

VICTORIA

Security Novels Series - Episode VI



John M Upton

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Victoria

It was an unusual location to find the Division Commander of the Security Department's Metropolitan Division. The Commander's general dislike of boats meant that a large sea container port would normally have been the last place anyone that knew him would expect to find him, more so you considering how far outside his jurisdiction of Greater London it was, situated on the south east corner of the Kent coast.

The Commander was sat in the second man's seat in the lead cab of a Freightliner Class 66/5 heavy freight locomotive and watching the unloading of a large container vessel nearby with the aid of binoculars.

"Refresh my memory" the Commander asked his colleague from the Customs & Excise Division who was sat alongside him in the drivers seat "Exactly why am I sitting in a locomotive watching lots of metal boxes move backwards and forwards?"

"Don't worry Sir" the officer confirmed "The container we are after is on this ship and should be unloaded any minute."

"Where did intelligence say this container came in from?" the Commander asked as he resumed his observations.

"Somewhere in the Balkans apparently" the officer confirmed "via the Mediterranean and then Portugal."

"The scenic route then" the Commander commented but then paused and leaned forward as he saw something in particular that caught his eye.

"Is that the one?" he asked as he passed the binoculars back to the officer alongside him.

Taking the binoculars, the officer concentrated them on a red container that was currently suspended in mid air from the crane which was in the process of winching it from the ship's hold down to the dockside where a team of Customs Officers were already waiting.

"Yep, that's the one" the officer confirmed and with that both he and the Commander exited the locomotive cab, clambering down the side access steps onto the hard wet concrete surface of the dock area itself.

With precision manoeuvring, the container was landed inch perfect onto a waiting empty container flat wagon and once the dock master had released the haulage chains, the Commander and the waiting customs officers clambered on board and made straight for the end access doors.

After a bit of manhandling, they managed collectively to remove the security seal on the lock. It then only took a few seconds with a pair of bolt croppers to remove the lock before the doors were opened.

The Commander, dressed in his best gold braided uniform and the yellow day-glo jacketed Customs & Excise division officers looked inside the container, whereupon the Commander's expression turned from one of triumph to one of puzzlement.

"Davis!" the Commander called over to the operation commander, beckoning him over with a wave of the finger.

"Yes Sir?" Davis responded as he went over to his superior officer.

"Refresh my memory" the Commander enquired "If I recall I approved this joint operation on the basis that we were about to seize, and I quote, a considerable amount of dangerous material."

"Err yes Sir" Davis responded.

"Now I appreciate that my opinion on vegetables, indeed any food considered to be allegedly healthy is to avoid it at all costs" the Commander continued "But even I would not classify ten cases of baking potatoes and two boxes of cauliflowers as 'dangerous material', would you?"

Davis looked across into the container at the contents the Commander was pointing at and scratched his head in equal puzzlement.

"I would say Sir" Davis responded with clear bewilderment at this latest development "that our intelligence may have been a bit duff."

"You don't say!" the Commander retorted with a bit of a wry giggle.

The Commander contemplated the container momentarily before turning smartly away on his heels. He clambered back down from the wagon onto the dock and began to head back towards the main dock master's office.

With the majority of the Customs & Excise officers having now been stood down just leaving a token couple of officers guarding the seized container, the Commander casually started to walk away but stopped when he detected a scrabbling sound coming from somewhere behind him.

Turning around, he took his gun from its holster and looked back at the wagon and its container where, initially he could see nothing untoward.

"You're imagining things" he told himself as a large seagull flew low overhead causing him to look up for a few moments. As he was distracted however, a man suddenly appeared from beneath the wagon where he had been hiding and made a run for it.

"What the.....?" the Commander exclaimed as he suddenly realised something was not right and proceeded to give chase after the escaping stranger.

"Lima Mike Zero One from Lima Tango Zero One" the Commander's radio suddenly came alive with the sound of his wife Tracy's voice calling.

"Morning love" the Commander responded as he continued to run after the stranger "Can I call you back only I am a bit busy at the moment!"

"Well I am just outside the main Customs & Excise building" Tracy confirmed "Is there anything I can help you out with?"

"There is a chap in a black leather jacket legging it in your general direction" the Commander responded, already beginning to run out of breath "Could you possibly do me a favour and head him off?"

"On the way!" Tracy responded before jogging back over to a nearby red patrol car parked nearby. Quickly she was in the driver's seat with the door closed whereupon she started the engine and accelerated away.

The escaping stranger only narrowly avoided being run down by a dockside crane and a slow moving Freightliner train as he ran, seemingly fearing for his life. By the time he had reached the far side of the ferry port though, the Commander had fallen some considerable distance behind.

Looking around, the running man saw that it appeared he had managed to shake off his pursuer and began to slow down, entering the adjacent main public ferry terminal building and trying to blend in with the crowds inside.

He made his way through the building, past the various shops and enquiry desks towards the main exit and as he stepped out into the sunshine, he felt confident that he had managed to successfully escape his pursuer.

Proceeding towards the shuttle bus area to catch a ferry bus into Dover itself, the stranger suddenly found himself confronted with Tracy, standing in front of him, gun drawn.

"Hold it right there matey" she called.

"Or what?" the stranger defiantly enquired with a menacing scowl in an Eastern European or maybe even Russian accent.

"Then I would just have to shoot you" Tracy responded as a matter of fact with a shrug of her shoulders.

"I really wouldn't try it you know" the Commander, who had crept up behind the stranger advised, backed up by his gun placed in the stranger's back "She's really quite a good shot you know."

They say that a person's office says a lot about its owner. This was more than true of the office of Vladisov Barkov, a Russian business man with a lot of prominent if rather dubious connections.

As he casually sat back in his office chair, he looked up at the crossed AK47 assault rifles that were present like trophies on his office wall. Alongside them were framed pictures of himself and other colleagues on duty in Afghanistan, Chechnya and other military conflicts that he had been involved in during his life.

He got up and went over to the side table from where he poured a glass of vodka and quickly consumed the contents in one gulp. For a moment he contemplated a second glass when the telephone, an old bakelite type thing that seemed to predate the Soviet Union itself, rang out.

Putting the glass down, Vladisov reached over the back of the desk and picked up the telephone before answering in broad Russian.

"Yes?" he responded.

There was a longish pause as the caller relayed some important information which, judging from the way Vladisov's expression went from measured calm to controlled anger, was certainly far from positive.

"Where is he being held?" he enquired with a firm determination only to receive a negative answer.

"Well damn well find out and then report back directly to me!" he ordered before slamming down the telephone.

After the news he had received, Vladisov returned to his vodka and poured himself an extra large glass which again he consumed quickly in one gulp before walking over to the window and looking out on the city outside, now descending into darkness with the approaching dusk.

As the South Eastern Trains class 375 Electrostar train slowed for the approach to Factory Junction in south east London, the Commander, who had quite happily dozed off in Tracy's arms, awoke with a slightly dazed look.

"Welcome back love" Tracy commented when she saw her husband returning to the land of the conscious.

"Where are we?" the Commander blearily enquired.

"Approaching Battersea" Tracy confirmed as her husband sat up and looked around.

"Did I miss anything?" he asked as he snuck a quick kiss from his wife.

"Not really, our chappie is being moved to London later this afternoon" Tracy confirmed "and by way of a bonus, the boys in Kent have managed to put a name to our mysterious running man."

"Oh well" the Commander reacted as the train continued past Stewarts Lane depot and rounded the corner alongside the semi-derelict shell of the former Battersea Power Station. "So who is he then?"

"They are not saying" Tracy responded "Apparently we are going to be met at Victoria and then we are going to a meeting."

"Why is it I get the distinct feeling that things are about to go proverbially pear shaped?" the Commander asked as the train passed over the River Thames and slowed for the approach into London Victoria station.

"Well it's not like it would be the first time" Tracy remarked as she rose from her seat with her husband quickly following her to the nearest doorway.

With a squeal of brakes and the merest hum from the electrical motors, the predominantly white eight car train glided into platform three on the South Eastern side of London Victoria station.

A few moments after stopping just short of the buffer stops, the doors along the platform side of the train were released and simultaneously they all opened, allowing the tide of humanity contained within the train to exit onto the platform like a massive flow.

Tracy and the Commander waited for the crowd of disembarking passengers to reduce before stepping onto the platform themselves, arm in arm. Together they made their way up the platform towards the main concourse, pausing at the ticket barriers to place their warrant cards across the circular yellow magnetic sensors that allowed them to exit.

Walking out onto the busy concourse, passing beneath the large destination information indicators, the Commander noticed a group of three men in long overcoats who stood out from their surroundings in his opinion by a country mile.

"I think that may well be our welcoming committee" he commented.

"Who?" Tracy looked around as she had been distracted and had not seen them.

"The two goons standing either side of an old acquaintance over by the main entrance" the Commander nodded ahead.

"Oh you mean the ones trying to look discrete and failing miserably?" Tracy remarked with a wry smile.

"That would be them" the Commander confirmed as they went towards them, causing the little group waiting for them to step forward.

"Good afternoon Commander, Maam" Sir Richard Crowthorne greeted them as they met in the middle of the concourse.

"Hello Richard" the Commander responded "Why is it I am not surprised you are here?"

"Thought you would appreciate a lift mate" Sir Richard, the director general of MI5 responded.

"And the brain trust?" Tracy enquired of the two men accompanying Sir Richard in their dark glasses.

"Oh them" Sir Richard looked around behind him, "Let's just say they come with complements of another agency" he explained slightly hesitantly, clearly signifying that their presence was not his preferred option

"All right then" the Commander asked "What's all this about?"

"Let's talk elsewhere" Sir Richard responded "Shall we?"

"After you" the Commander replied before he and Tracy followed Sir Richard and his two minders out of the main entrance, across the front of the station to the taxi rank area where a traditional style black cab was waiting, parked to one side.

The two minders remained outside as Tracy, the Commander and Sir Richard climbed into the back of the cab and settled themselves down inside.

"All right Eddie" Sir Richard called to the driver "Away you go!"

"One of yours?" the Commander enquired.

"Well Eddie here is actually a genuine licensed black cab driver" Sir Richard explained "It means he comes in very useful when not doing his day job."

"So" the Commander relaxed and sat back "To what do I owe the pleasure of this little meeting then?"

"Dimitri Barkov" Sir Richard responded.

"Who?" both Tracy and the Commander replied in unison.

"The guy you arrested at Dover earlier today" Sir Richard explained.

"Oh you mean the guy who seemed to be smuggling potatoes and cauliflowers" Tracy realised.

"That's the one" Sir Richard confirmed "Where is he now?"

"On his way to London in the back of a black maria" the Commander responded as the cab continued up Victoria Street towards Westminster.

"Could I strongly suggest you lock him up in Paddington Green?" Sir Richard asked with a clear tone of concern in his voice.

"Maximum security for smuggling vegetables?" the Commander remarked with an amused grin "Which by the way, technically isn't even illegal."

"Let's just say for the moment" Sir Richard was reluctant to explain further at that time "that there is a lot more to him than meets the eye."

"Such as?" Tracy all but demanded to know.

"You will at some point be approached by a representative of another agency" Sir Richard continued to explain but was still being evasive "He will explain further, however trust absolutely nobody outside of the inner circle on this. You understand?"

"I think so" the Commander concluded, although both he and Tracy were none the wiser than they were before.

"This is where I get off" Sir Richard confirmed as the cab slowed and pulled into the side of the road in Whitehall.

"We will be meeting again on this matter on a more formal basis" Sir Richard responded as he got out of the cab "When that happens, this conversation did not happen."

"If you insist" Tracy replied.

"Believe me my dear" Sir Richard closed the cab door and spoke through the lowered side window "It's not me that is doing the insisting, good day."

With those closing words, Sir Richard put on his hat, turned smartly away and disappeared into the pedestrian traffic as though he was never there.

"Where to then Guvnor?" the cab driver called back "The fare is being picked up by the Government!"

"Holborn please" Tracy responded "And does that include the tip?"

Vladisov Barkov was clearly a man on a mission as he purposefully strode down the marble lined corridor of the old Communist Party building, its architectural grandeur a throw back to the days of Soviet Union power and control.

His footsteps echoed around the vast empty hall ways as Vladisov walked up to a grand staircase that dominated the centre of the building leading to the upper floors.

When he reached the first floor, Vladisov made his way to one of the many identical side doors leading off the corridor, entering an old fashioned office. Inside seated behind the desk was a short official looking gentlemen who barely looked up as Vladisov arrived and stood before him.

"Vaseli my old comrade" Vladisov announced.

"You are dangerous for my health my friend" Vaseli, the man seated behind the desk responded with a stern look.

"We have a mutual problem" Vladisov explained "And I need you to grease a few wheels."

"Dimitri has been arrested" Vaseli confirmed "Yes I am aware of the situation."

"I need you to get the paperwork started now" Vladisov responded "Get me unnoticed by the authorities into the United Kingdom as soon as you can."

"Not going to be easy" Vaseli responded as he removed the small round framed spectacles from the end of his nose and placed them on the desk "You are aware of course that numerous international authorities are crawling all over you and your, how shall I put it, business interests."

"None the less my old comrade" Vladisov enforced "This is something that must be done."

"All right" Vaseli responded reluctantly as he reached across his desk to a memo pad and began to scribble a number "Telephone this number in the morning and ask for extension 191" he instructed as he handed the note across.

"Thank you old friend" Vladisov responded as he took the note and discreetly tucked it inside his jacket pocket "I'll make sure I think of you when the next vodka shipment comes in."

"You do that Comrade."

"Where has the biscuit tin gone?" the Commander asked as he looked over the desk in Tracy's office.

"Your office is over in the Metropolitan Division now, remember?" Tracy reminded her husband but he still kept forgetting he had just been promoted to the Chief of the Metropolitan Division.

"Oh yes" the Commander remembered "The problem is my Personal Assistant keeps hiding the biscuits in the cupboards and refuses to let me have the key."

"Oh it worked then" Tracy commented wryly.

"Ah" the Commander looked up with realisation "The penny drops!"

"Well you do need to do something about your diet love" Tracy suggested.

"Point reluctantly taken" the Commander conceded before looking at his watch
"Anyway, I should get back to the yard."

"I'll see you at home" Tracy responded as they kissed.

"See you" the Commander announced as he left, leaving Tracy alone in the office.

It took only a minute or two for the Commander to make his way down the stairs and outside onto the street where he immediately headed for the nearby Holborn Underground Station, acknowledging the station supervisor who opened the ticket barrier gate for him as he passed through and then proceeded down the escalators.

A Piccadilly Line train was pulling into the platform as the Commander appeared, whereupon he quickly headed for the rear most carriage, grabbed an abandoned copy of the Evening Standard from a seat and stood in the standee area of the carriage with his back against the car wall.

"Please stand clear of the closing doors" the driver of the train announced over the internal tannoy, causing a last moment flurry of activity as late arriving passengers on the platform ran for the doors just as they were about to close.

Among these dare devil last minute borders was one gentleman in a tweed overcoat who had been leaning up against the platform wall, near the entrance, reading a newspaper. He had only moved forward to board the train when he had seen the Commander pass by.

Just as the door closing alarm sounded, the mysterious stranger boarded the carriage one up from the one the Commander was in, leaning on the perch seat at the carriage end and discreetly observing the Commander in the next carriage through the end car windows.

The doors were closed on the second attempt and with the hiss of air as the brakes were released, the train moved off.

The Commander murmured something in irritation when he made a mistake on the Suduko game in the paper just as the train pulled into Green Park. Only realising that this was his stop as the doors opened, the Commander quickly exited onto the platform, now somewhat crowded with the evening rush hour just starting.

As before, the mysterious stranger, waited until the last possible moment before discreetly following the Commander through the complex underground passageways of Green Park to the eastbound Jubilee Line platform.

There, the Commander took the opportunity of a short wait for the next train to purchase a bar of chocolate from the vending machine on the platform whilst the follower watched discreetly from the crowds.

As soon as the seven car Jubilee Line train of 1996 tube stock pulled into the platform, the gathered masses moved forward, oblivious to the strained announcements to let people off the train first.

Amid the confusion, the Commander managed to sneak onto the furthest door of the far end carriage where it was quieter and looked out of the corner of his eye down the length of the platform as the streams of boarding and alighting passengers conflicted with the usual resultant chaos.

The follower boarded the next carriage down as before and after three attempts, the doors were finally closed and the train moved off, veering right onto the Jubilee Line Extension where it separated from the disused branch to Charing Cross.

It was a short trip to the next station at Westminster, the train pulling into the platform with the sound of the motors echoing around the dark grey interior before slowing up to line up with the platform edge doors.

As the doors opened, the familiar conflicting tides of boarding and disembarking passengers duly collided in the doorways. In amidst the chaos, the Commander slipped out and headed for the escalator hall, the follower discreetly keeping track a short distance behind.

It was as he was heading up the first of the escalators that the Commander realised he had gone up the wrong exit, taking the combination of stairways that led to the surface exit rather than the sub-surface District and Circle Lines that were accessed via a different route..

The Commander decided that perhaps it was time to follow his wife Tracy's suggestion and try a little exercise so he continued to the ticket hall and exited out into Parliament Square, packed with traffic both pedestrian and vehicular.

This brief flirtation with healthy living soon broke down though as the Commander turned right out of the main entrance and proceeded into the small supermarket where he quickly purchased two packets of biscuits and a double chocolate chip muffin before proceeding out down the side of Parliament Square, across the end of Parliament Street and around towards Westminster Abbey.

Passing through the throngs of tourists that always seemed to be permanently encamped around the area, the Commander made the most of the cover of the crowd to make discrete use of his radio before continuing onwards past the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre and down into Victoria Street.

The follower continued to maintain a discrete distance from his target as the Commander turned smartly right into the side street that led to Broadway and the St James Park Underground Station.

As he entered the side street however, the follower realised that the Commander had disappeared from view as he had turned left further ahead, down into Broadway itself. As a result he quickened his pace and reached the same corner, before peering cautiously around it.

To the follower's surprise, the Commander seemed to have disappeared causing him to tut-tut with irritation before he casually moved on into Broadway and towards the New Scotland Yard building.

"Looking for me?" the Commander suddenly called casually. The follower turned to see the Commander casually sitting on the wall alongside the famous revolving three sided New Scotland Yard sign, his gun drawn and pointing in the follower's direction.

The follower could have chosen to run but the additional presence of a number of armed Security Service officers behind the Commander and also now approaching the mysterious gentleman from the rear meant he had little choice if he wanted to stay healthy, but to surrender.

"Lieutenant Commander Wilson" the Commander called to the officer immediately to his left "Have the gentleman here thoroughly searched, his identity established and washed through the usual channels and then deliver him to my office in thirty minutes."

"Yes Sir!" the Lieutenant responded as the Commander jumped down from the wall, smiled at the mysterious follower and then proceeded inside the building.

Whilst the mystery man was being unceremoniously bundled into the side entrance, the Commander was proceeding up the fire escape stairs, making his customary journey of avoiding the lift which he hated.

On the top floor, shared between the National Command Section and the Command & Control part of the Metropolitan Division, the Commander turned right and headed down the corridor to his office.

By now with the approach of evening with its accompanying darkness outside, the Commander's Personal Assistant had gone home leaving the coast clear for him to have a quick look in the desk drawers where he successfully confirmed his suspicions as to where she had hidden the biscuit supply, on his wife Tracy's orders.

"Me one, Tracy nil" the Commander wryly commented to himself with a wry grin before, with the packet of biscuits under his arm, he went into his office and over to the window which looked down on Victoria Street outside.

Returning to his desk, the Commander sat down and surveyed the cluttered surface which was littered with files, notes he should have read days ago and biscuit crumbs. The only reason it was not as cluttered as was normal for the Commander was that he had only been in the position of Chief of the Metropolitan Division and in that office for a little over a week.

The Commander contemplated his thoughts as he looked at the only clear part of his desk where his picture of Tracy stood in its antique silver frame, however he was soon interrupted when the telephone rang.

"Evening" the Commander responded as he answered the telephone slightly reluctantly. Usually calls this time of the evening meant trouble and the severe possibility that he would not be seeing his beloved Tracy until very late that night, if at all.

"Oh and he is who I thought?" the Commander enquired, a belief that was confirmed by the caller.

"All right" the Commander responded "Send him in."

The Commander hung up the telephone and relaxed back in his chair, consuming another biscuit in the process which sent another customary coating of crumbs down the front of his best gold braided uniform tunic.

He was still busily trying to brush the crumbs away when there was a knock at the door.

"Come in!" the Commander called whereupon the mysterious stranger who had earlier been following him, entered alone.

"Good evening Sir" the stranger began "I'm..."

"Special Investigation Officer Jean Deletant" the Commander completed his sentence for him "Interpol European Anti-Organised Crime Task Force, yes I know."

"Ah" Deletant responded slightly surprised "Your reputation does you proud Commander."

"Have a seat" the Commander indicated the comfy chair in front of his desk.

"So how did you know who I was?" Deletant enquired as he sat down and the Commander proffered him a biscuit that he took with a nod of thanks.

"Friends in low places" the Commander grinned knowingly as he sat back down behind the desk "Which brings me to my next question, why is Interpol interested in me?"

"Ever heard of the Barkov brothers?" Deletant asked in his broad French accent.

"Well assuming that this guy" the Commander consulted the arrest file on the desk "Dimitri Barkov is who he says he is I would suppose yes as far as it goes."

"Dimitri is not the major concern" Deletant confirmed "Your main forthcoming problem will be his eldest brother Vladisov."

"Do I know the gentleman?" the Commander asked as he poured them both a drink of whisky from the Administrator General's personal supply that he had liberated a few days earlier.

"Probably not" Deletant confirmed "But he will almost certainly want to meet you, and certainly not socially that much is for certain."

"Acquaint me with the chap" the Commander urged.

"Vladisov Barkov was a KGB heavy in their military operations section under the old Soviet Union" Deletant began to explain "He handled specialist operations involving weapons, terrorism, explosives, arms smuggling, that sort of thing."

"Not the sort of guy you want to be messing with then?" the Commander asked.

"Indeed Sir" Deletant confirmed "Especially now as he has gone into the private sector and sells his services for cash, US dollars of course."

"Let me guess" the Commander mused as he bit thoughtfully on another biscuit "drugs, weapons and prostitution?"

"Along with a few other allegedly legitimate business interests, yes" Deletant responded.

"So where do I fit into this merry little business empire of his?" the Commander wondered.

"That's what my regional boss wants to talk to you about" Deletant explained "Vladisov's younger brother was the advance party laying down the foundations we believe for a possible move into the British organised crime market, unfortunately the little brother arrived earlier than we had originally anticipated which is why we allowed the reliable information to enter the grape vine and let your guys pick him up."

"So what do you suggest?" the Commander asked as in the back of his mind he wrote off all chance of a quiet week ahead.

"We need to set up a meeting of all the Divisional Commanders of the Greater London area plus one or two others" Deletant suggested "And we will need an operations control room."

The Commander reached across his desk and picked up the telephone and pressed two numbers to speed dial him internally with the building manager.

"Steve?" the Commander enquired "Yeah, it's the boss. What spare operational office space do we have available in the building at the moment?"

There was a pause as the buildings manager consulted his paperwork, the rustle of dog-eared works documents clearly audible over the telephone "The fourth floor is nearly finished being redecorated" he responded "You can use that if its suitable providing you don't mind the smell of fresh paint and carpet glue."

"Sounds good to me" the Commander responded "Just one question, why are we redecorating offices when most of the division is scheduled to move down the road in a few weeks time?"

"Your guess is as good as mine Sir" Steve responded with a wry chuckle "I'll have it cleared for the morning."

"Cheers mate, I owe you a drink" the Commander replied before hanging up.

"So who will be attending?" Deletant enquired.

"Chief's of the VIP Protection Section Jennifer Caverner, River Division Commander Bowring, Royal Parks is Deputy Commander Asif and Thames Valley is Commander Faversham and then there is the Transport Division" the Commander held up the picture of his wife on his desk "My missus Tracy. I'll also invite along our friends from MI5, Special Branch and the Anti-Terrorist boys to the party as well."

"Sounds like a full set" Deletant remarked as he made a few notes "The senior department chief of Interpol you will be meeting is called Xavier Durrant" he advised "Trust me, you cannot miss him!"

"Isn't that the guy they called 'Big X' in that arms smuggling investigation a few years back?" the Commander asked.

"That's the guy" Deletant confirmed.

"Can't wait to meet him" the Commander pondered as the two men got up and moved towards the door to leave.

"One other thing" Deletant warned "Vladisov is extremely dangerous when cornered and has contacts and influence in a lot of places. Last year he assassinated the Chief of the Moscow police because he got a parking ticket."

"Better warn Traffic Division then" the Commander mused.

"Good night Sir" Deletant shook the Commander's hand "and good luck."

"Thanks" the Commander responded in kind. He watched Deletant head off down the corridor and as soon as he was out of sight, departed himself for the Control Room on the next floor down.

As was customary for an early evening, the Central London incident control and coordination centre was busy with calls being dealt with from all over the centre of the city.

The Commander managed to slip in almost unnoticed by the officers on duty, so much so that when he appeared in the seat next to the Chief Duty Controller, it nearly made her jump out of her skin.

"Good evening Sir" she responded as soon as she had quickly regained her composure.

"Evening lassie" the Commander responded "I need an all ports watch on a Vladisov Barkov" he explained "If he should appear on our proverbial radar, I want him very discreetly followed but not intercepted, and I will need to be notified immediately."

"No problem Sir" the Duty Controller responded as she made notes on her memo pad.

"Cheer's my dear" the Commander thanked her and headed back out into the corridor outside.

For a few moments, the Commander stopped in the empty corridor and looked out of the windows down one side that looked onto Victoria Street, the evening traffic crawling along at near snails pace several floors below.

He took his warrant card out of his pocket and opened the wallet like object, looking at the picture of Tracy smiling and contemplated the most important person in his life.

"Oh Tracy love" the Commander pondered "What the hell have we got ourselves into this time?"

"British Airways announce the boarding of their flight BA223 to London Gatwick from Gate 14" the announcer echoed all around the departure hall of Moscow International Airport.

As if the firing of a starting gun had just happened, a whole section of patiently waiting people suddenly arose from their seats in the waiting area and headed for the gate indicated with their carry on luggage in hand.

Blending in well with the plethora of mostly business types was a group of eight smartly turned out men in long overcoats and hats, all of whom were making a good job of appearing to be travelling apart.

Amongst these was Vladisov Barkov who, carrying a smart briefcase, made his way through the gate and out to the waiting Boeing 747 aircraft waiting for its passengers outside.

"Good afternoon Sir" the Stewardess at the doorway of the aircraft greeted Vladisov as he boarded where she examined his ticket "You are in First Class Mr Dudov."

"Thank you" Vladisov, travelling under a false passport and name responded before making his way through the aircraft to the First Class cabin.

He quickly found his seat and put his overcoat and hat in the overhead locker. As the aircraft doors were closed and secured, Vladisov opened the briefcase and removed a set of files from it before putting the case in the overhead locker.

Sitting back and fastening his seatbelt as instructed as the aircraft taxied to the runway, Vladisov looked through the files that he had received earlier that morning from a contact in the Intelligence Bureau in Moscow for he had a lot of planning to do.

"You rang my dear?" Tracy called as she looked around the door pillar of the Commander's office with a welcoming smile.

"Oh boy, are you a sight for sore eyes" the Commander commented with delight as he gestured her inside, where they met half way across the office and embraced warmly.

"I thought you were coming home early tonight?" Tracy asked as she looked across at the clock on the wall that now recorded the time as passing half past ten in the evening.

"I am coming home now" the Commander confirmed but Tracy was no stranger to his moods and immediately picked up on his demeanour.

"A quid for them" she asked as they headed out of the office.

"That inflation has gone up again" the Commander remarked with a wry smile as they entered the lift.

"Well" Tracy responded "Whilst you having the look of the entire world's problems on your shoulders is not by any stretch of the imagination unusual, there does appear to be something extra bothering you."

"I think the Russians are coming" the Commander quietly reflected as the lift doors closed and with a ping, began its descent.

"Stalin, Lenin, Putin, those kind of guys?" Tracy asked.

"A guy by the name of Vladisov Barkov" the Commander responded.

"Vladisov Dimitriev Barkov?" Tracy suddenly reacted with some sense of both surprise and shock.

"You know him?" the Commander was understandably surprised by his wife's reaction as the lift reached its destination.

"Oh I read about him a while back" Tracy explained.

"Ground floor, thank you" the lift announced in a cheery manner totally inappropriate for its setting, location or the mood of its occupants.

"So what do you know about this chappie then?" the Commander asked as they headed across the foyer and out of the main entrance of New Scotland Yard.

"Only what I read" Tracy confirmed "Respectable businessman on the surface but apparently dealt with a bloke who owed him a few roubles a couple of years back by sending around a couple of heavies in a van."

"Sounds all right to me" the Commander remarked as they entered the Broadway entrance of St James Park Station, having to raise their arms over the ticket barriers to pass through parallel lanes.

"Except the blokes ran this chap over, and then just for good measure, dynamited the van with the aforesaid chap still under it just to make sure he got the message."

"Ouch!" the Commander commented.

"So is this guy heading our way?" Tracy asked, having to raise her voice slightly above the echoing sound of a District Line train arriving on the platform immediately below them at the bottom of the access stairs.

"It turns out that his youngest brother was the guy we nabbed this morning in Dover" the Commander explained as they reached the platform and boarded the westbound service.

They took a seat at the driving end of the lead carriage and settled back resting against each other as the single leaf doors closed with a hiss of air and the train pulled away.

"Advance party?" Tracy enquired.

"That is the theory" the Commander grimly confirmed "It appears that the Russian market has dried up so our mate Vladisov is planning to corner a new market, namely London."

"Crikey" Tracy exclaimed "There will be a few of the old hands in East London who will not take too kindly to that."

"We could wind up with a turf war" the Commander expressed his concern clearly "And we will wind up right in the middle."

"Let me hazard a guess" Tracy enquired as the train slowed to stop at Victoria "Meeting of all divisional heads in the morning?"

"Exactly" the Commander confirmed "How did you know about that?"

"You are not the only one with friends in low places you know."

"We are currently flying at an altitude of twenty thousand feet and are now passing over Denmark" the pilot announced on board the aircraft for the information of its passengers.

Vladisov momentarily looked up from the files he had been consulting before glancing at his watch which was still set on Moscow time

"Excuse me" he looked up and asked the stewardess who was passing at that moment "What is the time difference between Moscow and London?"

"London is four hours behind Moscow Sir" she responded with that seemingly impossibly wide beaming smile that all airline stewardesses must have welded to their face when they get the job.

"Thank you" Vladisov responded as he adjusted his watch, moving it back four hours to the correct time for his destination before returning to the business of studying the files he had brought with him.

The comparative darkness of the cabin combined with the seclusion of the single seat he was occupying, meant Vladisov had near complete privacy as he looked through the Personnel Details files along with other documents that contained information that would be crucial both for the success of his forthcoming ventures and also the operation to secure the release of his youngest brother.

"Ah interesting" he commented to himself as he made some notes "I do believe we have a way in."

"As days go" the Commander commented as he slumped on the sofa next to his faithful old tabby cat "that was a bit of a weird one!"

"Tea love?" Tracy called from the kitchen.

"What happened to the hot chocolate?" the Commander enquired as he got up and joined his wife in the Kitchen, coming up behind and putting his arms around her.

"You drank it all yesterday" Tracy responded "I seem to recall something about picking up some shopping on the way home?"

"Oh yes" the Commander admitted, domestic chores not being a strong point with him "I knew there was something I meant to do."

"Tea?" Tracy asked proffering a tea bag up in her hand with a smile.

"Four sugars" the Commander responded as he sat back into one of the dining table chairs in the kitchen.

"What happened to that plan to see the doctor for a check up?" Tracy asked as she joined him at the table, whilst she waited for the kettle to boil.

"Stuck in that great big list on my desk" the Commander had to admit "It seems every time I am managing to get on top of things, some loon, criminal mastermind or just plain good old fashioned crook crops up and delves the entire Department into chaos."

"I know the feeling" Tracy admitted with a wry smile as she hugged the Commander for mutual comfort.

"I have an idea" the Commander suggested somewhat out of character "Let's have a couple of weeks off, as far away from here as possible."

"Are you feeling all right?" Tracy enquired. This was definitely an out of character move by the Commander who was known for his workaholic tendencies, a trait he shared with his wife which is probably one of the reasons why they got on so well.

"Just pack a bag, grab a passport, leave our Divisions to our deputies and just go somewhere" the Commander confirmed.

"All right, you have a deal" Tracy responded "Once whatever this latest crisis is has gone away, you and I are on holiday."

The scream of the four mighty Rolls Royce engines was deafening as the Boeing 747 came over the main London to Brighton railway line and into land on the runway at Gatwick Airport.

It only took a couple of minutes for the aircraft to slow down and then taxi across the site to its arrival gate in the North Terminal of the airport.

Vladisov was one of the last to disembark from the aircraft, his briefcase in his hand and his long overcoat draped over his arm. The others he had originally boarded the flight with alighted from a doorway further down the aircraft and continued to travel separately so as not to attract any unwanted attention.

He was approaching the customs clearance area when a short smartly dressed gentleman stepped forward and without speaking, proffered his identification.

After a warm shake of hands was exchanged, the two men left via a side door, effectively bypassing the customs area completely. They walked briskly through the airport terminal and then outside to a waiting black Mercedes car that was parked outside.

Without any word, the two men climbed into the back and the car discreetly pulled away, out of the airport and out into the main traffic flow.

This was a rare honour for the newly promoted Divisional Commander of the VIP Protection Division, Jennifer Caverner as she arrived outside Scotland Yard in the back of a traditional black cab.

She handed over a ten pound note and thanked the driver before alighting from the vehicle onto the pavement immediately in front of New Scotland Yard's famous three sided revolving sign.

Jennifer was about to proceed inside when she saw Tracy and the Commander arrive from the nearby St James's Park station.

"Morning you two troublemakers!" Jennifer called as her twin sister and brother in law joined her at the entrance "What trouble are you two in now?"

"Trouble, us?" the Commander sarcastically responded.

"Well it's just that every time we have one of these high level pow-wows and you two are mentioned on the invitation" Jennifer commented "within a matter of minutes someone is usually trying to shoot at me!"

"You know something Sis" Tracy responded with a wry smile "You are paranoid!"

"You want to know something else?" Jennifer added as the three officers proceeded inside the building "I am usually right!"

"So how's Simon then?" the Commander asked "Heard he had been in the wars lately."

"In bed with the flu" Jennifer confirmed the health status of her fiancé "Although now I come to think about it, it could just be an allergic reaction to wedding preparations."

Tracy giggled at one of her twin sister's typical dry witticisms as they entered the foyer, where the Commander was greeted by a very broad shouldered tall gentleman with what Tracy reckoned was very much a continental style about him, a theory soon proved correct when he spoke in a very distinct German accent.

"Good morning Commander, ladies" the gentleman greeted the three officers as he proffered his identification that the Commander took and examined, having to squint a bit with his failing eyesight.

"Xavier Durrant, Interpol Special Investigation Branch Northern Europe" the Commander read from the warrant card before handing it back "Your credentials are hopelessly impeccable, come inside."

"I feel I must apologise for the actions of my junior officer yesterday" Durrant commented as the four officers proceeded into the lift and pressed the button for the fourth floor.

"Oh that's all right" the Commander replied "If it had been anyone else he was following, he would never have been seen so try not to be too hard on him."

"Your reputation precedes you Sir" Durrant commented as the lift announced with its cheery disposition their arrival on the fourth floor "You are spoken of in high regards in Interpol circles."

"Well I'll try not to disappoint then" the Commander remarked as they exited out into the corridor only for the Commander to stop short when he saw the state of the place.

"Good grief!" Tracy remarked as she saw the corridor filled with paint pots, ladders and bits of wood with a fine layer of plaster dust and muck covering everything. In addition to the visual disaster, their noses were also assaulted by the overpowering smell of carpet glue and fresh paint.

"Got the decorators in by any chance?" Jennifer wryly remarked as she too surveyed the mess.

"What ever gave you that idea?" the Commander asked as they attempted to make their way through the mess carefully, working on the assumption that any vertical surface was coated with wet paint and not wanting to ruin their best uniforms.

"This should be interesting" the Commander remarked as they reached the double doors of the conference room and tentatively peered inside.

"Not much better in here is it?" Tracy remarked as they entered the room which although free of builders and decorators clutter, was still a little unkempt with dust sheets on some of the chairs and the window blinds stacked up in an unceremonious heap in the corner.

In amongst the debris sat a number of senior officers which together with the Commander, Tracy and Jennifer, made up the Divisional Chiefs of every major Security Service Division in the Greater London area.

