

EARL'S COURT

Security Novels Series - Episode VIII



John M Upton

The Episodes of the Security Novels Series:

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Earl's Court

"We will be landing at London Heathrow in just under an hour" the pilot announced over the PA system of the British Airways Boeing 747 as it approached the south coast of England "The time in London is now 6.14 am on Sunday morning."

Sir Richard Crowthorne took a moment to look at his watch as he sat back in the First Class section of the plane where he had been unable to sleep for pretty much the entire flight from Australia where, in his capacity as Department head of the Security Intelligence Agency better known as MI5, he had been attending a rather dull conference.

"Thank God I upgraded to First Class" he commented to himself as he rose from his seat, the only one of his fellow passengers awake despite the golden sunrise beginning to shine in through the small porthole style side windows of the cabin.

"You open yet laddie?" Sir Richard asked the member of Cabin Crew behind the First Class bar as he approached it and sat on one of the fixed bar stools.

"Seeing as it's you Sir" the Cabin Crew member gleefully announced "I am sure I can do something for you. What will it be?"

"What's the best whisky you have?" Sir Richard enquired.

"Try this" the Cabin Crew member suggested as he poured a drink and passed it to him.

"Ah" Sir Richard responded with satisfaction as he took a sip of the drink "I knew there was a reason I upgraded to First Class."

Forty five minutes later and the aircraft was on final approach into Heathrow and as it landed, Sir Richard offered a silent word of thanks to whatever gods he believed in as the plane throttled back and proceeded to taxi off the runway and towards the terminal.

"Welcome to London Heathrow" the Captain announced as the plane came to a halt at the terminal gate "Thank you for flying with us and we hope to see you again soon."

"Not if my head of Finance has anything to say about it you won't" Sir Richard commented wryly as he rose from his seat, retrieved his jacket and briefcase from the overhead locker and headed for the exit.

As Sir Richard alighted from the aircraft and entered the Terminal building, he casually observed his fellow passengers who had also travelled on the flight as they gathered in the arrivals lounge.

His casual looking around suddenly turned into a double take however when someone caught his attention, a gentleman in a neatly pressed grey suit who had alighted from

Business Class and was in amongst the passengers over on the far side of the arrivals area.

"Can't be..." Sir Richard commented to himself as he strained to get a closer look at the man he had identified in the crowd, however he soon disappeared into the crowds as the passengers from three different flights merged into one.

To confirm his suspicion, Sir Richard stopped and looked around where his eyes alighted upon the CCTV cameras guarding the immediate area. Sensing an opportunity to confirm or deny his suspicions, Sir Richard took a detour and headed for the Customs & Immigration offices.

"Morning" Sir Richard announced as he reached the Customs Division inquiry desk where he proffered his identification to the Duty Officer "Can I have a word with your boss?"

"Remind me love" Divisional Commander Tracy Caverner of the National Security Service asked her husband the Commander as he once again managed to burn the toast he was cooking for breakfast "Why exactly are we getting up at six on a Sunday morning to go into work in a City that normally on a day like this doesn't bother to get up until at least ten?"

"Blame the Prime Minister" the Commander responded regretfully as he tossed the two blackened slices of bread into the bin and looked on somewhat surprised that they actually managed to go in the bin rather than bounce off the edge and shatter onto the floor which is what he usually did.

"The new one or the old one?" Tracy asked as she joined her husband and put her arms around him.

"The new one" the Commander confirmed "He is trying to show he is the new broom with a, and I quote 'clutch' of initiatives, positive policies and a fully integrated positive regeneration of security methodology, whatever the hell that is."

"Huh?" Tracy responded.

"That was pretty much my reaction on Friday night when he decided to launch this cobblers on an unsuspecting Security and Policing Committee meeting" the Commander confirmed "I do believe he has gone a bit gaa gaa!"

The telephone rang in the hall which caused the Commander to abandon the second attempt at cooking toast and pass the bread over to Tracy "That's probably him now with some new daft idea" he commented wryly as he headed out to the hallway and answered the telephone.

"Good morning Prime Minister" the Commander announced.

"Blimey" Sir Richard remarked from the duty office of the Customs & Excise Division at Heathrow Airport "I've been promoted."

"Its a long story" the Commander admitted "I'll fill you in when you get back."

"It may have to wait old friend" Sir Richard responded with some hesitation "Something or should I say someone interesting has just appeared."

"You have me intrigued" the Commander remarked "Where are you?"

"Heathrow Airport" Sir Richard confirmed "We need to talk, not on the telephone though."

"Well" the Commander looked upwards as he recalled his schedule as the Security Service Regional Administrator General for London and the South East which was meant to fill his day "I have this little matter to deal with this morning, meet me at about eleven o'clock up at the Yard."

"It's a date" Sir Richard "If I can find my way out of this place that is" he admitted ruefully.

A dull thump echoed around the lower passageways of Bank Underground Station in the heart of the City of London which caused the duty Station Supervisor to make his way from the ticket hall down the passageways towards the Waterloo & City Line platforms from where the dieing echoes of the noise were filtering.

"Here we go" he commented as he saw a cloud of white smoke coming towards him, up the stairwell from the platforms which prompted him to reach for his radio "Control, Code Zero One on the Waterloo & City Line, commence immediate evacuation."

Within moments the large 'Emergency, Do Not Enter' signs at each entrance to the Station complex were activated and an automated siren and announcement commenced throughout the complex advising passengers to evacuate immediately.

The Commander's intercom on his desk buzzed which caused him to reluctantly put down the file he was working through and reach across to press the answer button.

"This had better be good" the Commander responded begrudgingly.

"Code one alert at Bank Underground Station" the duty dispatch officer announced from the Control Room of the Security Service at New Scotland Yard.

"I am on my way" the Commander responded by which time he was already up out of his seat, grabbing his uniform tunic and heading for the door.

Moments later he had clattered down the fire exit stairs by one floor and reached the control room that was now busy with much tooting and froing as a result of the unfolding incident.

"What have we got?" the Commander enquired as he arrived and took a seat at the main control console in the room.

"Explosion and release of a gas like substance in the Waterloo & City Line part of Bank Underground Station" the duty dispatcher confirmed passing across a report sheet straight off the printer "Transport Division have officers heading to the scene now, we just need you to declare anticipated level of incident."

"Senior officer dealing?" the Commander enquired.

"Division Commander Caverner" the dispatcher confirmed.

"Should have guessed really" the Commander responded as he picked up a radio headset "Lima Alpha One to Lima Mike One" he called.

"Hello love" Tracy responded as she clambered off of her Security Service motorbike outside one of the entrances to the station "I think we have a major emergency here, better roll out that snazzy plan we have had lying around waiting for the inevitable."

"I read you my dear" the Commander responded "Seal the area off and stand by."

"Major incident plan Sir?" the dispatcher asked.

"Yep" the Commander confirmed as he retrieved a red folder with the official Major Incident Plan instructions from the shelf behind him "Better bleep everyone on an Alpha Category One status or whatever it is called and get them rolling."

Within moments of his instruction, an armada of emergency service vehicles were en route and approaching the area around Bank Station where a full evacuation was in progress with Tracy coordinating operations on site from a command post set up in front of the Bank of England.

"I want every part of the complex double checked and make sure that Monument is also sealed in case we get any walk through's via the subway" she instructed as she briefed various department heads over a plan of the station laid out on a table in front of them.

Further emergency vehicles arrived including a chemical decontamination unit which was let through the tape barrier that was securing the whole area from public access.

"Line Control?" Tracy called over the mobile telephone she was issued for specific major incidents such as this "Confirm please that the power is off and all trains are out of the Bank area on all lines?"

"Gold Control from Central" the Commander called over the radio from New Scotland Yard.

"Gold One" Tracy responded using the official call code for her as the on site incident commander "Area sealed, Chemical Unit guys are going in now" she confirmed as she saw the chemical suited officers heading down into the station entrance.

"How many casualties do we have down there?" the Commander enquired.

"Ambulance Commander reports they have thirty walking wounded, eight serious injuries and a few non affected who they are holding to make sure but we still have an unconfirmed number down on the Waterloo & City platforms which will need the HazMat guys to deal with" Tracy confirmed.

"Keep things together down there love" the Commander advised her "I'll send down some reinforcements."

Below ground, the Hazardous Materials team were making their way cautiously through the station complex, following the cloud of thus far unidentified gas or smoke down to the Waterloo & City Line platforms where they could see in the obscured viewing conditions a number of people lying on the platform and in the open doors of the train, some of them coughing and noticeably bleeding from noses and ears whilst others were still and unconscious.

"Bronze One to Control" the leader of the team reported over the radio built into the inside of the suit headpiece.

"Gold One" Tracy responded from above ground "Go ahead."

