Whoa...” Jack remarked as he and Sir Richard arrived.

“Is that him?” Megan asked as she casually chucked the remnants of the champagne bottle neck that was in her hand away.

“It most certainly is” Jack confirmed as he kicked away the firearm whilst Sir Richard removed two knives from the still unconscious Adebesei.

“What’s happened?” Tracy asked as she finally caught up to the situation, “Oh...” she then remarked on seeing what had occurred.

“A seventy-six Bollinger, what a shame” Sir Richard remarked mournfully as he saw the remnants of the label from the bottle.

“Is he going to be all right?” Jack asked as he and Megan were reunited.

“I sincerely hope not” Tracy commented.

“He’s going to have a hell of a headache when he wakes up” Jack added.

“Got a broken nose too” Tracy added as she inspected the injuries, “What did you do to him?” she then asked.

“Smashed him in the face with a serving tray and then hit him over the head with the bottle” Megan admitted.

“Nice...” Tracy responded in admiration, “Right, let’s get him out of here before he wakes up, shall we?” she then suggested.

A few minutes later amid a media circus, Adebesei, now fully restrained and still barely conscious, was carried out of the Embassy in full view of the press by four strong Security Service officers and loaded into the back of the waiting prisoner van.

Looking on from the main entrance was Tracy, who allowed herself a small smile of satisfaction to herself before heading back inside.

As the prisoner van duly departed with a substantial escort convoy of Security Service vehicles, a figure in the shadows of an overlooking window on the opposite side of the street watched.

Once the convoy had disappeared out of sight amid a cacophony of sirens, the individual turned around to leave, a shaft of light through which he stepped revealing it to be Taylor who smiled knowingly before heading out of the room and down the back stairs of the building.

A car was waiting for him outside into which he got before being driven away.

As Taylor’s car left, splashing through the puddles of rainwater along the uneven side street, he too was being discreetly observed, Divisional Commander Appleby, looking suitably anonymous in civilian clothing, emerged from a phone box on the corner of the street where he made a note of the registration of the car before leaving.

“Now what the heck are you up to boss?” Jack remarked to himself as he noticed from a first-floor window of the Mobuto Embassy, his superior officer in the street below, heading away towards the main road before disappearing.

“Something wrong Jack?” Megan asked as she joined him.

“Uh?” Jack responded, taken unawares by her arrival which snapped him quickly out of his thought process, “Oh, it’s nothing, just shadows” he then explained.

“Okay then...” Megan responded although she knew Jack too well to really believe that whatever it was that had got his attention a few moments earlier was of little significance, “The excitement is over, the Ambassador is grumbling about one of the embassy’s antique solid silver salvers looking very bent and they have run out of Ferrero Rocher except for these two which I saved for you.”

“Oh, thanks love” Jack responded as he took the two chocolates before giving one back to her, so they shared equally.

“Time to go home?” she then suggested.

“Time to go home” Jack happily agreed before, arm in arm they headed off, “Nice work with Adebesei back there earlier by the way” he then complimented her.

“Thanks, it was just instinctive action with whatever came to hand really” Megan explained.

“Where did you learn that?” Jack then asked out of curiosity.

“I’m an east end girl” she reminded him “Tough as nails and twice as undefeatable.”

It was near midnight when Tracy finally arrived back home, this time more composed as she carefully hung up her uniform overcoat and tunic on the correct hooks before heading out into the kitchen to put the kettle on.

It was having put the kettle on that she looked off to her left and noticed a light on in the joint study and hobby room which caused her to head down the corridor to investigate.

The lamp on the desk was on, it being one of those touch activated types which would sometimes come on by itself whenever something like a spider crawled across it.

Illuminated by the lamp was The Commander’s journal, its final entry still incomplete, the pen used still lying by the side where he had left it and with the light shining down on it, it was almost as if he was, in spirit form encouraging Tracy to finish it.

Sitting down in the slightly creaky old swivel chair, Tracy took a moment to read the incomplete last entry that The Commander had begun writing on the morning he died.

“Probably going to be another day of dealing with lunatics and trying not to get hurt in the process.

“Maybe I should ask Tracy out to lunch today, I think we could both use the break.