"Morning Commander!" one of the officers called enthusiastically from the desk "Got the builders in?"

"Sorry about the mess ladies and gents" the Commander apologised as he went around to the head of the desk and picked up the piece of plaster board off cut that was lying on it in front of his seat which he then casually tossed over his shoulder much to the amusement of those present.

"Right then" the Commander began "Let me introduce you all to Xavier Durrant" the Commander indicated the neatly suited gentleman now seated to his right who briefly stood up and nodded in acknowledgement.

"Moving clockwise around the table" the Commander began to introduce the formidable uniformed presence of officers sat around the table to Durrant "Respectively Tracy Caverner of the Transport Division, Jennifer Caverner of the VIP Protection Branch, Terry Bowring of the River Police Section...."

At that moment the door opened and a slightly flustered and embarrassed Sir Richard Crowthorne entered the room apologetically.

"Sorry I am late everyone!" he called as he took a seat.

"Sir Richard Crowthorne from our friends at MI5" the Commander continued with the round table introductions "Jimmy Asif of Royal Parks and finally making up the last member of this little gathering is Rebecca Faversham, Chief of Thames Valley."

"It is an honour to be in your presence" Durrant responded as he stood up "I only wish it was under better circumstances."

"Where is our glorious new Administrator General then?" Jennifer enquired.

"On holiday" the Commander responded with some scepticism in his voice "and he's only been in the job for two weeks now."

"And the Deputy Administrator General?" the Thames Valley Chief enquired.

"Attending a week long conference in Bridlington about making better use of your manpower resources would you believe" the Commander remarked with a sarcastic tone in his response before he continued with the meeting proper.

"Anyway, you have been gathered here today as we have been made aware of an imminent threat from a prominent figure in the international organised crime fraternity" the Commander explained "So Xavier, the floor is all yours, just mind the loose carpet tiles."

"Thank you Commander" Durrant responded as he stood up. He began to walk around the table handing out dossiers to those sat around as he started his briefing.

"The gentleman who's dossier you have in front of you is a prominent Russian businessman by the name of Vladisov Barkov" he began as the officers around the table began to read through the material they had just received.

"He has a significant number of outwardly legitimate business interests across the former Soviet Union and into Eastern Europe including trucks, shipping and various other little empires."

"All this is a very convincing front for his more salubrious activities including drugs, smuggling of various items, prostitution, arms sales, you name it." Durrant's tone was stern and sincere "Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of the so called free market, he has gone from being a former KGB military expert with service in numerous countries, to the most powerful organised crime boss east of the Berlin Wall."

"Politically connected?" Tracy asked.

"It has been said that he owns at least one senior officer in every political and law enforcement office in Russia and many beyond" Durrant confirmed "In the last year, his err representatives have been connected to numerous assassinations, bombings and illegal arms deals."

"Would I be right in guessing that the lack of prosecutions I am reading here are because the witnesses had a miraculous change of mind?" the Commander asked.

"Pretty much so, yes" Durrant responded "The few that the authorities can get to testify don't usually live long enough to see the next sunrise. His organisation has so many informants that keeping anything secret is virtually impossible."

"And you are saying he is heading in our direction?" the Commander asked.

"Just so" Durrant confirmed "We in the Organised Crime Northern Europe section have been keeping tabs on Vladisov's operation for the last six months ever since he blew up your opposite number in the Moscow Police."

"Ouch..." the Commander commented again as he recalled what he had been told the day before about that particular incident.

"We have reason to believe that he wants to expand his business empire and he has the organised crime scene of East and Central London lined up for a none too friendly takeover."

"Richard my old friend" the Commander looked across at Sir Richard Crowthorne "You and I have a lengthy past history and contacts in that part of the world, have you heard anything on the grapevine?"

"Just a few rumours in amongst the pub poker circuit" Sir Richard responded "Apparently there have been a couple of strangers going around asking questions, the word was that they might have been some of my guys but we have no operations active down that way at the moment."

"Vladisov's youngest brother" Tracy asked Durrant "What is his role in all this?"

"He was supposed to be the advanced party" Durrant responded "basically he was going to negotiate with the local boys about getting a slice of the action. Anyone who didn't agree to sell up and move out wins a free visit from his heavy mob as soon as Vladisov and his boys arrive."

"When can we expect him?" the Divisional Chief of the Thames Valley Division asked.

"Any day now" Durrant finished pacing up and down the room and sat back down "Word from our colleagues in Russia is that he made arrangements to leave the country as soon as he heard about his brother's arrest."

"Ports and Airports have been notified" the Commander confirmed "But I am willing to bet this guy is too clever to get caught like that."

"Just so" Durrant confirmed grimly "He may even be in the country already and if he is, you can bet not only did he not travel alone but that his first target will be you guys until he gets his little brother out of prison."

"So whatever is going to happen, we can expect it to start imminently?" Jennifer asked.

"We had better raise the security threat level" the Commander responded "If this guy Vladisov is worth one tenth of his reputation then this could get very bloody, very public and very personal, very quickly."

"How did he assassinate the Chief of the Moscow Police?" Sir Richard asked out of curiosity.

"Lorry load of C4 explosive driven into the headquarters building and detonated" Durrant responded, "It left a hell of a crater I can tell you."

"Looks like we may need to do some more redecorating" Tracy mused wryly.

"Better alert the guys at the Bomb Squad as well" the Commander added.

"Do they do carpets as well?" Jennifer joked, injecting a little much needed humour into this serious and tense situation.

"So basically we should be on our guard, keep our eyes peeled and our ears to the ground" the Commander advised "I will put a dedicated investigation team on stand by here and if it all does kick off, they will liaise with Interpol and each of your Divisions."

"This is bad isn't it?" the Thames Valley Chief commented.

"Oh probably" the Commander grimly confirmed.

"I'll double the patrols on the river" the Boat Division Commander responded "They may try and smuggle people and equipment in by water, it's been done before."

"Likely targets under my jurisdiction will have their protection alert status reviewed within the hour" Jennifer put in "and adjusted upwards wherever necessary."

"I can't see anything likely to go wrong in the parks" the Parks Division Chief responded.

"Nothing new there then" the Commander joked, reflecting the comparative lack of action to be found in the Royal Parks Division of the Service to which its Chief laughingly agreed.

"But I'll put everyone on high alert just in case" he confirmed "It'll give them something to get excited about if nothing else."

"I'll have a trawl around the usual contacts" the head of the Anti-Terrorist Branch added "See if anyone is shifting any arms and related gear, squeeze a few contacts and see what squeaks!"

"Durrant" the Commander asked "What are the chances of this Vladisov having sources and contacts within the UK Security Services?"

"Anything is possible" Durrant responded.

"So let's keep anything we find out or discuss about this little party strictly only with those who actually need to know" the Commander advised.

"If you need any assistance" Durrant informed them as he stood up to leave "I can be reached through our London office."

The sound of the last rush hour trains thundering past overhead almost drowned out the sound of the car in which Vladisov was being transported, arriving in the warehouse and yard which was built within a converted set of railway viaduct arches somewhere in the east end of the city.

As the sound of the trains passing died down, the car came serenely to a halt in the archway alongside a minibus from which were exiting the heavily built men that had travelled with Vladisov on the aircraft earlier.

"Welcome to Great Britain comrade" the man who stepped forward to open the rear door of the car announced in broken Russian, made all the more unintelligible by his strong East London cockney accent.

This gentleman was Vladisov's London contact, Peter Harris, an old time east end of London villain who had fallen outside the inner circle of organised crime within the city and these days sold his services and that of his colleagues for cash to the highest bidder, regardless of who they were or what they wanted.

"Good evening" Vladisov responded with a firm if slightly cold handshake as the two men were joined by the men from the minibus.

"Is everything I requested ready?" Vladisov enquired.

"Follow me" Harris replied and led the gang of men through into the next arch chamber along, where a large box lorry was parked with two heavy minders on guard by its rear roller shutter door.

"Ok lads, let our Russian friend see his toys" Harris called whereupon the two minders turned, unlatched the rear door and rolled it up before switching on an internal light in the body of the vehicle to illuminate its contents.

"You got my little care package from old mother Russian then" Vladisov warmly responded as he surveyed the huge number of wooden crates inside the box van.

"Aye" Harris responded "And the dozen cases of best Vodka were much appreciated as well."

"My pleasure" Vladisov responded "It saved me having to convert more Roubles into dollars for a starter."

"So when do we begin our little party?" Harris enquired, clearly eager to get started.

"Right away" Vladisov confirmed as he indicated to the gang of men to start unpacking "Now where is this bank?"

"Commander?" the intercom on his desk buzzed into life causing the Commander to look up momentarily over the top of his new small square framed reading glasses that were perched professor like on the end of his nose.

"Yes?" he responded before realising he had not pressed the button when responding "Yes?" he reiterated again when he had managed to return the communication successfully.

"Urgent call for you on line three" the Personal Assistant announced.

"Who is it?" the Commander enquired as he contemplated his thoughts.

"A Mr Field sir" the Personal Assistant confirmed which caused the Commander to sit up and take more notice as soon as the name was mentioned.

"Put him through, thanks" the Commander instructed and picked up the telephone the moment it rang.

"Roger old friend" the Commander answered "This is a pleasant surprise."

"I wish it was under better circumstances" Roger Field responded on his mobile telephone standing on the side of a busy street somewhere in the centre of London.

"What can I do for you?" the Commander asked.

"We need to have a chat" Field responded "There appears to be some strangers in town, they have a large van full of some very nasty stuff and people are asking questions."

"Where are you?" the Commander enquired.

"Right outside your office window" Field confirmed causing the Commander to swivel his chair around and pull aside the blinds to look down outside. There standing on the opposite pavement below on Victoria Street stood the slightly elderly but distinguished figure of Roger Field still on his mobile telephone and looking straight up at the Commander.

"I won't even ask how you knew which window was the right one" the Commander responded, understandably curious as to how a gentleman connected firmly with the old style East London organised crime fraternity knew the internal layout of New Scotland Yard. "I'll be right down."

The Commander decided to make a discreet exit from the building, using the back fire escape stairs and then out of the back door straight into Victoria Street. On the opposite side of the road, Roger Field's lovingly cared for 1960's Rolls Royce motor car was waiting with two passengers in the back and a uniformed driver sitting up front.

Having a good look around first, the Commander got in the back and sat on the seats that faced backwards in the extended rear saloon of the vehicle where he came face to face with the two men already awaiting his arrival, Field and Sir Richard Crowthorne.

"See you got the old girl back on the road then" the Commander commented as he looked around the authentically restored interior of the car with its sumptuous leather and wood interior.

"Well" Field responded shaking the Commander's hand in greeting warmly "Retirement has given me some time to pick up on a few jobs that have been left lying around."

"This thing hasn't seen any action since it was used in that getaway from the Tooting Broadway bank job back in 82 has it?" the Commander asked.

"Well I thought seeing as it was just rusting away in a lock up in Battersea, it was time to let the old girl out for some well deserved air" Field confirmed.

"Did you know" the Commander turned to Sir Richard "I had a special trip with my real father in this car for my fifth birthday?"

"I believe I have that noted in the witness protection profile for you somewhere" Sir Richard responded with a knowing wink as the car pulled out into traffic and began to serenely make its way through the streets of London.

"I take it from this little chat my old friend that retirement has not removed you completely from circulation" the Commander enquired of Field "Still keeping the back channels open then?"

"Oh just what I hear on the pub poker circuit amongst other things" Field responded "Which reminds me, Mugger McGrew asked me to get this to you" he passed across two fifty pound notes "It's what he owes you after you cleaned him out with that Royal Flush at your tenth birthday party poker tournament."

"Took him long enough didn't it?" Sir Richard remarked.

"Well he got nicked the very next morning for armed robbery" the Commander explained as he tucked the cash into his top pocket "He only got let out finally last week."

"Very decent of you" Sir Richard commented.

"Well" the Commander sat back "He's sort of family you see."

"Ah here we are" Field announced as he looked out of the side window to see that they were slowing down and pulling to the side of the road in front of a traditional looking East London pub complete with immaculately kept flower baskets suspended from the upper level window ledges.

"I believe it's your round" the Commander commented as he, Field and Sir Richard got out of the car and proceeded inside

"I knew you were going to say that" Field responded as the three men proceeded to the bar area where the landlord was busy polishing the glasses behind the bar.

"Afternoon Dave" the Commander called as he reached the bar "It's been a while but I'll have my usual."

"Coming right up lad" the friendly barman instantly responded.

"We'll have the same in the back room" Field added as they left the bar and proceeded into the private function room that was situated off the main public bar area in a side room, guarded by an ornate Victorian style engraved glass and carved wood doorway.

"When was the last time you were in this place then?" Field asked the Commander as they sat down around a small table in the room.

"When I was about eleven" the Commander responded as he looked around the room with a look of someone who had come across an old familiar friend he had not seen for many years, "The night before the Lewisham Diamond Heist if I am not mistaken."

"Some of the greatest poker games in London have been played in this room I believe" Sir Richard added.

"Yep" Field confirmed "And the Commander here won a fair few of them before he was even a teenager."

"Hey I was a growing lad" the Commander shrugged with a wry smile "I needed the money!"

At that moment, Dave the barman arrived with the three drinks on a tray that he put out onto the table.

"There you go gents" he announced "These are on the house seeing as we have such distinguished company tonight."

"Cheers Dave" Field responded as the barman left, politely closing the door behind him.

"Right, to business" Field announced, but not before taking a sip of best bitter from the pint glass before him.

“There are some strangers in town” Field began “Eastern European, maybe even Russian going around flashing a lot of money and giving away a lot of genuine Russian quality Vodka whilst asking a lot of strange questions.”

“In light of my morning thus far” the Commander responded “You have my undivided attention.”

“I figured you might know something” Field responded “The word is that some big Russian Mafia boss is looking to move into the East End and he certainly is not going to be using glasnost to do it.”

“Vladisov Barkov” the Commander confirmed “Former military expert in the KGB, explosives, counter terrorism, that sort of thing, he went freelance when the wall came down as he discovered he could make more money working for the bad guys.”

“From what we have on this guy” Sir Richard added “He has a reputation for reprisals, violence and is very fond of getting his gun off, not the sort of person we want running around this City that is for certain.”

“Well that makes sense” Field replied “And for certain he will not be worried about obeying the unwritten code of honour we stick by.”

“That means we could see innocents involved” the Commander grimly admitted “Dead civilians on the streets does not go down well with the Daily Mail readers or look good on Newsnight.”

“I have managed to get one of my guys onto this Russian’s crew” Field added “I think you should meet him.”

Field got up and went over to the door, opening it, he called to Dave the barman.

“Dave?” Field enquired “Any sign of Terry yet?”

“Just come in” Dave confirmed “He won’t be a minute.”

“All right then” Field responded “Fix him up with a drink and then send him through.”

“Will do” Dave responded as Field closed the door and returned to his seat at the table.

“You see anything of your father these days?” Field asked as he took another gulp of his drink.

“Witness protection still have him firmly secured” the Commander confirmed, a tinge of regret or sadness in his voice “I am still not supposed to know he is alive but the Chief of the Witness Protection Division keeps me up to date with how he is.”

It was then that there was a knock on the door and a young man dressed in overalls entered, doffing his cap to those present but understandably surprised to see the uniformed presence of the Chief of the Metropolitan Division of the National Security Service in the room.

“Don’t worry about him” Field reassured Terry, the young man “He’s part of the family.”

“It’s a long story” the Commander admitted.

“Right Sir” the young man sat down at the table at Field’s insistence.

“Will you relax lad” Field insisted “Now tell the Commander here what you know about our Soviet friends.”

“It looks like they are going to kick off later this afternoon” Terry responded now he had composed himself in the presence of such distinguished company “Bank job down Park Lane, National Commerce Bank of Val Verde at four o’clock.”

“Nice target” the Commander commented.

“You can say that again” Field added “Open ground of Hyde Park, escape routes in all directions, sufficient tourists around to create plenty of panic and confusion for cover, it’ll be a very well put together mess that is for certain.”

“What are they bringing to the party?” the Commander asked as he looked at his watch to see that there was still over an hour left before the scheduled event.

“Shooters, about ten blokes, couple of vans” Terry confirmed “They’ve got some serious hardware I’ll say.”

“What do you know about this bank?” the Commander asked Sir Richard.

“Does a lot of bullion trading, big currency exchanges with the Diplomatic trade, embassies and so forth” Sir Richard confirmed “Your father nicked their safe out of there about thirty years ago as a favour for MI5.”

“I thought that place sounded familiar” the Commander remarked before turning to Terry “You best get back lad before you are missed.”

“Yes Sir” Terry responded as he gulped down the last of his drink and left quickly.

“It looks like I had better go and organise some muscle” the Commander responded as the three gentlemen got up and exited out into the bar, returning their empty glasses to the bar.

As they leant against the bar, contemplating a second round, the Commander’s ever eager hearing caught the sounds of a commotion outside with accompanying sirens.

“Why can’t a chap have a quiet drink in peace anymore” the Commander jokingly remarked as he headed for the door and looked outside to see what all the apparent fuss was about.

The reason for all the commotion was soon plain to see, a large crowd of football fans crowded into the entrance area of Caledonian Road Underground Station just down the road, with the two groups of rival supporters throwing taunts and insults at each other with equal vigour and enthusiasm.

Separating the two factions was a thin line of Transport Division patrol officers with some from the Metropolitan Division helping out as well. It was onto this scene that the familiar figure of Tracy arrived to sort out the mess.

“Oh this should be interesting” the Commander commented to himself wryly as he observed Tracy and the van load of additional officers she had brought with her, attempt to break up the crowd to little avail.

“Don’t you think we should lend a hand?” Sir Richard asked as they continued to observe the crowd ahead now getting uglier by the minute.

“Oh all right then, why not! the Commander responded and leaving Field to watch from the pub doorway, they proceeded together up the road to join the party.

It was as they approached that the sparks really began to fly, which set in motion the sudden forward lunge by both sides of the argument and a full scale fight began with fists flying in all directions.

“Grab them and nick them!” Tracy ordered as loud as she could over the din that was being thrown up by the fight “Blue ones in that van, red ones in the other.”

It was at that point that one particularly vicious looking thug was hurtled out of the crowd and with no one else near him, decided to swing a right hook in Tracy’s direction.

Fortunately for her, she saw it coming and instinctively ducked. Taking the opportunity of the thug’s momentary distraction, she grabbed the man who must have been approaching at least twice her weight if not size, and slammed him unceremoniously into the side of the Security Service van alongside.

“You’re nicked sunshine” she none to subtly informed him, a point she reinforced by striking him across the back of the head to subdue him before applying a set of handcuffs and then roughly bundling the thug into the back of the van.

Not content with one prisoner, Tracy rejoined the fracas and grabbed another thug kicking and screaming out of the chaos and hurled him into the back of the van as well with other officers around her doing the same.

Indeed it was almost all over by the time Sir Richard Crowthorne and the Commander had reached the scene.

“Very nicely done” the Commander commented causing the slightly dishevelled looking Tracy to look up slightly surprised to find her husband standing there.

“Thank you love” she responded slightly out of breath as the officers behind her managed to bundle the last couple of fighters into the waiting vans before closing the doors and preparing to depart the scene.

“What are you two doing in this neck of the woods then?” Tracy asked as she went up to the Commander and exchanged a hug and a kiss.

“Oh just having a quiet drink you know” the Commander replied wryly.

“That wouldn’t be the Black Horse would it by any chance?” Tracy asked knowingly causing the Commander and Sir Richard to look at each with slightly stunned surprise.

“How the hell did you know that?” the Commander asked.

“Well known haunt for some of East London’s most legendary villains” Tracy responded “First place I figured you would ask around about our Russian friends.”

“She’s good isn’t she?” Sir Richard responded.

“And your opinion is not even biased!” the Commander added with a wry laugh.

“You two renegades need a lift anywhere?” Tracy asked.

“Err in what?” the Commander asked looking around to see that all of the Security Service vehicles had departed, leaving Tracy behind.

“Oh thanks a bunch guys!” Tracy jokingly called up the road in the direction of the last vehicle which was now barely visible in the far distance.

“Looks like we are taking the tube” the Commander motioned to the Underground Station ahead, now reopening after the earlier incident.

Sir Richard and the two officers crossed the road and entered the ticket hall, passing through the ticket barriers by passing their warrant cards over the round yellow card readers, before heading for the lifts.

“You know I went with my dad to that pub when I was about eight years old” Tracy added “He was asked to use his locksmith skills on some nicked safe if I remember.”

“Err Tracy love” the Commander recalled a distant memory that had been triggered by what she had just said “This safe didn’t by any chance contain some gold bullion by any chance?”

“I think it did yes” Tracy recalled as the lift neared the bottom of the shaft and began to slow.

“And you didn’t by any chance meet a rather small short sighted nine year old boy with a deck of cards and a seemingly permanent worried look did you?” the Commander enquired.

“Oh yes” Tracy remembered “I remember him, funny lad he was, first boy I ever kissed” she added as they entered the southbound Piccadilly Line platform where the indicator was showing the next train as being due imminently.

“Must be a small world” the Commander commented.

“Why is that then” Tracy looked across at the Commander.

“That little fella was me!” the Commander responded with a chuckle “I always thought we had met somewhere before that fateful day you walked into my office in Haychester.”

The conversation at that point was interrupted by the turbulence and noise of the six car train of 1973 series Piccadilly Line tube stock arriving at the platform and coming to a stop with its accompanying hum of electrical motors and squealing of brakes.

After the smattering of passengers who were alighting had passed, the two officers and Sir Richard boarded and took three adjacent seats next to the rear cab bulkhead wall of the car. No sooner were they seated then the doors were closed and the train quickly away into the running tunnel.

"Where are we going?" Tracy asked out of curiosity.

"Hyde Park Corner" the Commander explained "It would appear we have an appointment and we need to bring some friends."

"Afternoon everyone" Jennifer Caverner called cheerfully as she entered the open plan style operations office of the VIP Protection Division, located within a non-descript concrete office building off Waterloo Road.

"Did I miss anything?" she enquired as she chucked her car keys casually onto her desk and sat down.

"All pretty quiet" one of her officers responded looking up from his desk across the office towards her "Nigel did get called out on some last minute job though."

"Prime Minister forgotten to get the shopping again has he?" Jennifer jokingly asked.

"Some big wig Russian diplomat just flown into Gatwick from Moscow needed a lift to the Consulate and then onto a trade fair in docklands" the officer confirmed.

Something in the back of Jennifer's mind made her sit up and take notice at that last bit of news as she reached across to the radio set on the desk and picked up the handset.

"Which car did Nigel take out?" she asked.

"Err hang on a minute" the officer consulted a job log on a clipboard "Victor Echo Three" he subsequently confirmed.

"Victor Echo Three from Victor Pappa X-Ray Zero One" Jennifer called over the radio "Nigel, are you there?"

The only response to her enquiry was silent static leading Jennifer to repeat her call "Nigel, are you receiving over?"

Again silence greeted her call which led Jennifer to try an alternative possibility as she moved across to the computer terminal to one side of her desk, where she called up a location tracking program.

After a few presses of keys at the computer, a map of London streets appeared on the screen with a green spot marking the location of the car she was seeking.

"You said Nigel was heading over to Docklands didn't you?" Jennifer asked the officer.

"Well that's what is said on the work sheet request that came through" the officer confirmed as he got up from his seat and joined Jennifer at her computer terminal.

"Then why pray tell" Jennifer asked "is he parked up near Hyde Park Corner?" she pointed to the screen showing the location.

"I have no idea" the officer responded now as baffled as his own Commanding Officer alongside him.

"I wonder if we can get him on a traffic camera." Jennifer wondered as she fiddled about a bit more on the computer until she had managed to call up the view from a traffic camera only just covering the side street where the car had been parked.

"There he is" the officer pointed out a car visible on the right hand side on the screen.

"Doesn't seem to be doing much" Jennifer remarked "I can not even tell if he is in the car from this angle."

"I could try calling him again" the officer suggested as he returned to his own desk.

"Do it" Jennifer agreed as she got up and grabbed her uniform tunic "I'm going down there."

Within a matter of a couple of minutes, Jennifer had skipped down two flights of steps, out through the secure front doors of the building and out into the street, before rounding the corner to where her own unmarked dark coloured Security Service car was parked in a side street.

The manually mounted blue flashing light on the roof of the vehicle and Jennifer's advanced driving skills meant she managed to make her way through the streets of central London with ease.

Just a little over ten minutes after she had left her office, Jennifer was pulling up on the opposite side of the street from the seemingly abandoned vehicle that was the reason she was there.

It was with some understandable caution that Jennifer approached the vehicle, deciding to draw her gun from its discreet holster beneath her tunic and holding it lowered against her side. Instinct and experience told her something was not right about the abandoned vehicle which, she could just discern through the darkened side and rear windows, contained no driver.

Approaching cautiously, Jennifer reached the drivers door and took a grasp of the handle. To her surprise the door was unlocked as she slowly opened it, where she was greeted by nothing but an empty vehicle and the bleeping sound of what appeared to be some sort of burglar alarm sensor.

It was then that Jennifer noticed some extra wires on the inside of the driver's door that should not otherwise have been there.

"Oh hell..." Jennifer responded and turned away, running across the street before diving behind a car on the far side of the street. Barely had she managed to duck down when the abandoned car erupted in an explosion that lifted it off the ground in the midst of a ball of flame and flying debris.

"Did you hear something?" the Commander commented to Tracy as they and Sir Richard reappeared back into daylight from the ramped subway entrance to Hyde Park Corner station.

"Lima Tango Zero One to control" Tracy called over the radio "What in the name of all mighty Zarquon was that?"

"I think there has been an explosion about five hundred yards south of Hyde Park Corner" the Control Room despatch officer back in Holborn responded as the emergency calls incoming display in front of him suddenly began to light up like a Christmas tree.

"Come on" the Commander responded and together they ran quickly around the corner, down the side of Hyde Park Corner past the Wellington Memorial and then turned right into the side street where they came across a scene of devastation with the remains of the car that exploded spread liberally all over the street, adjacent vehicles damaged and burning and in the midst of the wreckage, a somewhat smoke blackened and dishevelled looking Jennifer clambering through the mess poking things with a stick.

"Hi sis!" Tracy called as she surveyed the damage "Thought this looked like your handy work" she joked.

"What the hell happened here?" the Commander enquired as he looked around the smouldering mess.

"One of my lads got called up to escort some Russian guy on a diplomatic passport from Gatwick Airport this morning" Jennifer confirmed "Then our chap disappears until we find his car parked here for no readily apparent reason."

"This 'Russian guy' as you put it" the Commander enquired as behind him, Tracy and a couple of officers proceeded to move the curious public back and close off the area with tape "I don't suppose you got a name for him by any chance."

"Nothing on the job request sheet" Jennifer confirmed "It was apparently a last minute thing but I do have an idea" she went over to Sir Richard Crowthorne who was looking around the mangled mess with a professional interest.

"Sir Richard" Jennifer called "I was about to call you!"

"Well us guys at MI5 are supposed to be presenting a more customer friendly accessible service these days" Sir Richard joked as he quoted from the latest nonsense Government directive that had landed on his desk the previous day "So how may I be of assistance my dear?"

"I'd like you to pull the video from the secret camera you had installed in all my Department's Ministerial cars six months back" Jennifer requested "That would of course be the cameras you think I don't know about by the way" she added with a wry smile.

"Right...." Sir Richard responded "Which car out of interest?"

"This one" Jennifer handed him a bent and melted number plate which although blast damaged, was still just readable.

"I'll get right on it" Sir Richard responded and departed the scene by hailing a taxi from the main road nearby, the number plate tucked under his arm as if it was some kind of trophy.

"You think this Russian guy was our Mr Vladisov don't you?" Tracy asked as she joined her sister and the Commander on the edge of the blast area which was by now being attended to by members of the fire brigade who had just arrived on the scene.

"Well it fits" Jennifer mused as together the three officers walked away from the scene "And if I am right, you might as well call off your all ports and airports alert as I think he is already here."

"Where is your driver?" Tracy asked as she looked around.

"I think that may be what is left of him in the boot of the car" Jennifer grimly responded "Which means I have to go and deliver a death-o-gram to the relatives."

"Uh-oh" the Commander commented as he looked at his watch "We are going to be late!"

"Late for what?" Tracy asked as she started running after her husband who was making a swift departure from the scene as far as the Wellington Memorial where he looked around for some transport.

"Hold it mate!" the Commander stepped out into the road right in front of an articulated bus that was working on a route 73 journey, forcing it to brake sharply to avoid running the Commander down.

"Afternoon Guv!" the unusually cheery driver called from his cab as he opened the front door, allowing the three officers to climb aboard.

"Park Lane" the Commander called "and quickly please!"

"You got it" the driver responded as he put his foot to the floor and accelerated the huge eighteen metre long machine up the road, rounding the Wellington Memorial that dominates the centre of Wellington Place before swinging left into Park Lane with the Commander riding shotgun on the front platform trying to urge as best he could the traffic out of the way.

"Do you know where we are going?" Tracy asked her sister as they held on for grim death whilst the bus swerved through the traffic.

"Haven't a clue" Jennifer responded shrugging her shoulders "But I think this driver has been taking lessons from you!" she joked.

"Here will do nicely" the Commander called to the driver who pulled into the side of the road and opened the three sets of doors which allowed both the three officers and some very relieved looking passengers to alight from the vehicle.

"What time is it?" the Commander asked.

"It's..... stopped." Jennifer responded when she discovered that her watch had been a victim of earlier incidents.

"Five to four" Tracy confirmed as the bus pulled away leaving the three officers looking across Park Lane's two double lane carriageways at the bank on the opposite side.

"Lima Mike Zero One to Control" the Commander called over the radio "Where is that back up at Park Lane I asked for?" he enquired with a worried frown on his face.

"Err what back up Sir?" the Control Room officer responded somewhat mystified.

"I forgot to order it didn't I?" the Commander asked.

"Yes Sir" the Control Room officer confirmed the bad news "I am afraid you did."

“Nuts....”

“Sorry Sir, I didn’t catch that last transmission” the Control Room officer responded.

“Well I guess we will just have to do it the old fashioned way then” the Commander responded as he drew his gun from its belt mounted holster “Send whatever you can over here ASAP all right?”

“Will someone *please* explain to me just what the hell is going on around here?” Tracy enquired.

“Some very bad people are about to do bad things in that bank right over there” the Commander responded “in about three minutes.”

“All right then” Tracy responded as she too drew her gun, a move her sister quickly replicated “Let’s go nab some nutters then!”

It was a bit of a struggle to weave their way across the busy traffic flows that seem to constantly run up and down Park Lane irrespective of the time of day and by the time the three officers had reached the opposite side, the ornate clock above the main entrance to the bank was now reading just one minute to four.

When the three officers reached the front door of the bank however, all seemed pretty quiet and normal, a private security guard on duty just inside the entrance and people around and about going about their normal business.

“Are you absolutely sure about this?” Jennifer enquired as she took a look down the side street that ran adjacent to the bank to see if anything was amiss. Just as she looked around however, an explosion erupted, blowing out a large section of the side wall and sending rubble and debris across the road as well as coating Jennifer in dust and other material for the second time in less than an hour.

“I’m sure now!” the Commander responded as he and Tracy got up off the pavement where they had thrown themselves down to in response to the explosion.

“This just isn’t my day!” Jennifer sat up on the ground now looking even more dishevelled than ever.

At that moment, six armed balaclava wearing men suddenly emerged through the hole in the wall and slung a large number of bags into the rear of a white van that was waiting in the side street.

Before anyone knew what was going on, the men where all inside the van, the doors were closed and it was moving off at high speed down the side street.

Tracy quickly took aim at the oncoming vehicle firing off a series of shots at the driver’s position only to be defeated by the vehicle being fitted with bullet proof glass.

Both Tracy and the Commander had to pull back out of the way as the van lurched past them out onto Park Lane where its sudden emergence into traffic caused numerous vehicles to swerve and at least two cars to collide with another route 73 bendy-bus.

Quickly, all three officers gave chase on foot as the object of their pursuit raced ahead as fast as the heavy traffic conditions would allow, only for the van to suddenly swerve sideways and screech to a halt as they were rammed by a Security Service patrol car that emerged from a side road, forcing the van into the side kerbing on the other side of the road.

“Oh dear” the Commander responded as they reached the scene of the collision “I do hope that isn’t one of my division’s motors!”

“I don’t know” Tracy mused sarcastically “always thinking with your budget!”

“It’s all right” the Commander informed her as they reached the collision site “it’s one of yours.”

“Oh terrific!”

At that point the officer who had been driving the fortuitously timed patrol car slightly gingerly eased himself out of the drivers seat with his gun drawn, revealing himself to be none other than Simon Fuller, the operations commander of the Transport Division and Jennifer’s fiancé.

“Afternoon Sir, Maam, Jenny love!” he called as they joined him “I was on my way over when I heard there was a party on.”

At that moment a couple of the men trapped inside the van had managed to get to the side doorway and proceeded to fire bullets indiscriminately around from semi-automatic weapons.

“Everybody down!” the Commander called as simultaneously anyone within firing range and many beyond ducked down behind whatever cover they could find, the four officers now behind the patrol car, the upper parts of which were being thoroughly perforated with gunfire.

“Welcome to the party” the Commander commented “Unfortunately we appear to have some gate crashers!”

“Hello love” Jennifer greeted Fuller amidst the chaos with a quick kiss “I don’t suppose you brought any spare armoury with you by any chance?”

“I think I have six bullets to my name” Fuller responded.

“I have three and another clip” the Commander looked down at his own weapon before offering a couple of shots in the general direction of the shooters in a futile attempt to try and persuade them to surrender.

“Six and two clips” Tracy confirmed as she followed the Commander’s lead by firing off six shots before ducking back down and reloading “Just the two clips now.”

The distinctive whirring and reverberating of rotor blades becoming increasingly louder heralded the arrival of the Security Service helicopter which moved in overhead only for one of the shooters inside the van to reach back inside and grab a large calibre weapon that he aimed upwards with clear skill, taking one shot that in an instant saw smoke come from the helicopters engines.

“He shot my chopper!” the Commander looked up in disbelief as the craft moved away to make a rather impromptu emergency landing in Hyde Park nearby.

“Lima Tango Zero One to Control” Tracy called into her radio “where in the name of God is our back up?”

“Stuck in traffic” the Control Room responded apologetically “Estimated time of arrival four minutes but the helicopter should be with you any moment now.”

“Do you want to give Control the bad news or shall I do the honours?” Tracy asked the Commander wryly as another volley of gunfire ripped through the saloon section of the patrol car they were hiding behind.

“Oh I am angry now!” the Commander reached inside his tunic pocket and pulled out a spectacle case from which he took his new reading glasses and perched them on his nose.

"Very snazzy" Jennifer commented.

"Thank you" the Commander responded as he checked his gun was loaded, moved up, aimed at the most prominent of the shooting suspects and fired one single shot which amazingly was on target, sending the gunman spiralling to the ground.

The Commander then used the momentary distraction to shoot a second gunman with similar effect whilst Tracy hit a third.

"Well that's three of them down" Tracy commented as they ducked back down again, "What happened to the other three?"

"All right" the Commander instructed "On three, you two go around the left hand side" he indicated to Fuller and Jennifer, "Tracy and I will go around the right hand side and don't take any chances."

"Got it" the other three officers agreed as they braced themselves to launch into action.

"One, two and...." the Commander counted down.

"Three!" they all said together in unison as they moved up, proceeding in their agreed directions around the van to surround it and its occupants.

A quick inspection of the scene revealed three shot on the ground and the driver, badly injured and slumped over the steering wheel from where he would play no further part in this fight.

"We are definitely two missing" Fuller confirmed as he panned his gun around the unoccupied interior of the van.

"Oi!" a bus driver stuck in the stationary traffic nearby called "If you are looking for two nutters, they headed that way into Hyde Park!" he pointed to his right in the direction of the park land on the west side of Park Lane that spread for many square miles.

"Jennifer and Simon" the Commander instructed, "Take care of this mess and greet the cavalry if it bothers to turn up. Tracy, you are with me."

With that, Tracy and the Commander headed off, weaving through the stationary traffic that was completely jamming Park Lane in every direction, across the pavement on the other side and through an access gate into Hyde Park itself.

"Does the proverbial saying about needles in haystacks mean anything to you?" Tracy commented philosophically as the two officers looked around the vast open area of grassland and trees, however Commander had an idea.

"Lima Mike Zero One to Romeo Papa Lima Control" the Commander called over his radio to the Control Room of the Royal Parks division. Well known as one of the quietest and most laid back Divisions of the Security Service, it seemed that the Control Room officer on duty was quite surprised to receive the call.

"Err yes, Royal Parks Control receiving. What can I do for you Sir?" the Control Room officer enquired.