"We've got approximately a dozen casualties down here" the team leader reported as his colleagues proceeded to attend to the victims "Is the decontamination unit set up?"

"Ready to go whenever you are ready" Tracy confirmed as she looked over towards the red inflatable tent now set up in the middle of the road with the decontamination showers being connected up to a water bourse specifically brought in for the purpose.

Within the space of a couple of minutes the chemical suited members of the decontamination team were leading both walking and stretcher borne casualties out of the designated exit from the station and through the decontamination area before they were led to awaiting ambulances.

"All lower levels clear" the report came over the radio a couple of minutes later as the last casualties were being whisked away for hospital treatment.

"Thank you ladies and gentlemen" Tracy responded before switching over to the main frequency "Central from Gold One" she called "We are clear on site."

"If all Department Heads are in agreement then" the Commander declared "Then I duly declare this exercise over."

"Fantastic" Tracy responded "I'll get things cleared up here before I head back to the Yard, put the kettle on."

"Good morning" Frederick J Renquist announced as he arrived in the Library of the Open Prison in which he nowadays found himself incarcerated "My shift I believe" he confirmed to the prisoner on duty behind the desk.

"All yours mate" the prisoner responded as he got up and passed the books he was working on to him before departing.

"Right then" Renquist declared as he turned to the computer and started it up "What shall we find out about today?"

The computer humming and Renquist's tapping of the keyboard where the only sounds echoing through the deserted Library early that Sunday morning as he worked away accessing a number of files that he had stored at a remote off site secure location.

"Now where were we?" he asked himself as he accessed his own file store and resumed from where he had left off the day before, looking through a series of electronic documents and records that listed a series of crimes, arrests and prosecutions.

"Now he looks familiar" Renquist commented to himself as he tapped the screen with interest when one file appeared on screen "Another one to join the team perhaps?" he asked himself.

Quickly he scribbled some notes in a spiral bound book that he always carried with him before moving on to the next file, all the time continuing to remain unobserved and undisturbed.

The Commander observed the croissant that Tracy had brought for him from the New Scotland Yard canteen with some suspicion, much to his wife's amusement.

"What's wrong with my usual bacon buttie?" the Commander enquired.

"Nothing until I saw the report that the medical examiner wrote on you" Tracy explained "You have to accept that I am going to be insisting on a few changes."

"Mmm" the Commander murmured in reluctant surrender. He may well have been the Administrator General of the entire Security Service for London and the south east but there was never going to be any chance of winning an argument with his wife, not that he ever wished to argue with her anyway.

"The wife got you eating healthy food?" Sir Richard Crowthorne remarked as he joined the couple at the table in the canteen.

"I am afraid so" the Commander had to admit although he still managed an air of satisfied determination as he poured in his customary four sugars into his cup of tea.

"If you saw his last medical report you would understand the reason why" Tracy admitted.

"Ah" Sir Richard responded.

"You said you wanted a word?" the Commander replied, grateful for the distraction from the disappointing breakfast.

"I'm sorry my dear" Sir Richard addressed Tracy "Could you possibly spare a moment so I can talk to your husband alone?"

"I can take a hint" Tracy admitted with a wry smile "Just don't let him anywhere near the fried food counter."

"Its a deal" Sir Richard agreed.

"See you later love" Tracy responded as she and the Commander kissed before she left smiling.

"Heard the exercise went well" Sir Richard commented.

"I think in theory everyone survived but we will have to wait for the final independent observers report" the Commander responded "How was Australia?"

"Well the scenery was lovely" Sir Richard replied "The wife loved the Opera House in Sydney, she is still there staying with her sister for another week."

"So what is all this mystery about?" the Commander asked.

"I spotted someone that looked strangely familiar" Sir Richard explained as he produced a CD case from within his jacket pocket "Got anything I can play this on?"

"Lets go up to my humble office" the Commander suggested.

Vladisov Barkov was a man seemingly resigned to his fate as he contemplated what passed for a Prison Service breakfast. Indeed he had contemplated his cornflakes so long that the milk poured over them had turned them completely soggy by now and his coffee was cold as well.

"Mind if I join you?" the calm authoritative tone of Renquist enquired which caused Barkov to look up.

"Its a free world" Barkov responded in a heavy Russian accent indicating the chair opposite "Well sort of I suppose" he added ruefully as he glanced around the prison canteen.

"You and I have a mutual acquaintance" Renquist began "Someone with whom we have both had prior dealings which have had unfortunate consequences."

"Define unfortunate consequences" Barkov asked inquisitively.

"Winding up getting incarcerated in this charming establishment for one thing" Renquist continued.

"Well" Barkov responded "Either you have met my Mother who always warned me I would end up like this or your imprisonment was courtesy of a certain Security Service officer."

"Fortunately a man in my position has access to certain, how shall I put it" Renquist paused for a moment to phrase his explanation correctly "Resources shall we say, which I am utilizing to put together a little team of experts on our old friend the Commander."

"You have my attention comrade" Barkov responded as he abandoned his breakfast in order to learn more. "You will have to bear with me a bit though, much of what I know of this country since I arrived here has been from your so called newspapers that are printed here."

"Try avoiding the ones with small pages and big print" Renquist wryly suggested.

"Good idea" Barkov agreed "Back in old mother Russia, the only tits in Pravda where the idiots in the Kremlin."

"Anyway" Renquist continued after allowing a chuckle at Barkov's wry comment "What I want to do is make you a part of the team."

"Who else do you have on this team of yours?" Barkov enquired.

"Just a few old acquaintances of the Commander" Renquist explained "A selection of interesting individuals with unique talents and most importantly of all, an axe or three to grind."

"Let's suppose I was interested in your little scheme" Barkov responded "What about the little problem of our current accommodation" Barkov cast his hand around the room "We are a bit restricted aren't we."

"All being taken care of my friend" Renquist replied with smug confidence "All being taken care of."

"To play disc, press eject" the Commander read from the instructions as he and Sir Richard fumbled around with the DVD player that was installed but largely unused in the Commander's Office.

"Try that one" Sir Richard suggested as he pointed towards one of the buttons on the front of the unit and demonstrating that his technical knowledge with any sort of electronic equipment was not much better than the Commander's.

"Ah ha!" the Commander declared with triumph as the draw opened and he inserted the disc only for Sir Richard to reach forward, pick it up again and turn it over before closing the drawer.

"Right, lets see what's on the telly" the Commander announced as he returned to his chair behind his desk "Err why is it not playing?" he asked.

"Do you have the remote?" Sir Richard asked.

"Ah" the Commander realised "Hang on a minute" he responded as he reached into his desk draw and scabbled about in amongst the clutter of long lost files, half eaten packets of biscuits and bits of semi melted chocolate until with an exclamation of victory produced the remote control, pointed it at the player and switched it on.

"Very well done" Sir Richard commented as the playback commenced on the large screen mounted on the wall.

"All right then" the Commander enquired "What am I watching?"

"This is the surveillance tape from the arrivals area of Terminal Four at Heathrow Airport early this morning" Sir Richard explained "To be precise, the passengers alighting from the flight that has just arrived from Australia which includes myself."

"Good flight?" the Commander asked.

"Not bad" Sir Richard admitted "Managed to get a free upgrade to First Class which helped."

"You still won't catch me going anywhere near one of those things" the Commander added.

"Now this is where it gets interesting" Sir Richard continued "Pause it right there."

"Ah missed it" the Commander realised when he failed to press the pause button in time but he soon succeeded in reversing the footage back a bit to the point indicated."

"That's it" Sir Richard confirmed "Now, do you recognise anyone here?"

The Commander looked but could not identify anyone that jumped immediately to mind. There was however something about the image which managed to ignite his curiosity and make him rise from his seat, perch his reading glasses on the end of his nose in a professor like style and go over to the screen and look more closely.

"Hello old friend..." the Commander commented when he looked closer and recognised exactly the same person that Sir Richard had seen "Now what are you doing here?"

"I take it that is gentleman you know or knew as James Garforth then?" Sir Richard confirmed.

"It is indeed" the Commander confirmed "I do believe life just got interesting."

"I had a couple of my boys watch him leave the airport but they lost him when he did a sneaky double back at Earl's Court" Sir Richard confirmed "I did put a call into my Australian opposite number though, turns out he has been busy doing some outside consultancy work for their Secret Service."

"Last I heard he was taking in the sights of Canada and the USA" the Commander remarked so I expect he will surface in front of me at some point" he added as he returned to his desk.

"I thought you would like to know" Sir Richard responded "It just seems one of those bizarre coincidences that he just happened to be travelling on the same aircraft as myself."

"And I of course don't believe in coincidences as you know" the Commander cut in.

"As you said" Sir Richard agreed "It looks like life just got interesting."