It was then she noticed something in the back of the journal, the edges of which were just protruding. Carefully lifting the pages to the inside back cover revealed a couple of photographs and a sealed envelope addressed to her.

“Ah, there you are” Tracy remarked as she looked at the first photograph, an old black and white snapshot showing The Commander when he was probably no more than nine or ten years old, smiling with his older brother and sister along with his late father all stood in front of the bonnet of a Mk1 Ford Transit van parked somewhere, probably in Lewisham.

On the reverse in faded pencil was an inscription, ‘Dad’s brand-new van, 1967’.

The other picture was a glossy colour print supplied by the press office of the Evening Standard newspaper which showed Tracy looking fabulous in her wedding dress when she emerged from the Transport Division offices at Holborn on the way to their wedding.

“Good choice of photo” Tracy complimented before turning her attention somewhat apprehensively to the sealed letter.

For a few moments Tracy contemplated the letter, her name clearly written in The Commander’s handwriting on the front, unsure if she really wanted to read it.

“Oh, why not?” she then remarked before proceeding to carefully open it, extracting the single sheet inside from the envelope before unfolding it and proceeding to read.

Tracy, my dearest love.

If you are reading this then the inevitable has happened and I am no more. It was going to happen sooner or later I reckoned, doing what we do day in and day out, it was obvious that old age was never going to be put as the cause of death on my coroner’s report.

It is my sincerest wish that even though I am gone, you are still here, still fighting and staying where you can make a difference.

In my life I was always what my old man called a one-man band, dedicated, probably reckless from time to time but with no one to worry about except myself, then you came along and for the first time I had focus and someone worth fighting and living for, maybe even dying for too.

Even though I am no longer with you in physical form, I will always be with you in spirit; I will always love you more than life itself.

By now I expect various unpleasant people have been dragged off kicking and screaming into prison, the Prime Minister has made a speech and Sir Richard has ordered half a dozen cases of single malt on expenses for the wake.

I have nothing much to pass on beyond my undying love for you except my journals which I would like Jack to have. Tell him there are a few bits of unfinished business in there which, if he finds himself with some spare time looking for something to do, he is more than welcome to have a go at.

One day we will meet again, in the afterlife, the next life, whatever it is called but until then, keep your spirits up, don't let the buggers get you down and never give up.

Tracy's eyes were welling up as she finished reading the letter before placing it and the photographs back in the rear of the journal which was when she looked at the last incomplete entry.

Picking up the pen, she looked up as if in search of inspiration for a few moments before beginning to write.

"All good things come to an end, but sometimes an end can be a beginning of a new chapter. However, this is one that the author of this journal will no longer be making, his journey is now at an end after many years of dedication and sacrifice, he can finally rest, his job is done, and it is now down to me to carry on his work.

"So many names he was known by, Eddie Regent, Sam Edwards, The Commander, Divisional Commander, Administrator General, son, father, husband, friend, soul mate, and I will forever remember him.

"On behalf of my beloved husband, this is Tracy Caverner-Regent, signing off.

Two Weeks Later...

It seemed like a different world, a different city that crisp early December morning compared with the tumultuous events of a couple weeks earlier that had rocked London and indeed the whole country to the core, figuratively and literally.

Now the streets were quiet, the population were back to the normal milling about on everyday business and a sense of calm had descended.

In the foyer of New Scotland Yard, a couple of engineers from the Security Service Estates Maintenance Department were working on a task that nobody in their section ever liked performing and especially not under these potential unique circumstances.

Tracy arrived in the foyer, dressed in the full black variant of the official dress uniform although minus her still missing ceremonial sword but now with the A1 designation in gold plated letters on her epaulettes as her appointment as the new National Administrator General of the Service had been formally confirmed a few days earlier.

It was with an understandably heavy heart that she looked up to see what the engineers were doing, carefully applying a name in ornate gold leaf lettering to the memorial, the honour roll of all those who had lost their lives in service stretching back almost a century.

Tracy managed a meek smile as she saw them finish applying the name before stepping back.

“Edward Regent GC QPM”

“It should have been me” Tracy quietly remarked to herself before heading slowly off towards the lifts.