"How fast can you seal off every exit from Hyde Park?" the Commander enquired.

"Blimey!" the Control Room officer burst into life at the suggestion of a major incident "Within five minutes if I push the panic button."

"Well bloody well push it then!" the Commander instructed "We are after two heavily built gentleman in dark clothing, they were wearing balaclavas but they probably have ditched those by now, and they are to be considered armed, dangerous and annoying the hell out of me!"

"Consider it pushed" the Control Officer enthusiastically responded.

"All right then Einstein" Tracy looked around the vast park that totalled some 350 acres in area "Which way?"

"I need a map" the Commander responded as he purposefully jogged over to a nearby information sign where he looked at it for a few moments. However after seeing the myriad of pathways and routes across the vast site that were illustrated, he decided to go for blind luck instead.

"That way" he declared pointing off to the right in an approximately north westerly direction in which the two officers began to set off.

"Why this way?" Tracy asked out of curiosity.

"Wild guess" the Commander explained "With just a hint of reasoning behind it mind."

"Lima Mike Zero One from Romeo Papa Lima Control" the Commanders radio blasted out loud enough probably for the entire park to hear.

"Go ahead" the slightly exhausted sounding Commander responded as he and Tracy continued to move reasonably briskly along.

"Most of the exits are now covered" the Control Room officer confirmed "And we have had a report of two large gentlemen pushing past a group of old ladies without apology near the Albion Gate on Bayswater Road."

"Lovely" the Commander responded as he realised that his somewhat unlikely long shot might actually be right after all.

"How the hell did you know they would head this way then?" Tracy asked.

"If my theory proves correct, I'll tell you later.

"Well lets cut their travel options then" Tracy remarked as she reached for her radio "Lima Tango Zero One to Control" she called "I want Lancaster Gate, Bayswater, Notting Hill Gate and Marble Arch stations shut to all incoming persons immediately!"

"What about Queensway?" the Commander asked as they approached the north gateway which exited out onto Bayswater Road.

"Shut for lift refurbishment" she explained.

"Oh yes" the Commander recalled one of those notes that had been on his desk that he had given his customary glance over a few days earlier as they stepped out of the park onto the south side pavement of the tree lined avenue of Bayswater Road.

"So what do you do if you are a couple of Russian thugs in need of somewhere to hide in London on a late afternoon when the tubes are shut?" the Commander asked as he looked down the road at something that had attracted his attention a short distance away.

"You get on a bus" Tracy realised as she too looked ahead and saw the same thing as the Commander, two slightly nervous looking men waiting by a bus stop some two hundred yards away down the road.

"Hi there" the Commander commented just as a double deck bus on the 148 route passed them by, leaving a trail of wind turbulence in its wake.

"We are going to lose them" Tracy commented as they observed the bus slow to a halt at the stop ahead before the two suspects boarded.

"Tracy love" the Commander requested as he moved on ahead "Find us some transport."

"Taxi!!" Tracy called out as she stepped into the road with her arm held aloft which elicited the required result as a black cab pulled in to the side of the road in front of her whereupon the two officers quickly climbed in the back.

"I know this is going to sound like a terribly old cliché" the Commander requested "But follow that bus!"

"Well that's the evening rush most likely shot to hell" Fuller commented as he surveyed the scene around the crash site with the van still firmly jammed up against the kerbside.

There was a huge ripping noise of dieing metal as the Foreman from the Security Department's Garage Division pulled forward in his tow truck and wrenched the bent, battered and bullet hole ridden patrol car from its position jammed into the side of the truck.

"Coat of paint and it will be fine" Fuller joked as Jennifer looked on at the wrecked vehicle.

"At least yours is enough of a state to fit on the back of a lorry" Jennifer remarked philosophically, mine will probably be carted away in something resembling a carrier bag."

"Someone had fun" Sir Richard Crowthorne commented as he joined the two officers at the edge of the scene that was still causing Park Lane to be closed in both directions with resultant diversions, chaos and jams.

"The tally is two dead, two hospitalised and two escaped" Jennifer announced "The Chief and Tracy are chasing the other two now."

"I thought you were ill or something?" Sir Richard asked Fuller.

"Felt a bit better by lunchtime and I needed to get the car back to the garage" Fuller explained "I was passing through when I head the call about this little lot and decided to crash in so to speak."

"Oh by the way" Sir Richard added "I checked the video from those in car cameras you know nothing about and if I were a betting man..."

"Which you are" Jennifer cut in.

"Exactly, then I would say your Russian diplomat on the Get Out of Jail Free passport is indeed our Mr Barkov" Sir Richard confirmed.

"Now all we have to do is identify these jokers" Fuller remarked as one of the dead gunman was discreetly loaded into the back of a waiting ambulance nearby.

The bus made its way westbound along Bayswater Road in the direction of the Notting Hill Gate area at a fairly sedate pace, almost so that the taxi that Tracy and the Commander had commandeered, was practically nose to bumper with the back of it.

"Looks like he's stopping Guv" the taxi driver called over his shoulder, causing Tracy and the Commander to lean forward and look ahead out of the front of the cab at the bus ahead.

"Stick it on the company slate" the Commander called as he opened the cab's side door "And don't forget to put on the tip."

"Cheers" Tracy called as she followed her husband out onto the pavement where ahead, they saw the two suspects alight from the centre doors of the bus.

"Where are they going?" Tracy mused as the two men strolled as casually as they could along the pavement just as the bus pulled away.

One of the men then looked casually around and when he saw the two officers over his shoulder, suddenly realised that they were still being followed.

"Down!" the Commander pulled Tracy to the ground as one of the gunmen pulled a gun out and fired a number of rounds in the direction of the two officers, all fortunately missing but the emphasis of the message being sent was obvious.

"These guys are starting to really annoy me!" Tracy commented as the two officers scrambled back to their feet and set off in pursuit of the two men.

To Tracy's surprise, as the two gunmen reached the end of Kensington Gardens, they tossed their weapons into an adjacent litter bin as they passed before then ducking sideways through a gateway, waving what appeared to be their passports at a man guarding the entrance who allowed them admittance.

"Drat!" the Commander uttered as he and Tracy reached the gate that was set into a high wall guarding an ornate large town house style building. "Looks like we are going no further on this one."

"And why not?" Tracy asked as they stood by the gate, the guard observing them with a sincere frown on the other side.

"Because my dear" the Commander tapped the engraved bronze plaque on the gate pillar with its small white, red and blue flag emblem and bi-lingual writing "this is the Russian Embassy and we try and go in there, we will have the diplomatic headache of all time."

"As you say love" Tracy agreed "drat!"

"Lima Mike Zero One to Control" the Commander called over the radio as he exchanged a glare with the guard on the other side "Have Commander Howard of the Diplomatic Operations Office frogmarched up to my office in thirty minutes!"

"Well I would say comrade that did not exactly go according to plan" Peter Harris commented as they watched the reporting of the events in Park Lane unfold on the news being broadcast on the television in front of them.

"Every beginning has its few faltering moments" Vladisov remarked philosophically as he sipped a glass of Vodka "It has shown that we are serious and do mean business, also it has served other important purposes, however it is clear we do have a few leaks in the system."

"I reckon someone talked to the authorities" Harris commented as he helped himself to another drink "I know for a fact that a lot of the old time crime bosses in the east end are none too happy at your arrival in town."

"In that case" Vladisov stood up and began to pace purposefully towards the window "We had better remove the opposition."

"What do you have in mind?" Harris asked.

"First we deal with the competition, cut off their heads and the bodies will die" Vladisov instructed "Then we target the authorities, a gentle reminder that they mess with me and I will very much mess with them."

"It's going to bring a lot of heat down on us" Harris pointed out "The Commander for one."

"Who?" Vladisov looked back from the window.

"The Divisional Commander of the Metropolitan Division of the Security Service" Harris explained "He has the ear of Prime Ministers, the respect of most of the criminal fraternity, you name it. You target him and he'll wipe the floor with you, kill him though and you'll find he has powerful friends who will do the job for him."

"Everyone has a weakness" Vladisov looked back out of the window as if in search for inspiration "you just have to find it and squeeze."

"So what about your little brother?" Harris enquired.

"In time, they will have to move him to court" Vladisov responded "When that is going to happen, my contact will call and we will make our move."

With the exception of the Security Service uniform, Commander Silas Howard of the Diplomatic Operations Office looked every bit a diplomat, a distinguished appearance enhanced by the noble silver grey hair and neatly trimmed beard.

He was waiting patiently in the area outside the Commander's office to where he had been summoned some twenty minutes earlier. Indeed he had been sitting there so long that as he looked at his old pocket watch, he was beginning to think the Commander was not coming after all.

Suddenly the Commander appeared, passing through the outer office at some speed, so much so he initially failed to register Commander Howard's presence.

"Oh!" the Commander exclaimed as he realised he had company, by which time he was already half way through the office door, "Sorry Silas" he apologised "Wheel yourself in and I'll put the kettle on!"

"Milk and four Commander" Commander Howard responded as he rose and followed the Commander into the office.

"Ah, a man after my own heart" the Commander responded with glee, it was not often these days that he met a fellow lot of sugar in their tea drinker.

"I hear you've been upsetting our Russian friends" Commander Howard commented as he took a seat, the Commander doing likewise behind his desk.

"You could say that" the Commander explained "Two very unpleasant armed robbers escaped to the sanctuary of the Russian Embassy about an hour ago and unless I want to spend the rest of my life in Siberia, I can't use my usual err tact and diplomacy to get at them."

"Tact and diplomacy from you Commander?" Howard commented with a chuckle "That would be a bit of a new departure would it not?"

"Exactly why I need your services" the Commander explained "I need you to use whatever contacts you have on the Russian side to persuade them to hand over the two suspects."

"Could be tricky" Howard mused for a few moments "It would tie them up in red tape for weeks."

"Indeed" the Commander agreed "With any luck whoever is working for Vladisov inside the Russian Consulate will be eager to hide their tracks to such an extent that they will be unable to help him for the foreseeable future."

The Commander got up and went over to the side table where the kettle had boiled and proceeded to make two mugs of tea as he continued to explain his overall strategy.

“The main weapon we have until we locate Vladisov is to severely restrict or indeed cut off his support mechanisms. We already have his little brother and we know he is politically connected so all we have to do is progressively isolate him.”

“What about outside the Russian’s?” Howard asked “Does he have any other connections?”

“I know he has a crew working for him in the east end of London somewhere” the Commander responded as he removed the tea bags before pouring the milk “They are just the hired muscle, you know, the ‘lets blow stuff up for kicks but have the fun of getting paid for it at the same time’ types.”

“That car bomb near Hyde Park Corner this afternoon?” Howard enquired as he received his mug of tea and thanked the Commander.

“Apparently it has all of Vladisov’s hall marks” the Commander confirmed as he sat back down behind his desk “And I fear their may be more where that one came from.”

“Well I admit that organised crime is not exactly my forte Commander” Howard responded “But even I can tell that if our Russian friend gains control of the London criminal fraternity, the code of honour will be out of the window and we could be looking at a blood bath on the streets.”

“You should have been in Park Lane this afternoon” the Commander recalled earlier events “I have never seen such indiscriminate gunfire in a public space in my entire career.”

“There used to be a time when villains had some decency and left innocent members of the public out of the firing line” Howard reminisced.

“Well I’ve got Sir Richard Crowthorne compiling a report on Vladisov’s past glories” the Commander confirmed “I think it is going to make for pretty grim reading.”

They were interrupted when Tracy appeared, knocking at the door, a sight that cheered the Commander up instantly after a poor day.

“Sorry love” she apologised “We’ve got something downstairs you ought to see.”

“Mind if I tag along?” Howard asked as the two officers got up from their seats and joined Tracy at the office door.

“Join the party” the Commander responded.

“Two pairs” Alfred McGraw declared as he put his cards on the table “Kings and nines” he announced as he sat back with a confident look on his face whilst inhaling on a huge cigar.

“Full house” his young opponent, Terry declared as he leant forward to reveal his cards on the green baize covered table.

“Nicely played” McGraw, a gruff old timer of the organised crime scene in old East London declared. Despite his lengthy record and occupation, he was still a pretty honest guy and knew when he had been fairly beaten and tonight was one of those very rare occasions.

“Get you next time lad” McGraw joked as he stood up and shook the young man’s hand before turning and leaving the room, heading down a flight of steps to the bar area of the drinking club that he owned.

“Don’t tell me you got beaten?” the barman asked seeing McGraw’s look on his face as he arrived at the bar.

“Afraid so Barry” he confirmed “Double whiskey please, I have some damaged pride to soothe.”

“Here you go Sir” the barman passed across the drink.

“Cheers mate” McGraw responded as he looked around “Bit quiet in here tonight isn’t it?” he remarked.

“I think a lot of people are keeping their heads down after that bodged bank job over in Park Lane” the barman responded “In case the law start sniffing around.”

“I would dearly like to meet the bunch of trigger happy Muppets that tried that one” McGraw remarked, a clear tone of stern disapproval apparent in his voice “I mean for God’s sake, they open fire in a crowded public street, used badly controlled explosives and nearly killed the Commander in the process.”

“Not good Sir, not good at all” the Barman agreed.

“Can you imagine what would have happened if he had been shot, or his wife for that matter?” McGraw asked “He is about the only decent honest bloke left in the land, and considering my line of work, that’s saying something!”

“Take more than a bunch of half arsed Bolshevik lunatics to get rid of him” the Barman commented.

“Bolshevik?” McGraw picked up on what the barman had said.

“Word going around that apparently the Russian Mafia may be touting for business” the barman explained “Looking to move in and take over is what is being whispered.”

“Here Barry, chuck us the telephone will you?” McGraw nodded over at the far side of the bar.

“Here you go Sir” the Barman passed across the telephone “Another of these?” he asked picking up the now empty whisky glass.

“Oh please” McGraw responded as he lifted the handset and dialled. After a few moments he was connected.

“Roger?” McGraw asked as he was answered “Yeah, it’s Alfred. How have you been?”

“Oh not too bad” Roger Field, sat in his study responded “Yourself?”

“So, so” McGraw confirmed “Just got beaten by that Terry bloke of yours though.”

“Yeah, he’s good isn’t he?” Field responded with a chuckle.

“Haven’t seen poker talent like that since that twelve year old cleaned me out thirty years ago” McGraw remarked “Anyway, wanted to ask you if you have heard anything about some Russians that are lurking around, stirring things up with the law.”

“I know there is supposedly some big Russian boss out of Moscow in town looking to muscle in on the action” Field confirmed what he knew “The main trouble is they seem extremely trigger happy.”

“I think we should meet” McGraw suggested “Talk strategy and then maybe bring the rest of the guys on board. I am sure it would be in all our interests to work together to remove these guys off our radar as soon as possible.”

“I agree” Field confirmed “Where are you?”

“At the club” McGraw confirmed “Come round, we’ll talk in my car, its parked around the side.”

“See you in about ten minutes then” Field confirmed and hung up.

“You off out then Sir?” the barman asked.

“Won’t be long” McGraw confirmed as he put his long overcoat on and took the last swig from the glass on the bar “Keep the kettle on.”

With that, McGraw headed for the door, pulling his overcoat closer over himself against the cold air and intermittent rain as he went outside. He paused momentarily outside the door of the club and looked up and down the dimly lit street before turning right and then after a short distance right again into the side street where his old Bentley car was parked.

The dampness of the night air had meant that McGraw's cigar had gone out and as he clambered into his car, looked down at it with distain.

Closing the door, McGraw reached inside the glove compartment and retrieved a fresh cigar that he unwrapped and clipped. He was about to reach for the lighter on the dash board when he noticed Roger Field turn into the street some distance ahead and duly raised his hand in greeting as he approached.

Field was only about a hundred feet from the car when McGraw reached down for the lighter, as he pressed the button in however, a huge explosion ripped through the car, tearing him and it to pieces in an instantaneous ball of flame and debris which sent Field crashing to the ground to protect himself from the blast as the shockwave reached him.

The air was filled with the sound of the explosion's echo, breaking glass and the scream of nearby car alarms set off by the shockwave as Field got back to his feet and moved forward to see if there was anything left to be rescued whilst at the same time keeping back any onlookers to prevent any further injuries.

A short distance away on the upper floor of a building overlooking the scene, Vladisov, standing in a darkened room, barely a shadow in the window, observed the burning carnage with the illumination of the fire reflecting on the window.

"And so it begins" he declared with a satisfied evil smirk.

"Vladisov Barkov" Sir Richard Crowthorne began his briefing in the still unfinished conference room in New Scotland Yard. Fortunately, his projected presentation meant that the darkness of the room hid the worst of the construction calamities.

His audience was an important one, all of the Divisional Commanders, Durrant from Interpol and representatives of the Bomb Squad and Anti Terrorist Division.

"Who is he and where is he now?" Sir Richard continued "Well we can now confirm from this footage that he arrived in the UK on a fake diplomatic Visa and passport earlier this morning" he confirmed as he showed a still from the in car surveillance camera and then compared it with a photograph from Russian Intelligence records.

"Prior to going freelance" Sir Richard carried on "he was one of the old KGB's most prominent weapons and military operatives specialising in explosives and ordnance of pretty much every kind."

"Nuclear?" the Commander enquired, fearing the worst possible scenario.

"That is a possibility" Sir Richard confirmed "But then again you can turn up with a bag of hard cash and purchase pretty much anything over there these days."

"The wonders of a free market economy" Tracy remarked.

"Exactly" Sir Richard agreed with a wry grin "When he left the KGB, he disappeared from the scene for a while, indeed MI6 even though he was dead until they had a tip off he was the money man behind an arms smuggling scheme in East Germany. They ran a surveillance operation and duly discovered he was indeed alive and well and had moved into the private sector."

"Busy fellow" the head of Thames Valley Division commented.

"In the following years, he was sighted running guns, drugs and Gawd knows what else in Afghanistan, Chechnya, the Balkans, Iran, Iraq, numerous places ending in 'sthan' but anyone who got close to nailing him for it, won a free visit from his public relations guys."

"Ouch!" Jennifer exclaimed as the shot was changed to the view of a very badly battered dead body.

"This chap used to be a Police chief who was about to arrest Vladisov a few years ago" Sir Richard explained "and after a visit from Vladisov's heavy mob, this was all that was left of him."

"So where the hell do we find him now?" Tracy asked.

"Initial indications are that he has put together a crew in the east end of the city" Sir Richard continued "both local rent-a-thugs and imported Russian muscle."

"Two of which are holed up in the Russian Embassy" Tracy added.

"That is being taken care of as we speak" Commander Howard confirmed with a knowing look.

"And we have his little brother safely locked up in Paddington Green" the Commander confirmed.

"That could be a useful bit of leverage when the time comes" the Anti-Terrorist Section representative commented.

"The weapons that were recovered from the scene of this afternoon's excitement" Sir Richard continued as he reached under the table and picked up an automatic weapon wrapped in a plastic evidence bag which he then placed in the middle of the table for all to see "Standard AK-47 assault weapon, the serial numbers of which come from a consignment of some five hundred identical weapons that vanished from a military supplies depot outside of Kiev one night about three years ago."

"Since then" Sir Richard continued as he consulted his notes "weapons and other materials stolen that night have turned up in the hands of all sorts of unsavoury people around the world."

The sound of a mobile telephone ringing interrupted the tense atmosphere of the meeting and after much looking around at each other, Tracy tapped the Commander on the shoulder.

"It's yours love" she informed him.

"I have a mobile?" the Commander looked down at his uniform tunic and began to rummage through the pockets, emptying the contents, mostly half eaten bars of chocolate, loose change, sachets of sugar and ketchup as well as old burger restaurant receipts onto the table before he finally located the telephone.

"Hello?" he answered.

"Commander?" Field responded "If you are near a television, turn on BBC News 24 right now."

"Right" the Commander responded and turned to Commander Howard "Can you turn the telly on mate, News 24."

"Right you are" Howard responded as he turned around in the swivel chair and activated the television set, quickly locating the right channel.

"...remind you of our breaking news story" the studio presenter announced, the television having been turned on when she was in mid sentence "A car bomb has exploded in the east end of London killing at least one person."

The news report was backed up with sketchy pictures of burning wreckage which was until a short time earlier, an old Bentley motor car.

"Ok Roger" the Commander responded "Who got the unpleasant surprise?"

"Alfred McGraw" Field confirmed over his mobile telephone as he stood huddled in a closed shop doorway a short distance from the scene "I was on my way over to meet him when well, bang!"

"Old Alfie, I don't believe it" the Commander responded "It's starting isn't it?"

"It looks like it" Field agreed "I am going to make some phone calls and call in some favours. I'll be in touch."

"Watch your back old friend" the Commander responded before hanging up.

"Who got the bad news?" Sir Richard enquired.

"Alfred McGraw" the Commander responded "Old time crime boss from Bethnal Green."

"Vladisov's handy work?" Tracy asked.

"First rule of competitive business" Sir Richard commented "Eliminate the competition!"

“Well I reckon if this Vladisov guy wanted a turf war” the Thames Valley Chief responded “then he certainly has one now.”

“Yeah” the Commander grimly agreed “Trouble is how long before he turns his attentions to us?”

“What about Vladisov’s little brother?” Tracy enquired “Could we not apply a little pressure?”

“It would have to be unofficial” Durrant responded thoughtfully “Maybe we could have a chat in the back of the van tomorrow morning when we move him to the Old Bailey for his preliminary extradition hearing?”

“Sounds good to me” the Commander agreed “His court appearance is at ten thirty so if we provide the escort for a nine o’clock departure from Paddington Green then that will give us plenty of quality time with him.”

“See you there Commander” Durrant confirmed as he got up to leave.

“Will we be expecting company during the transfer tomorrow?” Tracy asked.

“Given the way my day has gone so far” the Commander was philosophical “Nothing surprises me anymore!”

“Strike a light!” the Security Service officer seated in the drivers seat of the stationary Metropolitan Division patrol car commented as a black Mercedes Benz car sped past them at the Charing Cross traffic lights near Trafalgar Square.

“He going some isn’t he?” the driver’s colleague commented as they saw the car speed off up the Strand in the direction of Aldwych.

“Right” the driving officer responded as he started the engine of the powerful patrol car, engaged the blue lights and sirens and pulled out into the sparse late night traffic “Let’s pull this guy over before he imbeds himself in a wall or something.”

“Lima Mike Whisky Three Six Five to Whisky Control” the officer in the front passenger seat called over the radio “We are in pursuit of a black Mercedes Benz saloon registration Echo One Six Nine Victor Lima Tango currently speeding in excess of seventy miles per hour along the Strand towards Aldwych, over.”

With the surrounding light traffic all pulling out of the way of the patrol car as it came speeding through with full lights and sirens, they soon managed to close the gap between them and the vehicle they were pursuing.

“I think he’s realised we’ve got more grunt than he has” the driving officer remarked with a satisfied smile as the car they were pursuing noticeably slowed and came to a halt by the side of the road in front of the old long since closed Strand/Aldwych Underground Station.

As per standard procedure for a road side vehicle check, the officers drove past the offending vehicle and stopped in front of it so as to better prevent any sudden exit the driver might have considered making.

“Call it in Steve” the driving officer requested as he climbed out of the patrol car and put on his cap before proceeding purposefully in the direction of the stopped vehicle.

“Good evening Sir” the officer politely but firmly announced as the driver of the offending vehicle, a grey haired man in his late fifties, who lowered his window.

“Good evening officer” he responded “I am sorry about that back there, it’s been one of those nights.”

“Would you mind stepping out of the vehicle please Sir” the officer asked.

“Yeah sure” the driver responded as he opened the door and stepped out onto the road surface, his breath visible as clouds of vapour in the bitterly cold night air.

“You were doing over seventy five miles an hour through Charing Cross back there” the officer informed the slightly embarrassed looking driver. “Can I see you licence, insurance and registration documentation please?”

“Yeah sure” the driver responded as he continued to be thoroughly co-operative. He reached inside the car and extracted his papers from the glove box and passed them to the officer.

“Thank you Mr...” the officer read the documentation by a torch light “Robbins?”

“Jack Robbins” the driver confirmed “That’s me, lousy picture though!”

“You all right there Ian?” the second officer asked as he got out of the car and came over to join his colleague and the driver.

“Papers are in order” the first officer confirmed “Will need to write up a ticket for the speeding offence though.”

“Fair enough” Robbins admitted, he knew when he had done wrong and was prepared to accept the penalty for his stupidity.

“Who’s this joker?” the second officer commented as he observed coming down the Aldwych towards them from the opposite direction, a large blue van with its headlights extinguished and travelling suspiciously slowly.

“Here Steve, go and have a word while I finish up here will you?” the first officer requested.

“Will do mate” the second officer responded as he headed across the carriageway and approached the slow moving dark van just as it was pulling level with him.

“Excuse me!” the second officer called to the unseen driver of the van as he got near it, waving his arms to attract the driver’s attention, seemingly to no effect.

“What the....” the second officer suddenly commented as the sliding body side door of the van opened and in the opening, three balaclava wearing men with automatic weapons appeared, opening fire firstly on the second officer and then turning the majority of their attention and gunfire to Robbins the car driver and the first officer stood next to him.

The surrounding buildings reflected the flashes of multiple rounds of automatic gunfire for over twenty seconds, killing their primary target, the first officer and in the process badly injuring the second officer.

Seeing that their task had been successfully completed, the driver gave a shrill whistle where upon the gunmen ceased fire, closed the side door of the van and sped away into the night with only a few shots fired off by the badly injured second officer offering anything by way of resistance.

As the second officer slumped to the ground from his injuries and the last echoes of gunfire faded away, Vladisov, seated in the back seat of a silver saloon car parked a short distance away, wound up the side window and smiled with satisfaction as his driver pulled away into the night.

“Did you know this McGraw fellow then?” Tracy asked as she drove the patrol car down Victoria Street with the very tired Commander semi-slumped in the passenger seat alongside her.

“Oh yes” the Commander confirmed “Had a passion for robbing high class jewellers amongst his many talents. Damm good safe breaker though, MI5 even borrowed him on the odd occasion when they needed his talents in exchange for certain leniencies shall we say.”

“Is there any of the old East London villains you didn’t meet when you were a kid?” Tracy remarked with a chuckle as she rounded the corner into Vauxhall Bridge Road.

“Never met the Kray twins” the Commander remarked “My father once played poker with one of the Great Train Robbers though.”

“Really?” Tracy responded slightly surprised.

“Now I come to think of it, I think he still owes him twenty quid” the Commander realised.

“Lima Mike Zero One from Control” the radio in the patrol car suddenly interrupted, causing the Commander to give it a hard glaring stare before reluctantly picking it up and answering.

“Tell me laddie” the Commander casually enquired “Do the words ‘I am off duty, tired, cheesed off and going home with my wife’ ring any bells in there perchance?”

“Sorry Sir” the Control Room officer dutifully apologised fearing a potential telling off “It’s just that there has been a drive by shooting in the Aldwych about five minutes ago, two officers and one member of the public down.”

“I am on the way” the Commander responded “Get as much back up down there as you can and for gawd’s sake keep the media, any vultures and the usual sightseers well back.”

“Guess we are not going home then?” Tracy asked.

“Flip this crate around and floor it love” the Commander requested.

“You got it” Tracy responded as she slammed on the brakes and executed a perfect hand brake turn around a traffic island to be facing in the opposite direction before burying the accelerator and speeding off.

“Don’t tell me you actually went on that advanced driving course at last did you?” the Commander remarked at Tracy’s seemingly improved driving skills.

“Jenny gave me a few lessons” Tracy explained as she ripped through red traffic lights with the sirens and blue lights at full cry “I think I am getting the hang of it” she added only to then side swipe a bollard on her way up Buckingham Palace Road.

“Then again...” she added ruefully as she left the shattered rear offside light glass and a wrecked bollard in her wake.

Progress around Hyde Park Corner, along Piccadilly and through Piccadilly Circus was swift thanks to the light traffic. The section through to Trafalgar Square did encounter a few minor difficulties as Tracy had to negotiate her way through a number of overnight road works and a large gantry crane that was being transported to a nearby building site but it was not long before they were arriving at the scene at the Aldwych where already something of a circus was in attendance.

“Good grief!” the Commander commented as he got out of the car on the edge of the scene that was surrounded by passers by, Security Service vehicles, ambulances and officers of various agencies.

It took him a couple of minutes to make his way through the massed ranks of press and onlookers to reach the tape that had been stretched across the road in an attempt to keep people back.

“Sorry Sir” a Metropolitan Division officer remarked as she saw the Commander at the tape barrier and lifted it up to allow her senior officer to access.

“Evening” the Commander responded “Well almost morning in fact” he ruefully added “Who’s the scene Commander?”

“Commander Fuller Sir” the young officer confirmed pointing ahead to where the distinctive red Transport Division Mobile Operations Unit, a converted single deck bus was parked to one side of the shooting scene.

“Right thanks” the Commander responded “Try and get some of this lot back will you, I’d appreciate it.”

“Yes Sir” the officer responded enthusiastically.

“I’ll give you a hand” Tracy joined the officer at the tape barrier and together they attempted to sort out the mass throngs whilst the Commander went on ahead.

“Simon!” the Commander called over causing Fuller to look up from where he was kneeling over the body of the car driver.

“Hello Sir” Simon responded clearly despondent at the scene he had been presented with “The local Met Division boys were busy when the call came through so as we were in the neighbourhood, I popped down.”

“What have we got?” the Commander looked upon the grim scene, the distinctive scarlet red of blood soaking away across the wet road like drops of wet paint in a glass of clear water.

“Drive by shooting by all accounts” Fuller explained as he conducted the Commander on a tour of the depressing scene.

“Apparently two of your traffic section guys pulled this chap over for speeding down the Strand” Fuller went on to explain “Whilst they were going through the motions, a van pulls up, the back opens and a number of gunmen open fire with automatic weapons.”

“Charming” the Commander grimly commented “So what’s the score?”

“The driver of the car was the intended target it appears” Fuller led the Commander over to the bullet ridden Mercedes where the driver’s body lay slumped by the open door, albeit covered with a blanket to preserve some dignity “He’s dead, so is one of the officers” he indicated a second blanket covered body alongside the car with a day-glo yellow uniform jacketed arm protruding from the edge, covered in blood.

“The other officer?” the Commander asked.

“Just on his way to hospital now” Fuller confirmed “Chances are fifty-fifty apparently. I’ve ensured the ambulance has a full escort and I’ve got Jennifer to provide a couple of her protection lads for when he gets there.”

“Good thinking” the Commander agreed “If this was done by who I think then they might try and eliminate the witness.”

“The driver’s name is, or should I say was a Jack Robbins” Fuller read from the blood splattered driving licence that had been recovered from the scene.

“Oh hell” the Commander responded as he seemed to recognise the name before kneeling down and lifting gingerly back the blood stained blanket covering the driver’s body.

“Anyone we know?” Tracy asked as she joined them at the scene.

“Jack Robbins, its him all right” the Commander grimly confirmed with a sick feeling in his stomach as he put the blanket back “Well what’s left of him that is.”

“Wasn’t he a fence or something?” Fuller recalled a vague memory of an old case file he had worked on some years earlier.

“He fenced a lot of stolen goods for many of the east end firms in the 1970’s and 1980’s” the Commander confirmed “If you wanted something urgently and were not too bothered about it’s legality or provenance, he was the guy you went to see.”

“The end for another of Vladisov’s potential competitors?” Tracy asked.

“It looks like it” the Commander grimly confirmed.

"Looks like your boys made a mistake tonight" Harris commented as Vladisov arrived back in the office area "Killing a couple of the law wasn't in the plan, at least not yet."

"Collateral damage" Vladisov dismissed the incident casually with a wave of the hand.

"You will have the entire Security Service after you!" Harris went on to advise in the most sincere terms.

"Well I guess then we will have to deal with the authorities rather sooner than we planned" Vladisov remarked as he sat down behind an antique oak desk and poured himself a shot of vodka, "See to it will you?"

"All right" Harris agreed but the reluctance in his voice was obvious as he picked up the telephone and began dialling.

"Oh by the way" he remembered as he waited for the telephone to be answered "Your contact rang while you were out, they are moving your brother from Paddington Green to the Old Bailey and then probably on to Belmarsh Prison in the morning."

"Excellent" Vladisov responded "The time has come to really show everyone who is now running dear old London town" he commented with an evil cackle.

"Hello?" Harris asked as he was finally answered "Yes it's me and I know what time it is. We need everything in place for the little job we discussed first thing in the morning." he advised.

"I'll have the details brought over to you in an hour" Harris responded "And after that we will be moving to phase two, have you got that?"

Vladisov looked up from his vodka glass as the instructional conversation continued and grinned satisfactorily as he knew the extent of the chaos he was about to unleash and the power and control he was determined it would bring him.

As the UK song being broadcast by BBC Radio 4 echoed through the apartment that was the seemingly rarely reached home of Tracy and the Commander, the old grandfather clock in the hallway partially struck in the hour of six o'clock in the morning, the striker on the bell jamming every second or third ring as its age was beginning to tell.

The Commander, dressed already in his full best dress uniform, was watching the toaster very closely, determined that this morning would be the first for over a week where he had not managed to set off the smoke alarm whilst cooking his breakfast.

"A watched pot never boils" Tracy commented as she entered the kitchen and saw her husband continuing to watch the toaster with an eagle eye, even to the extent he had put his reading glasses on.

"You look beautiful in the morning" the Commander remarked as he looked up to see Tracy, also in her full uniform smiling away there in front of him.

"I'm glad you think so" Tracy wryly responded as she embraced the Commander and kissed him "I've never really been a morning person I thought."

"What are the chances of us actually making back home in the hours of daylight this evening you think?" the Commander pondered as he looked lovingly into Tracy's eyes.

"About as much chance as you managing to cook breakfast without setting the smoke alarm off" Tracy nodded to the toaster behind the Commander that was starting to emit plumes of smoke.

"Oh no, not again!" the Commander responded, reluctantly letting go of Tracy and pressing the release button on toaster, sending two blackened slices of bread up and onto the kitchen counter.

Tracy just giggled with the sight that she was witnessing, one of the most powerful men in the country defeated by two little slices of bread.

"Oh that'll scrape off" the Commander casually remarked as he looked at the burnt offerings before plonking them onto the plate, nearly burning himself in the process.

"I think I'll have cereal thanks" Tracy admitted as she headed for the kitchen cupboard.

“So what have you got on for today then?” the Commander enquired.

“Transport Division are providing the motorcycle escort for Barkov junior’s court appearance” Tracy responded as she poured her cereal “I am doing the traffic co-ordination.”

“Well try not to go too fast” the Commander responded as he bit into the toast, shattering the burnt carbonised pieces in several directions “Only I am going to be in the back of the van and I need plenty of quality time with young Comrade Barkov.”

“I’ll see what I can do” Tracy smiled in response.

“First though” the Commander added “I have some more unpleasant duties to attend to.”

“The dead officer from last night?” Tracy asked.

“Yep” the Commander confirmed with some sadness in his voice “Wife and two kids apparently.”

“I thought the employee relations section did that sort of thing” Tracy remarked.

“Normally yes” the Commander gave up on the toast at that point as he continued “But I feel this is something that needs to be done by top brass, not some desk bound civil servant.”

“What about the guy in hospital?” Tracy asked.

“He should be all right” the Commander’s mood seemed to lighten “The surgery went well and they managed to patch him up but he will be in hospital for quite a while yet. I am seeing him later as well.”

“Rather you than me” Tracy responded mournfully.

“This is a District Line train calling at all stations to Edgware Road” the female driver of the first northbound departing service of the day from High Street Kensington announced over the tannoy “The next station is Notting Hill Gate, please stand clear of the doors.”

The characteristic warning bleeps heralded the closure of all the doors down the platform facing side of the six car formation of London Underground ‘C’ type stock. Having checked all the doors were closed, a fact confirmed by the orange indicator lights on the body side of each carriage going out, the driver released the brakes and moved off into the tunnel ahead.

Being the first train of the day, there were comparatively few passengers around with the morning rush proper still being at least an hour away yet, indeed most of the passengers were Underground staff heading to their first duties of the day.

As she continued at a moderate pace through the darkened tube tunnels, the occasional shaft of light passed by overhead where there was an opening to the surface level above but this went unnoticed by the driver.

With only a short distance before reaching Notting Hill Gate, the driver slowed for the advance signal that informed her that the next one at the far end of the station platform would be red.

However as the train rounded the curve into the final approach, something on the track directly ahead, illuminated by a gap in the tunnel roof suddenly made the driver brake sharply and bring the train to a sudden and juddering halt.

It took a bit of distance to stop entirely and she only narrowly missed the object on the line, the front edge of the cab just protruding into the shaft of daylight from the break in the tunnel roof above.