"Please ensure you are in the correct part of this train" the automated announcement echoed around the eight car train of Southern Class 377 Electrostar stock as it pulled into the small rural station of Ford in Sussex.

As the train came to a halt, one of the two pairs of doors along the platform side of the front car opened and James Garforth alighted onto the platform surface. He took a few moments to look around the rural surroundings of the west end of the station that looked out across rolling fields before, with the train departing to his left, he headed along the length of the platform to the exit at the opposite end and the road way outside.

Parked in front of the main station building , a pre-booked taxi was already waiting for him.

Garforth calmly got in the back whereupon the taxi set off, managing to cross the level crossing only moments before the bell sounded and the gates lowered for another train.

It was actually quite a short journey to the nearby Ford Open Prison a mile and a half down the winding road, a unique example of this type of institution as being the only

prison site in the country with a main public road running right through the middle of it.

"Shall I wait here Guvnor?" the driver asked as Garforth got out of the taxi immediately in front of the main gate.

"If you would be so kind" Garforth confirmed as he handed across a twenty pound note which the driver gratefully accepted before proceeding towards the visitors gate where a Prison Service Officer was on duty.

"Good morning" Garforth announced his presence and presented some identification that elicited the required result of him being allowed through the gate with no further comment or questions being asked.

In the prison Library, Renquist was assembling a further collection of files when there was a knock at the door.

"Come in" he called whereupon a Prison Officer showed Garforth in and then closed the door behind him to leave them alone.

"Welcome, a pleasure to meet you" Renquist greeted Garforth by standing up and shaking his hand "Step into my office."

"A cosy arrangement you have here Mr Renquist" Garforth commented "You must have some very high up connections."

"It is a little ironic that they put me, a man who is renowned for using the power of information to achieve his aims in charge of the Prison Library" Renquist remarked "Which brings me to the point of our little conversation."

"Well you did fly me around the world first class so I take it this will be worth the effort?" Garforth enquired.

"You and I" Renquist began "And for that matter a small number of other people have a unique feature in common."

"An exclusive club I take it" Garforth commented.

"Indeed" Renquist agreed "I believe from reading your most interesting file that you have had dealings with a certain high ranking member of the Security Service?"

"The Commander you mean?" Garforth raised a surprised eyebrow "Our paths have certainly crossed if that is what you mean."

"Two arrests" Renquist read from a file he produced from the desk in front of him "You managed to shoot him four times before he arrested you the first time by throwing you off a roof."

"I did break his fall" Garforth admitted.

"Very noble of you" Renquist responded "Second time you were arrested on a Eurostar train at Waterloo International when you were knocked unconscious by his wife Tracy."

"Charming lady" Garforth retorted with a hint of sarcasm "I wouldn't want to get on the wrong side of her I can tell you."

"Would I be correct therefore that you would be partial to a little revenge?" Renquist enquired.

"Entirely possible" Garforth confirmed "Who else is hitching their chain to this little band wagon of yours?"

"Primarily at the moment a gentleman by the name of Vladisov Barkov" Renquist continued "He has access to muscle, finances and hardware."

"That the Russian guy who set up that armed raid in Victoria Street last year?" Garforth recalled.

"The very same" Renquist confirmed.

"Very slick operation if I recall" Garforth commented "Any lesser officer than the Commander might have lost on that one."

"I take it we have an agreement then?" Renquist asked.

"I'm prepared to shake hands on it" Garforth offered his hand in agreement which Renquist took and shook firmly to seal the deal "Just how are we going to get you out of here?"

"I do believe that my Mother is about to suffer a terrible incident of ill health that will require me to be granted immediate compassionate leave of absence" Renquist smiled knowingly "Sometimes relatives can have unusual but very convenient uses."

"They can indeed" Garforth agreed.

"Are you sure about this colour?" Commander Simon Fuller called through the open door to his fiancé Jennifer Caverner, twin sister of Tracy Caverner and head of the VIP Protection Division of the Security Service.

"Trust me" Jennifer responded from the hallway as she struggled with assembling a bookcase and was about to resort to ending her frustration by hitting it with a very large hammer if she could find one.

"Oh hello" Fuller commented as he glanced out of the window to see a Security Service patrol car pull up outside and the familiar figure of the Commander emerge from the drivers seat "Better put the kettle on, I think we are about to have company."

It was with some clear apprehension that the Commander looked around the almost deserted back street in the west end of London as he locked the Patrol Car. It was not the location that was making him apprehensive however, it was the subject of his unplanned visit to see one of his most trusted officers that was bothering him.

He crossed the road and after pausing a moment to try and identify the correct front door at which to knock, arrived at the house which Fuller and Jennifer had recently purchased.

The sign that maybe all was not well with the property was clearly made obvious when the Commander used the rather dilapidated brass door knocker and it promptly fell off in his hand whereupon the door opened.

"I believe this is yours" the Commander sheepishly announced as he handed Fuller the door knocker "Can I come in, I need a word?"

"Mind the paint" Fuller informed him as the Commander entered.

"Morning Sir" Jennifer called down the stairs as the Commander looked around the hallway with concern at the not very advanced state of the building which they were in the middle of a major renovation of.

"Morning my dear" the Commander responded "Is this place safe?"

"Depends on how you define safe" Fuller was forced to admit "I am beginning to think that the surveyor was either walking around with a blindfold on or actually managed to survey the wrong house."

"Not good then?" the Commander concluded.

"Well the plumbing sounds like the 1812 overture" Fuller regaled the tale of woe "the electrics predate the war, the first one, the kitchen has more cracked tiles than the Elgin Marbles and even the death watch beetle have left in protest at the state of the place."

"Lovely" the Commander responded.

"The agent did say it had period features" Fuller responded.

"That would be the damp then" the Commander remarked as he wiped his hand after having leaned against a damp patch of the hallway wall.

"Exactly. It will be a tough bugger to fix up but I think we can do it" Fuller reassured the Commander with an uncertain smile.

"I know its your week off" the Commander continued with some reluctance.

"Yes Sir....." Fuller responded knowingly and with suspicion.

"I need you to monitor the movements of a gentleman who has just arrived in town" the Commander explained.

"This would presumably be strictly outside of official channels I take it?" Fuller enquired.

"Exactly" the Commander confirmed "If you have a set up here..."

"Naturally" Fuller confirmed opening one of the doors to reveal the study with his computer desk already set up and running.

"The gentleman is an old friend of ours" the Commander explained as Fuller showed him into his study, the only part of the house that showed any sign of being complete.

"Anyone I know?" Fuller asked as he sat down at the computer and prepared to begin.

"He arrived from Australia on a flight this morning" the Commander explained "Sir Richard Crowthorne spotted him and tipped me the nod."

"Why do I suspect that this chap coming in on the exact same flight as a senior officer of MI5 is not a coincidence?" Fuller asked.

"That thought had occurred to me too" the Commander admitted.

"And the name of this mysterious gentleman?" Fuller asked.

"James Garforth" the Commander grimly confirmed.

"*The* James Garforth?" Fuller asked with a raised eyebrow "As in your brother?"

"The very same" the Commander responded "Apparently he is back in town and there must be a good reason, I am just curious as to what it is."

"I'll see what I can find" Fuller responded as he set about his task "I take it if I find anything I don't use the regular channels?"

"Just monitor what is going on" the Commander instructed him "If anything turns up, use the X-Ray Division communication system."

"And the good lady wife?" Fuller asked.

"Keep her out of this for the moment" the Commander confirmed "She is not exactly Garforth's number one fan even though he is on our side these days."

"I think its safe to say Sir" Fuller commented wryly "Life is about to get rather complicated."

"Renquist" the prison warder called into the door of his cell "Emergency telephone call for you."

"Thank you my good man" Renquist responded as he got up from the desk in his cell and proceeded to follow the officer from the cell block to the administration and visitor area where a telephone was waiting to be answered.

"Hello?" Renquist answered as the officer stood discretely nearby just observing.

"Oh right" he added with a clear hint of concern expressed for the benefit of his small audience "I'll see what I can do. Can you send written confirmation to the Governor here?"

The officer on watch looked more attentive at the mentioning of the Governor in the conversation and stepped forward a little.

As soon as the call was complete and Renquist had hung up, he turned to the officer with a clear sense of urgency.

"Sorry to be a pain" Renquist apologised with false sincerity "But I need to see the Governor most urgently."

The usual chaos of an early Monday morning in central London was readily evident as the traffic around Hyde Park Corner ground to a total standstill thanks to a combination of large numbers of vehicles and over running night time road works.

In the middle of the traffic, seated calmly in the back of a black cab, James Garforth surveyed the scene of traffic chaos as his driver finally managed to round the corner and turn left into Park Lane.