A couple of minutes later Tracy emerged from the lifts on the top floor where, standing in the corridor she noted how much quieter it was than had been the case in recent weeks.

With most of the major investigation work now concluded and suspects detained, there was little else left ongoing, the Special Operations Control Room had been stood down and the various commandeered officers had returned to their normal duties.

“I thought I would find you here” called a familiar voice which caused Tracy to look around.

“Sir Richard” Tracy responded, “Fancy meeting you here” she remarked.

“Well, you know, official duties and all that” Sir Richard honestly admitted.

“I have to admit, other than dusting off my old black uniform and changing the epaulettes, I am not really sure what the plan is for today” Tracy admitted, seemingly feeling a bit lost.

“Ah, it’s all been carefully planned my dear” Sir Richard reassured her as he proceeded to escort her down the corridor, “My role today for example is ‘Official Escort to the Administrator General’, it even says so in the official blurb.”

“And what is my role then, Official Merry Widow?” Tracy asked as they approached her office.

“Something like that, yes” Sir Richard admitted as they passed through the outer office and proceeded inside.

“Wonderful...” Tracy remarked with little enthusiasm as she went and sat behind the desk, “What is Jack doing then? I heard him in the corridor the other day, mumbling about something being the wrong colour I think.”

“He is the designated Transport Division officer in charge of the official transport” Sir Richard confirmed to a look of realisation from Tracy, “I do believe he has managed to procure the required items as per his assignment.”

“I am sure he has; he is a resourceful lad despite his young age” Tracy agreed.

“Oh, I thought you might like to know that the New Mobuto Government has formally confirmed Adebese and Torore have been officially stripped of their citizenship, so we are free to prosecute them and, quite frankly do whatever we want with them” Sir Richard then confirmed.

“For those two evil bastards, no mercy” Tracy determinedly instructed, “Find the darkest, dampest rat-infested hell hole there is, throw them in it and chuck away the key.”

“Absolutely” Sir Richard agreed.

“Have Special Branch got anything more out of that snivelling git of an ex-Mayor by any chance?” Tracy then asked.

“Lots of preaching, death threats, usual nonsense but nothing really useful” Sir Richard confirmed, “I don’t think he likes you very much...”

“The feeling is mutual, believe me” Tracy replied, “Besides, we have more than enough evidence to send him down for decades.”

“That we have” Sir Richard confirmed.

“There is one loose end to tie up though...” Tracy’s voice trailed off in thought.

“Administrator General?” Sir Richard called.

“How long have we got before I have to be there?” Tracy then asked, clearly deep in thought.

“Err, about two hours” Sir Richard consulted his watch.

“Right” Tracy then picked up the telephone on her desk and pressed a single button to connect her.

“I sense an idea approaching that I am probably not going to like...” Sir Richard remarked with some unease.

“Terry?” Tracy called as soon as her call was answered by Commander Kinderley, her official driver “Bring the car around to the side entrance in Dacre Street right away, please” she then requested.

“I am almost afraid to ask” Sir Richard remarked as Tracy hung up the telephone
“what are you up to?”

“Just popping out for a little drive around town” Tracy evasively responded with a bit of a knowing smile.

“I had better get my coat then” Sir Richard remarked as he began to stand up, but Tracy shook her head.

“No need for you to come along my old friend” Tracy reassured him as she stood up and put her black uniform overcoat on “This is a little personal matter I need to take care of, alone.”

“Are you sure?” Sir Richard asked as Tracy headed for the door.

“I am a big girl now, I can take care of myself” she reassured him before swiftly departing, leaving Sir Richard looking on with an understandably apprehensive expression.

“Yes, I am sure you can...” he remarked to himself.

A few moments later Tracy came into Fuller’s office just down the corridor, taking him by surprise.

“Oh, erm sorry Ma’am” Fuller remarked, initially standing up only for Tracy to indicate he could relax.

“I am not here” Tracy confirmed as she looked over some files located off to one side before finding what she was looking for on a piece of paper which she quickly tore off and shoved in her pocket.

“Is there something I can help you with Ma’am?” Fuller then asked.