Indeed it was not until the driver opened the front cab communicating door that she was even sure she had missed the object, however as soon as she looked out onto the track bed below her, it was obvious that the object was a body.

“Oh hell” the driver commented at which point she was joined in the cab by a member of off duty Underground staff who was also travelling on the train and had come forward to see what the problem was.

“Hello Terri” the second member of staff announced as he arrived “What happened?”

“Morning Steve” Terri the driver recognised her colleague from the same depot that she was based at “Take a look out there and check if he or she is still breathing while I phone it in.”

“You got it” Steve responded as he donned an orange high visibility vest and then stepped down carefully onto the track bed below. Being careful not to touch the live rail with its 650 volts of direct current, or indeed anything touching it, Steve examined the body and checked for a pulse in amongst the semi dry blood that appeared to be all over it.

“Line control from train Edgware Eight Three One” Terri called over the radio.

“Line Control receiving” the response quickly came “Pass your message.”

“I am about three hundred yards short of Notting Hill Gate northbound” Terri advised “There is a body on the line right in front of me.”

“He’s dead!” Steve confirmed, calling up from the track bed before he noticed that a train was about to depart in the opposite direction from Notting Hill Gate.

“Tell control” Steve called into the cab “I am going to flag down this southbound service and transfer our passengers across” he confirmed “There is no way we can lead them out the front with this stiff in the way.”

“Control from Edgware Eight Three One” Terri called “We are going to use the southbound service now approaching to offload our passengers and transport them back to High Street Ken.”

“Roger that” Control confirmed “We’ll round up the cavalry and the Transport Division coppers and get them down to you. Control out.”

“Well this is a circus” Tracy commented to herself as she arrived alongside the sunken street side entrance to Notting Hill Gate underground station on her Transport Division patrol motorbike, a fully kitted out red painted Honda Pan-European that she was very fond of.

Parking it alongside the road and removing her helmet, Tracy looked around and saw that already the London Underground Emergency Response vehicle and two ambulances were on site and a Transport Division patrol car with two officers was pulling up on the opposite side of the road.

Tracy let out a shrill whistle to attract the two officer’s attention and then indicated towards the entrance to the station next to her. The two officers looked up, saw their Commanding Officer and understood her signal, heading down into the entrance on their own side of the road.

They met in the middle, immediately beneath the busy main road in the subway that served the station booking hall entrance that was partially closed off and blocked with Underground station staff trying to placate anguished intending passengers who were now stranded as the station had been closed.

“Morning chaps” Tracy called as they gathered together in the immediate entrance to the station, “You” she indicated the taller of the two officers “Help the station guys sort this mess out whilst you” she turned to the second officer “Come with me.”

“Central or Circle?” Tracy asked as she and the officer entered the evacuated booking hall area and were met by the duty Station Supervisor who, judging by the look on his face at any rate, was certainly having a bad morning.

“Circle northbound” the Station Supervisor confirmed as they proceeded through the open ticket barriers and then headed right and right again to the steps that led down to the northbound Circle and District Line platform of the station.

“Ever dealt with a dead body before?” Tracy asked the young officer.

“No Maam” he responded, clearly slightly apprehensive.

“Then I hope you are not squeamish” Tracy commented as they reached the platform which was empty except for a team of Underground engineers at the far end.

“Morning gents” Tracy announced “Transport Division” she flashed her warrant card, not that she really needed any introduction of course “What have we got?”

“The first up service of the morning braked just before it hit the body” the leading engineer confirmed.

“Where is it?” Tracy asked looking around.

“About three hundred yards in” the engineer confirmed “The train crew and a couple of paramedics are down there now.”

“Looks like we are walking” Tracy remarked before turning to the officer with her “High-vis vest lad.”

“Oh right” the officer responded, pulling out an orange high visibility safety vest from his pocket and proceeding to put it on as Tracy did the same.

“Any of you guys got a torch?” Tracy asked as she jumped down onto the track bed with the officer following suit.

“Here you go” one of the engineers passed down a couple of torches to the two officers before they headed off into the tunnel with the lead engineer leading the way.

“Is the power off?” the young officer enquired, still slightly nervous.

“Juice is off both lines all the way back to High Street Ken” the engineer confirmed “Rush hour is shot to hell though.”

“Nothing new there then” Tracy remarked with a smirk which the engineer had to begrudgingly agree with.

“What about the passengers?” Tracy added.

“Transferred over to a southbound service and shifted back the High Street Ken” the engineer explained “and they were none too happy about it I can tell you!”

“Show me an Underground passenger who is obviously happy with the service and I’ll show you a liar or a lunatic” Tracy remarked as they approached the gap in the tunnel roof with its shaft of light illuminating the scene immediately in front of the train’s cab front.

There, two paramedics were standing guard over the body, now covered with a green sheet whilst the two train crew sat on the cab door step drinking tea from flasks.

“Hi guys” Tracy called as they arrived on the scene whereupon she went around to the body and prepared to look at it. “Confirmed dead I’ll assume?”

“Well if he isn’t dead” the lead paramedic confirmed “then he is very calm.”

“Let’s have a look at you” Tracy commented as she lifted one end of the blanket to reveal the face of a middle aged man, pretty badly battered with dried blood and signs of severe trauma.

“Oh no...” the young officer responded when he saw the body before turning away, leaning up against the tunnel wall and throwing up.

“If it makes you feel any better” Tracy offered by way of a crumb of comfort “That was how I reacted the first time as well.”

“It looks like he fell through the gap in the tunnel roof” Terri the train driver commented “Thing is there is no blood on the rails or track bed yet the body is coated in the stuff.”

“That means he didn’t jump” Tracy looked up at the opening in the tunnel roof “He was dead before he even got here.”

Everyone looked up as two engineers approached with a manual track trolley which they brought to a halt just short of the scene before joining them.

“Lets find out who you are my deceased friend” Tracy remarked as she carefully looked in the jacket pockets of the body for some form of identification where upon she found a wallet.

“All right, let’s get him out of here” Tracy remarked as she stood up and motioned for the paramedics and engineers to set about their task.

Carefully they lifted the body up off the tracks and laid it flat onto the trolley as Tracy looked through the wallet at various pieces of paper and material inside.

“Come on” Tracy motioned to the young officer who had now recovered and followed her up the front cab steps and on board the train.

“Ok lad” Tracy called as she took a seat next to the cab bulkhead wall in the passenger saloon area “Quiz time, lets see how good you are.”

“Yes Maam” the young officer responded as he sat down opposite her.

“All right then” Tracy announced “This chap had approximately three hundred in cash on him which tells us?”

“It wasn’t a robbery?” the officer responded.

“Spot on” Tracy agreed. “Also no credit cards, indeed no sign there ever has been any in the card section of the wallet.”

“He doesn’t trust banks?” the officer asked as the full saloon lights came back on, accompanied by the start up of the electrical equipment on the train whirring into life.

“That would be my theory, yes” Tracy thought.

“Power’s back on” Terri the driver confirmed as Tracy stood up, passed the wallet to the young officer to investigate further and then stepped forward into the cab.

“Let’s get the hell out of here then” Tracy responded “I hate dark tunnels.”

It only took a minute for the train to advance the three hundred yards of so to reach Notting Hill Gate platform where Tracy and the officer alighted by the saloon side doors that were opened when the train came to a stop.

On the platform, the engineers were folding up their little yellow track trolley and preparing to take it away whilst the paramedics wheeled the body away towards the stairs on a stretcher.

“Give me that a minute” Tracy motioned to the officer who passed her the wallet which she took, opened again and took another look.

“Lima Tango Zero One to Lima Mike Control” Tracy called as she sat down on the bench seat alongside the platform wall.

“Lima Mike Control, go ahead” came the response that echoed around the near deserted station.

“Is my husband free and available to speak at the moment?” Tracy asked, well aware that he may still have been on his relative visit duty and did not want to interrupt a delicate scene.

“He’s just arrived at Euston Hospital” the Control Room officer confirmed “Do you want me to patch you straight through?”

“If you could, I’d appreciate it” Tracy responded as the engineers departed the platform just behind the paramedics heading back up to the surface.

“You can tell the Station Supervisor he can re-open the station now” Tracy called over to the young officer.

“Yes Maam” the officer responded and quickly departed, leaving Tracy alone on the platform with just an empty train and a passing seemingly disinterested pigeon for company.

“How do Tracy” the Commander responded over the radio.

“Hello love” Tracy replied “Look this may seem like a long shot but the way things have been lately I thought I would just check.”

“What’s on your mind?” the Commander asked as he stood outside the private ward where the shot officer was resting.

“I don’t suppose you know a guy by the name of Christopher Edward Ryder by any chance?” Tracy asked as she looked down at the pigeon that was now hopping past her again.

“If he’s about forty five, six foot tall, bit overweight and going thin on top then quite possibly” the Commander responded “Why just out of interest?”

“Because I just scraped what’s left of him off the Circle Line at Notting Hill Gate” Tracy confirmed “And he didn’t commit suicide.”

“That makes three so far and counting” the Commander grimly responded “He was a driver and bag man in the east end for Roger Field before he went legit about five years ago.”

“This is turning real ugly real fast isn’t it?” Tracy asked as she skipped past the pigeon and headed on towards the platform steps.

“I am afraid so” the Commander responded.

”See you at Paddington Green then” Tracy added before leaving the station platform just as the first passengers began to arrive.

The two officers from the VIP Protection Branch acknowledged the Commander as he arrived outside the single bed private ward that they were guarding before opening the door for him.

Inside with the door closed behind him, the Commander looked around before his eyes came to rest on the patient, the sole occupant, the officer who survived the shooting incident in Aldwych the previous night.

“Morning lad” the Commander quietly greeted the conscious officer who was lying in the bed with numerous monitoring devices attached to his body “How are you feeling?”

“Like I’ve been shot Sir” the young officer admitted casually “But all things considered, it could have been a lot worse.”

“You have a point” the Commander conceded as he took a seat alongside the bed “Anyway, I thought I would pop in and see how you were doing.”

“Doc says I’ll be all right” the officer confirmed “Walking is going to be a bit difficult for a while but I am determined to be back on duty as soon as possible.”

“You married?” the Commander enquired.

“Six months” the young officer responded “kid on the way too.”

“Did you know your colleague at all?” the Commander asked.

“What Ian?” the officer replied “He was my induction officer when I joined about a year ago. Had a wife and two kids as well.”

“Yeah” the Commander’s mood was obviously one of sadness at this moment “I just met them about half an hour ago.”

“How is she taking it?”

“Better than I expected” the Commander admitted slightly surprised “I expect the shock hasn’t settled in yet. What about your missus?”

“She’s in New Zealand” the officer explained “That’s where I met her, she is moving over here in the next couple of weeks. Was actually born in the UK but she could not get away immediately as she is in the Navy over there.”

“Have you talked to her though?” the Commander asked with insistence.

“Err no.”

“Pick up the phone and make the call at the first opportunity” the Commander firmly recommended.

“I will” the officer replied.

“Right, now then” the Commander moved the subject on “Any idea what happened last night?”

“All happened in a bit of a flash” the officer recalled “We pull this guy over, Ian then did the usual documentation spiel while I checked the registration number and then this van with no lights on pulls up.”

“Then what happened?” the Commander was reluctant to push for information but time was short.

“Side door of the van opens and the next thing we know there are half a dozen nutters with AK47’s shooting at the driver of the car” the officer recalled “Then they shut the side door of the van and drive off.”

“Any witnesses about?” the Commander asked.

“Silver Mercedes” the young officer recalled “It was behind us as we entered the Aldwych and I distinctly remember seeing it pulling away discreetly after the shooting before I passed out.”

“Could be useful” the Commander responded as he made a few notes.

“Whoever he was, he must have seen something” the officer said.

“Lima Mike Zero One to Control” the Commander called over the radio “Can someone there patch me through to Commander Fuller of the Transport Division please?”

There was a pause whilst the Commander waited for a response before the familiar voice of Simon Fuller echoed from the radio.

“Morning Sir” Fuller called “What can I do for you?”

“Where are you at this very moment?” the Commander asked.

“Control Room at Holborn” Fuller confirmed between sips of coffee.

“Perfect” the Commander responded “Can you call up all the traffic cameras for the surrounding areas around the car bomb and the Aldwych shooting and anything near the first access point to the Circle Line tracks south of Notting Hill Gate.”

“What am I looking for?” Fuller asked as he began to work at his computer console, summoning the appropriate CCTV footage for the task.

“I am hoping that at least at Aldwych, you find me a silver Mercedes” the Commander explained “And I want you to see if one also appears in the vicinity of any other incidents as well.”

“If I find it?” Fuller asked as he began to fast forward through the first of hour of CCTV footage on the large screen in front of him.

“Get a number off it and then run it through the Congestion Charge system” the Commander continued to instruct “It’s a long shot but may be worth a try. If you get anything, call me direct, don’t use the usual lines as I suspect we may have an insider.”

“I’m on it Sir” Fuller responded before signing off.

“Right then” the Commander got up “I have to go and see to the travel arrangements of Mr Barkov junior.”

“Have fun Sir” the officer responded “And if you find the chap who put me in here, give him my regards.”

“Oh I intend to lad” the Commander grinned “With interest, now you rest up and let us take care of them all right?”

“Yes Sir.”

“I am going to go through this once and once only” Tracy announced from the front of the briefing room at the Paddington Green High Security Offices “Phase one will involve the transport of the prisoner under heavy escort from Paddington Green, via the Euston Road down into the City and thence the Old Bailey” she informed the audience as she pointed out the planned route on a map pinned to the wall.

“Transport Division, along with our friends from the Traffic Section” she nodded in the direction of a group of motorcycle uniformed officers to one side of the room “Will be handling the escort and making sure the traffic is out of the way.”

At that moment, the Commander arrived and mouthed a silent apology to his wife for his lateness before discreetly hiding in the corner as Tracy continued the briefing.

“The Metropolitan Division will be handling any crowd problems, the press who are likely to be camped out outside the Old Bailey en-masse and any other issues should they arise” Tracy continued.

“If anything goes pear shaped and we receive the attentions of any uninvited gate crashers to the party” she went on “I will authorise the sending in of the three Specialist Weapons Teams who will be shadowing the convoy at a discreet distance all the way.”

“Phase two” Tracy went on “Depending on how long the hearing is and what its result is, will see the same convoy travel from the Old Bailey, directly north out of the City and on to Belmarsh High Security Prison where chummy will be put in a nice warm cell with some cocoa and a plate of cookies. Any questions?”

“Yes” the Commander raised his hand as he looked around quizzically “Has anyone seen that Durrant chap from Interpol this morning?” he asked “He is supposed to be here.”

The Commander could tell from the shrugs of shoulders and general looking around perplexed that was going on in response to his query that Durrant had failed to show up so far.

“Ah well never mind” Tracy remarked “He is going to miss all the fun isn’t he.”

“Good point” the Commander agreed with a smile even though he was still troubled deep down.

“Right lets go everyone” Tracy announced and with that, everyone in the briefing room filed out of the door like a tidal wave had been let loose.

“So you had an eventful morning I gather?” the Commander asked as he joined Tracy before following the crowd out of the door.

“I know bodies on the line are a fairly common occurrence on the Underground” Tracy commented “But it is rare we get one quite that early in the morning.”

“I have been totting up in my mind who might be next” the Commander mused as they made their way towards the main doors that led to the back yard of the complex “I’ve told Roger Field to go on holiday for a couple of days and suggested he tells anyone else likely to be hit to do the same.”

“Nice weather for it” Tracy remarked as they exited through the double doors to be confronted by the chaos of about a hundred officers and numerous vehicles all crammed into the small back yard area.

The atmosphere of cramped and enclosed conditions was further enhanced by the fifteen foot high security fence topped with razor wire that surrounded the perimeter, befitting the location’s status as one that handled high security prisoners and terrorists from time to time.

“Ok!” Tracy called to everyone as loud as she could “Let’s get this show on the road shall we?”

On her signal, the numerous officers went to their assigned vehicles and prepared to move out. The first three vehicles to depart were the armed response vehicles, a trio of seemingly ordinary looking high speed marked patrol cars but with a selection of the best heavily armed protection officers from the division travelling inside.

“Lima Mike Zero One” the Commander called over his radio “Send out the prisoner now.”

The steel plate and barred door that led from the custody area to the main yard opened and, surrounded by four armed officers, Dimitri Vladisov, handcuffed and dressed in prisoner overalls, emerged into the daylight, squinting a little as his eyes adjusted to the bright sunlight, a contrast from the slightly murky conditions of the building’s interior.

With care and consideration, the prisoner, who sensibly offered no resistance, was escorted across the yard and loaded into the back of the waiting prison service van with two of the escorting officers joining him.

The Commander looked around one last time before boarding the vehicle himself and closing the door firmly behind him.

“Ok Tracy lets go” the Commander announced over the radio as he sat down on the bench seat directly opposite Dimitri who had a guard seated either side of him.

“Lima Tango Zero One to Trident Units” Tracy called from her motorbike at the front of the gathering of vehicles nearest the main gate “Are you in position?”

“Trident One” the first of the armed response units responded as they discreetly pulled into a side road a couple of miles away “Confirmed, we are in position.”

“Trident Two in position” the driver of the second unit confirmed as he pulled into a bus stop alongside the busy Euston Road.

“Trident Three” the female driver of the third unit called “Be advised traffic is a little heavy up near our position.”

“Roger that” Tracy responded as she boarded her motorcycle, started the engine and switched on the blue flashing lights before looking over at the three other motorcycle officers, all from the Transport Division who were alongside her and whom nodded that they were too indeed ready to go.

“Control this is convoy Echo Delta Eight One” Tracy called “Ready for roll out.”

At that point, the large electrically powered double gates that led from the yard to the road outside opened majestically and Tracy led the convoy of four motorbikes, two vans, two patrol cars and sandwiched in the middle, the prison service van, out onto the road. Lining either side of the gates and the opposite side of the road were a number of officers standing with their arms linked to hold back the press and interested members of the public.

Following the progress of the convoy as it majestically swept out of the main back gate onto the main road was Fuller who was watching via the numerous traffic cameras from the comfort of his desk in the control room in Holborn.

Indeed so intense was his concentration on the scene unfolding on the screens before him that he failed to notice Jennifer Caverner enter the control room and creep up behind him. It was not until she put her hands over his eyes from behind, making him jump that he realised he had the pleasure of the company of his fiancé.

"Blimey!" he exclaimed as he looked behind him, obviously glad to see her "Where did you pop from?"

"Just passing" Jennifer remarked with a smile "Thought I'd pop in and watch the show."

"Take a seat" Fuller said, indicating the empty chair alongside him "The show has just started."

With a busy thoroughfare like the Euston Road that which runs across the top of Central London between Paddington and Euston, there is nothing more guaranteed to jam it up completely than a large Security Service convoy of vehicles trying to force their way through it.

Even though they had dispensation to pass through red traffic lights where it was safe to do so, the rest of the traffic did not and it was this congestion, coupled with the confusion presented to their drivers by having numerous sirens approaching them from behind which made for slow progress for Tracy as she attempted to lead the convoy through the mess.

"Lima Tango One to Control" Tracy called over the radio headset that was incorporated into her helmet "Simon, find me a way out of this mess."

"Hold on to your horses" Fuller responded as he began working through possible routes on maps displayed on a side screen "At the next traffic lights, turn right" he responded.

"Isn't their road works down that road?" Jennifer asked as she studied the route Fuller had identified with some concern.

"Well it's either slow through the road works or no movement at all down through Euston" Fuller admitted.

Slowly the convoy managed to force its way through the blocked traffic and turned right into a much quieter side road where progress became much more swift.

"That's better" Tracy commented to herself before suddenly having her confidence dented as she was forced to hit the brakes sharply when the way ahead was blocked alongside the road works by an oncoming bus.

"Come on then" Tracy waved the bus forward which duly passed them but before signalling to the convoy behind to follow her onwards. Slowly the convoy weaved its way past the road works and once out the other side, picked up speed again approaching a junction.

"What's that?" Jennifer pointed out something on one of the screens displaying live traffic camera feeds.

"Where?" Fuller asked.

"That one on the left" she indicated the screen that had caught her attention.

"That's Dave Thornton in Trident Unit Two" Fuller responded.

"I meant two cars behind him" Jennifer tapped on the screen, indicating a large box van parked discreetly in a side street.

"Lima Tango Zero One from Control" Fuller called over the radio "Be advised of a potential unfriendly vehicle in a side street approximately two hundred yards ahead of your current location."

"This is Trident Unit Two" the driver of that car called "Would that be the blue Luton van I can see in my rear view mirrors?"

"That's the one" Fuller confirmed.

"Only it looks like he has a friend in a silver Mercedes parked on the opposite side of the street" the driver of Trident Unit Two confirmed.

"Lima Tango Zero One to Lima Mike Zero One" Tracy called over the radio to the Commander who was still seated directly opposite Dimitri Barkov in the back of the prison service vehicle.

"You will have to excuse me" the Commander graciously apologised "It's the missus calling."

"Be advised that we may have some company" Tracy advised over the radio "You may want to hold on tight."

"Looks like your brother may be about to pay us a visit" the Commander informed Dimitri who continued just to stare onwards into space.

"Look" the Commander asked him as he was forced to brace himself when the vehicle with its somewhat inadequate suspension passed over a bump in the road "You might as well tell us who your contacts are in London, it will look good if you are shown to co-operate when you have your hearing."

"I speak not English" Dimitri responded almost in a stammer.

"Oh that's all right, I speak fluent Russian comrade" the Commander responded in near perfect Russian, a move that elicited a look of shock and annoyance from Dimitri as his plan of evasion was thwarted.

"I am impressed" Dimitri admitted in English, dropping his non communication pretence.

"You and I both know that your brother is dangerous" the Commander stated.

"I think we can both agree on that" Dimitri responded "But you are asking me to betray him. Let me make myself clear Sir, I have no great love for him but you know full well what has happened to informers in the past who have crossed him."

"He seems to be in an awful hurry" the Commander remarked "Has he some sort of deadline, urgent gas bill to pay, debt collectors knocking on the door or something?"

"All he would tell me was he wants to transfer the bulk of his operations to the UK" Dimitri admitted "So he sent me ahead to start things off, to make sure that everything is set for the sixteenth of this month."

"That's tomorrow" the Commander looked at his watch with concern "Any idea what the plan is?"

"No, sorry" Dimitri admitted.

"Lima Tango Control to all convoy and trident units" Fuller called over the radio "Be advised that your suspicious van is following at a discreet distance but the silver Mercedes has disappeared off somewhere else."

"Lima Tango Zero One to Trident units" Tracy responded quickly "I don't like party crashers, pull that van over and have a polite word will you?"

In a matter of moments, the three trident units had deployed from their locations shadowing the convoy at a discreet distance and proceeded directly to the van which was just approaching a busy junction.

The van driver, whose attention had been almost permanently fixed on the convoy ahead of him suddenly found himself having to brake sharply as the three red patrol cars suddenly appeared from side streets and behind to block off and surround the vehicle.

Barely had the tyre squeals died down than a dozen heavily armed specialist officers deployed and surrounded the vehicle, their guns trained on it and the driver, its only visible occupant who looked around with understandable shock and surprise.

"Morning officers" the driver responded trying to appear as calm and co-operative as his fear of being imminently shot would allow him "Something I can do for you?"

"Lima Tango Zero One from Trident Unit One" Tracy's radio called as she led the convoy into a back road just a few hundred yards now from the Old Bailey "The van was a decoy."

"Define decoy exactly" the Commander enquired, jumping into the conversation before Tracy was able to respond.

"One driver, unarmed and a cargo of fresh lettuce" the Trident Unit Commander responded as he stood a short distance from the van which was being thoroughly inspected by his colleagues, some of them looking understandably bemused by the whole situation.

"Oh hell!" Tracy's voice was suddenly heard to call over the radio. The reason for her sudden outburst was when a large articulated lorry suddenly pulled right across the road, forcing the front of the convoy to become separated from the prison van.

Instantaneously, a second large lorry sliced across from another side street, separating the rear vehicles from the prison van and isolating it.

"All units" Tracy called over the radio "Convoy under attack!" she announced as she stopped and got off her motorcycle, removed her helmet and pulled her gun from her holster before dropping to the ground and rolling under the middle section of the lorry trailer into the isolated area.

The driver of the first lorry had by this time leapt from his cab and produced a gun, proffering a number of shots in Tracy's direction as he saw she was about to emerge from beneath the vehicle, causing her to duck back down for her own safety.

A similar volley of shots also forced back a number of other officers who were attempting to enter the area from the other side, both beneath the trailer and through the cab of the rear lorry.

Seeing that his potential interceptor had been warded off, the gunman quickly went around to the back of the prison van and shot the lock off. As soon as he had managed to open the door, the Commander pulled his gun and shot the gunman, a strike that did not deter him one bit as he aimed directly for Dimitri and opened fire, rendering him dead immediately.

"Grab him" the Commander called to the other two officers in the van with him who together lunged forward when the gunman ran out of ammunition.

"Do svidanja!" the gunman announced as he pulled a second gun from inside his jacket, quickly put it to the side of his head and pulled the trigger before anyone could stop him.

"Oh my God!" Tracy exclaimed as she arrived on the scene to find the dead gunman and prisoner along with the blood spattered Commander who was looking down at himself with distain.

"That's another uniform ruined" he grumpily admitted.

"I don't suppose you managed to get anything useful out of Dimitri before he met his sticky end?" Tracy asked as she joined the Commander inside the prison van and together they sat down on the bench seat.

"A few snippets" the Commander confirmed "May be useful, then again it may not."

"Come on" Tracy took the Commander's hand in hers and put her arm around him "Let's go and get a cup of tea."

A little gingerly as he was still a little shocked, the Commander, supported by Tracy, clambered out of the prison van and stepped out onto the road where he found the body of the shooter.

"I would like to know who this joker is for a starter" the Commander looked down at the body before him "I am starting to get really annoyed now."

For the Divisional Commander of the Thames Valley Division, today was not a good day so far.

Besides the fact her car had refused point blank to start that morning, the train she then tried to catch was late and finally when she did get into the Divisional Headquarters in Reading, the electrical power was off as the decorators had accidentally put their ladder through the main fuse box overnight.

The lamp on her desk suddenly came on all by itself as the power was thankfully restored after a three hour break in near darkness.

She did remark to herself however how quiet it had been with no computers or air conditioning whirring in the background, just the silence of the office interrupted only occasionally by the odd telephone call and the distant sound of footsteps on the floor immediately above from time to time.

Now that she was able to see around the office better, the Divisional Commander looked across at the side table where her post and messages for today were awaiting her attention.

One item in particular caught her eye, a smartly wrapped brown paper parcel nestling in amongst the usual plethora of envelopes, folders and junk mail which she decided to investigate further.

Stepping over to the side table, she picked up the neat parcel and looked over its outer wrapping and the address label, clearly marked as being for her by name.

Other markings on the parcel also showed it had come through the Service's internal mail system rather than the regular postal service, there being no stamps attached, instead a franking label marked with the sorting code for New Scotland Yard.

She was always a neat and studious person, both in her professional as well as personal life and therefore it was with care that she proceeded to open the package, using a pen knife to gently slit the cello taped seals on the ends and across the back before folding back the outer wrapping paper to reveal a fairly anonymous brown cardboard box within.

Whether it was some instinct or premonition, she was unsure but something made her stop from instantly opening the box. Instead, with the end of a pen she gently lifted up the front edge opening flap just enough to catch a glimpse inside.

"Oh bugger...." she uttered as with lightning reflexes, she leapt back from the desk and ran towards the office door. Just as she was exiting the office, a massive explosion erupted from the parcel, the blast from which sent her and anything not tied down flying across the outer office and beyond into the corridor outside, whilst outside, the windows were blown out sending a shower of glass onto the shocked people who were passing below.

Back in the east end of London, a telephone in an office rang for which Harris reached across and answered it. He said nothing, merely listened to the short message before nodding and hanging up.

Then he turned to Vladisov himself who was stood at the nearby window, a vodka in his hand as he surveyed the view of London before him.

"Boom" Harris confirmed with an evil smirk.

"One down, three to go then Comrade" Vladisov smiled in response raising his glass in appreciation. "Let the other teams know they can proceed."

As the Commander walked in through the front door of New Scotland Yard it was clear he had a troubled look on his face. Admittedly this was nothing all that new but the Receptionist seated behind her desk who watched him arrive was sufficiently concerned that his mood was even more worried than was normal.

“Are you all right Sir?” the receptionist asked. It was then that she noticed the spatters of blood on the uniform tunic that the Commander had draped over his arm.

“Believe me lass” the Commander admitted with a forced smile “I’ve had better days.”

The Receptionist broke off the conversation to answer the telephone and the Commander was about to head off in the direction of the uniform issuing office down in the basement when he heard her say something that probably meant his plan was about to be curtailed.

“He’s just come in” the Receptionist confirmed looking up at the Commander who was now slightly begrudgingly returning to the desk. “I’ll put him on, he’s just here.”

“It’s your boss” the Commander answered “This had better be good as I have had a hell of a day and it isn’t even lunchtime yet!”

“Something has happened at the Divisional Office in Reading” the Control Room officer on the other end of the telephone informed him “You had better get up here quick Sir.”

“I’m on my way” the Commander confirmed before handing the telephone receiver back to the Receptionist with thanks “Well there goes my lunch!” he commented wryly.

Up in the main Control Room, it was clear when the Commander entered that something had happened as many of the officers on duty along with other personnel trying to find out what was going on, were crowded around one of the main screens which was broadcasting live news coverage from BBC News 24.

“What did I miss?” the Commander enquired as he made his way to the front of the crowd, put on his reading glasses and looked up at the screen.

“Bomb went off at Thames Valley Division’s head office about thirty minutes ago” the Duty Officer explained as he watched the unravelling story on the screen whilst at the same time listening to a telephone call.

“Apparently the Thames Valley Chief got a parcel bomb through the internal mail” he added as he hung up the telephone and delivered the latest update.

“How is she?” the Commander asked, understandably concerned.

“Well she managed to get part of the way out of her office before the device exploded” the Duty Officer confirmed “She is still alive but the hospital are listing her as critical and she is going into surgery right now.”

“Anyone contacted her husband?” the Commander asked “I think he is supposed to be on a pot holing week in Wales.”

“South Wales Division are trying to find him now” the Duty Officer informed him “They have their helicopter standing by to bring him to the hospital as soon as they locate him.”

“Sir!” one of the despatch officers called from the opposite side of the room “Deputy Divisional Commander Gogarty for you on line four.”

“Thanks!” the Commander called as he picked up the nearest telephone and selected the correct line.

“Eddie” the Commander greeted the Deputy Divisional Commander of the Thames Valley Division over the telephone “What’s occurring?”

“It’s a right mess down here” Eddie confirmed as he looked around the remains of his immediate superior’s office which was being made safe by fire brigade officers “Whoever sent that package really meant to kill her.”

“What are her chances?” the Commander asked, fearing the worst.

“Not good” Eddie confirmed his fears “Fifty-fifty at best they reckon.”

“Has she upset anyone lately that might have access to explosives?” the Commander asked.

“Well you know what it’s like in this job mate” Eddie responded “Everyone we arrest usually has an axe to grind which means the list is pretty lengthy.”

“I don’t suppose she was in any fit state to say anything was she?” the Commander asked more out of hope than expectation.

“I’m afraid not” Eddie responded as he stepped out of the blast damaged office into the corridor outside which was filled with emergency service personnel and fire brigade hoses which he had to be careful not to trip over “We may have one break though, her secretary said that she thinks at least one parcel in her in tray had an internal post mark.”

“Inside job?” the Commander asked sensing trouble.

“You tell me” Eddie said “Listen, can I borrow some of your Bomb Squad guys, I could use the help down here.”

“They will be there within the hour” the Commander was happy to confirm “Keep me advised of anything you find.”

“Will do” Eddie confirmed “And watch your back, I have feeling this is larger than it may appear.”

“You too” the Commander responded before hanging up and turning back to the Duty Officer. “Have Commander Pearson send one of his explosives teams down to Reading post haste.”

Walking out into the corridor, the Commander’s mind was filled with various theories and thoughts about recent events, however his train of thought was suddenly brought to an abrupt halt when he bumped into Interpol Officer Durrant.

“Where the bloody hell have you been?” the Commander demanded to know.

“Following up some intelligence” the large man responded hoping that this would be a sufficient answer that did not prompt too many further probing questions.

“I’ll assume you do know Dimitri Barkov was executed?” the Commander assumed.

“Err yes” Durrant admitted although to the Commander’s well trained mind, he did not sound all that convincing.

“Nearly took me with him as well” the Commander added “We have just got an identification on the assassin, another Russian as it happens.”

“Right” Durrant responded clearly still slightly uncomfortable about being there.

“I would like you to wash his details through Interpol records and see if anything squeaks” the Commander insisted as they continued down the corridor towards his office “Call it a positive beacon in inter departmental co-operation or something, that sort of cobblers usually impresses the politically minded.”

“I’ll get right on it” Durrant replied, seeing an opportunity to make a hasty exit. However before he departed he turned back to the Commander.

“Where will you be Sir?” Durrant asked.

“I will be in Holborn within the hour” the Commander confirmed “You can contact me there.”

“As you wish” Durrant responded before making a hasty exit.

“Funny fellow” the Commander commented to himself before entering his office and closing the door behind him. Inside, he dumped his uniform tunic on the chair located in the corner of the room and sat down behind the desk.

He looked at the files that were piled to one side on the desk and casually picked up the first one off the pile and opened it. The case file within caused him to chuckle to himself as he read about an armed robber who tried to hold up the St James Park Post Office, directly opposite Scotland Yard.

“That must have been the quickest response time in Security Department history” the Commander commented to himself as he signed the order to proceed with prosecution
“What an idiot!”

The intercom on the Commander’s desk buzzed at that moment and the dulcet tones of his Personal Assistant came through.

“Uniform branch just brought up your new tunic Sir” she informed him.

“I’ll be right out” the Commander responded as he rose from his desk and headed towards the door.

“Here you go Sir” the Personal Assistant handed him the new tunic still wrapped in its protective plastic wrapping. “They did say something about black listing you if you wreck any more uniforms though.”

“Whoops....” the Commander commented wryly.

Commander David Bowring was on one of his routine scheduled inspection tours of one of the small powerful patrol boats that made up his Thames River & Waterways Division when the call came through the radio on the bridge.

“SDV Sheridan, this is River Control, are you receiving over?” the request came.

The captain of the Security Department Vessel Sheridan leaned over and picked up the radio headset. “This is the SDV Sheridan, receiving over” he responded.

“What is your current location, over?” the Control Room officer asked.

“Moored up at Embankment Pier” the Captain confirmed as he looked outside at the drizzly rain that was starting to turn into a full on storm outside the bridge cabin.

“Can you proceed up river and investigate a report of a body somewhere near Westminster Bridge” Control asked.

“Will do” the Captain responded before turning to his superior officer who was standing just behind him “Look’s like we have a call Sir.”

“Let’s go then” Bowring responded with enthusiasm and gestured to the Captain to proceed.

“Cast off” the Captain called out of the bridge window to one of the crew outside near the bow of the ship who acknowledged the order and proceeded to release the rope that was anchoring the ship to the dock.

With the two powerful engines accelerated to full speed and the sirens and blue lights in full cry, the Captain expertly pulled away from the dock, turned around in mid river and headed at top speed up the River Thames towards Westminster.

As the boat approached Westminster Bridge, the Captain throttled down and slowed, passing beneath the busy main road and out the other side directly in front of the Houses of Parliament that lined most of the length of the north river bank between there and Lambeth Bridge in the distance.

“Ok, shout out if you see anything” the Captain called to his crew who all trained their eyes on the choppy water and the river bank on both sides for any sign of the reported body.

The Captain carefully and slowly advanced the boat further upstream towards Lambeth Bridge whilst the crew, along with the Divisional Commander, continued to watch carefully, battling against the stormy conditions that was seeing rain beating down and the surface of the river become choppy and distorted.

“Lovely weather for it!” Bowring commented as they approached Lambeth Bridge.

“I don’t mind the fact we pull on average a hundred bodies a year out of the river Sir” the Captain commented “I just wish they would have the decency and consideration to sling themselves in the river when the weather is a little more friendly!”

“Something over there Sir” one of the deck officers called “By the pier” he pointed towards Lambeth Pier on the south side of the river near Lambeth Bridge.

“Well spotted lad” the Captain responded as he brought the boat around and alongside the pier where an object could be seen just visible above the choppy surface of the water.

Two deck officers with Bowring assisting, leaned over the side of the boat and using poles, managed to hook the object and pull it into the side before hauling it over onto the deck.

As soon as the object was on the deck and fell onto its back, it became obvious it was the dead body of a middle aged man.