"I tell you Guvnor" the taxi driver commented as they at last started to make progress up Park Lane "It's all the fault of that mad Mayor of ours and his bleeding Congestion Charge."

"Such is the mysteries of power and ideas" Garforth agreed with some amusement as the taxi pulled across the road and into the forecourt area of the Park Lane Hotel.

"Here we are" the taxi driver announced "That'll be £8.50 please."

"Here you go" Garforth passed across a twenty pound note "Keep the change."

"From a twenty Sir?" the taxi driver responded with some surprise as Garforth collected his bag and briefcase and exited the cab "Why thank you Sir."

"Thank you mate" Garforth responded, revealing a little of his south east London side in his response as he shut the cab door and it pulled away in search of its next fare.

"Good morning Sir" the receptionist announced as Garforth arrived at the desk in the plush reception area of the Hotel with a porter carrying his bags to the desk just behind him.

"Good morning" Garforth agreed "You have a reservation for me in the name of Garforth, booked through the secretary of a Mr Renquist?"

"Ah yes Sir" the Receptionist confirmed as she checked her computer screen "You have been assigned a suite on the eighth floor and there is a envelope for you here" she passed a large fat A4 sized brown envelope to Garforth.

"Your key Sir" the Receptionist passed him the key "Have a pleasant stay."

"Thank you my dear" Garforth responded before leaving the Reception desk and following the porter to the lifts and then up to the eighth floor.

Once shown into his room, Garforth tipped the porter handsomely before he was left alone to look around the plush well appointed room which he admired with some surprise, he had certainly never been treated to this level of luxury before.

A quick consultation of the well stocked drinks cabinet duly elicited a glass of finest scotch, although Garforth was forced to admit to himself that it was a little early in the morning but then he thought what the hell.

Sitting down and relaxing back in the very luxurious arm chair, Garforth took the brown envelope he had received and opened it, extracting the contents which he then proceeded to read through carefully.

As he read through the material that he had been provided with through Renquist's contacts, his expression changed from curiosity through to deep concern and then finally utter horror.

As what he was reading began to sink in, Garforth reached for the telephone and instantly the reception switchboard answered.

"Good morning dear" Garforth responded whilst he continued to read the file in front of him "An outside line please."

"Number Sir?" the switchboard operator asked.

"The British National Exports Company in Westminster please" Garforth requested "Extension number three zero one."

There was a pause of almost a minute as the call was made downstairs in the hotel before Garforth was connected through to an answering service and a friendly sounding lady came on the telephone.

"Extension Three Zero One, how can I help you?" came the response.

"Operator number eight one zero eight two nine, password Phoenix" Garforth cryptically responded "Can the old man please come urgently to room eight one nine of the Park Lane Hotel as soon as possible on a matter of some urgency."

"I will notify him at once" the message taker confirmed and hung up.

"I just hope he comes quickly" Garforth expressed clear concern.

"Yes Prime Minister I appreciate that you feel there is a problem with gun crime in this country which is causing a major problem for the Home Secretary and certain other politicians but I can assure you we are trying to shoot as many of them as we can" the Commander reassured over the telephone in his office as Tracy discreetly entered.

"No, shoot the bad guys Prime Minister, not the politicians" the Commander grinned with amusement at the thought given his record against the latter group of individuals over the years.

"An initiative" the Commander repeated the Prime Minister's words "I'll get my Press Officer on it right away, good day Sir" he responded before hanging up.

"Pratt" the Commander offered as an after thought "If he paid less attention to his inner circle of dodgy advisers and more attention to the real world, he might just have a chance of getting re-elected."

"Never mind dear" Tracy comforted her husband "Besides, you don't have a Press Officer anymore do you?"

"Oh yes, I forgot" the Commander remembered that he had in fact sent the gentleman in question packing the previous week "He kept telling me to push the envelope and think outside the box so I told him to push off which means he is probably now thinking outside a job centre."

"I guess all your high level intellectual conversations with heads of state was the reason why Sir Richard could not get through?" Tracy asked as she sat down alongside her husband and put her arms around him.

"Did he say what he wanted?" the Commander asked out of curiosity as he got up and grabbed his uniform tunic.

"Wouldn't leave a message" Tracy confirmed "Is their something going on?"

"Not that I am aware of" the Commander responded but Tracy saw right through that one.

"Come on" Tracy responded with clear insistence "I have been around some of the best liars in the business and I know you better than you know yourself so I know when you are hiding something so out with it."

"Ah" the Commander responded as he looked across at Tracy with a resigned look "I never could keep anything secret from you could I?"

"Well the last time I was kept in the dark" Tracy replied "The first I knew something was going on was when I was the front row witness to your attempted assassination at Victoria Station."

"Don't panic" the Commander responded "It's not that bad I can assure you love."

"Out with it or no supper" Tracy insisted with a knowing grin which was justified as the Commander gave in.

"There's an old friend in town" the Commander explained slightly evasively "Garforth came in on the same flight as Sir Richard yesterday morning."

"Ah..." Tracy responded "I see why you did not want to tell me."

"It's probably nothing" the Commander admitted as he kissed Tracy for reassurance "Anyway, I'll be busy with this patrol inspection over at Hammersmith for the rest of the day so what could possibly go wrong?"

"In this crazy world, anything is possible" Tracy remarked.

The bell of the lift arriving on the eighth floor was the only sound to echo around the otherwise deserted corridor of the Park Lane Hotel before the doors opened and Sir Richard Crowthorne stepped out and looked around.

With a confident stride he walked down the corridor until he reached room number eight one nine and after a deep breath, knocked on the door.

A few moments later the door opened and Garforth was stood in the doorway.

"Come in Sir Richard" Garforth responded "Would you care for a drink?"

"Thank you" Sir Richard accepted the invitation and walked inside, closing the door behind him "It's been a long time hasn't it?"

"That it has" Garforth was forced to admit as the slightly uncomfortable nature of both men began to ease a little "Here" he passed a glass of finest scotch from the drinks cabinet "You may need this."

"I knew it was going to be one of those days" Sir Richard remarked "My wife said so on the telephone this morning she had seen doom in her tea leaves."

"Scary" Garforth was forced to concede "She may be right though. Have you heard of a gentleman called Renquist?"

"Frederick Renquist?" Sir Richard asked "Earl of somewhere or other and last I knew of, safely ensconced in a High Security Prison facility courtesy of the Commander."

"He must have friends in high places then" Garforth responded "He managed to get himself moved to a cushy Open Prison in Sussex and will probably by now be on his way to London courtesy of a compassionate leave pass as his mother has been taken ill."

"Oh dear..." Sir Richard remarked as he took a large gulp of the drink upon hearing this news.

"Trust me old friend, it gets even more interesting" Garforth tossed the file he had received onto the coffee table in front of him "He's getting together a little soiree and I as a former acquaintance of the Commander has been invited along for the ride."

"Sounds like our friend Mr Renquist did not do quite all his homework then" Sir Richard remarked.

"Yes" Garforth agreed "Interesting isn't it?"

"Good God..." Sir Richard remarked as he began to read through the file "Is he serious?"

"From the impression I got of him" Garforth commented "I would say he is deadly serious and he has some serious financial backup to carry it out with."

"I had better notify the Commander before anything happens" Sir Richard remarked "Can I get a copy of this?" he asked.

"Winging its way to your secure e-mail inbox as we speak" Garforth confirmed "Can I safely assume you have informed the Commander about my arrival."

"Indeed" Sir Richard confirmed "He had a suspicion that you and I winding up on the same flight was not a coincidence."

"I thought I might be able to attract your attention just in case I was unable to contact you later" Garforth confirmed.

"I had better make a couple of discrete telephone calls" Sir Richard got up to leave "Any message for the Commander?"

"Tell my Brother I send my regards" Garforth responded with some sadness "I hope that is the only message I am able to send him otherwise if we do speak face to face then Renquist's plans will have come to fruition."

"Be careful" Sir Richard warned as he left.

"You too."

"Just relax" the Commander reassured the two patrol officers he was accompanying across the secure car park of the Hammersmith Security Service Offices "It's just a routine day out on the beat with me in tow."

"Yes Sir" both Lieutenant Commander Eade and Lieutenant Silver responded although they were still looking somewhat uncertain about having the Administrator General following them around all day.

"Dear oh dear" the Commander remarked to himself as he got in the front passenger seat of the patrol car and they prepared to depart out onto the streets.

"Do you want us to do our normal patrol route Sir?" Eade enquired as he started the powerful engine of the patrol car and began to move off towards the gate that led to the road outside.

"Might as well" the Commander agreed "Lets see what is going on out there."

"Tell it to your lawyer" Tracy responded to the large heavily built gentleman that she and another officer were hauling handcuffed out of a Bank at Bethnal Green where outside a large consignment of Security Service vehicles and officers were forming a cordon around the site of the attempted armed robbery.