“No, it’s all right thanks” Tracy confirmed as she turned to leave, “I am just popping out for a bit.”

“Erm, if you don’t mind me asking, where?” Fuller then inquired.

“Pest control” Tracy called back as she left.

“Okay...” Fuller remarked to himself, completely in the dark.

A couple of minutes later, Tracy emerged largely unnoticed from a little used exit in the narrow Dacre Street that runs down the south side of New Scotland Yard and proceeded to get in the front passenger seat of her official car that was already waiting for as she had requested with her official driver Commander Kinderley behind the wheel.

“Where to Ma’am?” Kinderley inquired as he started the engine which prompted Tracy to locate the piece of paper that she had obtained from Fuller’s office a few minutes earlier and consult it.

“Err, Caterham please” Tracy instructed “and I will direct you in when we get closer” she confirmed.

“Certainly Ma’am” Kinderley confirmed before driving off.

The only person to observe her departure was Sir Richard who was watching from the stairwell window above, who looked on with a disapproving expression as he watched Tracy’s car disappear out of sight.

Although officially he had no idea where she was going, deep down inside, his experienced instincts told him exactly what she was probably up to.

Jack and Megan arrived in the main train maintenance and preparation shed at Stewarts Lane in South London just in time to see the sleek and highly polished steam locomotive about to be backed onto a very special train that he had been responsible for organising and putting together for this most solemn day.

“All right mate, draw up slowly!” came the call from the Duty Shunter as he directed the driver of the huge one hundred and twenty eight ton Battle of Britain Class locomotive, number 34051, named ‘Winston Churchill’ to back up to the five coaches that had been assembled together to form the train.

With much hissing and squealing, the mighty locomotive was driven at no more than a slow walking pace as it approached the end of the first coach.

“And.... stop!” the Duty Shunter then called whereupon with a gentle clunk as the buffers of the coach and the locomotive tender met, he then proceeded to attach the couplings and brake connections between the two parts.

“You did it” Megan remarked with pride “You actually got the train.”

“What you see here is the end result of about two weeks of seemingly endless phone calls, emails and even at one point a good old fashioned telex message” Jack confirmed proudly.

“Wow!” Megan responded, clearly impressed.

“Now all I have got left to do is sort out the seating plans, the catering and hope nothing cocks up out on the line that holds things up” Jack remarked as they continued to observe the ongoing preparation of the train.

“She’s good to go Lieutenant!” the Duty Shunter then called with a thumbs up.

“Cheers Steve!” Jack responded gratefully as he and Megan walked around to the front of the train to admire the gleaming locomotive as it quietly simmered and sizzled, awaiting the off.

“Hang on” Megan then pointed out, “I know my geography is a bit ropey and my knowledge of railways equally lacking but when I last looked, Victoria Station was that way” she indicated towards the rear of the train, “Isn’t it pointing the wrong way?”

“Another loco attaches to the rear and hauls it back into the station then when the time comes, this beauty here leads it out” Jack explained.

“So, what happens to the other loco?” Megan then asked as a smartly turned out blue and yellow painted Class 33 diesel locomotive advanced slowly into the shed, approaching the rear of the train.

“We leave it behind” Jack confirmed as the diesel was coupled up at the back, “Once we are gone, the driver takes it empty back to the shed and probably goes off for his lunch I expect.”

“So where will you be during all this?” Megan asked.

“I am the officially designated train security supervisor” Jack proceeded to explain, “It is my responsibility to ensure it gets into the station, everyone gets on, it departs on time and reaches its destination without any interruptions.”

“In other words, you get to ride on the footplate” Megan confirmed.

“That’s the best bit” Jack confirmed, “I just wished it were for a far happier occasion” he then admitted.

“We are ready when you are Lieutenant!” came the call from the Duty Shunter then called.

“Right with you mate” Jack responded before he and Megan headed to the coach immediately behind the diesel locomotive and climbed aboard.

With the hissing of air brakes being released and the gentle burbling of the diesel, the train of four traditional first-class Pullman cars, two either side of a specially prepared luggage van headed slowly out of the shed into the yard outside before proceeding slowly out onto the main line leading towards London Victoria Station.