Whilst the crew looked over the body, they were blissfully unaware that they were being observed from Lambeth Bridge by Vladisov who watched intently through a pair of binoculars.

“Boom...” he commented menacingly as an explosive device hidden within the clothing of the body exploded, destroying the front two thirds of the boat almost instantaneously in a huge fireball with debris being sent in all directions.

Calmly, Vladisov returned the binoculars to his overcoat pocket before returning to his silver Mercedes parked in the bus lane behind him. Calmly he got in the back, closed the door and the car drew quietly away into the traffic.

The Commander had just left New Scotland Yard by the back door that exited out onto Victoria Street when he heard what appeared to be an explosion come from the general direction of Westminster.

“Control from Lima Mike Zero One” the Commander called into his radio as he began to jog down Victoria Street in the direction of Parliament Square and Westminster itself “What the hell was that?”

“Unknown Sir” the Control Room responded “I’m trying to find out now.”

It took the Commander some ten minutes to reach Westminster Bridge and the river where for the first time he got a clear view of the source of the tall black cloud of smoke that was hanging over the area.

“What the hell happened here?” the Commander asked a Traffic Warden who was amongst the crowd of sightseers who were on the bridge watching what was going on.

“A boat just exploded” the Warden confirmed “It looked a bit like one of yours.”

“Lima Mike Zero One to Control” the Commander called into his radio as he crossed Bridge Street to the other side and approached the steps down to the river side pier “Have a River Division boat pick me up at Westminster Pier as soon as.”

As soon as the Commander arrived on the pier, the SDV DeLenn was pulling in to pick him up. It was with some trepidation that the Commander boarded the vessel as deep down he hated boats but duty called on this occasion so he would just have to suppress his fear.

“Welcome aboard Sir” the Captain called. No sooner had the Commander arrived on the Bridge of the boat than the Captain was accelerating away from the pier, beneath Westminster Bridge and approaching the scene at Lambeth Pier, being careful to try and avoid causing any damage to his vessel from the numerous pieces of debris that were floating all around.

“Oh hell, it's one of ours” the Captain confirmed as they saw for the first time the shattered remains of the rear part of the boat, its distinctive red, blue and white livery matching his own vessel.

“SDV Sheridan” the Commander was able to make out from the remains of its name on the stern before the Captain was forced to back away from the scene as a Fire Brigade fire fighting vessel moved in to deal with the mess.

“That was the boat our Chief was on this morning” the Captain confirmed.

“I was afraid you were going to say that” the Commander responded grimly.

Roger Field had decided to leave his trusty and faithful Rolls Royce car in the garage for his journey to Canary Wharf, instead taking the tube from Southwark, along the Jubilee Line eastbound.

“The next station is Canary Wharf. Change here for the Docklands Light Railway” the automated on board announcer informed the occupants of the car of 1996 series tube stock as it slowed for the station platform.

With the view of the side tunnel wall giving way to the cavernous interior of the platform level of the station, Field got up from his seat and tucked the copy of the Evening Standard neatly under his arm before proceeding to the nearest doorway about one third of the way along the carriage.

With a bleeping, the doors of the train and the protective platform edge doors opened in parallel unison allowing the passengers to disembark and board. Field held on at the back of the crowd of alighting passengers, following them up through the impressive cathedral like complex of the station up to the sub surface ticket hall.

There he turned right and made use of the side escalator exit that led up into the basement of one of the many tall modern office buildings that dominated the area, this lower level having been fitted out as a spacious shopping mall open to the general public.

Field was however not interested in shopping, he had an appointment elsewhere in the building and made directly for a set of glass doors that led into the main reception foyer of one of the main towers.

From the directory listed on the marble lined wall of the reception area, Field identified the name of the organisation he was seeking and its location on the thirtieth floor before discreetly proceeding to the lifts on the opposite side.

“Good grief!” Field remarked to himself as the lift doors closed and he found himself enclosed inside with the tinny music being played badly through a speaker.

As the lift ascended to the thirtieth floor, Field’s attempts to block the awful ‘music’ from his mind failed and instead he tried to work out what tune it was actually meant to be. Such was its effect that when he finally arrived at his floor and exited out into the corridor, he found himself humming it as he went along.

At the far end of the corridor that Field found himself in was a large double door with two discreet but large private security guards standing outside. As he approached the door, the two gentlemen stepped sideways in front of the door to block his path.

“Some identification please Sir” one of the guards asked politely yet insistently.

“Roger Field” he confirmed as he passed over his driving licence and passport which confirmed this “I am expected.”

“Thank you Sir” the guard responded as he handed back the documentation and nodded at the second guard who opened the door to allow Field to enter.

“Blimey Leonard” Field asked as he entered the boardroom inside and was greeted by an elderly man in what appeared to be an equally elderly but well cared for suit and tie “You been sending your boys on a customer care course or something.”

“Indeed” Leonard Phillips confirmed as he greeted Field with a warm handshake “I get a discount you know, although I stopped short at the name badges though.”

“How have you been?” Field asked as the two men went over to the table where a number of people were sat talking amongst themselves and enjoying a few drinks.

“Not too bad” Phillips admitted “Back’s playing up a bit though, playing havoc with my golf swing.”

“You don’t play golf!” Field remarked.

“I own two golf courses now” Phillips said “Won them in a poker game a few months back.”

“Nice” Field admitted as he took a seat at the table and a glass of finest scotch was passed to him which he gratefully accepted.

“Nearly everyone is here that you asked for” Phillips confirmed as he sat down alongside Field “No sign yet of Barry though or your mystery extra guest yet.”

“Yeah well I have the nasty feeling Barry was the body they fished out of the Thames about an hour ago” Field admitted “So I think he may be more than a bit late.”

“That incident with the Security Service patrol boat explosion?” one of the men seated around the table enquired.

“If the information I have received is correct” Field admitted “Then it looks like our local friendly Russian lunatic has claimed another one of us.”

“And is targeting the Security Service into the bargain as well” Phillips concluded “Not good, not good at all.”

“As the establishment of the rule bending black economy throughout London” Field began to explain the situation “We have always abided by an unwritten code of honour, the most important rule of which is that we ensure no innocent civilians are injured or killed in our business dealings.”

“If our Russian friend removes us all and the Security Service with whom we have a sort of unofficial understanding then their will be blood on the streets” Phillips said.

“There already has been” another of the men sat at the table interjected “That armed robbery in Park Lane was a near blood bath and this guy Vladisov had his own younger brother killed in broad daylight just this morning in case he said anything to the authorities.”

“We have to do something” Field urged “If we don’t, not only will we be out of business but the streets of the city we care about will be a scene of utter carnage.”

“Someone is providing the muscle for this Vladisov’s operation” Phillips concluded “He seems to be using a combination of former Russian military thugs he brought with him and some local talent.”

“A guy I know mentioned to me last night that there is a lot of odd activity going on near Stratford at the moment and he hasn’t seen some of his guys in over a week” one man commented.

“Could be something” Field thought “Can you dig around a bit deeper?”

“I can try” the man responded reluctantly “But if it is this Russian loon then I am rather more concerned about staying alive.”

“Speaking of which” Phillips asked “How are we to know that Vladisov won’t try for us all now that we are all sitting here in the one metaphorical basket?”

“Don’t worry about that” the voice of an elderly man interrupted the conversation as he entered the room “It’s taken care of.”

“Eddie Regent?” Phillips looked up at the elderly man as he sat down at the head of the table, his look being reflected in the surprised expressions of the others in the room except for Field who knew of this gentleman’s impending arrival.

“I thought you were dead” Phillips added.

“I get that a lot” Regent casually admitted as he accepted a drink “Anyway, I have seen to it there are two van loads of the Security Service’s finest parked downstairs on a ‘lunch break’ just in case our Russian friend tries anything.”

“How the hell did you manage to arrange that?” one of the men asked.

“Friends in high places” Regent responded “One of the advantages of being in the witness protection programme for the last twenty five years and having your own son on speed dial.”

“That wouldn’t happen to be the same lad who beat me at poker when he was twelve years old would it by any chance?” Phillips casually enquired as he thought back to the early 1970’s.

“That would be the one” Regent grinned knowingly.

“Here is what I propose to you gentlemen” Field announced “We will collectively keep our heads down and work together, I stress together to find out where these nutters are, what they propose to do and collectively bring them down.”

“Then what?” Phillips asked.

“We deliver them gift wrapped to the authorities” Regent responded with a wry grin.

“Thanks guys” the Commander called as he alighted from the SDV Sinclair where it had just arrived alongside the Temple Pier having given him a lift down the Thames from the scene at Lambeth Bridge.

“I thought you didn’t like boats?” Sir Richard Crowthorne called from the pier side as the Commander joined him while the patrol boat pulled away and headed back up river.

“I don’t!” the Commander responded, clearly thankful to be back on dry land
“However in his infinite wisdom, the Administrator General just made me Acting Commanding Officer of the Thames River Division now that poor old Bowring is fish food back there.

“I hate to be the one to add to your somewhat overflowing plate” Sir Richard reluctantly began as the two men headed back up onto the river bank “but something has come up.”

“After the day I have had, in some way I am not in the least bit surprised” the Commander commented.

“Witness Protection just called” Sir Richard explained “Your father has just disappeared and apparently so has pretty much every London crime boss that is still breathing.”

“I know” the Commander replied, seemingly perfectly relaxed at this news “I arranged it.”

“So where are they then?” Sir Richard asked out of curiosity as they walked up Surrey Street past the old entrance to the former Aldwych Underground Station.

“Roger Field is gathering the clans together and is going to organise them to find out where Vladisov’s base of operations is” the Commander explained “It’s obvious he is using some local talent so that is our way in to find the buggers.”

“In the meantime now that he had his primary competition apparently either breathing their last or hiding beneath the metaphorical sofa, it looks like he now wants to get scare off the Security Service as well” Sir Richard commented as they exited out into the Aldwych itself.

“It looks like the parcel bomb sent to Commander Faversham in Reading was sent through the internal mail” the Commander said as they crossed the road “That suggests we also have an insider.”

“Any ideas?” Sir Richard asked.

“A few names spring to mind” the Commander responded “One in particular which is what I would like your boys to check out.”

“Name him” Sir Richard said.

“This Interpol bloke Durrant” the Commander asked “What do you know about him beyond the official biography?”

“Word has it he is the best officer in Interpol’s International Affairs Bureau” Sir Richard responded as they crossed the other side of Aldwych and headed up into Kingsway “Everyone thinks the light shineth from his proverbial backside.”

“I think he just talks out of it!” the Commander commented.

“I have to say, you never let anyone’s reputation cloud your judgement do you?” Sir Richard asked.

“Well I have been around enough liars, morons, two faced bastards and personal agenda grinders in my time to spot that something is not one hundred percent genuine about our Mr Durrant” the Commander determinedly replied.

“I tell you what” Sir Richard responded as they continued to walk up Kingsway towards High Holborn “I’ll have a few words around the European back channels, talk to a few friends and have a word with my opposite number at MI6 and see what crawls out from the woodwork.”

As they continued to walk along the pavement, the Commander watched as a bus passed slowly by in the same direction in the adjacent bus lane. It was as the rear of the modern double deck bus passed by that something attracted his attention reflected in it's rear window.

“Don’t turn around” the Commander commented quietly aside to Sir Richard.

“Something I should know?” Sir Richard asked.

“When I say so, throw yourself to the ground and stay there” the Commander instructed as he discreetly reached into his inside tunic pocket and removed his reading glasses that he then proceeded to put on.

Sir Richard looked on with understandable concern as the Commander then proceeded to discreetly pull his gun from its holster and hold it close to his chest, all the time keeping a watchful eye on the reflection in the back of the bus alongside.

Just then the traffic lights ahead changed and the bus accelerated away. As it moved off, the noise of its engine was joined by the sudden revving of a powerful motorcycle coming from behind them.

“Now!” the Commander called as he pushed Sir Richard away to one side, swung around and brought his gun to bear on a motorcyclist who was approaching rapidly and taking aim at them with an automatic weapon.

Just as the motorcyclist was about to open fire, the Commander shot directly at him, one bullet striking him in the arm holding the weapon and causing him to drop it to the ground.

The motorcyclist was about to reach down for a handgun as he drew nearer when the driver of a bus coming up behind him, realised what was going on ahead, accelerated and rammed her articulated bendy bus straight into the would be assassin, crushing him and his motor bike beneath the front wheels before coming to a sudden halt.

“That’s what you get matey for illegally driving in a bus lane!” the small female bus driver called in her broad Irish accent as she alighted from her vehicle and with the Commander and Sir Richard, peered beneath the front of the vehicle to inspect the damage.

“Ouch!” Sir Richard commented before moving along the length of the stationary bus and picking up the dropped automatic weapon.

“Ah, the AK47” Sir Richard looked the weapon over in his hands “The only choice of your average communist thug with a grudge.”

“Thank you my dear” the Commander shook the bus drivers hand before something occurred to him “Didn’t you used to be a bus conductor?”

“Actually yes” the driver confirmed as she got back on board her vehicle and returned to the cab to summon help from her garage for her now stricken vehicle.

“I thought she rang a bell” the Commander commented as he reached for his radio “Lima Tango Zero One from Lima Mike Zero One” he called.

“Morning dear” Tracy, sat behind her desk in Holborn called over the radio “Something wrong?”

“Some loon on a motorbike just tried to take a pot shot at me and Sir Richard” the Commander confirmed.

“Are you all right?” Tracy asked, shocked by this unexpected development.

“We are all right” the Commander was happy to confirm “The bus is going to need a bit of work to it though.”

“Bus?” Tracy asked “Never mind” she conceded “Any idea who was behind it?”

“Our old Russian friend with the endless arms supply by the looks of it” the Commander responded “That’s three Divisional Chief’s he’s had a go at since breakfast, four if you include Sir Richard.”

“How would he know where any of us would be though?” Tracy asked as she sub-consciously reached for her bullet proof vest which in the light of recent events may come in useful.

"I reckon that Vladisov's reputation of having a contact in every law enforcement agency in Eastern Europe has extended to our little part of the world" the Commander concluded "Anyway, put the kettle on, I'll be right up."

"It worked" Vladisov commented with clear delight as he read a message that had just been passed to him.

"What worked?" Peter Harris asked as he looked up from his desk.

"They have changed the origin and destination of the delivery route tomorrow" Vladisov explained as he approached the desk with a broad grin of satisfaction across his face "Exactly how I predicted and even more importantly, exactly where I want it."

"With your competitors having now gone to ground and the Security Service in complete turmoil, nothing will now stand in your way surely?" Harris asked.

"A few loose ends to tie up before we begin" Vladisov confirmed as he poured another vodka from the bottle on the table "One of which should be dealt with any minute now."

"I do hope you know what you are doing" Harris cautioned.

"Always my friend, always."

"Good afternoon Sir" the receptionist at the Holborn offices called as the Commander entered through the main front doors "Your wife is up in the Control Room."

"Thank you!" the Commander responded as he breezed through and headed up the stairs. A couple of minutes later, he emerged on the fourth floor and proceeded along the corridor to the Control Room that was as usual a busy hive of activity.

Sitting at the main console watching over events like the captain of a ship, Tracy turned to greet her husband as he arrived with a warm reassuring embrace, something he sorely needed following the morning he had experienced so far.

"I love you" the Commander said, not caring one jot that pretty much the entire Control Room staff were now watching their warm exchange.

"I love you too" Tracy responded "How about lunch?"

"I thought you would never ask" the Commander responded and together arm in arm the two officers left the Control room and headed along the corridor and down the stairs one level to the staff canteen.

"My usual please" the Commander called to the canteen lady behind the counter.

"Are you feeling healthy or non healthy today Sir?" she asked with a knowing smile.

"Need thy ask?" the Commander responded as the canteen lady duly loaded a significant quantity of chips onto a plate for him.

"Ta very much!" the Commander thanked her before heading in the direction of the beverages counter where he helped himself to a fresh cup of tea and several sachets of sugar.

"Have you ever heard of the concept of hypoglycaemia?" Tracy asked as they went over to a vacant table by the window and sat down.

"I never catch illnesses that I can not spell" the Commander reassured her between chips and mouthfuls of tea.

Three floors below them at street level, two patrol officers where calmly escorting a handcuffed prisoner into the rear custody area entrance of the building. The prisoner, a tall man in his late twenties seemed strangely unconcerned at his current situation and the two uniformed officers escorting him also appeared to be equally relaxed.

It was a young officer covering the custody desk that lunchtime and being inexperienced, he did not pick up on the fact that something was not right about the prisoner and his escort as they arrived at his desk.

"Afternoon" the young officer behind the desk called as they arrived in front of him "What is he in for then?"

"Erm pick pocketing" one of the escorting officers responded a little unsteadily.

"All right then" the officer behind the custody desk called "Dave will be back in a few minutes, take chummy here through to the cells and we'll get him sorted out later."

"Right" one of the escorting officers responded, seemingly relived to have overcome this hurdle to his progress "Come on mate" he shoved the prisoner unceremoniously down the side corridor in the direction of the cell area.

Once out of sight of the custody area, the two officers proceeded to release the prisoner's handcuffs before producing handguns and then consulting a plan of the building that was on the wall adjacent to a fire alarm call point.

"Fourth floor" the leader of the three men announced in a prominent Russian accent "Let's go."

"Do you think I should have the double chocolate chip muffin with custard or the chocolate gateaux and double cream?" the Commander asked Tracy as he perused the sweet counter in the canteen.

"Oh dear" Tracy commented largely to herself as the Commander blissfully ignored any thoughts of healthy eating.

"Well they've gone all low fat everything at Scotland Yard" the Commander complained "You are not even allowed salt and ketchup now!"

"And there was me thinking that you came over here at lunchtimes just to see me" Tracy mused with a wry smile.

"Of course that's why" the Commander reassured her "The decent menu here is just a bonus that's all!"

"You're amazing, you know that?" Tracy asked as the Commander decided that the chocolate gateaux was to be the winner and together they returned to their table over by the window that looked over the junction of High Holborn below.

Downstairs on the custody desk, the young officer covering was relieved when the duty officer returned from his lunch break.

"Afternoon mate" the duty officer called as he reclaimed his seat "Anything happen whilst I was away?"

"Couple of officers brought a pickpocket in" the younger officer confirmed "They took him straight through to the cells."

"Are you sure?" the duty officer looked on a little puzzled "I didn't pass anyone back there."

"That's odd" the younger officer thought "I'll go and have a look, maybe I was imagining things due to lack of food."

The young officer proceeded out to the back and into the cell detention area but found nothing but the deserted yellow painted corridor and an abandoned pair of handcuffs discarded on the floor from where he bent down and picked them up with a confused expression.

"Dave!" he called back down the hall "Hit the alarm button will you, I think we have a problem!"

"Blast!" the Commander mumbled through a mouthful of chocolate gateaux, crumbs of which went flying towards Tracy as the general alarm went off in the building.

"Is that fire or general emergency?" Tracy asked.

"Can't be fire" the Commander responded as he got up "I can actually hear it."

"Lima Tango Zero One to Control" Tracy called into her radio as the two officers headed towards the exit "What the hell is going on?"

"Two offices and a prisoner came into custody five minutes ago and then vanished" Fuller sitting in the Control Room responded as he rapidly scanned the internal CCTV system for any sign of the intruders.

"You three with me" the Commander called to a small group of officers standing in the corridor looking around and wondering what was going on "We'll search this and the second floor."

"I'll take fourth, fifth and if necessary the roof" Tracy called before heading towards the stairs, collecting a couple of officers as she went.

The Commander and the three officers with him proceeded to search the third floor, room by room and corridor by corridor with no result. Directly above him, Tracy was nearly finishing her sweep of the fourth floor and was about to come to the conclusion they were not there either when three strangers appeared at the far end of the corridor she was in.

Without hesitation, they realised that their target was ahead of them and proceeded to aim automatic weapons in her direction and open fire. As the first rounds hit the corridor side walls, Tracy, realising what was happening and ducked into the doorway to her right, landing on the floor in the control room.

One officer who ducked out into the corridor to investigate the source of the sudden gunfire found himself hit and collapsed to the ground whilst Tracy and a number of officers from the Control Room gathered at the doorway, weapons drawn.

"They are on the fourth floor!" the shout came over the radio as the Commander was halfway down the stairs between the third and second floors, echoing all around the cavernous stair well.

"Come on!" the Commander encouraged the officers with him as they reversed course and proceeded back up the stairs quickly past the third floor to the fourth.

The sound of gunfire was prominent as they reached the fourth floor and the Commander opened the doorway just a little to look inside.

On the other side of the gunfire, Tracy and two other officers were ducking out from behind the door pillars momentarily, offering gunfire down the corridor towards the assailants and then ducking back in again before they could respond.

"If anyone has any suggestions" Tracy called back to the Control Room "Now would be a good time to bring them into the discussion!"

"Hold it right there fellas" the Commander called as he and four officers appeared behind the gunmen, however he had underestimated their determination as two of them swung around and took aim.

Tracy observing from further down the corridor saw the two turning around and took her chance to pull out into clear view and fired two shots, sending the two men she hit spiralling to the ground in an instant, the third however opened fire on her.

The Commander reacted quickly, shooting the third gunman but not before he had let off a number of rounds, some of which ricocheted off the corridor.

It was then that Tracy felt a sudden shrieking pain in her right leg and collapsed to the floor as she felt unable to remain standing.

"Deal with these three" the Commander ordered as he hurdled over the three bodies and ran down the corridor to Tracy who was sitting up against the side wall, clasping her lower right leg which was bleeding profusely.

"Well I guess it had to happen eventually" Tracy joked as she grimaced from the pain.

"Keep the pressure on it" the Commander joined his hands with Tracy's own over the wound.

"Building Maintenance is not going to be too happy" Tracy remarked as she looked around at the bullet ridden paintwork and shattered glass around.

"Ambulance on the way now" Fuller announced as he arrived with a first aid kit and attended to Tracy's leg.

"Commander!" one of the officers inspecting the bodies called from the far end of the corridor "This one is still alive I think."

"Right" the Commander determinedly responded as he arose from the floor and proceeded in a menacing manner down the corridor only to suddenly stop in his tracks when he noticed the gunman who was still just alive was fiddling with something beneath his jacket.

In an instant, the Commander pulled his gun, took aim and fired at the gunman. As his head fell, the gunman's hand released a small green spherical object that rolled away from him.

"Oh bugger!" the Commander remarked as he stooped down and scooped up what was now clearly identifiable as a grenade and looked around frantically for somewhere to dispose of it.

A vacant office to his right proved to be the solution to his urgent problem as the Commander opened the door, tossed the grenade as far in as possible and slammed shut the door before heading off back down the corridor.

Instinctively as an explosion erupted from the office, sending its door and surrounding wall segments out into the corridor, the Commander threw himself to the floor and covered Tracy to protect her from the worst effects of the blast.

As the echoes of the blast with the dust and smoke began to die away, the Commander looked around and checked that Tracy was all right, a fact confirmed as she gave a thumbs up.

Although there was no major fire, Fuller duly waded into the remains of the office with a fire extinguisher and doused any sources of smoke just as the fire alarm activated.

"Come on" the Commander urged Tracy as he picked her up in his arms and proceeded to carry her as best as he could towards the fire exit stairs.

Outside, there was chaos and confusion as onlookers gathered to watch what was going on amid the sounds of sirens, the arrival of the fire brigade and the sight of smoke and dust billowing from the blown out office windows on the fourth floor, beneath which a layer of broken glass, papers and bits of furniture lay where they had been thrown out by the explosion.

A paramedic ambulance crew intercepted the Commander and Fuller as together carrying Tracy, they emerged from the main entrance where she was lowered onto a waiting stretcher under protest.

"I'm fine!" Tracy demanded.

"You are going to the hospital" the Commander insisted as an ambulance was carefully reversed towards them to load the patient.

"All right" Tracy conceded as her stretcher was lifted aboard the ambulance whereupon the Commander joined her inside the vehicle.

"Simon!" the Commander called from the back door "See what is working in this mess and get what you can up and running."

"I'm already on it" Fuller confirmed as he reached for his mobile telephone and began to dial.

"All right, let's go" the Commander called to the ambulance driver. With the rear doors firmly shut and an escort of two patrol cars, one in front and one behind, the ambulance departed at speed through the massed traffic.

"This is a rare pleasure Richard" Sir Edward Stevens, the director of overseas intelligence for MI6 commented as he and Sir Richard Crowthorne enjoyed a drink together in a bar just around the corner from the House of Commons in Westminster.

"I am honoured that you enjoy my company that much" Sir Richard responded.

"I meant the rare pleasure of you buying someone a drink" Sir Edward, a large jolly man close to retirement in his late fifties commented with a hint of a belly laugh.

"You may have heard that we seem to be having some trouble with some Russians in the last few days" Sir Richard began "I was wondering if any of your guys and girls had picked anything up on the back channels?"

“Ah you mean Comrade Barkov and his associates” Sir Edward commented “Yeah, nasty business all round there.”

“Why is he so interested in taking over London, and why in such a hurry?” Sir Richard asked.

“About fifteen years ago, before the Berlin Wall finally collapsed, Barkov was a high ranking intelligence officer in the KGB” Sir Edward explained “Sort of my opposite number in a way.”

“I sort of gathered that from the rather thin biography you sent over the other day” Sir Richard agreed.

“Word had it that he was involved in some shady deals around the time of the break up of the Soviet Union. This was a time when practically everything not nailed down in the USSR had a for sale sign on it, the world’s largest closing down sale!” Sir Edward continued to explain.

“A lot of military equipment, arms, explosives, even it is rumoured some nuclear material and also a couple of submarines all basically got, how shall I put it, lost in the confusion” Sir Edward was a little vague as he only had the basic story himself “Strangely enough though, our old friend Barkov starts selling a lot of stuff to basically anyone with hard currency.”

“I assume he was onto a nice little earner then?” Sir Richard asked.

“Pretty much yes” Sir Edward confirmed “Then he used the money from his first arms deals to finance the rest of his burgeoning business empire, greasing the wheels of democracy along the way to ensure that not only did he get preferential treatment but also that the authorities left him to it.”

“So what happened?” Sir Richard asked as he nodded to the barman to refill their glasses.

“He started running out of customers with large cheque books who did not want any questions asked” Sir Edward explained “Over the last few years he has lost a lot of big customers, notably Iraq, Afghanistan and a few private operators. You see every time a new democratic Government moves in somewhere in the old Eastern Bloc or George Bush has another power trip and takes over Iraq, Barkov loses his customers.”

“So he is having cash flow problems?” Sir Richard asked.

“Barkov’s organisation has become so large that there are an awful lot of people with their hands in his till which he needs to keep sweet otherwise the Russian Government would crush him” Sir Edward explained. “It’s got to the point where his homeland is so used to Chechnyan terrorists that his threats to blow up or disappear anyone who dares cross him simply don’t have the same impact anymore. Tie that up with the new tougher stance of the Government on organised crime and he is running out of time, money and options, not to mention friends.”

“So whatever he is in London for” Sir Richard commented “It must be worth an awful lot of money to him.”

“That’s what I would reckon” Sir Edward agreed “And it looks like he has brought some of his old Army unit along for the ride.”

“How did you know that?” Sir Richard was surprised that MI6 seemed to know more than he did at that point even though long experience should have convinced him otherwise.

“The two Russian thugs the Commander chased to the Embassy along with the shooter who killed Barkov’s brother are all former Soviet Special Forces guys who served in the same unit as Barkov in Afghanistan” Sir Edward produced a brown envelope which he passed across the desk.

“And I am willing to bet that the three guys who shot at Commander Caverner at Holborn half an hour ago and your stiff who head butted that bus on Kingsway are from the same unit” Sir Edward added as Sir Richard looked over the copies of Russian military documentation and two photographs that were in the envelope he had just received.

“What ever his target is” Sir Edward continued “It will be high profile and large and with the Security Service apparently scared off along with anyone from London’s organised crime community, I am willing to bet it will be within the next twenty four hours.”

“One other thing” Sir Richard looked up and took a nervous gulp of whisky from his glass as if he was afraid to raise the subject “It looks like we have a mole in the system somewhere.”

“Wouldn’t surprise me given Barkov’s reputation” Sir Edward agreed “Did you have anyone in particular in mind?”

“There is an Interpol officer by the name of Durrant who pops up occasionally yet manages to be absent when the bullets start flying” Sir Richard explained “Now either he has some extremely good luck or he knows more than he is saying.”

“I do know from a mate of mine” Sir Edward responded “that Interpol are about to launch a massive operation to nail a number of corrupt officers. No names floating into the frame though but it may be something you and the Commander might want to bear in mind.”

“Now all I have to do is find the Commander” Sir Richard responded as he rose to his feet.

“Guys Hospital” Sir Edward confirmed “I had a couple of my special protection guys sent over to shadow him and Tracy when I heard what had happened, just in case.”

“Thanks mate” Sir Richard shook Sir Edward’s hand “I owe you one.”

“You’re pretty lucky” the duty doctor in Guys & St Thomas Hospital’s casualty department commented as he held up the x-ray of Tracy’s leg to the light for all to see.

“The bullet passed right through the calf muscle and missed the bone bar a slight chip” the doctor pointed out the very small niche in the leg bone just visible on the x-ray
“You will be limping for a bit but apart from that, all should be well.”

“Thank you Doctor” Tracy responded as he left to see to his next patient.

“Thank Gawd for that” the Commander commented as he hugged Tracy for comfort.

“If you think I am going to let a bunch of trigger happy thugs be the end of me, you have another thing coming!” Tracy responded with defiance.

“I would dearly like to meet this Mr Barkov” the Commander commented with a quiet determination as he helped Tracy to her feet before they set off at a moderate pace through the Casualty Department towards the exit.

“Oddly enough, so would I” Tracy said as they reached the automatic sliding doors which glided open silently to allow them to pass, only for them to meet a rushed looking Fuller with Jennifer coming the other way.

"Been in the wars again Sis?" Jennifer asked as she embraced her twin sister.

"You could say that" Tracy admitted looking down at her bandaged leg and torn blood stained trousers.

"Well, I have some good news and some bad news" Fuller announced as all four headed out to his patrol car parked on the far side of the road "The good news is that the Holborn building is fine bar a few broken windows and some holes in the plasterwork, the bad news is that the explosion severed the main electrical and data cable trunking."

"Ah!" Tracy remarked as she and Jennifer got into the back of the car.

"Electrical guys have been in and say it will be at least a week" Fuller continued as he got into the front passenger seat "But I do have a back up plan which I have put into action."

"I am almost afraid to ask" the Commander pondered as he started the engine and prepared to move off "But what is the back up plan?"

"The Administrator General has given me permission to temporarily commandeer the Metropolitan Division's new Central London Co-Ordination Centre building at Cardinal Place" Fuller responded slightly reluctantly.

"You mean my brand new multi million pound not actually completed yet Central London Command building in Victoria Street?" the Commander asked as he pulled out into the traffic flow.

"Well, Steve the building manager said it was as good as completed when I telephoned him" Fuller responded.

"Last I heard half the light bulbs were missing" the Commander began.

"That was fixed yesterday" Fuller answered.

"The roof leaked...."

"Half a dozen buckets on standby...."

"Half the automatic doors won't open properly...."

"Well that goes without saying...."

"And the lifts talk to you in Spanish!" the Commander finished.

"Well that may still be a problem" Fuller had to admit defeat on this latter point.

"I hate to interrupt such a great conversation about building defects" Jennifer intervened "But isn't that Sir Richard Crowthorne trying to flag us down?" she asked pointing over the Commander's shoulder ahead towards an island at the traffic lights they were approaching.

"Afternoon Ritchie" the Commander called as he pulled to a halt alongside Sir Richard and wound the window down "We really must stop meeting like this."

"Room for one more?" Sir Richard asked.

"No!" all four officers in the car responded in unison.

"Simon" the Commander called across as he got out of the car "Take the ladies to Cardinal House and get things up and running there" he instructed as Fuller slid across to the drivers seat "I will join you shortly."

The Commander and Sir Richard waved off the patrol car as it set off down the road and disappeared amongst the traffic crossing Westminster Bridge, before they proceeded across the road to the far pavement and walked along.

"We really must stop meeting like this" the Commander commented as they descended the steps at the south end of the bridge to the Lambeth embankment foot path alongside the Thames.

"I had a word with a friend" Sir Richard explained "Lets just say he is in the same line of work."

"Sir Edward from MI6 by any chance?" the Commander asked with a wry knowing smile.

"How did you...." Sir Richard began "Oh never mind. Anyway, he filled me in on the murky past of our Russian friend."

"Anything I need to know?" the Commander asked.

"Vladisov is having cash flow problems" Sir Richard confirmed "And he is about to get his wings clipped back home."

"End of a cushy little number for him then" the Commander concluded.

"The general consensus of opinion is that he is looking for a retirement plan and quickly" Sir Richard continued "So he brings his old army buddies over for a bit of smash and grab, probably some form of hard currency and then it's off to Cuba or somewhere."

"And we have precisely zero to go on as to his likely target" the Commander added "I suppose we could always just walk around and listen for explosions!"

"All of Vladisov's guys we have identified so far are all former Soviet Special Forces guys who served with him in Afghanistan amongst other similarly charming destinations" Sir Richard passed across the photographs that he had been handed earlier to the Commander.

"You didn't hear this from me" Sir Richard continued as they sat down on a public bench that looked out across the Thames towards the Houses of Parliament "But apparently Interpol are about to pull the proverbial rug out from under some of their officers in an internal mole hunt."

"Interesting" the Commander agreed.

"It may be nothing" Sir Richard added "Just rumours on the grapevine but it does tie in with certain people with whom we have been dealing with in the last few days so I'd watch your back if I were you."

"Vladisov must have smuggled his arms and explosives into the country somehow, possibly in the last couple of weeks" the Commander commented "Can you get your Ports & Airports guys to check for anything suspicious which may be connected with one of his legitimate businesses?"

"I'll get the girls and guys onto it as soon as I get back" Sir Richard was happy to cooperate "Ten quid says he transported them through Finland mind."

"You heard anything from Roger in the last day or so?" the Commander asked as they stood up and continued to walk along the footpath towards Lambeth Bridge.

“Very quiet over that way” Sir Richard responded “Organised Crime section says that they all appeared to have gone to ground. I reckon they are gathering their forces to pay Vladisov a visit at some point.”

“That was what I had been led to believe” the Commander responded “A meeting in Canary Wharf if I am not mistaken.”

"Your insight serves you well" Sir Richard laughed but his and the Commander's mood changed to a more sombre one as they approached Lambeth Bridge and the scene of the earlier boat explosion where a barge mounted crane was in the process of removing the shattered remains of the vessel from the water.

"Oh dear" the Commander commented as they stood leaning against the embankment parapet wall and watched the operation.

"I told you Vladisov was ruthless didn't I?" Sir Richard commented.

"Yes you did" the Commander responded as they turned away from the scene and towards the main road "I just never reckoned it was possible for anyone to be quite as ruthless as he has been thus far."

"He will start making serious mistakes now" Sir Richard sounded confident "He thinks all his competition is hiding and you guys are blasted into submission and chaos and that will make him more careless."

"Pride goes before a fall is what my Father always used to say" the Commander commented as they reached the edge of the pavement and looked up and down the road before crossing quickly in a momentary gap in the traffic.

"Yeah usually just before he placed the highest hand of the night on the table if I remember correctly" Sir Richard remarked as they reached the bus stop just as an articulated bus on the Red Arrow 507 route pulled to a halt.

Both Sir Richard and the Commander boarded by the rear set of doors and dutifully swiped their warrant cards on the card reader to register they were permitted to travel before taking a seat.

"I was just thinking that had Tracy been killed, you would have been tearing the City apart by now" Sir Richard commented as the bus pulled away and turned right up and onto Lambeth Bridge.

"Oh probably" the Commander agreed "However she has been trying to teach me patience and diplomacy" he added.

"Blimey...." Sir Richard remarked as the bus slowed for the Horseferry Road stop and he rose from his seat.

"Stay in touch" the Commander advised him "I have this feeling things are about to get busy."

"Will do" Sir Richard confirmed as he stepped off the bus onto the pavement before the doors were closed and it pulled away up Horseferry Road.

The Commander contented himself with reading a discarded copy of the Evening Standard that was on the seat next to him as the bus continued onwards as far as the junction with Victoria Street where it turned left.

A few minutes later, the Commander was alighting from the bus at the south end of Victoria Street, one stop short of the railway station and directly opposite the imposing new Cardinal Place office building. An impressive and newly completed structure, with its main entrance enclosed in a massive V shaped nose type section that pointed and curved right from the roof down to the ground and all encased in glass.

"Architect must have a friend with a glazing business" the Commander commented to himself as he looked up at the imposing architecture of the building which was still impressive even though it was not fully completed yet and builders were still clambering all over it adding its finishing touches.