Once outside the bank, Tracy and a couple of other officers helped the would be robber into the back of a waiting van despite his vain efforts to resist arrest.

"Lima Control from Lima Mike One" Tracy called into her radio once the doors of the van had been firmly slammed shut behind the robber.

The response from the radio however was garbled which caused Tracy to look down at her radio with some concern "Can you say that again for the benefit of us who do not speak Klingon?"

There was another response from the radio but again it was garbled nonsense which caused Tracy to throw up her hands in disbelief and look for an answer.

"Terri!" she called to a nearby officer who was observing the departure of the van "Is your radio working?"

"Just a moment Maam" the officer responded "Lima Mike Three Nine Five to Control" she called.

Once again the only response was an outburst of static garbage which caused both officer to look at each other with concern.

"I need a telephone" Tracy responded as she headed for a telephone box and after rummaging around in her uniform tunic pocket for some change, made a call to the nearby offices at Holborn.

"Oh I don't believe it" Tracy remarked as she was connected "I'm on hold."

The officer nearby smirked with amusement as Tracy looked around with a growing sense of disbelief as she was subjected to some really terrible hold music. It would be a whole minute before finally a human voice was heard on the other end.

"Oh thank God" Tracy responded, more relieved that the excruciatingly bad hold music had ended than her success at actually managing to make a live contact "This is Commander Caverner, put me through to the Control Room will you?"

"Holborn Control Room" the voice of the Duty Despatch Supervisor announced with a background noise of some sort of confusion and pandemonium.

"My radio is on the blink" Tracy informed them "What's occurring?"

"The main transmitter at Elmwood just suffered a power failure and the backup is not responding" the Supervisor informed her "Also there is a gentleman from MI5 looking for you."

"Tall chap, grey overcoat in his late fifties?" Tracy asked.

"That would be the chap" the Supervisor confirmed.

"Ensnounce him in my office with a cup of coffee and don't let him leave" Tracy instructed "I am on my way."

"Problem Maam?" the officer nearby asked Tracy as she hung up and looked around with a determined look on her face.

"Take control of this mess and wait for the Scenes of Crime lads" Tracy instructed "I have a train to catch" she announced before heading off in the direction of Bethnal Green Underground Station.

Being mid morning, the station itself was relatively quiet and Tracy was able to pass through the ticket hall and on down the escalators to the Central Line platforms without incident or hindrance.

No sooner had she arrived on the westbound platform than a eight car train of 1992 type Tube Stock arrived and squealed to a halt before opening its doors.

Tracy allowed the small numbers of passengers alighting to pass before boarding the second coach from the rear and taking a vacant seat before the train moved off.

Something nagged at her experienced mind as the train continued on its journey with stops as Liverpool Street and Bank. It was not until the train was leaving St Paul's station that she became aware of the possibility that someone may be following her, observing from the next carriage up.

She decided to test the theory and so alighted at Chancery Lane where she remained on the platform and purchased a bar of chocolate from the vending machine in order to make it look like she had a reason for remaining there.

Once the small number of passengers who had alighted from the same train as she had, had passed off the platform, Tracy observed that she was now alone on the platform.

Retrieving the chocolate bar that she decided she would give to her husband later, she left the platform and headed to the surface by way of the escalators before heading up the short flight of steps from the ticket hall to street level.

With hot sunshine beating down, Tracy took off her uniform tunic and slung it over her shoulder before walking westwards towards Holborn, all the time discreetly checking around and using reflections in shop and vehicle windows to see if there really was anyone observing her progress.

Ten minutes later she was passing through the door of the Holborn offices and after a trip up to the fifth floor in the lift, she entered her office where she found Sir Richard Crowthorne sat enjoying a cup of coffee.

"Good morning" Tracy announced as she arrived in the office, hung her tunic on the coat hook and sat down behind her desk "What can I do for you?" she asked with sincerity.

"I need to speak to your husband as a matter of some urgency" Sir Richard's tone was one of clear insistence but still maintaining his normal polite gentlemanly manner.

"It's funny you should say that" Tracy remarked "I wanted a word with you as well."

"Such is life" Sir Richard responded "Where can I find him?"

"On a patrol in Hammersmith" Tracy confirmed but quickly followed up her response with a very insistently toned question "What the hell is going on?"

"Your husband has had one of his hunches" Sir Richard responded as he tried to give a response that would deflect Tracy's questions without further inquiry.

"And?" Tracy continued to ask.

"Just a minor intelligence matter" Sir Richard continued his evasiveness "Pay it no mind, thanks for the coffee."

"You're are definitely up to something" Tracy commented wryly as Sir Richard got up and turned to leave.

"It's in the job description my dear" Sir Richard admitted ruefully as he reached the office door "Don't worry my dear" he pretended to be positive despite his feelings of worry.

"Expect to hear from me before the day is out" Tracy warned.

"I'll be expecting your call" Sir Richard responded as with a tug of his forelock, he left

"What does that say?" the Commander asked the motorist that the two officers he had been accompanying for most of the morning had pulled over near Kensington Olympia.

"Err thirty?" the motorist responded as he looked up at the speed limit sign the Commander was indicating. Up until now the motorist had been arguing with the officers as to whether he was speeding or not until the Commander had quietly sidled up behind him and tapped him on the shoulder whereupon his tone had changed considerably.

"And what does that say?" the Commander asked as he showed the motorist the display on the speed gun.

"Forty eight?" the motorist was definitely back tracking on his confrontational approach now.

"And which is the larger number?" the Commander asked.

"Forty eight..." the motorist conceded.

"Congratulations" the Commander responded "You're fined" he handed the ticket to the motorist with a wry smile "Case closed, have a nice day."

The motorist nodded in surrender, took his ticket and trudged forlornly back to his vehicle.

"Well I reckon that is lunch" the Commander declared to the two officers.

"Best idea I have heard all day Sir" Eade agreed as they returned to their patrol car but as they were about to get into it, the noise of a commotion starting up was heard from a pub a short distance up the road.

"Now what?" Lieutenant Silver asked as all three looked on down the road in time to see someone fly out of the pub doorway onto the pavement only for them to pick themselves back up, raise their fists and determinedly rush back inside again.

"Control" the Commander called over the radio only to be responded to by a wail of static whilst similar attempts by Eade and Silver elicited the same result.

"Terrific" the Commander remarked "Looks like its down to us" he announced as the three officers jogged down to the pub entrance where a large fist fight was in progress within.

"We could just shoot them Sir?" Eade suggested as they observed the mayhem from the doorway.

"Not worth the paperwork" the Commander commented "Come on" he led the way inside "We will have to do this the old fashioned way."

The first thing the main aggressor knew of the arrival of the authorities in the midst of this bar room brawl was when the considerably smaller Commander tapped him on the shoulder.

As soon as he turned around, he was sent spiralling unconscious to the floor courtesy of the Commander's right fist.

"Whoa!" Eade suddenly called out as he was accidentally sent flying backwards by another of the participants in the fight only for the perpetrator to find himself being thrown by the Commander into the bar and crashing to the floor.

By this point as Silver grabbed another fighter and restrained him in the corner, the rest of the occupants had realised that the fight was all but over and it was now time to stand down.

"Right" the Commander announced all be it a little out of breath "Now that I have everyone's attention, just what the hell is going on in here?"

"He spilt my pint!" the largest man responded indignantly as he looked up from the floor.

"Terrific" the Commander remarked "We can sort out this mess down at the station" he announced as he handcuffed one of the participants in the fight and together with the other two officers, proceeded to haul them out of the pub "Come on!"

Outside as a Security Service van arrived to take the prisoners, a shadowy figure observed from a nearby roof top the events unfolding some six storeys below in the street.

"Three to one" the stranger called into a radio head set "Ten minutes to commencement of operations."

"Jim!" the Telecoms Company engineer called to his mate by the van "Bring the connection kit will you?"

"You got it mate" Jim confirmed as he opened the large sliding side door of the van and retrieved one of several large tool boxes contained therein "Can you see the problem Trev?"

"Not yet" Trevor responded as he shone a torch inside the engineering access door of the rather dull looking featureless brick building that contained a large amount of

mysterious humming boxes. Only the large two hundred foot high transmission tower on the top of the building really gave anyone any clue as to the buildings real purpose.

"Fiver says its damm mice again" Jim remarked as he joined Trevor and together they proceeded inside.

"Well it is lunch time mate" Trevor agreed "Bloody light is out again though" he announced as he tried the light switch to no avail.

"Perhaps the little blighters have developed a taste for light bulbs" Jim commented as he shone his torch upwards to reveal that the bulbs had been removed from their ceiling fittings, hence the lack of illumination.