“By the almighty grace of Ixion, I thank thee for our deliverance into the realm of chaos” Orbison called towards the altar he was kneeling before, “To Life Immortal, Amen!”

“AMEN!” echoed the voices of the thousands of followers who were following Orbison’s broadcast online from around the world, broadcast over large speakers inside the chamber before he turned to face the bank of webcams before him.

“My Brothers, Facilitators, dear friends” Orbison then declared “May the teachings and blessings of our glorious Brotherhood reflect upon you all, Be Seeing You.”

A significant amount of cheering and clapping was then heard over the speakers before it faded away, the lights dimmed, and the broadcast ended.

“Now give us your money...” Orbison quietly smirked to himself as he thought about the generous cash contributions that would now be flooding into his account from his followers worldwide in response to his latest broadcast.

Taking off his gold embroidered black ceremonial robes and handing them to a waiting aide who bowed in reverence, Orbison proceeded off the stage and over to a small door through which he then passed.

It was into his personal meditation chamber that Orbison had arrived, dimly lit with a solitary candle flickering in the centre of a table right in the middle of the room.

It was then that Orbison got the distinct impression he was not alone, a fact confirmed when suddenly in the darkness, someone struck a match and proceeded to light another candle which cast a warm almost ethereal glow around and revealed someone was sitting there in a large armchair.

“Good morning Mr Orbison” Tracy formally called before casually blowing out the lit match in her hand.

“Administrator General Caverner” Orbison responded with not inconsiderable surprise at his unexpected guest, “This is erm, quite a surprise.”

“I thought that in light of the events of the last few weeks and months, it was time you and I met” Tracy calmly explained.

“I do hope you don't mind me asking but, how did you get in here?” Orbison then inquired as he took a seat.

“Magic...” Tracy coolly replied “and a little discrete lock picking” she then admitted.

“Hmm...” Orbison responded, almost in admiration, “So, what can I do for you?” he then politely asked.

“Thanks largely to the efforts of your very expensive legal team plus whatever well connected strokes you managed to pull, I can’t touch you” Tracy explained.

“Indeed, if you wish to see it, I would be happy to show you my signed and sealed Get Out of Jail Free card if you like?” Orbison suggested.

“That’s quite all right” Tracy confirmed, “It however does not preclude conversation, a little chat, so here I am.”

“I would offer you a drink Administrator General, but this is my personal meditation sanctuary chamber and is the one place where I do not permit such niceties” Orbison explained “so what would you like to talk about?” he then asked.

“You and I both know you are into a lot of crooked stuff” Tracy admitted “drugs, prostitution, corruption, money laundering, etcetera” Tracy began “but it is more your connections to lunatics like The Hand I am most interested in.”

“Thanks largely to the efforts of your organisation and its very dedicated personnel, my former cohorts from The Hand have been pretty much taken out of the equation” Orbison remarked.

“Indeed” Tracy agreed “which means that, apart from whoever it is who is in the shadows really pulling the strings, on your side at least, you are the only player still left in the game.”

“Ah, I like games...” Orbison responded with a hint of glee.

“The thing is Mr Orbison” Tracy ominously warned “In any game, especially one with such high stakes like this one, the rules can change, and your protection won’t be there forever, I will be watching, I will be waiting.”

“There is a revolution coming you know” Orbison casually remarked, “A utopia beyond the realms of chaos that I and my devoted followers so earnestly long for.”

“Let me guess, I am not invited?” Tracy responded to a look of slight surprise from Orbison.

“Oh, so you have heard that then?” Orbison asked, clearly intrigued.

“Somebody mentioned it a couple of weeks ago, yes” Tracy confirmed “The thing is, if whoever else is playing this mysterious game that you and I seem to be stuck in is none too keen on me being part of it, I suspect they may well not be all that bothered about what happens to you either, once you and your minions have served their purpose.”

“Hmm...” Orbison mused.

“Just something you might want to think about” Tracy then suggested as she stood up, “In some games, people get hurt when they find they no longer have a chair once the music stops.”

“Thank you, I’ll bear it in mind...” Orbison responded, clearly a little concerned.