"Mind the paint mate!" one builder called out as the Commander managed to enter the building through the automatic glass doors even though only one leaf of the two actually managed to open.

"Any danger of you guys getting this place finished by the end of next week?" the Commander asked out of casual interest as he picked his way through the layer of building debris that littered the floor.

"In theory yes" the foreman responded "In reality, Gawd knows!"

"Do the lifts work?" the Commander nodded ahead towards them.

"You are fine as long as you can speak German" the foreman confirmed.

"I thought they were spouting Spanish last week?" the Commander asked as, with some hesitation he pressed the call button for the lift.

"They were until the company fixed them yesterday" the foreman explained "Then we had a power outage last night and now the computer that controls them thinks its in Düsseldorf!"

"This is turning into a very surreal week" the Commander commented as the lift doors closed and with a cheerful 'Guten Tag!' from the announcement system within, he ascended up to the fifth floor.

He was surprised to find the fifth floor quite busy as not only had Fuller been successful in transferring almost the entire Transport Division's personnel but a large number from other Divisions of the service as well.

“Welcome to the temporary combined operational headquarters of the Transport, River & Waterways and Anti-Terrorist Divisions” Fuller announced as the Commander arrived in the hastily commissioned Control Room, essentially an identical set-up to that at Holborn only larger as its intended mission was to be the central control point for all of the Metropolitan Division’s Central London operations in a couple of weeks time.

“Good grief” the Commander commented as he sat down at the main control console where Tracy was already positioned using her walking stick to direct operations in an even more authoritative style than normal.

“It’s nice isn’t it?” Tracy responded as she kissed her husband.

“I’m glad you like it” the Commander remarked “Just don’t get too comfortable will you?”

“Thames Division just rang” Tracy added “Apparently Commander Faversham is out of surgery and should be all right.”

“Well at least that is one bit of good news” the Commander responded before looking around “Where’s my office in all this mess?”

“I think it’s the one the builders are using as a canteen” Fuller remarked as he joined the two commanding officers “Oh and don’t use the back stairs either, the plaster is still wet.”

“Well at least I can get a decent cup of tea in my office I suppose” the Commander remarked as he headed out of the Control Room down the corridor to what the nameplate on the door identified as he future new office, however its interior certainly did not live up to the billing.

Tracy hobbled up behind him on her walking stick and surveyed the mess of discarded coffee cups, paint splattered kettles and empty biscuit packets that littered the old pasting table that made up the majority of the furniture.

"Nice desk" she commented sarcastically as the Commander decided to give up and supporting Tracy, they returned back to the near finished reality of the Control Room.

"That was quick" Fuller commented, barely looking up from his desk as they returned.

"Yeah well I didn't like the colour" the Commander joked as he sat back down again.

"Roger Field just rang" Fuller passed a slip of yellow paper to him "Suggests you look at a Cordelia International Airfreight."

"Can't say I've heard of them" the Commander remarked.

"Apparently they are owned by some Russian consortium or other" Fuller explained "I'll run a check of all recent shipments into the UK they have made, may lead somewhere."

"Are you going to be all right love?" the Commander asked Tracy.

"It's amazing what being shot in the leg does for a girl's motivation" she responded with a wry smile.

"I'm heading back to the Yard" the Commander confirmed as he kissed Tracy and held her for a moment "Don't go getting into any more fire fights."

"I'll try!"

"Russian mafia terrorises London!" the Evening Standard seller called at the top of his voice, barely making himself heard above the background noise of early rush hour traffic, incessant rain and the footsteps of commuters as they rushed along the pavement and into the entrance of Caledonian Road Underground Station.

Walking against the general flow of pedestrian traffic out of the station was Roger Field who looked up despondently as he reached the exit of the station and saw the dark grey clouds and pouring rain outside before pulling up the collar of his long overcoat and exiting out into the street.

He walked briskly down the street to the door of the bar that he owned and went inside, making direct for the bar where already Dave the barman was pouring a glass of the finest whisky.

"Ta very much Dave" Field responded as he reached the bar and received his much needed drink.

"Terry's in the back room" the barman informed him "Needs a word in private like."

"Right" Field raised an eyebrow at this unexpected development, picked up his glass and left the bar, crossing the room to the old Victorian engraved glass door and entering the private function room where inside he found his young employee Terry sitting at the poker table playing a game of patience.

"Oh, evening boss" Terry responded as he got to his feet when Field entered the room.

"Sit down lad" Field indicated before taking the seat opposite him "Now what's up?"

"It's about those Russian geezers you were asking us to look into" Terry explained.

"You have my undivided attention, please continue."

"Well some lot have taken over the old railway arch warehouses that the Mannerie's used to own near Old Ford" Terry continued "Three or four containers of items, a number of vans and other vehicles and a lot of activity."

"Nothing that unusual surely?" Field asked.

"Well I know the east end can be a little rough" Terry responded.

"That's an understatement" Field agreed.

"But an entire container consignment of machine guns is a bit out of the ordinary" Terry explained.

"Are you sure?" Field asked.

"Neil, the guy from the cab firm across the street" Terry continued "He says he saw them when he dropped off a fare outside that place late last night and he's been making notes on the comings and goings" he passed across some hand written notes.

"Anyway" Terry continued "I made a few discrete inquiries and found out that it was rented by some haulage and import company. I did a few checks and they are apparently registered in Finland of all places."

"A long way from home aren't they?" Field remarked.

"Neil said he's give me a bell if he sees anything" Terry responded.

"If you hear of anything, you call me direct all right?" Field was insistent.

"You got it boss!"

"Internet Explorer has performed a fatal error and will now be shut down" the Commander read from the computer screen in his office back at New Scotland Yard.

It was true to say that when it came to anything remotely resembling technology, the Commander was usually at a loss. Lately however, mostly at Tracy's insistence, he had been trying to make an effort to improve his skills with computers although in reality it had made little real difference.

"Hello? IT support?" the Commander asked down the telephone "My computer just said it has performed an illegal operation. Am I supposed to arrest it or something?"

"Well it says press any key to continue" the Commander confirmed "Which one is the any key?"

Tracy stuck her head around the door at that point and smiled with amusement as she heard the Commander trying to describe his technological problem.

"Having trouble love?" she asked as she walked gingerly into the office with the help of her walking stick before sitting down alongside her husband in front of his stricken computer.

"I seem to have reached a great technological divide" the Commander commented "With the world of computers on one side and me firmly ensconced on the other."

"Hello, its Superintendent Caverner" Tracy announced down the telephone "Don't worry, I'll sort him out thanks!"

"I always wondered what would have happened if we had never met" the Commander pondered.

"You would still have been that grumpy technophobe I met that fateful morning in Haychester" Tracy responded "And you would probably have fired at least half a dozen more deputies by now as well."

"Anyway" the Commander returned slightly reluctantly to the computer screen and put his reading glasses back on "I was trying to find out more about this Cordelia Airfreight Company" he explained "I actually managed to get as far as their official website thingy and then this thing went to buggery."

"Well I can save you the effort" Tracy responded "Apparently according to the Companies Register and other sources they are legit."

"And where do I find their base of operations?" the Commander asked as he switched off the computer and turned back to Tracy.

"They operate out of a couple of industrial estates, one in Romford, the other in Felixstowe" Tracy passed over a sheet summarising everything Fuller had found out about the company thus far.

"Charming idyllic holiday spots" the Commander chuckled.

"Simon is running a trace on shipments" Tracy added "It turned out Sir Richard Crowthorne had already asked him to do that anyway."

"It would seem his skills are very much in demand" the Commander commented "You ought to be careful he doesn't get poached by MI5 or someone else for that matter."

"Don't worry" Tracy responded "I have a secret weapon that I can hold over him."

"Which is, dare I ask?"

"My sister" Tracy smirked.

"You two are the best collusionists in the business you know that?"

"Oh yes" Tracy agreed.

"What time is it?" the Commander looked at the clock on the desk to see that time had passed quicker than he had anticipated and it was now gone half past six in the evening.

"Time we were going home" Tracy insisted as she closed the file that was open in front of the Commander on the desk and pointedly switched off his desk lamp as if to emphasize the point.

"I can take a hint" the Commander surrendered easily and got up, grabbing his uniform overcoat from the back of his chair and putting it on before taking Tracy's arm in his and walking out of the office.

"I heard from our colleagues over at Reading" Tracy added as they walked to the lift "Commander Faversham has regained consciousness so she is on the road to recovery."

"Thank goodness for that" the Commander agreed as the lift doors opened and they entered the empty car.

"The Administrator General was on the phone earlier" the Commander added with a tone of foreboding "He was threatening to send both of us on holiday I think."

"Well there is the small matter of a honeymoon we still haven't gone on yet" Tracy mused although after over a year of marriage, she was now firmly of the opinion that it was never going to happen.

"I'd settle for an afternoon in Bognor Regis if all else fails" Tracy added.

"Good grief, you must be desperate" the Commander responded with a chuckle as the lift stopped on the first floor and the doors opened to reveal Commander Howard of the Diplomatic Operations Division waiting.

"I was just on my way up to see you" he announced cheerily and with some surprise.

"Must be your lucky day" Tracy responded.

"It sure as hell isn't mine" the Commander muttered under his breath.

"Those two Russian gentlemen currently holed up in the embassy" Commander Howard explained as he joined them in the lift and the doors closed "Word has it from a contact of mine that they are planning to ship them out of the country discreetly some time tomorrow."

"Sneaky" the Commander remarked as the lift slowed for the ground floor before with an accompanying ping, the doors opened in the entrance lobby.

"They have kept the details of route, flight, etc restricted to a few of their key personnel on a strictly need to know basis" Howard continued as the three officers exited and they proceeded across the lobby towards the main exit "Fortunately my contact is one of them" he handed across a piece of paper with some information written in Russian to the Commander.

"You can read that?" Tracy asked.

"One of my few hidden talents" the Commander explained.

"They are likely to be under plain clothes escort by your opposite numbers from the Russian Intelligence Bureau" Howard continued to explain as they exited through the doors into the outside evening air "Discreet but rather unpleasant if messed with."

"Taxi!" the Commander called with a raised hand causing a passing black cab to pull into the side of the road and stop in front of them.

"Not your usual form of transport is it?" Commander Howard asked.

"Well Tracy can't really travel well on that leg" the Commander explained as he opened the back door of the cab and allowed Tracy to get inside before entering himself "Keep me apprised of the progress of our Russian friends."

"Will do" Howard responded before turning on his heels smartly and heading away.

"Vauxhall Bridge, south end please driver" Tracy called to the cabbie as the Commander shut the cab door before the driver accelerated and pulled away.

The sound of welding and electrically powered tools filled the confined enclosed space of the warehouse beneath the railway arches as a number of boiler suited men worked on a variety of vehicles.

Observing from a nearby office was Vladisov who viewed the work in progress through a dusty window pane as he held a glass of vodka in one hand and his customary cigar in the other.

He took the last sip of vodka from the glass just as Harris entered the room, dressed in oil stained overalls and looking somewhat tired.

"We are nearly done" Harris confirmed as he sat down behind the cluttered desk and began to rake around in one of the drawers "A couple more things and we will be ready to rock and roll."

"Excellent" Vladisov responded as he joined Harris at the desk where the item he was attempting to locate, an adjustable wrench, was finally located.

"And what about the patrol car?" Vladisov asked.

"Two of them on the way as we speak" Harris cheerfully confirmed as he looked out of the office window towards the large doors of the warehouse which were being opened to allow the arrival of at least one vehicle.

"They're here boss!" one of the mechanics called over towards the office leading to Vladisov and Harris walking out into the workshop area just as a Security Service marked patrol car was being driven into the workshop, its smashed drivers side window signalling how it had been stolen.

Right behind it and having trouble fitting into the cramped warehouse was a second unmarked patrol car, a similarly smashed window indicating the unauthorised and illegal nature of its acquisition.

"Excellent" Vladisov commented as he leaned back against the side of a van that was being worked on "Now we can begin our little game."

There was something of a deputation waiting for Tracy and the Commander as they arrived in the entrance hall of the apartment block that when work demands allowed, they occasionally called home.

"I take it this is not a social call" the Commander enquired as he and Tracy were met by Roger Field and Jennifer Caverner.

"Well sort of" Field explained "I was on my way over when I came across this damsel in distress."

"Would you believe someone has stolen my car?" Jennifer asked incredulously "I don't suppose any of your guys borrowed it did they?"

"Not any of mine that I know of" the Commander remarked as together, the little party headed for the lift.

"Not guilty sis" Tracy added as they entered the lift car and the Commander pressed the button for the fourth floor.

"Great" Jennifer responded with a clear sense of frustration "That's two motors I have lost this week, the garage chief will go nuts."

In a matter of moments they were standing outside Tracy and the Commander's front door where they waited whilst the Commander tried to work out which key of the numerous ones he had actually would let them in.

"Ah got it!" he triumphantly announced as the door finally opened and they all entered "Find yourselves a seat ladies and gents" the Commander added "I'll just go and put the kettle on!"

"How's the leg?" Jennifer asked Tracy as they collapsed onto the sofa with Roger Field taking the seat facing them.

"Uncomfortable" Tracy looked down at the blood soaked trouser leg and lifted it up a bit to reveal the extensive bandaging covering her wound "At least the painkillers are still holding up."

"So to what do we owe the pleasure?" the Commander enquired as he carried in a tray with four mugs of tea, milk, sugar and biscuits and placed it on the coffee table before sitting down alongside Tracy.

"I have a couple of my guys watching a warehouse in Old Ford" Field explained as he helped himself to three sugars in his tea "A warehouse I might add that apparently contains a lot of Russians, some mechanics and a fair few vehicles."

"You have my undivided attention" the Commander leaned forward and helped himself to his third chocolate digestive in less than a minute.

"We can keep an eye on it for you if you like" Field suggested "I reckon you guys would have a problem getting a warrant where as we do not suffer such legal niceties, besides which we want these bozos off our patch as much as you do."

"I wouldn't mind a quiet chat with them as well" Tracy added, a sentiment that her sister Jennifer firmly agreed with.

The door chime rang at that point which made the Commander reluctantly rise to his feet and walk to the front hall.

"Are we holding a party and nobody told me?" the Commander asked as he opened the door to find Fuller standing on the other side.

"Someone mention a party?" Fuller asked.

"Come in and join the fun" the Commander mused "Tea?" he asked.

"Prefer coffee to be honest" Fuller admitted as he sat down alongside Field.

"Blimey" the Commander commented as he returned to his seat alongside Tracy "We only need Sir Richard to show up and I will have the full set."

"He's having a romantic dinner for two with his lady friend" Jennifer confirmed "I drove them to the restaurant myself."

"How come you never take me to any posh restaurants?" Tracy asked the Commander.

"We never have any time" the Commander responded "Besides I took you to the Harrow branch of Burger King the other day."

"You are the last of the great romantics, you know that?" Tracy responded, leaning across and kissing him.

"Well if the Administrator General is serious about sending us on a couple of weeks leave when all this is over" the Commander mused "I'll make sure we go for a proper meal."

"Fish and chips from the Tooting Broadway chippy?" Jennifer asked.

"Very funny...."

"Ere Dave, where did you park the motor?" one of the Metropolitan Division's experienced patrol officers called to his colleague as they departed the super market where they had spent the previous hour and a half dealing with an aggravated shop lifting incident.

"Over by the trolley park...." the second officer's voice tailed off as he looked to where he was pointing to, only to find the space where he had parked the patrol car was now empty bar a small scattering of broken window glass on the ground.

"Dave" the first officer enquired as they walked together with a rather bemused look over to the empty parking space and looked despondently at the ground "I hate to be the bearer of bad tidings but what's missing from this picture?"

"Ah...."

"Lima Mike Eight One Five to Control" the first officer called into his radio.

"Control, go ahead" came the quick reply from the eastern area control room at Stratford.

"Someone has nicked our motor" the officer announced "Any chance of some transport or do we have to walk home?"

"Control, can you just repeat that last message?"

"I said our patrol car has been stolen" the officer reconfirmed "As in nicked, purloined, taking without consent, you get the picture?"

"Roger, message received" Control confirmed "I will inform everyone."

"You do realise we are going to look like right idiots if this gets out don't you Dave?" the other officer called over to his colleague.

"Don't worry" the first officer looked confident "We'll be all right."

"Congratulations" the Commander announced as he walked into New Scotland Yard's main staff room and saw the two officers who had lost their patrol car the previous night "I hear you two Einstein's lost your car last night!"

"Sorry Sir" they both mumbled in slightly embarrassed response.

"Well if it makes you gents feel any better, my sister in law lost her car last night as well" the Commander informed them before winking knowingly and then heading back out of the staff room chuckling to himself with amusement.

A few minutes later and the Commander poked his head around the door of the main Control Room to see if anything was happening bar the usual plethora of incidents, to be suddenly greeted with a message being thrust into his hand by the night shift supervisor as he was clocking off.

"Why thank you, just what I have always wanted" the Commander responded "What is it?"

"A message from a Commander Cassini of the Transport Division" the tired officer explained as the Commander read the note with interest.

"You get off home and get some sleep" the Commander advised the officer "I have to go and call a cab."

For the young Officer Deletant of Interpol, it was supposed to be a fairly routine day with his assignment and a few other duties to perform, all of which he was contemplating as he left the front door of the flat in Kensington that he was currently renting for the duration of his London based assignment.

Looking up and down the quiet side road as he reached the pavement, Deletant was surprised and delighted to see a black cab with its orange availability light on just a short distance away which saved him a five minute walk to the main road to hail one.

"Taxi!" he called out as he stepped into the street with his arm raised. Sure enough the driver of the cab saw his call and pulled in alongside him whereupon Deletant leaned towards the side window.

"Ealing Broadway please" he asked as the driver released the lock on the back door.

"Hop in mate" the driver responded with a cheery smile as Deletant sat down and shut the door. It was at that moment, just as he was sitting back that the opposite door opened and the Commander stepped inside and took the seat alongside him.

"Drive on Eddie" the Commander called to the driver upon which the cab pulled away and headed off down the road.

"Bonjour Commander" Deletant responded, understandably somewhat surprised by the unexpected arrival in the back of the cab.

"Morning" the Commander responded "We need to have a little chat you and I."

"Anything in particular?"

"Pick a subject" the Commander calmly asked.

"Durrant?" Deletant enquired.

"Give the fella a gold star" the Commander responded "You see I have a problem" he continued "Someone with a connection on the inside has been feeding information to our rather unpleasant Russian friends with the guns and I reckon I now know who."

"It's not me honest" Deletant was quick to defend himself, especially as he was well aware of the Commander's reputation with regards to what he did to nasty traitors and other similar individuals.

"Calm down lad" the Commander responded reassuringly "I know its not you, you are working on the internal investigation that is about to nail our mutual friend Durrant and I think it is time we joined forces."

"You seem awfully well informed" Deletant commented.

"More of those friends in low places" the Commander confirmed.

"So if you don't mind me asking Sir, where are we going?" Deletant asked, now clearly a little more relaxed.

"Oh I am going to have a quiet chat with our mutual friend" the Commander explained "Your Chief has given me clearance to detain him and use whatever means I feel are necessary and as a bonus, you get invited along to give him some stick as well."

"This could be interesting" Deletant remarked as the cab turned into Park Lane past Marble Arch.

"Oh I intend it to be" the Commander's response was cool, calm and determined.

"Room service!" came the call after Durrant heard the knock on his hotel room door. Slowly he rose to his feet from the sumptuous leather armchair where he had been reading the morning paper and went over to the door, opening it to find the Commander standing there along with a couple of other officers and Deletant.

"I know, it's an old cliché but you have to admit it does work" the Commander responded as with his gun drawn and pointed at Durrant, he entered the room.

The two tall broad shouldered and heavily built officers that were accompanying him grabbed Durrant firmly by both arms and carried him to the armchair, pushing him down into the seat with some insistence whilst Deletant closed the door discretely, hanging the do not disturb notice on the outside handle as he did so.

"What is the meaning of this?" Durrant demanded to know defiantly.

"You and I are going to have a little chat" the Commander politely explained but with a strain of menace detectable in his voice as he sat down directly opposite Durrant and looked him firmly in the eyes.

"I somehow assumed that this was not a social call" Durrant grunted.

"Correct" the Commander was more than happy to confirm "You are going to tell me all about Comrade Vladisov Barkov, his plans and where I may find him."

"You are not going to get anything out of me" Durrant responded defiantly.

"I tell you what, I'll start off" the Commander continued "I know that someone has been feeding our Russian friend inside information and oddly the only person who connects all the various incidents is you. Then there is the imminent investigation into some of your more dubious contacts and whatever influence they may have had over your professional activities."

"You cannot prove anything" Durrant continued to uphold his defiance.

"Fine" the Commander responded "You did fail to take into account a few things though."

"Such as?"

"Firstly, you are connected with the deaths of several Security Service officers, that makes you very popular with my more muscular colleagues" the Commander explained "Secondly I am sure that Comrade Barkov would be more than interested in this little conversation and thirdly there is the small matter of the various members of the London criminal fraternity who would equally like a chat on similar subjects."

"There is nothing you can do that will make me talk" Durrant responded.

"Of course if any of the three parties mentioned got hold of you" the Commander continued "Well, lets see, my colleagues would ensure you fell down lots of stairs on your way to jail, Vladisov's guys would probably introduce you to the business end of an AK47 and the London criminal fraternity would almost certainly measure you up for a new set of concrete boots."

"They would have to catch me first" Durrant muttered.

"I like your determined attitude" the Commander mockingly complimented "Of course there is the fourth party you failed to take into consideration" he added as he rose from his seat and walked around the room until he was standing behind Durrant, glowering at him menacingly.

"From your information, an attempt was made on not only my life" the Commander's tone became more menacing "but even worse for you, your associates shot my wife."

It was at this point that Durrant realised he really was in deep trouble, a fact that was emphasised when the Commander grabbed him by the scruff of the neck and dragged him up out of his seat.

"Now for that I would have no problems in dragging you down to Trafalgar Square, nailing you upside down to Nelson's Column by your balls and using you for target practice" the Commander told Durrant direct to his face before throwing him back down into the chair and moving on.

"However" the Commander continued as he straightened his uniform tunic "Your one and so far only saving grace is that I need you healthy and well so that you can tell me where Vladisov is and what he is intending to do."

"And if I tell you?" Durrant enquired.

"Then I won't feed you to any or all of the aforementioned parties, at least some of which would be more than likely to fly you home to Moscow in very small pieces."

"How considerate!"

"I'm waiting...." the Commander's deep felt impatience was made readily obvious.

"All right" Durrant surrendered to what was probably the least painful of his potential fates.

"Vladisov is intending to hit a gold bullion delivery in the centre of the city somewhere later today" Durrant reluctantly informed the Commander "Several million pounds in bullion and cash which will fund his retirement plan."

"And then what?" the Commander asked "After all you don't just steal a large amount of cash from under the nose of the Security Service, especially on my patch and then park by the side of the road to count your winnings do you?"

"He's booked on a flight to the Caribbean late this afternoon" Durrant explained "I don't know where from but I think after that its on to South America to sit on a beach and watch the interest mount up."

"And what do you get out of this little arrangement?" the Commander asked as he stopped pacing back and forth in front of him and returned to the seat facing Durrant.

"Ten percent" Durrant confirmed "Enough to get me to a non extradition country before Interpol's internal investigations team knocks on my door."

"Assuming of course that the briefcase containing your payment doesn't have a little extra surprise included" the Commander commented, a thought that given recent events was probably more than valid.

"That is all I know, honest" Durrant held up his hands in submission.

"We shall see" the Commander responded as he looked up to Deletant and the two heavily built officers standing behind Durrant's chair "Mr Deletant, you may take him away and do with him as you see fit."

"Thank you Sir" Deletant responded "Come on you!" he called to Durrant as he was roughly brought to his feet by the two accompanying officers and physically escorted out of the room, leaving the Commander alone, where he proceeded to pick up the telephone and dial out.

"Commander Fuller please" the Commander requested. A few moments were to pass before he was connected during which time he took the opportunity to glance around the room until his eyes alighted on a briefcase in the corner by the end of the bed.

"Morning Sir" Fuller announced from his seat in the temporary control room of the Transport Division in Cardinal Place at Victoria "What can I do for you?"

"Are there any notifications floating around about any high value shipments in the City today?" the Commander enquired.

"Not that I am aware of" Fuller responded "But I am sure I can find out as long as you don't enquire too carefully about how I do it if you see what I mean."

"Message received and understood" the Commander responded with a wry grin "Let me know if you get anything, I am heading over to Holborn to get some idea of the damage."

"This is Holborn, change here for Piccadilly Line services" the driver of the Central Line train announced over the intercom as the Commander alighted from the rear most carriage, one of many passengers who were crowding out onto the platform, meeting the massed throngs of boarders coming in the opposite direction.

The crowded scene was not unexpected as it was just past eight thirty in the morning and rush hour with all its attendant problems was now in full swing. The crowds filed slowly up through the station complex to the main bank of four escalators that led to the surface ticket hall where further pedestrian traffic coming from the Piccadilly Line platforms added to the crowds.

When he finally managed to reach the top, the Commander did his usual customary manoeuvre of turning right and heading out of the side entrance, superstition on his part seeing that as always he passed through ticket barrier number 55 before exiting out into the busy street.

The row of parked up builders lorries protected by traffic cones lining the side of High Holborn immediately outside the Transport Division office was merely adding to the traffic chaos as the Commander arrived at the main entrance.

Inside the main reception area was stacked enough builder's materials, tools and scaffolding in his opinion to rebuild the ark. Even though the reinstatement of the electrics and the bit of patching up that was required was only going to take maybe a week, it was clear they had come prepared for a long haul.

"I do hope the insurance is going to cover all this lot" the Commander commented to the tea drinking foreman who was sat behind the reception desk with a plan of the building spread out in front of him.

"No worries Guv" the foreman called from behind the desk "We will have that little lady of yours back in here by the middle of next week."

"Do the lifts work or am I taking the stairs?" the Commander enquired.

"You are taking the stairs" the foreman confirmed.

"Oh good" the Commander responded as he headed towards the fire stairs and then ascended up to the fourth floor.

There he exited out into the corridor which had been the scene of the previous day's incident to find a team of engineers ripping the walls apart and pulling long lengths of cabling about with much enthusiasm.

"It looks like you lot are doing more damage to the place than the original incident" the Commander wryly commented as he navigated his way through the mess, ducking under at least two runs of cable that were taped to the ceiling in at various points.

In the general office, the Commander found Commander Cassini at his desk, the only person in the empty office.

"Morning lad" the Commander called to the tall black officer who was the head of the Transport Division's undercover unit "I wanted a word with you as it happened."

"Oh right Sir" Cassini responded.

"Meet me in Tracy's office in a few minutes?" the Commander asked before looking around at the general state of the place, barely visible in the sparse illumination of the emergency lights "Assuming of course there is any the office left and I can actually see it that is" he added ruefully.

Although Roger Field was walking into a taxi office in the east end of London, he certainly was not there to order a cab. Instead, after acknowledging the dispatcher at the desk, he went through into a back room where Terry his assistant and another young employee of his organisation were sat at a rather tatty coffee table drinking tea from plastic cups and keeping watch on a warehouse and yard on the opposite side of the road through a tatty net curtain in the window.

"You know boss" Terry commented "There is a lot of activity for an abandoned warehouse."

"Bet the neighbours have been complaining" Field remarked as he joined the two other men in observing out of the window.

"Strange thing is" Terry continued "I could have sworn I saw a fuzz car pull into there late last night along with a couple of other vehicles.

"Hello, what's this?" the other man remarked as the tatty old double gates of the yard outside the railway arches warehouse and workshop gingerly opened to let out a silver Mercedes car.

The sight of this triggered something in Field's mind as he watched it pull away down the road and the gates firmly but discretely closed behind it.

"Can I borrow your phone?" he asked.

The Commander had now resorted to using a torch to find his way around Tracy's office and once sat down, placed it on the desk so that he could see what he was actually doing. In fact what he was looking for was some files for Tracy that she had left in there but in the unlit gloom, pretty much everything on and in her desk looked the same.

"Come in" the Commander called out when he was interrupted by a knock on the door, indeed he was relieved at having the distraction away from the problem.

"You wanted to see me Sir?" Cassini asked as he popped his head around the door.

"Did I?" the Commander asked before remembering "Oh yes, I did, come in and find yourself a seat if you can see one that is."

Cassini managed to locate a seat in front of the desk assisted by the Commander shining the torch forwards so that he did not trip over anything in the process.

"Right then" the Commander returned to his seat and repositioned the torch so at least the two officers could have a conversation whilst actually being able to see each other "I've had an idea which I ran past the Administrator General last week."

"I see Sir" Cassini responded, still unsure exactly what this was all about.

"How do you fancy a job?" the Commander asked.

"I've got one unless you know something different Sir" Cassini replied slightly uncertain as to what was being implied here.

"All right, let me explain" the Commander continued "Progressively over the last couple of years, a significant number of major incidents and cases have wound up in a lot of cross department co-operation and it is clear that our best specialist resources need to be restructured if we are to keep on top of things."

"I follow you so far" Cassini agreed as the Commander proffered a sweet from the bowl on the desk that he thankfully accepted.

"The key area I am thinking of at the moment is specialist undercover surveillance and infiltration" the Commander continued "It would be based over at Victoria Street assuming they ever finish decorating the place that is, and it would be cross curricular, i.e. it would serve all sections of the service."

"Sounds interesting" Cassini responded with a renewed interest as he gratefully accepted a second sweet "So where do I fit into this grand scheme?"

"I want you to be in charge of it" the Commander explained "Promotion to the rank of section Commander plus whatever resources you need. It seems that as the Government is having a heart attack whenever anyone mentions crime and terrorism that they throw money at the alleged problem for fear of being seen as not doing anything, it would be a pity to appear as rude by not spending it."

"Well err yes, right" Cassini responded somewhat surprised but before he could respond, the Commander's mobile telephone rang.

"Don't you just hate it when that happens?" the Commander commented as he struggled to work out which button he was supposed to press to answer it. After a few moments of tentative deliberation, he managed to answer the call.

"Hello?" the Commander enquired, still uncertain as to whether he had either managed to answer correctly or just cut off the caller completely.

"Morning old friend" Roger Field called "You wouldn't happen to have lost one of your patrol cars last night by any chance?" he asked.

"Do you know, as a matter of fact, yes I have" the Commander responded.

"Well in that case, you might want to come on down to Old Ford and have a look out of this window that I am currently peering out of" Field suggested.

"That the place you mentioned last night?" the Commander enquired.

"The very same" Field confirmed.

"Mind if I bring a friend?"

"Feel free."

"I'll be right there" the Commander confirmed before hanging up and turning back to Cassini.

"Right then Commander Cassini of the Specialist Undercover Operations Unit" the Commander announced "How do you fancy a little trip up to the east end?"

"No madam, lost property enquiries should be directed to the Transport for London office at Paddington" Tracy confirmed to the caller as she helped man the incoming calls desk at the temporary Transport Division Control Room at Cardinal Place.

Fuller looked up from his computer console as he heard Tracy's reply and smiled. It was not unusual for all sorts of strange calls to come through their system and this was just one of the less strange examples.

"Transport Division" Tracy responded to the next caller to come on the line "There's a what on the line?" she asked "A Highland Terrier?"

Jennifer Caverner arrived in the Control Room at that moment and was in time to hear Tracy's response of stunned surprise when the caller she was dealing with corrected her.

"Oh a Highland Bull" Tracy responded "Right...." she looked around for inspiration as to what she was supposed to do with this information.

"Anyone got any idea what the hell I am supposed to do with a Highland Bull on the line at Tottenham?" Tracy called across the Control Room.

"Could get one of the guys from the Mounted Division onto it" Fuller suggested "They are good with animals."

"Good thinking!" Tracy responded before turning to her caller and dealing with the emergency.

"Bright, intelligent and resourceful too" Jennifer commented as she took the seat alongside Fuller and kissed him on the cheek, a move that really made his day.

"Not to mention devastatingly handsome as well" Fuller added with a smirk.

"Now don't push your luck" Jennifer giggled.

"No, no, a bull dear" Tracy was heard in the background on the radio "Four legged, large horns, goes moo."

"I think your sister is feeling a bit stranded" Fuller commented "With her injury, she is pretty much confined to barracks until further notice."

"She'll find some way of escaping" Jennifer remarked "When it comes to ignoring medical advice, she is second only to her husband in the Security Service league of stubbornness."

"So are we still on for dinner tonight?" Fuller asked.

"That's why I came to see you" Jennifer explained apologetically "One of my guys has phoned in sick and so I have to stand in for him which means I might be a little late for our romantic dinner for two."

"So what high ranking VIP am I being stood up for then?" Fuller asked out of curiosity.

"Some delegation from Lithuania" Jennifer explained "I have the honour of escorting the Lithuanian Foreign Trade Minister from Downing Street to the Department of Trade and Industry in Victoria Street and then on to Gatwick Airport via the Gatwick Express service."

"Sounds riveting" Fuller remarked unenthusiastically.

"Believe me" Jennifer responded "I'd rather have open heart surgery than this dull escort job."

"I guess I'll see you later then love" Fuller remarked.

"Yep, see you" Jennifer turned to leave but paused momentarily "Oh try and make sure my sister doesn't do anything silly will you?"

"Could be tricky but I'll see what I can do" Fuller confirmed with a wry smile.

Jennifer made her way out of the Control Room past the hordes of confused decorators who were still working on the main corridor and trying to work out how come their appeared to be two Tracy's in the building.

The lift duly announced to Jennifer her arrival on the ground floor in what appeared to be Hungarian this time before she walked through the plasterboard strewn reception area and out into Victoria Street.

Her high powered but largely unmarked dark grey VIP Protection Division car was parked in a side street on the opposite side of the road and as she crossed the road, she waved to the Commander and Cassini who were waiting at the traffic lights.

"Which one is that one?" Cassini asked.

"Jennifer" the Commander responded "The one without the limp."

"Oh yes of course" Cassini remembered "Where are we going exactly if I may ask Sir?"

"To see a man about a car" was the Commander's typically cryptic response.

"Sorry I'm late Comrade" Harris called as he entered the railway arch garage "Train was delayed, something about an animal on the line."

"Bull" Vladisov casually remarked.

"Yeah I think it was actually" Harris commented.

"Let's get on with it shall we?" Vladisov returned to the business in hand and guided Harris to the adjacent archway area where several members of the gang had gathered to await their final instructions.

"Good morning gentlemen" Harris announced "This is it fellas, today we are going to pull off the most daring raid in the history of this fair city."

There were murmurs of approval from amongst the audience that Harris let die down before he continued.

"This robbery will make the Brinks Mat job and the Lewisham Diamond Heist look like a girl scout picnic" Harris continued, delving firmly not only into criminal lore but also the cliché handbook in one sentence "Sixteen million in bullion, diamonds and cash just waiting for us to go and pick it up."

The English speaking members of the gang at the front of the group looked cheerful, enthusiastic and ready to go, a strong contrast with their Russian friends who stood at the back and looked on in a stern and serious manner.

"You all know your assignments but just to refresh your memories I'll go through it once more" Harris carried on "Team One under Gerry will be responsible for isolating the area and getting us to the target with as little fuss as possible. Team Two with Brian will hit the vehicle and grab the loot, unloading it and preparing it for transport whilst Team Three with my good self will be seeing to our rapid and discrete departure."

"Our Russian friends get to play with the big boy's toys, dealing with anyone who drops in uninvited and creating enough chaos, panic and confusion that no one will know we have left with all the loot" Harris announced with triumph.

"Any questions?" he asked in a manner that insisted that there should not actually be any.

"All right then, lets go" he urged and with that the gang dispersed to their various vehicles and readied for their departure.

"Morning Roger" the Commander announced as he arrived in the Taxi Office back room "Meet Mr Cassini" he introduced the other officer with him and the two men exchanged handshakes.

"He specialises in being invisible so don't be surprised if he suddenly disappears without warning" the Commander explained.

"Oh right" Field responded slightly bemused.

"What have you got for me then?" the Commander asked as he peered over Field's shoulder at the view outside the window.

"See that old railway arch yard over on the other side of the road" Field pointed ahead.

"Oh you mean the one that is supposed to be empty and abandoned" the Commander remarked as he looked directly across at the yard in question.

"Well in there that I know of are at least a couple of dozen guys, a couple of large vans, a few cars and you are going to like this, one of your patrol cars" Field explained.

"The will be the one that got nicked from the Stratford branch of Tesco's last night" the Commander remarked "Everyone back at the yard has been giving the two guys who lost it a right ribbing."

"The question is" Cassini remarked "What do they want with it?"

"How soon can you have a van load of your guys around here for a little surveillance job?" the Commander asked Cassini.