"More likely someone has nicked them to flog down the Camden Car Boot Sale again" Trevor remarked as they proceeded further inside and cast their torches along the line of large equipment boxes with their little LED status indicator lights blinking away in the darkness.

"Which one is it?" Jim asked as they continued on into the gloom.

"Security Department radio transmitter control boxes are numbers eight to fourteen" Trevor consulted a reference book by the light of his torch before shining it ahead "Should be just up here."

"Well here is number eight" Jim confirmed as he wiped a thin layer of dust off the indicator plate to reveal the unit number before he opened it to inspect the equipment inside.

"Can't see anything obvious" Trevor remarked as he too looked at it before moving on to the next unit. As with the previous ones, all of the units up to and including number thirteen seemed perfectly fine but yet there were no transmissions going out or coming in through them.

"It's always the last one isn't it?" Trevor remarked with a wry grin as he unlocked the final unit case and opened it before they both shone their torches inside.

"What in the name of Omra's aunty is that?" Jim asked as they both saw a strange device with wires coming out of it and a LED display mounted on it attached to the main equipment panels.

"I have no idea mate" Trevor responded as he leant forward and prodded the device with his screwdriver in curiosity.

"Are you sure you should be doing that?" Jim asked clearly a bit nervous "Perhaps we should call the bomb squad or something."

"Nah!" Trevor dismissed that idea as an over reaction before moving further forward and making an attempt to remove the device from its mounting. As he clattered around in an effort to dislodge the device, it emitted a beep.

"What the hell was that?" Jim asked now even more apprehensive.

"You have ten seconds" a pre-recorded voice announced from the device "Start running."

"Let's get the hell out of here" Trevor suggested as he quickly jumped to his feet.

"I hear that" Jim agreed as they ran for the door. In a split second they were outside and running to their van whereupon they went around to the back and fell to the ground.

No sooner had they taken cover than the brick shed exploded, sending debris in all directions, some of which hit the van the two men were hiding behind as well as pulverising the surrounding area.

As the echo of the explosion died down and the dust and debris began to settle, the two men got up and looked over the top of their wrecked van at the shattered remains of the building and the transmitter now leaning at a rather alarming angle.

"I told you we should have called the Bomb Squad" Jim commented ruefully.

"What the hell was that?" the Commander wondered as he heard an echo of a distant explosion as he chewed on a bacon sandwich outside a cafe near Earl's Court Underground Station.

"Thunderstorm?" Eade pondered.

"I wish these damn radios worked" the Commander remarked "Then we might to be able to find out what the hell is going on around here."

"Hello" Eade commented as he saw a couple of officers heading down the road towards them, clearly with some purpose.

"Where's the fire?" the Commander asked as the two officers reached them.

"Oh afternoon Sir" the lead officer recognised their Commander in Chief "Reports of a suspicious package on the platforms at Earl's Court Station."

"All right then" the Commander announced "Saddle up gentlemen."

Within the space of a minute they were at the east entrance to Earl's Court Station where the Commander duly took charge of the scene of chaos that he found.

"What the hell is this mess?" he enquired of the Station Supervisor who was trying in vain to get everyone in the station out whilst at the same time stopping determined travellers from coming in.

"Something dodgy looking got left on the platform" the Station Supervisor informed him.

"I take it we are not talking about someone's sandwiches this time then?" the Commander asked.

"Definitely not Sir" the Supervisor confirmed.

"Right then" the Commander declared "Lets get this better organised. Eade, Silver and you two, close of this entrance and clear the pavements both sides for one hundred yards in each direction.

"Yes Sir" they all responded and promptly set about their assigned task.

"You three" the Commander indicated another three officers who had just arrived "Get around to the Exhibition Entrance and make sure its shut off."

"What is the status on the trains?" the Commander asked the Station Supervisor as he turned to him before they proceeded inside through the ticket hall area to the vast train shed that covered most of the four District Line platforms.

"Piccadilly is non stopping" the Supervisor confirmed as they passed through the open ticket barriers "District is being held at Hammersmith, Gloucester Road, etc."

"Terrific" the Commander remarked "Where is the device?"

"Down there" the Supervisor pointed down from the upper balcony towards the empty eastbound platforms "By the indicators."

"Stay here" the Commander advised him "I'll go and have a look."

With a deep breath, the Commander descended the steps down to the westbound platforms and proceeded with caution along its length until he reached the old style destination indicators for which Earl's Court Station was well known.

Sure enough, as he had been informed there was a large cardboard box sitting on a bench seemingly unattended and abandoned.

"Definitely not sandwiches" the Commander remarked to himself as he stepped forward and with care, lifted the top flap of the box to try and look inside.

"Are you all right down there boss?" Eade called from the balcony at the Exhibition Entrance end of the station.

"I think so" the Commander responded, his voice echoing around the vast empty train shed "Put a call into the bomb squad will you."

"They are apparently busy trying to reassemble what's left of the radio transmitter control" Eade responded "Some nut just blew it up."

"Wonderful" the Commander sarcastically commented "I wonder if today could possible get any worse."

With caution, the Commander returned to the box and once again lifted the top flaps but as soon as the daylight entered and touched upon a light sensor, a bell began to sound from within the container.

"Time for a swift exit" the Commander remarked as he proceeded to make a hasty departure up the platform away from the box which suddenly began to erupt with the noise, sparks and flashes of fireworks being set off from within.

"What the..." Eade commented before he headed down the steps as fast as he could to join the Commander on the platform "Are you all right Sir?" he enquired.

"I think so" the Commander remarked "What the hell is going on around here?" he asked generally as the fireworks began to die down.

"I don't know Sir" Eade admitted "But I would be intrigued to know what is likely to be said at the press conference on this one."

"A spokesman for the London Fire Brigade earlier today responded to reports of fireworks with the quote 'Oohhhh Ahhh'" the Commander mocked with a wry grin "Come on, lets get this mess cleared up."

"I'll get a fire extinguisher" Eade remarked.

"See if you can find the Bomb Squad while you are about it" the Commander suggested "I am going to take a look around and see if there are any more surprises."

As Eade left the platform, the Commander looked around the deserted train shed, across the four platforms and towards the empty abandoned train on the opposite side.

It was as he contemplated the unusual empty nature of the station that he became aware of a telephone ringing from somewhere along the platform he was standing on.

With understandable curiosity, the Commander walked down the length of the platform until he approached a pair of public telephones, one of which was the source of the ringing.

"Never a dull moment" the Commander remarked to himself as he reached the telephone and with an air of curiosity, picked up the receiver to answer it.

"Earl's Court District Line Eastbound" the Commander answered.

"Good afternoon Commander" a voice responded "I do hope you are well."

"I'm still in good health although my Doctor would probably argue otherwise" the Commander admitted with some scepticism "Who am I addressing if I may be so bold?"

"For the purpose of this and our future conversations" the mysterious caller responded calmly "You may call me Trident."

"That's nice" the Commander responded "You're named after a bus?"

"An interesting observation" the caller replied "but in this case you are wrong."

"If there is a point to this little one to one, is it possible we could get to it?" the Commander asked.

"As you wish" the caller agreed "To business then. At this very moment your good lady wife, Tracy is currently being discreetly followed and observed by a team of expert covert surveillance people employed by myself."

"For the purpose of?" the Commander responded with clear concern.

"Making sure that I have your complete and undivided attention" the caller explained "I take it you are listening intently?"

"I am" the Commander confirmed grimly.

"These employees of mine are highly trained in the sadly rarely practiced arts of long distance sniper assassination and close quarter lethal combat plus thanks to the extremely generous sponsorship of myself and my associates, they are extremely well motivated" the caller explained.

"Money always greases wheels in certain circles" the Commander agreed.

"Indeed" the caller responded "If you wish to ensure the survival of your good lady wife then you need to follow these instructions to the letter. Are you listening carefully?"

"Go ahead" the Commander confirmed.

"As you are no doubt aware by now, the radio network of the Security Service in the City has been shut down by means of good old fashioned high explosive" the caller continued "However if and when communications are re-established, you are under strict instructions not to contact any members of the Security Service past or present or any other related agencies or organisations."

"All clear so far" the Commander replied.

"Any attempt at communicating with anyone other than myself will result in Tracy's immediate death" the caller continued "Further, any failure to comply with the instructions you receive from me within the set time limits where applicable will also result in her immediate death."

"Anything else?"

"You are to only use public transport" the caller continued "At no time will you deviate from the route specified by me and if I so much as see another member of the Security Service lurking in your vicinity, the phone call will be made and Tracy will be dead with a few seconds."

"You fail to take into account one key factor" the Commander responded with calm but distinct menace "You harm her and I'll personally break your neck."