“In the meantime, do remember I will be keeping my eye on you” Tracy then reminded him as she turned to leave, “See you around someday...”

“I look forward to it...” Orbison remarked as Tracy left, leaving him alone with his worried thoughts.

As Tracy left the building, returning to her car parked outside and Orbison prepared to enter a meditative state, neither was aware that they were being overhead by a third party who had planted listening devices in the room a few days earlier.

The transmission from these microscopic listening devices was being sent automatically to a receiving computer on a desk in a darkened office in Cato Street, W1.

Sat at the desk were a number of individuals whose identities were shielded by being in the shadows, only a single source of light shone down on the one man at the head of the table where they all had listened intently to the exchange that the listening devices had relayed to them loud and clear.

“Dear oh dear Administrator General” Taylor remarked as he stopped the playback and proceeded to light a large cigar “In this game, WE make the rules and one day you are going to find that out, the hard way...”

Waiting to receive the train as it pulled into Platform Two of London Victoria Station was Shelby who had been pacing up and down nervously and constantly checking his watch until he heard the distinctive sound of a locomotive horn being sounded in the distance.

He stood and watched as the official train snaked its way across the complex point work that marks the entrance and exit lines from the large terminus station before, with the diesel locomotive burbling away and the clank of the wheels over the joints in the rails, it came slowly into the platform and then stopped smoothly, just six feet from the buffers.

No sooner had the train stopped than Jack and Megan emerged from the first door immediately behind the diesel locomotive.

“Looking good I must say” Shelby remarked as he admired the gleaming train.

“Thanks” Jack responded, “What’s the running?”

“Metropolitan Division on site liaison, Lieutenant Eisley reports that everyone should be arriving at Westminster Abbey in about twenty minutes” Shelby confirmed.

“Stand clear!” called a member of the train crew as the diesel locomotive was duly detached from what was now the rear of the train, its job now complete.

“Would you like the honour?” the Guard called, proffering a railway tail lamp with its red aspect already flashing.

“Why thank you” Jack responded, taking the lamp and then leaning forward to fix it in place on the iron bracket on the rear of the last carriage.

“So, you had best get moving” Shelby then prompted, “You should just make it if you head over there now.”

“I’m not going” Jack responded to a look of understandable confusion from Shelby, “I don’t like funerals, all right?”

“Who does?” Shelby replied.

“I have got a job to do here, and this is where I need to be” Jack continued to explain.

“All right” Shelby agreed, still not absolutely sure about Jack’s stance on the subject but deciding not to push it any further.

“Besides, if I don’t keep an eye on things here, Sir Richard will have drunk the Bar Car dry before we have even reached Clapham Junction!” Jack added.

“Good point” Shelby readily agreed.

“I know this is going to sound like a silly question” Megan asked as they watched the on-train staff preparing the coaches for the journey, “but, where exactly is this train going?”

“Haychester” Jack confirmed “The Commander is to be interred in the vaults of the Cathedral by kind permission of the archbishop.”

“That is quite an honour” Megan remarked.

“Well, he did spend fifteen years there, eleven of them as an Officer of the Law” Jack explained, “The only other real option was Lewisham where he was born but there is nowhere realistically suitable to bury him apparently.”

“Understood” Shelby called into his radio before turning back to them, “Just been confirmed, they are starting now.”

It had always been The Commander’s wish that were this day to come, any ceremony would be brief and uncluttered by over exuberance.

His wish was granted as after a brief service that lasted barely twenty minutes, the main doors of Westminster Abbey opened and the coffin, draped in the National Security & Police Service flag was carried out on the shoulders of six bearers as the mourners led by Tracy and the Archbishop of Canterbury followed solemnly behind.

With the greatest care and respect, the coffin was then placed on the rear of the waiting horse drawn gun carriage, a traditional method of transportation of the deceased in such high profile funerals.

All around was almost total silence as many hundreds of onlookers watched the moment the final journey began, the gun carriage moving off with the distinctive sound of horse's hooves across the cobbled surface before reaching Victoria Street and bearing around to the left.

As the procession proceeded at walking pace down the empty Victoria Street, Tracy followed immediately behind with Sir Richard just a little behind and to her left.