"I'll ask" Cassini responded as he reached for his radio which was secreted beneath his jacket lapels "Lima Tango Eight to Lima Tango Six One" he called.

"Lima Tango Six One" came the response.

"Iggy, how soon can you have your team over to Old Ford" Cassini asked "The Commander himself requests the pleasure of your company."

"We can be there in about fifteen minutes" Iggy responded positively.

"Lovely" Cassini replied "Call me when you approach Old Ford and I'll direct you in."

"Very nicely done" the Commander remarked as Cassini got up to leave.

"If you'll excuse me, I'm just going to take a discrete look around" Cassini announced before quietly leaving the room.

"I don't suppose you have any idea what this lot are up to by any chance?" the Commander asked Field.

"A few on the grapevine type rumours about a possible bank job but nothing concrete" Field replied "Whoever these Russians are working with are playing their cards very close to their chest."

"All right everyone" Harris called loudly "Look alive now!"

With this encouragement, the members of the gang proceeded to their various vehicles and soon the confined yard and attached warehouse was filled with the sound of many slamming doors, revving engines and the haze of exhaust smoke.

Over on the far side of the yard, Vladisov watched as the various vehicles prepared to leave before clambering into the back of his silver Mercedes saloon with two other well appointed looking gentlemen all carrying briefcases.

"Looks like they are about to roll out" Cassini called over the radio as he casually strolled past the gate way to the yard and discretely glanced to one side before continuing on down the pavement.

"We are just around the corner in a plain transit van" Cassini's colleagues from the Undercover Surveillance team informed him whereupon he walked more briskly around the corner and got into the anonymous and slightly tatty old van.

"You guys follow the main convoy" the Commander instructed Cassini and his team just as the main group of vehicles departed "Keep it tight and discreet."

"Have I ever let you down Sir?" Cassini responded.

"No you haven't" the Commander replied with a smirk "Keep me informed."

With the last of the main convoy of vehicles departing and the gates to the yard being closed behind them, the traffic following included Cassini's van with his team of undercover specialists a couple of cars back from the suspects.

As they passed the window the Commander rose from the seat and tapped Field on the shoulder "Come on, I want to go and have a look,"

"Right behind you" Field confirmed as they left the back room and passed through the taxi office, exiting out into the road before turning right and proceeding around the corner and towards the gates to the yard, any possible sound of their approach drowned out by the passing over the top of the arches of a train with the howl of electrical motors and the clanking of wheels over the rail joints.

"I don't suppose you have a plan by any chance?" Field casually enquired as they reached the far pavement.

"Yeah sure" the Commander responded confidently even though he was very much uncertain as to how this was going to turn out.

As it would happen, other events were to intercede as the yard gates opened once again, causing Field and the Commander to duck into the adjacent bus shelter out of sight. Peering tentatively around the corner as a couple of bemused waiting bus passengers looked on, the Commander observed a silver Mercedes saloon car manoeuvre slowly out of the gateway and out onto the road.

"We need some transport" the Commander commented.

"Never a cab around when you need one" Field remarked as he looked up and down the road in the vain hope of a taxi around when you actually need one.

"I'll just have to hope he is going to Mile End" the Commander remarked as a bus pulled up alongside and opened its doors, allowing its passengers to alight.

The Commander boarded by the front set of doors and passed his warrant card over the ticket pass reader followed by Field who was forced to tender his money.

"I left my bus pass at home" he explained as the driver issued a ticket before the two men took a seat over the front nearside wheel arch from where they could observe the silver Mercedes car a few vehicles ahead in the slow moving traffic.

"Whilst I think about it" Field recalled as the bus continued on its journey "A friend of mine reckons he knows who the Russian fella's London agent is."

"Who?" the Commander asked.

"Every heard of a guy named David Harris?" Field asked.

"Didn't he specialise in payroll robberies back in the 1960's?" the Commander recalled "Died in prison a few years back I think."

"Well Vladisov's contact is his son Peter" Field explained "Used to be a muscle man for the Mannierie's until they chucked him out for being too ruthless and violent."

"Sounds like Vladisov's sort of guy" the Commander remarked.

"Lima Mike Zero One, this is your wife calling, where the hell are you?" Tracy's voice echoed all around the interior of the bus from the Commander's radio.

"Morning dear" the Commander responded slightly embarrassed "I'm on a bus approaching Mile End."

"Oh right" Tracy responded slightly surprised "Only your office have been trying to get hold of you for the last half hour" she explained "Fuller has something that may be of interest."

"Put him on love" the Commander asked.

"Morning Sir" Fuller called over the radio "You asked me to check into possible targets for Vladisov's thugs and I think I may have found something."

"Let's hear it lad" the Commander prompted.

"The National Bank of Val Verde has listed with us an unspecified shipment of an unknown value being transported from their City of London branch in Cheapside to an unspecified destination via an unknown route."

"Well that's helpful" the Commander remarked sarcastically. "Any particular reason why they are being so vague?"

"Apparently they don't trust anyone" Fuller explained "When I tried to lever some more details out of them they got very evasive and hung up citing something about commercial confidentiality and lack of trust."

"They will be the first on the phone to the Administrator General to complain about lack of support if they get hit though I'll bet" the Commander remarked.

"I'll have an ask around" Fuller responded "hack into their central computer, that sort of thing and see what I can dig up."

"Lovely" the Commander commented "Put the missus back on will you?"

"Hello!" Tracy called after a brief pause.

"How's the leg?" the Commander asked.

"Uncomfortable" Tracy confirmed "Being stuck in here with nothing to do but answer the telephone and bark orders at my officers is making me a bit grumpy."

"Surely not" the Commander responded.

"I'll wind up as grumpy as you by the end of the day at this rate" Tracy added.

"Oh thank you" the Commander was slightly aghast "I thought you loved me?"

"I do" Tracy reassured him "I'm only kidding you know" she added with a reassuring laugh knowing that she had managed to wind up her husband successfully yet again.

"There is something very important I do need to talk to you about though" Tracy added with a slightly hesitant and nervous tone clear in her voice.

"Err this seems to have become a bit of a party line" the Commander looked up to see the passengers in the bus all looking at the Commander and listening with interest whereupon he just smiled at them meekly.

"I'll talk to you later" Tracy confirmed "Just try not to get yourself injured between now and the end of the day.

"On current form I can't make any promises but I'll try my best" the Commander responded by way of a small measure of reassurance.

"Looks like we are about to take a detour" Field commented as he indicated ahead to the traffic in front of the bus where they could see the silver Mercedes car slowing down and pulling into the side of the road.

"I'll have to call you back love" the Commander informed Tracy before the two men got up from their seats and headed towards the front platform. From there they could see ahead the Mercedes parked by the side of the road where Vladisov and his two associates were stepping out onto the pavement directly in front of Mile End Underground Station.

“Let us off here mate cheers” the Commander called to the bus driver who responded by opening the front set of doors whereupon the two men discretely alighted out onto the pavement some one hundred yards further up the road from those they had been following up to that point.

From where they were standing, Field and the Commander duly observed Vladisov and his travelling companions head into the main ticket hall of the station.

“Do me a favour” the Commander asked Field “See if you can round up some of your more beefier lads and accidentally gate crash that warehouse.”

“Consider it done old friend” Field responded enthusiastically “Where are you going?”

“I’m going to follow the money and see where it leads” the Commander replied as he set off towards the station entrance.

“Divisional Commander Caverner” Jennifer announced at the reception desk of the Department of Trade and Industry building in Victoria Street “VIP Protection Division” she confirmed with a show of her warrant card to the receptionist “I’m here to escort a trade delegation from Lithuania.”

“One moment please” the small receptionist responded from behind her huge designer glass desk that seemed to be way over proportion in relation to its sole occupant.

Jennifer looked around the reception area which had that typical air of a Government building to it, trying to look all posh and expensive but failing miserably and winding up looking cheap and tacky instead.

“I’m sorry Commander Caverner” the receptionist responded a few moments later “I am afraid they have been delayed in a meeting and will be another half hour at least.”

“Oh yes of course, it’s nearly lunchtime isn’t it?” Jennifer responded with a hint of unsurprised sarcasm, “That will be at least an hour then!”

“Quite probably” the receptionist agreed.

“I’ll shift the motor around the back” Jennifer announced “Have my Control Room call me on the radio when they have finished their complimentary wine and cheese!”

The double sliding glass doors opened serenely to allow Jennifer to exit out into the Westminster end of Victoria Street and proceed directly to her ministerial escort car that was parked alongside the pavement immediately outside

"Well there's my Jenny" Fuller commented as he observed through one of the city's many traffic cameras his fiancé enter her vehicle and proceed to drive off. Turning neatly across the middle of the road and then back around into the side street that ran alongside the Department of Trade and Industry main building where she would park up for the duration.

Fuller returned to working through the pile of documentation on his desk that he was working through but managed to proceed little further when the telephone rang.

"Hello?" he enquired as he answered it. "Really, Mile End?"

Tracy looked up from her desk when she heard Fuller mention Mile End and glared at him communicating silently that she wanted to know what was going on.

"Charlie over at Stratford says take a look at the CCTV feed from Mile End" Fuller explained to Tracy "Something that may interest you."

"All right then" Tracy responded and turned to her console, using the system to call up the CCTV views from the various cameras that were installed throughout Mile End station "Did he happen to mention whereabouts over there?"

"Westbound Central and District" Fuller re-laid the message "Towards the ticket office steps end."

"Why hello there" Tracy commented as she recognised Vladisov standing patiently on the double sided platform that served both Central and District Line westbound services along with his two colleagues "If it isn't our infamous Russian friend."

"Charlie says look further up" Fuller added.

"What is that old rascal of mine up to now?" Tracy asked as she changed the view and saw her husband the Commander standing just behind one of the green and white tiled pillars that were situated down the centre of the platform, just peering out and discretely observing his Russian nemesis and his two travelling companions a short distance away.

"This is a customer announcement" the tannoy boomed across the four platforms "There are currently some delays on the Central Line due to passenger action at Leytonstone."

The Commander shrugged his shoulders in response and then noted Vladisov look slightly impatiently at his watch and then up the platform in the direction from which the next train should emerge.

"Lima Mike Zero One to Lima Tango Control" the Commander spoke very quietly into his radio.

"Lima Tango Control" Tracy responded "Having fun are we?"

"Hello love" the Commander responded "I'm at Mile End station."

"I know" Tracy said "I can see you from here" she announced which caused the Commander to look up at the nearest CCTV camera and give her a wink which made her smile.

"Define passenger action at Leytonstone" the Commander asked.

"Someone tried to run for a train as it was about to leave and wound up with their head wedged in the closing doors" Tracy explained "Throw in a bull on the line at Tottenham and its been a typical morning all round really."

"Cassini is following the main group overland" the Commander explained "I would appreciate it if you could have some of the Transport division at each station on the Central west of Mile End but not visible from whatever train our Russian friend boards."

"Next westbound is a White City service" Fuller announced across the Control Room having consulted the running status of the Central Line on his computer console "Should be at Mile End inside of two minutes."

"Anything else I can do?" Tracy enquired.

"Wish me luck and tell me you love me" the Commander asked.

"I love you!" Tracy announced over the radio.

"I love you too" the Commander responded "See you later."

The Commander's words were almost drowned out by the arrival of a six car train of District Line sub-surface 'D' type rolling stock that clattered into the platform behind him and squealed to a halt.

Also approaching now was the distant rumbling of a Central Line train and the Commander kept a close watch to ensure that Vladisov was remaining on the platform and not suddenly executing a change of mind and switching to the District Line service instead.

As the Central Line train of 1992 type tube stock advanced from the tunnel portal into the platform, the Commander hustled quickly to the edge of the platform and managed to stand right where the last set of doors in the rear most carriage stopped.

He stood to one side briefly to allow a few passengers to alight before boarding and standing to one side of the doorway where the low curvature of the tube profile carriage meant he could just see along the length of the train towards where Vladisov and his two associates were boarding three cars further down.

"This is all stations except Queensway to White City" the driver announced over the internal tannoy before closing the doors having allowed sufficient time for anyone intending to change from the District Line train in the adjacent platform to reach it "Please stand clear of the closing doors!"

The Commander continued to observe until the doors were nearly closed to ensure his quarry did not do a quick evasive alight from the train before departure. As the trains brakes were released with a hiss of air from beneath and proceeded to accelerate away from the platform into the dark running tunnel, he proceeded to walk to the inner end of the car and the connecting door between that and the next carriage.

It was with some slight trepidation and against the strongly worded advice of the notices on the windows that the Commander opened the connecting doors and discretely entered the next carriage, much to the surprise of some of the passengers he encountered. Seeing someone come through the train whilst it is in motion did happen occasionally but when that person is a fully uniformed and armed Divisional Commander of the Security Service it is a whole different matter.

Taking care not to bump into anyone or tread on any sticking out feet, the Commander proceeded through the second car to the far end and perched himself against the bench seat at the end of the car.

From there he was able to observe through the end windows the occupants of the next carriage, Vladisov and his two associates in particular who were seated in the centre of the next carriage looking inconspicuous and blending in as businessmen commuter types.

"The next station is Bethnal Green" the on board automated tannoy announced in a rather tinny voice as the train slowed and arrived in the classic 1930's built cream tiled platform tunnel.

As soon as the train came to a halt, the doors opened and the Commander positioned himself on the door step at the end of his carriage and looked up and down the train to ensure that Vladisov did not alight and that they were not joined by anyone else.

The only point of interest as far as the Commander was concerned was a plain clothes member of the Transport Division seated on a bench nearby keeping a casual eye open as per his instructions re-laid via Tracy.

The Commander raised his hand in acknowledgement of his presence before he ducked his head back inside as the doors closed and the train moved off again.

It was a few slightly tense minutes for the Commander as he continued to observe the targets before the train arrived in the busy platform at Liverpool Street where a significant number of people were waiting to board the service.

Realising that here was an opportunity for his quarry to easily disappear into the crowd, the Commander looked anxiously up and down the length of the train as soon as the doors were opened, a task not made any easier by the large number of people alighting and boarding through the doorway he was standing in.

Although in the minute the train was stationary, Vladisov and his two colleagues did not leave their seats, they were joined by a further two similarly attired gentlemen who sat with them in the same carriage.

A five to one ratio was something that the Commander was none to keen on and quickly attracted the attention of one of the plain clothes officers stationed on the platform.

"Over here" the Commander beckoned him over.

"Yes Sir?" the young officer enquired.

"Get onto Control and advise them there are now five targets" the Commander instructed "have some more officers in plain clothes waiting on the platform at Bank at this end."

"Will do" the young officer responded and turned away to talk into his hidden radio discreetly as the doors of the train closed and once again it set off away from the platform and plunged into the running tunnel.

By now the Commander was fairly sure where he thought the Russians were heading and sure enough as the train twisted around the tight curves as it approached Bank station, they started to stir and rise from their seats before walking calmly over to the carriage door preparing to alight.

The squealing of wheels on the tightly curved tracks almost drowned out any other background noise as the train crawled slowly into the platform and came to a stop. As the doors opened, the Commander, being careful not to fall down the large gap between the train and the platform, stepped out whilst continuing to observe.

Despite the crowds, he could make out further down the train, the taller than average figure of Vladisov getting off and assembling with his associates by the platform edge wall.

"Afternoon Sir" a couple of officers in plain clothes announced their presence.

"Welcome to the party" the Commander greeted the two officers "Our targets are that little grouping by the third carriage down".

"Tall, grey hair and beige trench coat?" the younger female officer asked as she looked down the platform.

"That's our man" the Commander confirmed "And he's brought along four friends as well."

"Your wife has arranged for a team of tactical armed support guys upstairs in an unmarked company Transit van" the slightly older male officer informed the Commander.

"Lets hope we don't need them" the Commander commented as he became aware that their quarry was about to make a move "Lets go shall we?"

The Commander and the two officers with him duly blended into the crowd departing the platform as the train left, tagging onto the back at a sufficient distance so as to maintain visual contact with Vladisov but stay sufficiently far enough back to avoid detection.

The crowd gradually dissipated as they made their way up through the station and people separated off to either connecting services or any one of the several different exits from the complex.

In the ticket hall, the Commander hung back slightly and allowed the two plain clothes officers to go ahead and tail Vladisov. Being in full uniform, the Commander did rather stand out and he did not want to risk being seen by his quarry.

After passing through the ticket barriers the two plain clothes officers continued to follow Vladisov's party through the complicated passageways just below street level until they emerged into daylight from the Threadneedle Street exit immediately below the Bank of England.

When the Commander emerged from the same exit a few moments later, he had to admit a bit of relief when he observed that the men had crossed the road away from the Bank of England as anyone trying to rob that would trigger probably the highest level of major incident short of a major terrorist attack.

"Lima Mike Zero One to Lima Tango Eight" the Commander called into his radio as he peered around the corner from Threadneedle Street into Cheapside.

"Cassini here" the response came.

"Where are you and your guys now?" the Commander enquired.

"First and second vehicles are approaching the Embankment" Cassini reported as he looked ahead at the two vans which were a few cars ahead in the traffic proceeding along the north bank of the River Thames.

"What about that patrol car?" the Commander asked.

"Whizzed off at a right old rate as soon as it hit the City" Cassini confirmed "We couldn't follow it without blowing our cover unfortunately."

"Life is full of small challenges and disappointments" the Commander commented but tailed off when he observed the five men that were being followed climb into a couple of saloon cars parked on the opposite side of the road.

"Taxi!" the Commander called to a black cab parked nearby which drew forward and to the Commanders surprise contained Sir Richard Crowthorne and his usual driver.

"Fancy meeting you here" he commented as he opened the rear door to allow the Commander to enter.

"Small world isn't it?" the Commander agreed "How the hell did you know where Vladisov was heading?"

"Intelligence report from one of my lads about some vehicles shadowing security van cash deliveries in the City area in the last few days" Sir Richard explained as the cab driver put his foot down on the accelerator and began to follow the two saloon cars as they pulled away and proceeded down Cheapside in the direction of St Paul's.

"Unfortunately it only landed on my desk half an hour ago" Sir Richard continued "When I listened in on your radio traffic it was obvious the way our Russian friend was heading."

"Lima Mike Zero One to Lima Tango Control" the Commander called over his radio "Fuller, have you managed to get anything out of that banking firm yet?"

"Only that the shipment is heading for a vault facility in Hounslow" Fuller confirmed "and that it is travelling in an unmarked van with a two vehicle escort."

"What about a schedule?" the Commander asked.

"After a bit of err investigation" Fuller responded slightly hesitantly "I managed to find a transfers schedule in their computer. They have two runs booked for today, the most evasively written details of which is scheduled to leave their St Paul's branch at two o'clock."

"Well now there is a coincidence" Sir Richard commented.

"Have those discreetly secreted armed response guys roll in this general direction" the Commander asked "I have a feeling they may be needed."

It was a pretty anonymous looking van, painted dark blue with no external markings. Only it's slightly thicker than normal windows and some discreet traces of armour plating here and there marked it out as different from any of the thousands of otherwise similar vehicles to be found on the streets of the city.

Located in a secure basement car park, the van was surrounded by a ring of helmeted and armed security guards employed by the bank. Behind them the lift doors from the vault below opened and three large trolleys were pushed out to the rear of the van, their contents a large number of heavy secure cases with just some sorting codes on their sides to tell those who knew them what they contained.

Few words were spoken as the trolleys were unloaded and with two men to each case, the precious cargo was loaded into the waiting vehicle.

It took ten minutes to load all of the cases into the van before the rear doors were firmly closed with a heavy clunk and then secured using the multitude of heavy duty locks with which the vehicle was equipped.

The supervisor looked around and without words indicated silently to the guards to proceed to their various vehicles before he himself got into the front passenger seat of the security van.

"Albatross One" the supervisor called into the radio "Ready for roll out."

As soon as he spoke the heavy secure gates that led to the exit ramp opened and the van with its two escort vehicles proceeded up and outside, exiting into a small discreet side street parked at the end of which was a marked Security Service patrol car waiting to provide an escort.

Most passers by barely gave the vehicles a second glance as they exited out onto the main road in the shadow of St Paul's Cathedral where the Security Service vehicle duly pulled out behind them and followed at a discreet distance.

That vehicle was not the only one following however as there was a dark saloon car, a taxi cab and a van all following the convoy as well, all trying to merge into the traffic and look as inconspicuous as possible.

"Is that your lot in the van behind us?" Sir Richard asked as he looked out of the back window at the vehicle behind them.

"One of our armed response teams" the Commander commented "Trouble is this is starting to look like a longer convoy than the Lord Mayor's Show."

"Lima Mike Zero One" the voice of Cassini called over the radio.

"Go ahead" the Commander called as he continued to look ahead.

"Your two vans with the unfriendly Russians inside are approaching Westminster" Cassini conformed "They are definitely heading somewhere specific."

"Stay on them" the Commander responded "I have a feeling we will all be in the one place before this little circus is over."

"So when do we push the panic button then?" Sir Richard asked as they drove through London continuing to maintain contact with the Security Van and its escorts, official and unofficial.

"We can't do anything yet" the Commander commented with some regret "The problem is if we stop them now and arrest them before they have done anything, a smart lawyer would have them back on the streets inside of an hour with nothing more serious than a failure to pay the Congestion Charge."

Some miles away, Jennifer was still reading her wedding magazine, mostly in the vain hope that Fuller might get around to agreeing on the wedding arrangements one day. She had been parked in that side street with a colleague in an identical vehicle immediately behind for over an hour now whilst the diplomats she was meant to be escorting finished their long over running official lunch.

Having finished reading an article for the second time, Jennifer put down her magazine on the passenger seat alongside and looked ahead down the road towards Victoria Street which crossed the end of it.

Her attention was caught by one vehicle in particular, a battered Ford Transit van that pulled into the side road and stopped near her, just a short distance ahead.

Whilst the driver seemed vaguely familiar, Jennifer instantly recognised the face of Cassini who was looking around as if in search of something or someone.

“Victor Papa X-Ray Zero One to Lima Tango Zero Eight” Jennifer called into her radio as she continued to observe Cassini and his undercover team nearby.

“Lima Tango Zero Eight” Cassini responded “A pleasant surprise, what can I do for you?”

“More what I can do for you matey” Jennifer remarked “If you are on an undercover surveillance operation in Abby Orchard Street then do you want me to bugger off somewhere considering I am in full uniform?” she asked.

“Charcoal grey Vauxhall Omega about one hundred yards in front of you” she added as Cassini looked up and saw her.

“Oh hello!” Cassini waved discreetly in her direction “It’s an unmarked motor so just keep your head down and all should be fine.”

“Well I am an extra pair of eyes” Jennifer responded “Anything I should be looking out for?”

“Couple of white Luton type vans” Cassini informed her “One of which is in the next street up behind you. It’s our Russian friends and they are up to something.”

“Do you mind if I join the party?” Jennifer asked, glad of the distraction as she removed her semi automatic firearm from her holster and checked it.

“Feel free” Cassini confirmed.

“Where are we?” the Commander asked.

“Fleet Street, approaching the Aldwych” Sir Richard confirmed “I am surprised you didn’t know that.”

“Unfortunately most of my geographical knowledge comes from travelling on the Underground” the Commander explained slightly embarrassed as they entered the Aldwych, passing the site of earlier events “Whenever I get lost I just usually follow a bus or something.”

“Oh I see” Sir Richard commented slightly surprised by the Commander’s admission “Proves no one is perfect I suppose!”

“Lima Tango Zero Eight” the Commander called over the radio “Where are those Russians now?” he asked.

“Holed up in a couple of back roads near Victoria Street” Cassini confirmed “Whatever is going to go down looks set to be in the Westminster or Victoria area I would guess.”

“We are never going to get anywhere in this mess” the Commander commented as they proceeded towards the Strand where ahead the van and its escorts along with the two suspect cars proceeded to crawl in amongst heavy traffic towards Charing Cross and Trafalgar Square.

“Lima Mike Zero One to Lima Tango Control” the Commander called over the radio.

“Afternoon love” Tracy responded having just limped back from the coffee machine, spilling coffee down her one and only remaining clean uniform in the process “Having trouble with the traffic by any chance?” she asked as she looked up at the main bank of screens showing slow moving and poor traffic conditions throughout the west end of the City.

“You could say that” the Commander commented “I am going for a plan ‘B’” he explained “If you and my lads from the Met have any backup that isn’t stuck in traffic, arm them to the teeth and get them to discreetly secrete themselves in the side streets between Buckingham Palace Road and Whitehall.”

“Expecting visitors?” Tracy asked as she motioned to the two despatch officers nearest her and beckoned them over.

“It may just turn out to be a damp squib” the Commander responded.

“Not likely on current form for these jokers” Tracy grimly commented as she felt her injured leg twinge as if to remind her of some of what these Russians were capable of.

“Anyway” the Commander continued “Cassini has a team on the ground, co-ordinate with him where he wants the backup.”

“Will do” Tracy confirmed.

“And you stay indoors, no heroics all right?” the Commander insisted.

“What makes you possibly think I would even consider wading in with all guns blazing?” Tracy asked mockingly as she drew her gun from its holster and looked it over.

“Oh I don’t know” the Commander responded with a chuckle “Insider knowledge?”

“Be careful” Tracy warned.

“I will” the Commander confirmed as the taxi cab stopped at the back of the slow moving traffic that was pulling into the main part of the Strand approaching Charing Cross Station.

“Jimmy” Tracy called over to one of the despatch officers nearby “Round up everyone you can, and I mean everyone from the heads of department right down to the tea lady if you have to and have them meet me in full body armour and weaponry in the front foyer in five minutes.”

“Yes Maam” the young officer responded as he departed quickly.

“Stella” Tracy called to a second officer who turned around from her console in response to face her commanding officer “Alert the line controllers for the District, Circle, Victoria and main lines that we may need an emergency shut down of all stations in the Victoria, Westminster and Green Park triangle at short notice.”

“Yes Maam” the second officer responded as she picked up the telephone on the desk and began to make the necessary calls.

“It’s time to show these Russians how us Londoners do things” Tracy grimly announced as she picked up her gun and with a bit of a painful grimace, limped out of the Control Room.

“Where are you going?” Sir Richard asked as the Commander got out of the cab.

“Scenic route” the Commander explained slightly vaguely “These guys are going to be stuck in traffic for a while which gives me a chance to leap around them.”

“Do you want me to stick with these guys?” Sir Richard enquired.

“If you don’t have anything else to do I’d appreciate it” the Commander replied “If you’ll excuse me...” he added as he dashed off, slamming shut the cab door behind him as he went.

Quickly the Commander made his way back along the line of traffic to the unmarked van that contained the Armed Response Team and opened the passenger side door.

“Shove over lad” the Commander instructed the front seat passenger who shuffled over to the middle seat “Who’s in charge?”

“I am Sir” the driver of the van confirmed “Commander Reilly, Tactical Support Services Group.”

“Right then” the Commander instructed “turn left here, hit the sirens when we are half way over Waterloo Bridge and then floor it all the way to Parliament Square.”

“With pleasure Sir” the driver confirmed as he pulled out of the traffic and turned left onto Waterloo Bridge, soon seeing the traffic out of the way when he turned on the screeching two tone sirens and activated the blue flashing lights that were mounted behind the front radiator grille.

The slowness of the traffic meant it was some twenty minutes before the security van, led by its Security Service patrol vehicle and two escorts made its way slowly around Parliament Square past the Houses of Parliament and then Westminster Abbey.

Standing on the corner of a side street a short distance away, Cassini casually observed the convoy of vehicles getting gradually closer to where he was. As they slowed to a stop in the heavy traffic by a set of traffic lights, Cassini returned to his vehicle a short distance away where it had been joined by the van from the Armed Support Team and the Commander.

“Their coming” Cassini confirmed to the Commander as he climbed out of the vehicle where he was quickly joined by the Armed Support Team all armed and fully kitted out in body armour and Kevlar helmets.

“Where are the two suspect vans?” the Commander enquired.

“One of them is parked in the next side street down” Cassini confirmed “the other is parked down the other end of Victoria Street.”

“I am feeling distinctly underdressed” the Commander looked at the armed support personnel “and under armed” he glanced down at his six shot revolver that was a mere pea shooter compared with the hardware that his colleagues were carrying.

“Step this way Sir” the Armed Support Team Commander responded as he showed the Commander to the back of their vehicle and opened the back doors to reveal the built in gun cage containing a variety of heavy weaponry.

“Everything a Security Officer needs for a fun and happy holiday” the Team Commander announced “Take your pick.”

As the Commander selected something a little more appropriate to the occasion, they were joined by two patrol cars of uniformed officers who approached the location by way of the back roads.

“Mind if we join the party Sir?” one of the officers enquired.

“Feel free” the Commander responded, glad of the additional backup “As soon as the suspect vehicles have passed, block off the east end of Victoria Street and evacuate as many civilians as you can out of there” he instructed “but do it discretely OK?”

“Yes Sir” the officer confirmed and with his uniformed colleagues, drove back down the side street to approach the end of Victoria Street from a direction where they would not be seen by the target and yet provide maximum support.

“There it is” Cassini called as he observed the security van pass across the end of the road but quickly was taken by surprise as the two saloon cars that had been following suddenly turned off into the very side road they were standing in.

“Quick!” the Commander called “Behind the van!” In an instant the officers rushed around to the pavement side of the van as the saloon cars drew near.

“Oh great!” the Commander commented as he saw the cars pull into the opposite side of the road and stop about a hundred yards ahead.

“Hang on just a damn minute....” Jennifer Caverner commented when she saw the two cars pull in a short distance ahead of her.

“Lima Mike Zero One from Victor X-Ray Pappa Zero One” Jennifer called into her radio “I don’t want to add any more confusion to a very surreal day but one of those two cars is my missing VIP Protection Division vehicle.”

“What?” the Commander responded.

“It’s got new number plates but it is definitely the same motor, it still has the scuff on the front bumper where my sister clonked it last week” Jennifer confirmed as she continued to observe the two vehicles, the occupants of which had still not exited yet.

“What job have you got on?” the Commander enquired fairly quietly so that he did not give his position hiding behind the van away.

“Escorting a couple of trade officials from Lithuania who are having a meeting at the DTI” Jennifer explained.

“Van one is on the move” Cassini’s radio suddenly announced.

“Where is it going?” Cassini enquired.

“Approaching Victoria Street in Artillery Row” the observer confirmed “It’s just pulling out immediately behind the second escort vehicle now.”

“And the second van?” the Commander asked.

“Parked up in Carlisle Place at the other end of Victoria Street” a second member of Cassini’s undercover observation team confirmed “Can only see one occupant though.”

“Commander Reilly” the Commander called to the Armed Response Team leader “Take out those two cars now” he indicated the two saloon cars.

“Let’s go lads” Reilly announced as they proceeded across the road with guns pointed directly ahead and quickly surrounded the two cars.

“You in the cars!” Commander Reilly called loudly and clearly “Armed Security Service Officers. Exit the vehicles with your hands on your heads!”

To everyone's surprise there was no response from the vehicles occupants, only the two drivers got out as instructed and timidly put their hands on their heads where upon they were brought to the ground and thoroughly searched by four officers.

"Err Commander!" Commander Reilly called over.

"Where the hell did they go?" the Commander asked as the doors of the two cars were opened to reveal that the vehicles were empty.

"Well at least I get my car back in one piece I suppose" Jennifer mused as she joined the group just as the two drivers were led away and bundled into the back of a patrol car that was brought in to provide prisoner transport.

"Victor X-Ray Pappa Zero One from Control" Jennifer's radio interrupted.

"Yeah go ahead" she responded.

"They are ready for you now" the Control Room of the VIP Protection Branch confirmed.

"Tell them to use the side entrance" Jennifer called "I will be there in two minutes."

"See you later" the Commander called.

"Don't get your head blown off!" Jennifer responded as she returned to her car.

"This is going to take forever" the driver of the security van commented to his supervisor sat alongside him.

"Once we are out of Victoria it should ease up a bit" the Supervisor responded although his impatience at the delay was obvious by how he backed up his statement with a concerned glance at his watch.

"What is this fool playing at?" the driver asked as the marked patrol car now in front of them began to slow down for no readily apparent reason as they approached the lower end of Victoria Street.

Oddly the patrol car stopped just short of the traffic lights and when most of the surrounding traffic had passed, the officer in the front passenger seat of the car got out and approached the security van.

"Problem mate?" the Supervisor asked as he rather unwisely opened the door.

"Engine trouble" the officer explained with a distinct hint of Russian in his accent that he was doing his best to try and disguise "Of course right now that is the least of your problems" the officer added as in an instant he produced an automatic weapon and shot dead the Supervisor and driver of the security van.

“Now” the masquerading officer confirmed over a radio as soon as he had checked the two men he had shot were dead. In an instant, armed and balaclava wearing men appeared from all sides and proceeded to open fire on the two escort vehicles, both of which quickly caught fire under the hail of bullets and exploded.

“Let’s go everyone” the Commander called as they heard the gun fire start in the distance. By driving on the pavement, with full sirens, they quickly reached the rear of the scene where the suspect van was now pulled across the width of the road blocking their path.

The movements of the first van at the rear of the convoy were mirrored by the actions of the second that pulled across the road, rammed the stolen patrol car and blocked the whole width of the lower end of Victoria Street.

As soon as the driver of both vans had got out, they simultaneously exploded with some force, blocking off access to the scene of the crime for the Security Services behind barriers of burning wreckage.

The Commander managed to pick himself up from the ground where he had flung himself instinctively when the first hints of the impending explosion had emerged.

"This looks like fun" Sir Richard Crowthorne commented as he arrived and helped the Commander to his feet.

“Don’t you just hate it when that happens” the Commander commented before he proceeded to lead Sir Richard and the officers into the scene, carefully treading around the widely distributed wreckage.

“Oh no you don’t” the Commander called to the driver who had escaped from the van just before it exploded and was running away from them towards the Security Van that was surrounded by armed hoodlums and being carefully emptied of its valuable cargo.

The gunshot that echoed around the tall buildings that surrounded the street on either side as the Commander shot the escaping driver alerted the Russians to the presence of the authorities and they immediately reacted by forming a circle around the Security Van and firing indiscriminately outwards in all directions.

“Lima Mike Zero One from Lima Tango Zero One” the Commander’s radio bravely tried to call, barely audible over the sheer noise of gunfire.

“Hello love” the Commander responded as he, Sir Richard and another officer with them took cover behind a couple of parked vehicles “Can I call you back, we are a little busy at the moment?”

"We have got them hemmed in at this end" Tracy announced as she too took cover behind a concrete roadside barrier, chips of which were being sent off by gun shots.

"I think we are a little understaffed over here" the Commander responded as he, Sir Richard and the other officer together momentarily aimed over the top of the car they were sheltering behind and fired before quickly ducking back down again "Ah, there is now one less of them mind" he added as he quickly glanced at the results of their latest attempt.

In the middle, shielded by billowing smoke and mayhem, the cases containing their precious cargo were being unloaded whole and placed into a set of outwardly ordinary looking suitcases of the sort any overseas traveller would use.

Showing the professional nature of their planning, there were exactly twelve suitcases matching the twelve boxes in the consignment and as the last case was sealed and secured, it was, along with the others handed to a group of men in neat business suits.

"Covering fire!" the leading gunman called to the others in Russian.

"What do you suppose that means?" Tracy asked.

"Duck!" the Commander responded just as a heavy assault of gunfire was let loose in nearly all directions.

"This is fun isn't it" Sir Richard commented wryly as he, the Commander and the officers with them moved further back down the street to take cover behind a row of concrete pillars.

"What I want to know is how the hell are they intending to get out of there?" Tracy pondered.

"I was just thinking the same thing" the Commander agreed "Trouble is with all this smoke and wreckage we are flying blind here."

As the Commander's words echoed over the radio, the gun fire suddenly began to die down to a stop.

"Now what?" the Commander asked as he and Sir Richard tentatively peered around the corner and looked into the clouds of smoke as silence descended upon the street only to instinctively duck down again when a single gun shot rang out.

"Tracy, was that you?" the Commander called.

"Sorry!" she called back "Just testing!"

"Everyone move in on my mark" the Commander called over the radio before taking a deep breath "One, two, three, go!"

The clatter of hard soled boots and the rattle of weaponry was almost deafening as the officers converged on the centre of the scene from both sides, the Commander leading from one side, Tracy limping in at the head of the other.

"Everybody sto..." the Commander began to announce as he reached the Security Van but tailed off when he realised he was performing to an empty audience as there was now no-one there.

"Looks like we missed the party" Tracy commented as she too arrived on the scene and looked around, peering into the back of the now empty van but keeping her gun firmly fixed ahead of her just in case she was wrong.

"These two guys have had it" Sir Richard grimly announced as he checked the two occupants of the front of the van.