"You are welcome to try" the caller calmly responded with cool defiance "However you may find that a little difficult as I have every single communications channel, telephone and CCTV link in the city available at my disposal so I and my associates as well as my sponsors will be able to follow both yours and everyone else's moves very carefully."

"All right" the Commander replied "You have made your point, quit the waffle and lets get on with it shall we?"

"Take a trip to Marylebone Station" the caller suggested "When you pass go, collect two hundred pounds."

"Then what?" the Commander asked.

"We'll talk again" the caller confirmed as if he was looking forward to this little game he was setting in motion.

"Tell me" the Commander asked "Do I get to meet you face to face at some point?"

"Oh yes" the caller responded with delightful anticipation readily apparent in his voice "I am looking forward to a nice little chat. Until later" whereupon he hung up.

The Commander looked at the telephone handset for a few moments before returning it to the hook carefully as he thought through his best course of action. If the caller who called himself Trident was not bluffing, he was going to have to be extremely careful about how he went about this.

At least the Commander still had a gun with him and at this point he checked to ensure it was loaded before looking around in time to see Eade leading the Bomb Squad onto the platform.

"The big bang boys just arrived Sir" Eade confirmed as he joined the Commander by the telephones.

"Great" the Commander responded "Get them on the job and report to me anything they find, I have some other business to attend to so if you don't mind taking charge of things here?"

"Not a problem Sir" Eade confirmed.

"Thanks" the Commander responded as he turned to leave "I'll see you later hopefully."

"That was odd" the Bomb Squad Chief commented to Eade as they both watched the Commander walk away up the platform towards the east end and then disappear down the spiral staircase that led down to the Piccadilly Line platforms of Earl's Court Station.

"Odd in what way?" Eade asked.

"He just seems oddly distracted which is just not like him" the Bomb Squad Chief remarked.

"He was on the telephone just now" Eade commented as he looked across at the public payphone that the Commander had been using a few minutes earlier "Excuse me a minute" Eade cut in as he stepped across to the telephone and picked up the receiver "I am just going to check a theory."

As he descended down the spiral staircase that led down to the Piccadilly Line, the Commander looked around to check that there was no CCTV cameras observing him before pausing momentarily to remove from his pocket a mobile telephone.

Unusually given his lack of ability for such items of modern technology, he managed to switch it on and speed dialled a number that was simply identified in the directory on the small screen with a letter 'X'. After letting it ring three times, the Commander disconnected the call, returned the telephone to his pocket and continued down into the depths of the station.

Many miles away in Fuller and Jennifer's new house, Fuller was trying to paper the ceiling in the hallway unsuccessfully as more plaster came down than paper was going up. Eventually he decided to give up and let the paper, now with half the ceiling plaster attached, fall to the floor in a crumpled heap.

"Stuff this" Fuller remarked as he climbed down from his ladder and decided to head for the kitchen "Darling" he called out to Jennifer who was trying to retiling the bathroom upstairs "I'm going to put the kettle on!"

"Bloody good idea!" Jennifer agreed as she laid down the tile she was trying to attach to a wall that was patently not flat and after climbing out of the bath tub, headed downstairs to join her fiancé.

As she was heading to the kitchen, she paused in the hallway when she became aware of a beeping alarm type noise coming from the computer set up in the study. Briefly she looked inside the study before continuing to the kitchen where Fuller was just finishing making the coffee for them both.

"Your computer is bleeping dear" Jennifer informed Fuller as she came in and gratefully accepted the mug of coffee from him.

"Probably another half dozen e-mails from the National Bank of Nigeria again" Fuller wryly commented as he took his mug of coffee and with Jennifer they went to the study to investigate.

"I don't think so" Jennifer remarked as they sat down in front of the screen which was displaying in the top right corner of the standard Windows desktop, a flashing rotating 'X' icon.

"Hello" Fuller commented as he double clicked on the icon which stopped the beeping noise and produced a high security password log on screen "Looks like life just got really interesting."

"What is it?" Jennifer asked.

"It's the old X-Ray Division emergency call system" Fuller explained "You remember when we got rid of that dodgy Omega Committee lot a year or two back?"

"Oh yes" Jennifer recalled the events Fuller mentioned "This is like some sort of emergency help call I take it?"

"Basically yes" Fuller confirmed "The question is who from and why?"

After logging into the secure system, Fuller accessed a communications log and raised a surprised eyebrow at what was revealed on the screen.

"It's the Commander" Fuller confirmed "Emergency beacon call from his mobile which at the time three minutes ago was located at..." he pressed a few more buttons to confirm the details "Earl's Court Underground Station."

"What's he doing there?" Jennifer asked.

"Probably wading in where Angels fear to tread as usual" Fuller remarked with a wry grin "We need to go into town."

"Why do I get the feeling our week off just got cancelled?" Jennifer remarked with amusement.

"Postponed my love" Fuller responded as he got up and with Jennifer, headed for the hall "Merely postponed."

"And there was set wheels in motion" Renquist announced as he put the telephone down and sat back behind the large desk before turning to Garforth who entered the room at that moment "Are the shadows in position?" he asked.

"They are" Garforth confirmed "Four watching Caverner and with our technical wizard downstairs monitoring the electronic airwaves and the Commander's movements, I think it is fairly safe to say this is all nicely wrapped up."

"Excellent" Renquist responded "Let the games begin."

At Piccadilly Circus, the Commander alighted from the eastbound Piccadilly Line service and looked around concerned to see if anyone was watching him.

With the plethora of CCTV and other equipment that was constantly observing the populace of city, it was safe to say that anyone with the advanced technical knowledge, the equipment and the financial backing would be watching, a factor that the Commander was both dreading and in a different light depending upon.

Proceeding through the station at a discreet walking pace as he merged with the crowds of passengers who were changing trains in the late afternoon pre rush hour surge, the Commander made his way to the northbound Bakerloo Line platforms where with a four minute wait for the next train, he strolled towards the empty far end of the platform which curved around the corner to the open section where the opposite platform was visible for a short length.

Up the top of a ladder at the very far end of the platform, the Commander noticed a day glow jacketed engineer who was working on the CCTV camera, apparently undertaking repairs to the unit. As he approached, the engineer clambered down the ladder and turned around.

"Fancy meeting you here Sir" the familiar face of Commander Cassini, the Chief of the Specialist Undercover Surveillance Section announced as he casually tossed the camera unit into the corner of the platform.

"Subtle" the Commander remarked as he shook Cassini by the hand "You are picking up my bad habits."

"A combination of Eade's intuition, your message and Commander Fuller's organisation" Cassini explained "A little something from us" he handed across a small envelope to the Commander.

"Ah" the Commander responded as he extracted a small ear piece device from the envelope "I was hoping someone would take the hint."

"Fuller is on his way to the usual location now" Cassini confirmed, having to raise his voice a bit over the sound of a train arriving across the point work into the opposite platform "He will call you over that thing when he is in position."

"Terrific" the Commander responded as he put it in his ear "One important message needs to get back to him though."

"I'll pass it on" Cassini confirmed.

"Under no circumstances is Tracy to know where I am or that anything is going on" the Commander warned sternly "Also no one outside of the inner circle is to be made

aware of any of this until the time is right with the exception of Sir Richard Crowthorne."

"I'll have him notified by the back channels" Cassini confirmed "I take it we keep this off the regular means of communication?"

"Exactly" the Commander responded as the next northbound Bakerloo Line service approached the platform "If you will excuse me, I have a train to catch."

"Good luck Sir" Cassini responded as the six car train of 1972 type tube stock pulled to a halt at the platform alongside them.

"Don't forget to put that camera back up when you have finished" the Commander advised Cassini with a wry grin as he approached the front most door of the nearest car "The line manager will go nuts if he finds out."

Cassini observed from by his ladder as the train doors closed once the Commander and other passengers were on board before it departed across the point work and away.

"This is Bank" the automated platform announcement rang out across the westbound Central Line platform as the eight car train of 1992 tube stock pulled to halt and the doors opened "Change here for the Northern, Circle, District and Waterloo and City Lines and the Docklands Light Railway."

None of these change options were valid for Fuller and Jennifer as they alighted from the train and headed for the platform exit whilst behind them the train closed its doors and departed as speedily as it had arrived.

"I do hope you know what you are doing love" Jennifer remarked as they walked arm in arm through the station complex and down to the subway section that connected Bank to the Monument section of the station.

"Well if I don't" Fuller had to admit "You will be the first to know."

A five minute walk soon saw them head back up to the surface by way of the Monument Station section and then exit out onto King William Street. Heading south towards London Bridge brought them to Monument Street and the small maintenance access doorway set into the ground floor of the modern office building that dominated the site to the right of the Monument itself.