They led a group of over a hundred mourners including family, numerous high ranking Security Service officers from across the World, politicians from all the main parties including the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister plus representatives from the various agencies and organisations who had worked with The Commander over the years.

Onlookers lined the route ten deep on the pavements either side of Victoria Street as the cortege proceeded until they reached the rear of New Scotland Yard where it faces onto Victoria Street where an honour guard of Security Service officers representing every section and division of the Service was lined up, all in the full funeral version of their respective dress uniforms.

At the barked order from Divisional Commander Appleby who was the senior officer present in charge of the honour guard, they all removed their hats and saluted the coffin as it passed.

Then came something that nobody expected, somewhere in the crowd someone started to clap, the clapping grew as further people joined in and soon a rapturous but respectful applause broke out that filled the area and, for the first time in over a week Tracy managed to noticeably smile.

There was something else too, as they passed the junction where Broadway branched off Victoria Street, Tracy and Sir Richard Crowthorne both noticed that someone had placed a wreath against the low wall alongside the street sign where The Commander's first life as Edward Regent was violently struck down as a twelve year old, in the immediate aftermath of the life changing events of the Lewisham Diamond Heist of so many years earlier.

Ten minutes later the procession reached Victoria Station and a reverential silence fell throughout the interior of the Station as the gun carriage conveying The Commander's flag draped coffin entered through the South Eastern side Wilton Road entrance and proceeded across the concourse towards its destination on Platform Two.

Even the normally constant echoing station announcements had ceased, and the usual throng of railway travellers stood still and silent in respect for the passing of the funeral party with Tracy still leading the mourners walking just behind the coffin.

On Platform Two, the special funeral train awaited with Jack and Megan standing by the specially prepared van that was waiting to receive the coffin.

The horses' hooves echoed all around the station interior as the gun carriage made its way along the platform before stopping, inch perfect on the correct mark.

As the following mourners stood nearby, the six pallbearers returned to the front and proceeded to carefully lift the coffin off the gun carriage and mount it back on their shoulders once more.

It was with great care that they then proceeded up the specially provided ramp and into the van before setting the coffin down on the stand inside where it would rest for this next stage of the final journey.

The bearers duly ensured the coffin was secured in place before withdrawing back onto the platform to watch with the others as the Train Guard closed and secured the double doors.

As the mourners duly proceeded to board the train, Tracy stood still for a few moments, her head lowered in thought and contemplation before she and Jack embraced each other, the support needed so much at this sad time.

With the train scheduled to depart in a couple of minutes, Sir Richard duly escorted Tracy along with Megan back down the platform to their allotted carriage, appropriately also named Tracy and helped her aboard.

Jack watched for a few moments before turning smartly on his feet and heading up the platform towards the front of the train, pausing for a moment to exchange pleasantries with the Guard before reaching the locomotive and climbing up the steps of locomotive number 34051 and into the cab.

Moments later the Guard, himself turned out in full gold braided 1950's British Railways uniform as suited the occasion, checked his pocket watch before blowing his whistle loudly.

This was the signal for the Pullman Car stewards to ensure all the carriage doors were properly closed before the Guard duly turned around, blew his whistle again and waved his green flag before boarding the train through the open Guards Van door.

The Fireman on the foot plate of the locomotive duly acknowledged the Guard's flag and indicated to the Driver the 'Right Away' whereupon, as Jack looked on from the other side of the cab, the Driver released the brakes and with a loud release of steam and two long haunting chimes of the locomotive's whistle, the train began to move off.

Thousands had gathered to watch on the station's other platforms, nearby over bridges and also watching from overlooking buildings as locomotive number 34051 charged up the rising gradient that leads south out of Victoria Station, approaching Grosvenor Bridge over the River Thames, steam billowing and the sound of the locomotive working hard filling the air.

As the train crossed Grosvenor Bridge, Tracy looked out of the window at the River Thames passing by before looking across at Sir Richard sat directly opposite.

“Nothing’s the same anymore...” she remarked sincerely.

To Be Continued.....

© 2021 - John M Upton
All Rights Reserved