"Ok everyone, spread out" the Commander announced "I want a wide area search, check every where and report anything you find, don't get creative, you wait for backup."

"Let's go" the two Armed Support Team leaders announced and with their officers headed off into the smoke and away.

"I knew you wouldn't stay inside" the Commander commented to Tracy as they embraced to give each other some much needed moral loving support.

"Well I did not want to disappoint you love" Tracy responded with a wry grin.

At the opposite end of Victoria Street, Jennifer and her colleague in the second VIP Protection Division car were pulling into the vehicle reception area in the front of the Department of Trade & Industry building.

With her colleague looking out for any problems, Jennifer got out of her car and proceeded inside into the foyer where she was met by the party of trade diplomats who were stood near the reception desk in a huddle.

"Gentlemen" Jennifer announced with a business like attitude "Your transport awaits" she showed the way to the front doors and the waiting cars outside.

For a brief moment Jennifer allowed the thought that there seemed to be more members of this party than she had been originally advised to pass through her mind before returning to her duty and the matter at hand.

The party split neatly into two groups as Jennifer and her colleague opened the car doors and allowed them to make themselves comfortable. Unusually however with the number that were travelling, one member of the party had to travel in the front passenger seat of each car.

"Are we all comfortable gentlemen?" Jennifer enquired as she sat down in the driver's seat and shut her door.

"Yes thank you" the voice of the gentleman sat alongside her confirmed but then she felt the pressing of a gun barrel in her lower side.

"Remain calm" Vladisov, the front seat passenger and holder of the gun calmly instructed "Follow my instructions carefully and all will be fine, understand?"

"Yes Sir" Jennifer coolly responded, hiding the fact that deep down she was apprehensive at best.

"If you will pardon me" Vladisov added as he discreetly reached inside Jennifer's uniform tunic and removed her gun which he tucked into his inside jacket pocket for safekeeping "Now start the engine and proceed at normal pace towards Marble Arch please."

Without any words, Jennifer duly did as she was instructed and started the engine before pulling away out onto Victoria Street and turning right, the other car following closely behind that she assumed was under the same degree of control as herself.

Unaware of the peril that Jennifer was in not that far away, Tracy and the Commander were surveying the wreckage as Fire Brigade crews arrived and proceeded to deal with the vehicles that were burning as a result of the efforts of the Russian robbers.

It was then that Tracy looked up and noticed a figure approaching the scene from the direction of Victoria Station, a somewhat stunned look on his face.

"Oh hell, we are in trouble now" Tracy mused to the Commander as he too looked up and recognised the tall black figure of the Administrator General approaching, his full uniform with its excessive gold braiding marking him out as the National Commander in Chief and therefore the senior most officer in the Security Service.

"Afternoon you two" the tall jolly looking man announced as he approached the two officers "Had a bit of a party have we?"

"Well you could put it like that" the Commander responded slightly reluctantly as he looked around at the wreckage.

"Thought this looked like your style of work" the Administrator General added wryly.

"I don't suppose you have seen any Russians around by any chance?" Tracy asked out of curiosity.

"Not that I have seen" the Administrator General admitted "Hell of a lot of passengers heading through Victoria Station though.

"Sir!" one of the Armed Response Team called over from the far pavement "Something you should see here."

"What have you got lass?" the Commander asked as he went over to see where the officer was indicating, a basement smoke outlet access point set into the pavement that appeared to be slightly open.

"Sneaky buggers aren't they?" the Administrator General commented.

"Care to join in the fun?" the Commander asked as he checked his gun.

"Wouldn't mind seeing a bit of action" the Administrator General confirmed with a grin.

"Tracy, see what you can do about sorting this mess out will you my dear" the Commander called.

"I'll have this lot shifted within the hour" she confirmed.

"After you" the Administrator General announced as he and the officer held up the smoke outlet access open to allow the Commander to climb down into the building basement before they followed.

"Ok Comrade" Jennifer announced as she neared the top end of Park Lane "We are approaching Marble Arch, where now?"

"Turn left and head along Bayswater until I say stop" Vladisov confirmed as he checked an A to Z atlas of Central London.

"You know that if you have time later, I can always drive you to a good show, fine restaurant or something like that" Jennifer wryly suggested.

"Nice thought" Vladisov casually agreed as they negotiated the complex road interchange that ran around Marble Arch before bearing left into Bayswater.

The traffic was fairly heavy and progress was somewhat slow along the road, hindered even more by being immediately behind a number 148 bus that seemed to be stopping at every bus stop along the way.

Some ten minutes later as they approached Notting Hill Gate, Jennifer instinctively slowed down as she worked out their likely initial destination.

"Pull in here by any chance?" she asked as they approached the austere exterior gates of the Russian Embassy.

"Clever girl" Vladisov commented upon which Jennifer duly turned into the entrance with the second car following closely behind.

Already sitting there outside the main entrance was another similar car with a driver standing by it who approached them as Jennifer pulled to a halt immediately behind it.

"Greetings Comrade" the man who approached announced to Vladisov as he lowered the side window before the two men exchanged warm handshakes.

"All set?" Vladisov asked as the two escaped gunmen from the Park Lane robbery earlier that week appeared from the doorway of the embassy and got into the back of the leading vehicle.

"We are now" the man confirmed and returned to the driver's seat of the leading car whereupon Vladisov turned back to Jennifer.

"Follow him" Vladisov instructed "And please no funny business, it's been a hell of a week."

"You can say that again" Jennifer agreed as she proceeded to follow the leading car back out onto the main road.

"I think we missed the party" the Administrator General commented as they exited out into a basement store room and looked around.

The sudden appearance of four armed Security Officers in the basement of the Department Store that they had just entered via the smoke outlets was a surprise for one of the shop's staff when she came in only to be met with the sight of gun barrels pointed directly at her.

"Ah sorry" the Commander apologised when he quickly realised their mistake, "Has anything unusual happened around here in the last ten minutes, well apart from us that is?"

"Bunch of courier delivery drivers passed through with a pile of cases about ten minutes ago" the shop assistant commented "Bit odd I thought as usually couriers deliver stuff, not take it away with them."

"Could be what we are looking for" the Administrator General commented.

"Come on then" the Commander led the way to the exit via the stairs before heading up to the shop's ground floor.

The small number of customers who had begun to filter back into the store after the all clear had been given a few moments earlier in the wake of the chaos outside, instinctively got out of the way of the four officers as they made their way business like through the vast shop floor area and headed for the side doors where they exited out into the street.

Looking up and down the street, it became quickly apparent that those they were pursuing were no where in sight.

"Lima Mike Zero One to Lima Tango Control" the Commander called over the radio as he led the Administrator General and the two officers accompanying them across the road and out in the direction of London Victoria main line railway station.

"Lima Tango Control receiving go ahead Sir" Fuller responded.

"What services are running at the moment out of Victoria?" the Commander enquired as he narrowly avoided being run down by a bendy bus on the 436 route outside the burger bar.

"Some delays on Brighton services" Fuller read from a read out display to his left which he had just called up "Eastbourne, Hastings and Arun Valleys are all running normally and South Eastern is experiencing signalling problems at Lewisham."

The throngs of pedestrians massing on the pavements in and around the bus station and taxi rank area around the front of the station quickly dispersed to make a way through for the four armed officers as they came past, making their way through onto the concourse area.

Quickly the Commander looked around and saw a couple of Transport Division officers who were on routine patrol walking across the South Central side concourse and got their attention with a shrill whistle.

"Yes Sir?" one of the two officers asked as they came jogging over to the Commander.

"Have you seen any large parties of gentlemen with cases or boxes pass through here in the last ten minutes?" the Commander asked more out of hope than expectation.

"Nigel mentioned about five minutes ago that he cleared the way to allow a bunch of suits through who were heading to the Gatwick Express" the younger of the two officers commented to his colleague.

"Worth a look I would have thought" the Administrator General commented.

"Agreed" the Commander responded by which time he was already walking briskly across the concourse through the throngs of waiting passengers towards platforms 13 and 14 which were dedicated to the non-stop express train service linking the centre of the City with Gatwick Airport.

"I hope they were not on that one" the Administrator General commented as he saw the eight car class 460 train start to move away at platform 13, its sleek streamlined cab nose gliding off into the darkness of the end of the platform and out onto the main line.

"Lima Tango Control from Lima Mike Zero One" the Commander called into his radio as he stood at the buffer stops and watched the tail lights of the train vanish into the distance.

"Go ahead love" Tracy responded having only just returned to the control room.

"The 16.00 Gatwick Express departure that just left platform 13 at Victoria" the Commander instructed "Have it slowed down as much as possible but under no circumstances is it to be stopped. Route it via Redhill and if necessary Crystal Palace if you have to, just get me enough time to get ahead of them."

"Line controller is not going to like it" Tracy remarked as she leant over to pick up the telephone.

"Well he is going to have to lump it" the Commander responded "Just use your charm on him, it usually works on me."

Jennifer continued to follow the lead car through the streets of South London and head out of the centre of the city. They were just passing through the area close to the suburb of Balham when the telephone the car was fitted with rang out with a shrill chirp.

"Do you want me to answer it?" Jennifer asked Vladisov.

"Go on" Vladisov urged after a monetary pause for consideration "But you do not tell anyone where we are going all right?"

"Hello?" Jennifer answered the telephone as she stopped the car at a set of traffic lights immediately outside the Underground station at Balham.

"Afternoon love" Fuller called "Just wanted to check are we still on for tonight?"

"I may be a bit late dear" Jennifer responded sounding as professional, calm and collected as was possible under the circumstances.

"I'm heading out to Stansted" she lied convincingly looking across to see Vladisov's satisfaction at her appropriately deceptive answer.

Fuller instinctively knew something was wrong but did not let on in case someone else was listening in, instead he reached across to the computer terminal he was seated at and called up the vehicle positioning system. The results he saw on the screen confirmed his suspicions.

"I'll see you later then" Fuller responded.

"Yes certainly" Jennifer responded as the traffic lights turned green and she turned into Balham High Road "I'll call you when I'm done."

"Love you" Fuller responded, already up out of his seat and taking his weapon from the desk drawer and fitting it into his holster.

"Love you too" Jennifer replied before hanging up.

"Maam" Fuller called to Tracy "We have a serious problem."

"Another one?" Tracy asked somewhat tired from the combination of the extra effort she had needed to excerpt because of her leg as well as that day's fairly extraordinary events.

"Jennifer just said she is taking her diplomats to Stansted Airport" Fuller announced.

"And..." Tracy was none the wiser at this point.

"According to the GPS trace she is currently passing through Balham, gateway to the south" Fuller explained "Unless someone moved the whole of outer London and Sussex around by 180 degrees and didn't tell me, when I last looked that was heading towards Gatwick."

"Where was her pick up from?" Tracy asked sensing the urgency here.

"Party of Lithuanian trade ministers from the Department of Trade and Industry" Fuller responded.

"That's the top end of Victoria Street isn't it?" Tracy asked.

"Yes Maam" Fuller confirmed.

"Gladys, take over" Tracy called to the evening shift control room supervisor who was seated nearby ready to come on duty.

"Lima Tango Zero One to Lima Mike Zero One" Tracy called over her radio as she joined Fuller and headed at the best speed her leg would allow in the direction of the lifts.

"Go ahead dear" the Commander responded as he stood at the far end of platforms one and two about to board his requisitioned rail transport to get him and half a dozen officers he had managed to round up to Gatwick as fast as possible.

"I think we just solved the mystery of where Vladisov and his senior colleagues went" Tracy confirmed "They are heading in a southerly direction in Jennifer's VIP Escort car, probably heading for Gatwick."

"Now there is a pleasant coincidence" the Commander responded "Where are you?"

"Heading across Victoria Street with Simon" Tracy confirmed as they dashed across the road and towards the main entrance to Victoria Station "Don't leave without us!"

"Where are you now?" Vladisov enquired of his associate travelling on the Gatwick Express service in the First Class section at the rear of the train which, importantly for them, was closest to the luggage van where their precious cargo was contained.

"We are heading south but very slowly" Vladisov's associate confirmed as he looked out of the window to see Wandsworth Common pass by slowly as unbeknown to them, they had been deliberately routed onto the slow lines behind a local service that was scheduled to stop at all stations as far as Purley.

"Signalling problems most likely" Jennifer remarked overhearing the conversation "They were having problems at Norbury this morning."

"Well just keep an eye on the merchandise and remember that the flight leaves at six" Vladisov responded with insistence.

"You have got to be kidding me" Fuller exclaimed as with Tracy they arrived at the head of platforms one and two on the station's passenger assistance electric buggy as her leg was not up to running the extensive full length of the platform in its current condition.

"All I could find" the Commander explained as he leaned from out from the cab of the steam locomotive that he had borrowed, former British Railways Southern Region 30850 named 'King Arthur' looking resplendent in its former dark green livery having just come back to Victoria with a charter service a few minutes earlier.

"You are not seriously going to try driving this thing are you?" Tracy asked as with a little difficulty she climbed up the access steps onto the footplate where the heat from the firebox offered some welcome warmth.

"No" the Commander confirmed as he picked up the shovel "I have been given a slightly less glamorous job, shovelling coal."

"We are all aboard!" Fuller called from the leading carriage immediately behind the locomotive's tender.

"Ok, lets go then" the Commander called and with a shrill note from the whistle courtesy of Tracy and the signal guarding the end of platform two indicating it was safe to proceed, the heavy locomotive and the leading carriage moved off amidst a nostalgic atmosphere of noise and steam.

The leader of the group of Russians on board the south bound Gatwick Express service looked at his watch with a little concern. They were now at least half an hour late and were still some miles from their destination as they passed through a tunnel on the approach to Redhill.

As they passed over a bridge just south of Merstham station, he looked out of the side window at the dark and gloom but failed to notice either the steam hauled train just visible passing by on the parallel running fast Quarry Line that provided a quick way of avoiding Redhill, also the convoy of three dark saloon cars that were transporting his boss and associates that at the same time passed beneath them.

"I think that's them" the Commander called as he looked out from the footplate across at the distant slower line on which could be seen the distinctive red and white Gatwick Express service which they were now overtaking.

"Thank gawd for that" Tracy remarked as she leaned on the coal shovel having taken over the duty of shovelling the coal.

"Don't see many of them these days" Jennifer quietly commented as she saw the steam locomotive power off into the distance along the Brighton main line, little realising the relevant significance of what she had just seen.

"When we reach Gatwick Airport" Vladisov instructed as he consulted a map of the airport he had produced from his inside jacket pocket "we will proceed directly to the private aircraft area. Do you know where that is?"

"Sure" Jennifer confirmed "been there a lot."

"This thing doesn't exactly hang about does she?" Tracy commented as the locomotive and its train of one solitary coach came flying around the curve approaching Earlswood, just south of Redhill.

"Of course not, she's a Southern Region girl. Who needs Flying Scotsman!" the Commander remarked with a wry smile as he looked out of the cab side and pulled the whistle cord to alert some rather surprised track workers who were clearly not expecting a steam locomotive to come through, a stark contrast to the usual diet of seemingly identical modern electrical multiple units that normally dominated the line's services.

"I hate to be the bearer of bad tidings" Tracy commented as she looked behind them to the up and down slow lines running parallel to the fast lines they were travelling on "But I think we are being caught up!" she pointed to the Gatwick Express train that was visible in the near distance now passing through Earlswood less than a mile behind them now.

"They lost the stopping service they were stuck behind at Redhill" the Commander confirmed "But don't panic, we will be all right."

"I wish I shared your confidence" Tracy responded as she put her arms around her husband's waist partially by means of support but mostly to comfort him.

Jennifer duly followed the lead car as it took the back entrance into the vast Gatwick Airport site, the sound of aircraft taxiing, taking off and landing providing a constant grumbling background noise.

Within a couple of minutes they were approaching the area where private aircraft departed from and as instructed, Jennifer pulled up in a car parking space a short distance from a small combined passenger and cargo jet aircraft that was waiting the arrival of its various passengers and its valuable cargo.

"Thank you" Vladisov responded. A violent villain who always got his own way he may have been but he was also a gentleman too.

"You're welcome I'm sure" Jennifer remarked with a hint of amused sarcasm.

"Sorry about this" Vladisov apologised as he took Jennifer's handcuffs and secured her wrists to the steering wheel before taking the car keys and leaving the vehicle.

"Do svidanja!" Jennifer wryly called after him.

"Please stand well away from the edge of platform six" the automated recorded announcer called across the platforms of Gatwick Airport station. The second repeat airing of the announcement was however drowned out by the hissing and clanking which marked the arrival at the platform of a steam locomotive and its short train of one single carriage.

On the platform waiting for the Commander and his party was the Operations Commander of the Gatwick Airport Unit of the service who, with five uniformed officers in tow, approached the Commander as he and Tracy stepped down from the footplate whilst Fuller and the other officers alighted from the carriage.

"Good afternoon Sir, Maam" the Gatwick Commander called.

"Hello Jerry" the Commander responded "Where are our friendly Russians?"

"Currently being held just outside the station" the officer explained as he pointed in a generally northerly direction "As soon as we are in place wherever you want us, we give the word and their train will be let in to wherever we want it."

"Lovely" the Commander responded "Let's go shall we?"

"Ladies and gentlemen" the conductor on the Gatwick Express service announced over the tannoy "Apologies for the delay caused by apparent signalling problems in the Purley area" she continued "We will be arriving at Gatwick Airport in just a minute."

Upon hearing this information, the Russian gentlemen calmly rose from their seats and proceeded to the back of the train and the luggage van where their precious cargo was waiting for them.

"Please ensure upon arrival that you take all bags and personal possessions with you" the Conductor continued to announce as the train moved off from the signal stop and began its final approach into the station itself "and please ensure you do not leave any items on the station or in the airport. Thank you."

As the train snaked through the complex point work at the north end of the station and proceeded into platform two, the Russian gentlemen proceeded through into the luggage van area and where they began to remove the securing straps that were holding their stack of cases in place.

With a slight forward jolt that caused them to momentarily brace themselves, the train braked to a halt alongside platform two at Gatwick Airport station and within a few moments a shrill beeping heralded the unlocking of the automatic doors along the side of the train.

The leader of the group, having returned to the passenger saloon immediately adjacent to the luggage van area, reached for and opened the door by way of the button and stepped out onto the seemingly near deserted north end of the island platform as his colleagues opened the roller shutter door of the luggage van and appeared carrying their large cases.

A few high visibility vest attired track maintenance workers were hovering around at the far end of the platform ramp end whilst a couple of station personnel could be seen a short distance away helping a couple of elderly passengers off the train one coach length further up.

"Everybody ready?" the leader looked around at his colleagues who simply nodded "All right then, lets go."

They proceeded in a group towards the two lifts that connected that end of platforms one and two with the main concourse overhead where they split with military precision into two neat groups, one each stood a short distance in front of the large double lift doors awaiting them to open.

"Afternoon gents" the Commander announced as the doors of the right hand lift opened and he and ten armed officers confronted the group.

"Thinking of jetting off somewhere were we?" Tracy asked as she and a further set of officers then appeared from the left hand lift.

Some of the men turned around to try and make an escape to the rear only to find that the track workers they had mindfully ignored a few moments earlier were in fact a further team of armed officers who had taken up position behind them cutting off their only other viable means of escape.

"Ok Jerry" the Commander called to his colleague from the Gatwick Office "Make sure our friends here are thoroughly searched and then very securely transported to somewhere appropriate, and keep it quiet."

"No problem Sir" Jerry confirmed "Come on chaps" he ordered his officers who moved forward to process their arrest.

"What about Jennifer and Vladisov?" Fuller asked.

"I have an idea about that" the Commander confirmed.

"I spy with my little eye...." Jennifer was getting bored just sitting there in her car watching the world go by, not that there was that much of it there to go by as it happened.

Vladisov and his guys were standing a couple of hundred yards away near the aircraft awaiting the arrival of their colleagues and of course their cargo and were just visible in Jennifer's rear view mirrors.

In her current predicament with both wrists handcuffed to the steering wheel, she could not even reach down to retrieve the small spare gun which she always kept in a leg holster beneath her trouser leg so by now she was starting to feel pretty useless.

"Anytime now guys would be appreciated" Jennifer remarked as she looked around in hope of any signs of a potential rescue.

A knock at the window made her suddenly jump and look across to the passenger side window where what at first appeared to be an Airport Parking Attendant was looking through the window with a clipboard in hand.

It was only when she took a second glance that she realised that this parking attendant that was trying to attract her attention was in fact Fuller who discreetly let himself in, sat down in the front passenger seat and quietly closed the door.

"Are you aware you are illegally parked madam?" he asked with a wry smile.

"Very funny" Jennifer responded as she leaned forward and kissed him, a move that made his day yet again "I was beginning to think you were never going to get here."

"It's a long story" Fuller decided to skip the explanation as there were more urgent and pressing matters at hand and so proceeded to unlock and remove the handcuffs that were securing Jennifer in place before casually tossing them over his shoulder onto the back seat.

"So where is the cavalry?" Jennifer enquired as she looked around at the seemingly empty car park area "Or dare I ask are you it?"

"All in good time Jenny" Fuller responded "All in good time."

"Oh dear" the Commander wobbled slightly with unease as he observed Vladisov and his associates through binoculars from his position on top of a two storey building some distance away.

"Problem?" one of the Armed Support Team officers who had joined him on the roof to survey the situation asked.

"It's just I've never been very good with heights" the Commander explained as he continued to appear a little uneasy with his position.

"If they are still armed then it is most likely small weapons" the officer remarked as he observed the Russians through his own set of binoculars.

"Even a small weapon can kill you though" the Commander commented "Just not as spectacularly."

"Indeed Sir" the officer agreed.

"Lima Mike Zero One to the legendary Tracy" the Commander called over the radio, having to turn away to stop the wind that was blowing from drowning out his broadcast.

"You rang love?" Tracy responded as she sat back in the front passenger seat of an Airport Authority Land Rover.

"Jennifer is safe and now the stage is all yours" the Commander announced.

"Getting under way now" Tracy confirmed before turning to the driver alongside her "Ok matey lets go."

At her instruction, the airport worker driving the Land Rover duly started up the engine and proceeded out onto the Airport perimeter road ahead of two similar vehicles carrying armed officers following in close formation.

"Ahh, here they come now" Vladisov responded as he saw the three vehicles approach and stop nearby where upon he thought he was seeing his men emerge, in fact these were all Security Officers but all now dressed in the grey suits that the Russians had been wearing.

With the cases in their hands they proceeded towards the aircraft and as soon as Tracy, still sat in the lead vehicle observing the unfolding scene, had seen that they were within range, she lifted her radio discreetly to her mouth.

"Go, go, go!" she called.

In an instant the disguised officers dropped their cases to the ground and produced their weapons, taking a defensive stance and causing Vladisov and his colleagues to freeze in their tracks.

"Don't even think about it Comrade" the Commander announced as he and a second group of officers closed in from the rear and sealed off any possible escape.

Vladisov let out a deep sigh of resignation and tossed his gun to the ground, a move that his associates then slightly reluctantly replicated.

"You don't know how much I have wanted to meet you" the Commander informed Vladisov as he went up to and stood alongside him.

"Probably not as much as me" Tracy remarked as she limped poignantly up to them with Jennifer and Fuller providing some necessary support, both physical and psychological.

"Ok" the Commander called "Lets get Comrade Vladisov into a nice cosy room, we are going to have a nice long chat."

Roger Field observed the yard from the driver's side window of his trusty old vintage Rolls Royce just as it began to rain. It was that light misty type of drizzle that made a quiet tapping noise on the window glass and always seemed to come as it was today when the majority of the city were heading home after a long day at work.

Briefly, Field looked in his rear view mirror as a couple of old Ford Transit vans pulled in behind him, their lights reflecting in the mirror until they were extinguished.

From the opposite direction, another elderly Rolls Royce pulled up, stopping almost nose to nose with Field's car, accompanying it was a further two more cars which pulled neatly in behind them.

After a brief silent pause, the doors of the various vehicles opened and a significant number of men appeared on the street and gathered around Field once he had got out of his own car and waited, leaning back against the bonnet.

With the various men were two of the senior gentlemen who Field had had his meeting with earlier.

"Evening Frank, David" Field welcomed the two senior men when they reached him accompanied by warm handshakes.

"How do Roger" the taller of the two men responded "I brought a few of the boys along, there are a few axes that are in need of grinding here."

"As do we all mate" Roger agreed "If everyone is up for this, shall we?" he asked gesturing towards the yard gates.

"Lets do it" the shorter of the other two men replied and together as a massed body, the group made for the heavy wood and wrought iron yard gates.

"Any word from our Soviet colleagues?" one of Harris's men asked his boss who was seated behind his tatty desk smoking a huge cigar and counting a very large pile of money.

"Nope" Harris responded, the unremoved cigar muffling his response a little "But there again as they paid up front for our services" with a broad grin he indicated the cash that was dominating his desk "Who cares?"

The usual background noise with trains rumbling overhead across the roof of the converted railway arch was suddenly interrupted by a loud crash as the sturdy gates of the yard outside gave way under the ramming effect of a heavy van being driven through them.

In moments, the various men on the site who had emerged to see what all the noise and commotion was about found themselves confronted with a large number of heavily built gentlemen armed with sticks and baseball bats who proceeded to set about them and quickly brought them to the ground where they were restrained.

Walking through the chaos of fists, people and objects flying through the air, Roger Field and his two senior colleagues proceeded purposefully towards the archway warehouse, pausing only momentarily as one of Harris's men was thrown past them into a pile of empty barrels with a huge crash.

"Looks like the lads are on good form tonight" the taller of Field's two colleagues commented as they looked around the yard where most of the enemy were now either unconscious or had simply had enough and surrendered.

"Yeah well" Field responded with clear determination "This isn't business, its personal. We have to show that you do not harm members of the community and expect to get away with it."

"Roger" Harris called as the three senior men entered his office "And in such distinguished company too, this is an unexpected pleasure" he lied. In reality, this was the last thing he was either expecting or wanting.

"I, a few friends and the boys wanted a bit of a word" Field began "A little reinstruction on the subject of honour, loyalty, that sort of thing."

"This must be some mistake surely?" Harris responded with a nervous laugh that failed to hide the fact he was feeling extremely worried right now.

"You provided assistance, manpower and facilities to a group of outsiders who attacked, injured and or murdered not only fellow colleagues within the community but most seriously, innocent bystanders as well" Field's tone was accusative and firm yet polite as he pointedly took the seat directly opposite Harris at the desk and stared at him with slightly squinting eyes.

"I am sure we can come to some arrangement" Harris replied with a slightly nervous chuckle as by now he was reduced to clutching at straws in an attempt to save his own neck and cast a hand towards the huge pile of money on the right hand end of the desk.

"Oh don't worry" Field reassured him "I've made all my own arrangements for you."

"Oh, err right" Harris now felt even more uneasy.

"Terry!" Field called whereupon his young assistant entered the office, looking a little unkempt as a result of being involved in the fracas downstairs a few minutes earlier.

"Yes boss?" he asked.

"Take our friend here and escort him to his transportation" Field instructed.

"With pleasure Sir" Terry confirmed and went around the back of the desk. Lifting Harris from his chair, he escorted him out of the room and away.

"What are we going to do with all this cash Roger?" the shorter of the two men asked "There must be about a hundred grand here."

"I am sure we can find it a good home" Field remarked.

"Get in there" Tracy unceremoniously shoved Vladisov in through the door of the interview room at New Scotland Yard where he promptly sat down behind the sparse cheap table.

The Commander was already in the room sat on the opposite side leafing through some notes in a file with an astute manner, his reading glasses perched very much in a business like manner on the end of his nose.

"Mr Vladisov Sergei Barkov" the Commander read from the file "You know you are quite an interesting gentleman."

"Thank you" Vladisov responded as he sat back in the chair.

"Decorated for bravery in three major incidents with the Soviet Army, entrepreneur, connections with the Political Directorate and the KGB and now the subject of arrest warrants in practically every know civilised country from Afghanistan to the United States and a few other places besides" the Commander announced.

"I like to keep busy" Vladisov remarked.

"You see" the Commander continued as he leaned forward and casually took off his reading glasses and placed them on the table "I have a bit of a problem."

"I'm sorry to hear that" Vladisov replied.

"I have just had a very interesting conversation with my opposite number in the Moscow Police" the Commander explained the complex situation that had arisen "Nice chap actually, seems he married his Deputy as well."

"Oh really?" Vladisov faked some interest.

"It would appear that they don't want you back, at least not for the time being" the Commander announced "So you see I am rather stuck with you."

"Oh dear" Vladisov mocked.

"I could hand you over to Interpol but they are busy dissecting your friend Durrant somewhere, probably literally as it happens so they may be some time."

"Ouch" Vladisov calmly commented at the thought of Durrant's likely fate given his betrayal of his Interpol colleagues, the chances of his detention being anywhere near as comfortable as his was right now were somewhat remote.

"Now my colleagues in Thames Valley division want to nail you to a tree somewhere in Berkshire, River Division would prefer to keel haul you under HMS Belfast, the Transport Division are undecided as to whether to send you around the Circle Line for eternity or handcuff you inside a route 73 bendy bus for twenty years and that's before my wife has had her say and then there are various colleagues in the Metropolitan Division who would like to cut to the chase and nail you by your testicles to Nelson's Column and use you for target practice."

Vladisov shifted slightly uneasily in his chair but said nothing.

"Of course I could just hand you over to the anti-terrorist guys and their specialist interrogation facilities in South London" the Commander pondered "They don't have the motto 'In Croydon, no one hears you scream' emblazoned in Latin over the front door for nothing you know."

"Hhhmph" Vladisov's reaction continued to be indifferent.

"However all of these pale into insignificance when you consider the largest problem on your list" the Commander's tone took on a very subtle hint of menace and hidden anger as he got up from his seat and paced slowly around to the other side of the desk and stood behind Vladisov.

"And that would be?" Vladisov enquired casually without even looking around behind him.

"Tell me" the Commander asked "Did you know exactly who was who when you decided on your list of senior members of the Service to have assassinated by your goons?"

The silence from Vladisov was determined and solid.

"Because you see amongst the various people you had targeted was the Divisional Commander of the Transport Division" the Commander's tone became noticeably more aggressive "Who is damn lucky no thanks to the efforts of your goons to be still alive which kind of makes me angry. Do you know why that is?"

"No" Vladisov casually responded neither knowing nor caring.

There was a loud crunch as the Commander suddenly grabbed the back of Vladisov's head and slammed it face first into the table top before pulling his head back up level again.

"She just happens to be my wife" the Commander explained as he stepped away and returned slowly and purposefully to his seat on the opposite side of the table.

"Nasty injury you've got there" the Commander casually remarked as he observed the blood flowing from Vladisov's broken nose "You really ought to be more careful."

"I could always make a formal complaint" Vladisov responded, his voice slightly muffled as he held a handkerchief to his nose.

"The chap you write to is a James Caverner" the Commander responded "He is the Administrator General of the Security Service Independent Oversight Committee, but I wouldn't expect much sympathy from him."

"And why not?" Vladisov enquired.

"He's Tracy's brother" the Commander explained with a wry grin "But you are welcome to give it a try."

"Lets get down to business shall we" Vladisov commented as he discarded his blood stained hanker chief onto the table and leaned forward.

"How much to get me out of here?" he asked.

"This isn't the Russian Federation" the Commander responded "There is no such thing as get out of jail free cards or political friends with large pocket books, this is London."

"I can assure you Commander that any stay in whatever prison you decide to put me in will be short one way or another" Vladisov threatened.

"Not if I have anything to do with it" the Commander leaned forward himself "And believe me my Soviet friend I will have a hell of a lot to do with it."

Vladisov looked on with a slightly impressed look, he had to admit he had some respect for his nemesis seated opposite him, far different from the many law enforcement officers he had encountered back home over the years who were always the more eager to open their bank accounts and receive his money.

"Well I must say I have enjoyed our little chat" the Commander remarked as he rose from his seat, the metal chair legs scraping on the hard concrete floor "We must do this again sometime."

"Oh we will" Vladisov calmly responded "You have my word on that."

"Do svidanja" the Commander bid farewell and exited through the door which was then closed firmly shut behind him.

"Went the day well?" Tracy asked as she greeted her husband outside in the corridor with a warmly welcomed hug and a kiss.

"Defiant to the last our friend in there" the Commander admitted "He'll have plenty of time to work off his smugness where he is going."

"I had the entire armed support division and a few other friends rounded up for the escort" Tracy informed the Commander as they headed up the stairs from the basement and came out into the back of the main reception area.

"That explains the traffic jam out there" the Commander looked ahead to the street outside that seemed to be jam packed with Security Service vehicles as well as a prison van awaiting its one and only passenger for the evening.

"No press around though thank goodness" Tracy remarked "Apparently they are all over at Great Ormond Street Hospital trying to get the scoop on some anonymous donation they just received."

"How much?" the Commander asked out of curiosity.

"About a hundred grand in used notes" Tracy reported.

"As long as the notes are genuine then they can keep it as far as I am concerned" the Commander remarked.

"Ok" Tracy called over her radio "Let's move this chap."

Downstairs, half a dozen of the heaviest and most armed officers Tracy was able to find proceeded to the secure interview room where Vladisov was seated waiting. Without any words spoken, he rose from his seat and proceeded surrounded by his armed escort up the stairs and out of a side door.

Between the building and his awaiting prison van was a double line each side of the footpath of armed officers ensuring that Vladisov did not make any attempt to escape and that no third party would even think about intervening.

"Have a pleasant trip" Tracy announced as Vladisov reached the prison van where she was holding the heavy armour plated door open for him "See you in about twenty years."

Vladisov just smiled meekly and entered the vehicle without saying a word.

"And then we happily kick your arse out of the country back to Russia" Tracy smirked as she slammed the van door shut and banged on the side of the vehicle to signal to the driver to pull off and away, the wail of the sirens of the numerous escort vehicles drowning out any other sound in the area until they were some distance away.

"Right then you two" the Administrator General came up behind Tracy and the Commander and firmly slapped his hands on their shoulders as he stood towering over them "You two are as of now on holiday for two weeks."

"Two weeks?" the Commander was slightly stunned, up until now in his career he had barely managed two consecutive days off let alone a couple of whole weeks.

"Two weeks" Tracy reiterated "Time for that honeymoon I think!"

"All right then" the Commander conceded quickly as he saw Tracy's irresistible beaming smile, a sight guaranteed to make his heart melt quicker than anything else.

The sound of a vehicle's horn beeping as it approached, interrupted the happy moment as the two officers turned and saw a large van approach. It was the driver in particular that attracted their attention.

"Isn't that your dad?" Tracy asked as the vehicle drew to a halt alongside the pavement in front of them.

"Hello old man" the Commander called "What the hell are you doing here?"

"Making a delivery" the old man grinned knowingly as he indicated the rear of the van "Compliments of Mr Roger Field."

"Well where's Roger then?" the Commander enquired.

"Making a delivery of his own" the Commander's real father explained "Seems Vladisov's London friend had a hundred grand in untraceable cash just lying around so he thought it ought to go to a good home.

Tracy and the Commander both looked at each other for a moment as they realised a connection between this news and a recent event occurring elsewhere.

"All right then, lets see what we have got here" the Commander responded as he with Tracy and the Administrator General went around to the back of the van where he lifted up the roller shutter door to be amazed by the sight of several somewhat bruised and battered henchmen, all handcuffed and restrained, not to mention looking a little fed up.

"Your Russian friend's London associates" the Commander's father explained as he joined them.

"You were right" Tracy remarked "Signed, sealed and delivered."

"Mr Administrator General" the Commander turned to his tall superior who was stood behind them looking into the van with an astonished expression "If you would care to do the honours."

"Why me?" he asked.

"We are on holiday" Tracy and the Commander responded in unison.

"Over here" the Administrator General called to a group of patrol officers nearby after attracting their attention with a shrill whistle.

"Couldn't give us a lift could you?" the Commander asked his father as the van was unloaded of its human cargo who were quickly escorted away to the custody area.

"Hop in the front son" he responded.

"Looks like you are having fun" Fuller remarked as he, arm in arm with Jennifer approached them from the Victoria Street direction.

"Simon" Tracy called "You are in charge of the Transport Division until I get back."

"Did I miss something?" Fuller asked as Tracy and the Commander climbed into the two front passenger seats of the van.

"We are on holiday for two weeks" the Commander explained "I am sure between you two lovebirds and the Chief here you can keep things together until we get back?"

"Don't I always?" Fuller remarked.

"Ok dad, lets go" Tracy called across to her father in law who in response started the engine and released the handbrake.

"Where to then my dears" the old man asked as he approached the end of Broadway and prepared to turn out into Victoria Street.

"Well do you know what" Tracy remarked "I have always had a hankering to go to Paris".

To Be Continued.....

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