Inside, Fuller switched on the light to reveal a narrow corridor with electronic equipment lining either side and a lattice gate guarding a small old style wooden lift at the far end.

"Here we go again" Jennifer remarked as they got in the lift and closed the gate, whereupon Fuller operated the ancient metal handle that started the lift machinery.

"Going down" Fuller announced with a wry smile "Basement only."

A minute later they were at the lower level which was the converted former platform area of the long since closed King William Street station, now home to a specialist control centre and office accommodation used for more specialist operations such as the events that were now apparently unfolding.

"Can you remember how to operate all this stuff?" Jennifer asked as they entered the specialist communications and computer centre with its bank of screens and computer keyboards.

"Of course I can" Fuller responded with a wry smile as he pulled on two large power switches which activated the equipment "I designed most of it."

"Ok then" Jennifer remarked as she took a seat alongside her fiancé "So what's first then?"

"First we need to find where our beloved leader is" Fuller announced as he stretched his fingers before commencing work on the keyboard in front of him "Then we have to hope that Cassini got the ear piece to him."

"Sounds like the beginnings of a plan to me" Jennifer agreed "I'll go and put the kettle on."

"X-Ray Five from X-Ray Control" Fuller called over the radio head set "Location and status please."

"Well" Cassini responded over his hidden radio as, parked outside the Regent's Street entrance to Piccadilly Circus Station, he casually tossed the CCTV camera unit into the back with a loud crash "I'm thirty five, married with two kids and standing outside Piccadilly Circus" he joked.

"Oh very good" Fuller chuckled "And our beloved leader?" he asked.

"Safely on his way up the Bakerloo Line about five minutes ago" Cassini confirmed as he got in the front of the van where he joined a colleague from his Undercover Surveillance Section "He has the ear piece device but you won't be able to use it until he hits ground level somewhere."

"At least we are making some progress I suppose" Fuller remarked "Any messages from him."

"Only that Tracy is not to know anything whatsoever about this little soiree" Cassini confirmed "Which in my book means she is somehow involved and probably not in a nice way."

"Roger that" Fuller confirmed.

"Listen" Cassini responded "I can have my lads and lasses flood the Underground System like rats if you want."

"Let's not do anything too hasty for the moment" Fuller replied "We still don't know exactly what or who we are dealing with yet but have you good folk on standby though, I have a feeling we may need them sooner or later."

"Confirmed" Cassini responded "You know the number, X-Ray Five out."

"Hello love...." Tracy's voice trailed off as she entered the Commander's office only to suddenly find it empty and abandoned "Now where the hell have you got to?" she wondered to herself as she looked around before turning and leaving the office again.

Outside the office, Tracy immediately bumped into the PA who was on her way back from the photocopier for the umpteenth time that day.

"Oh, good afternoon Maam" Janis the PA responded, clearly slightly surprised to bump into Tracy like that.

"Hello" Tracy cheerfully replied "You don't happen to know where that mad husband of mine has got to do you?"

"I haven't seen him since he left for Hammersmith this morning" Janis admitted "Although I did think he would be back by now."

"That's the odd thing" Tracy explained "No one seems to have heard from him since just after lunch time at Earl's Court and he hasn't called me at all which is odd."

"Well if he does surface" Janis admitted "I'll get him to call you."

"Thanks" Tracy responded "Bye."

"Is there anybody there said the traveller knocking on the moonlit door...." the Commander quietly commented to himself as he reached the top of the escalator at Marylebone Underground Station.

"Reading you loud and clear boss" Fuller responded "We got Cassini's message, Tracy is being treated like a mushroom as per instructions and I am all ears. What's occurring?"

"Listen carefully" the Commander spoke discreetly "Today's little explosive demonstrations at the radio transmission control and Earl's Court Station were undertaken by and on behalf of some gentleman calling himself Trident."

"Terrorist group or lone nutter?" Fuller asked.

"I got the impression on the telephone he was the co-ordinator of a bunch of variously talented merry men" the Commander responded "I am under instruction to follow his

directions to the letter as he leads me on a merry dance across the city and not to communicate with anyone."

"Ooops..." Fuller remarked aside.

"I think he is expecting this little subtle conference" the Commander reassured him "Indeed I would not be surprised if he was depending on it in some way."

"And if you fail to comply with this Trident character?" Fuller asked.

"Then one of the various characters he has got shadowing Tracy will kill her on his word" the Commander grimly confirmed as he reached the exit from the Underground station out onto the concourse of Marylebone Main Line Station "He was keen to stress that he has hired the best infiltration, intercept and sniper experts money can buy."

"I'll check around" Fuller responded "See what talent for hire is in town and who is signing their paycheques."

"Also be aware that this guy is claiming he is monitoring all of our channels, CCTV, etc" the Commander added "That means he must be employing the equivalent of you so ask around and see who is active."

"A few names spring to mind as possibilities" Fuller responded "Anyway, where are you going now?"

"Well this guy said to go to Marylebone Station and here I am" the Commander responded "I guess we shall wait and see."

"We'll keep listening" Fuller responded.

"Duty office, Hammersmith" the officer on the front desk responded when the telephone rang, expecting it to be some member of the public reporting a lost dog, he was slightly taken aback with surprise to hear Tracy's voice on the telephone.

"The Administrator General was down your way this morning" Tracy enquired "I don't suppose you know where he has got to do you?"

"Commander Eade reported that he left Earl's Court Station in a bit of a mysterious hurry after that firework incident this morning" the officer responded "We assumed he had headed back to the Yard."

"Have your boys and girls down that way keep an eye out for him" Tracy requested "If he is seen, let me know."

After hanging up, Tracy paused for a moment's thought, looking around the Commander's office in search for answers and inspiration.

"I wonder" Tracy mused as she reached for the telephone again and began to dial but after letting it ring for the best part of two minutes without an answer, she decided to leave and pursue her enquiries elsewhere.

"If he turns up" Tracy instructed the PA outside the office as she left "Be a dear and let me know."

"Yes Maam" the PA confirmed cheerfully in that way all Personal Assistants always respond with as Tracy left.

"Thank you" Sir Richard Crowthorne announced as he entered the control room area at King William Street causing Fuller and Jennifer to turn around and look.

"Thank you for what?" Fuller asked out of curiosity.

"For getting me out of that God awful Joint Security Chief's meeting" Sir Richard explained as he took a seat with them at the console "What did I miss?"

"The Commander is on a mystery tour courtesy of some loon calling himself Trident" Fuller explained "At the moment" he indicated the red dot on the screen on the map of the area around Marylebone Station "he is right there and looks like he is about to head off somewhere."

"Will Inspector Sands please report to the Left Luggage office" the tannoy announced across the concourse of Marylebone Station which caused the Commander to look up from the cup of tea he was drinking.

The automated announcement, a standard tool used by the Security Services and Transport Authorities to summon assistance to a specific location without necessarily causing any panic amongst the public, echoed through the station again, so the Commander looked around in search of the destination indicated.

"Afternoon" the Commander called to the supervisor behind the counter as he entered the Left Luggage Office "Something occurring?"

"Oh hello Sir" the supervisor responded "Someone left this for you" he passed across a black briefcase with combination locks.

"Thank you" the Commander responded as he took the case "I don't suppose you saw who left this by any chance?" he asked out of hope.

"Afraid not Sir" the supervisor replied "Not on my shift."

"Worth a try I suppose" the Commander remarked with a smile "Be seeing you."

The Commander duly took the case and headed out to the concourse where he took a seat and looked over the briefcase in an attempt to open it, however it was quickly

apparent that the combination lock was not pre set to the correct number to actually get into it.

"All right then" the Commander remarked to the listening Fuller "I have here one black briefcase, two catches each with three digit combination locks, any ideas what the number might be?"

"Try two, zero, zero" Fuller suggested.

"How the hell did you know that?" the Commander asked as he set both catch combinations to two hundred and with a push of the buttons, both catches duly released.

"When you pass Go, collect two hundred pounds" Fuller explained "Quite logical when you think about it."

"No signs of any explosive devices" the Commander remarked "Just a mobile telephone and a file containing some what look like quiz clues."

"Sounds like you are about to be sent on a little merry go round" Fuller remarked.

"My thoughts exactly" the Commander agreed only to be interrupted as the telephone rang "Here we go" he announced as he answered it "Hello?"

"Good afternoon Commander" the caller announced politely "I can safely assume you found the briefcase?"

"I got it" the Commander confirmed "What is all this in aid of?" he asked.

"All in the fullness of time my friend" the caller responded "In the file you will see a series of curious statements, the answer to each one is a location and when you travel to these locations in the order specified. Along the way you will find a number of challenges waiting for you providing you use your common sense and those years of expertise in detection."

"Can I safely assume there is a penalty for non compliance?" the Commander asked.

"Correct" the caller confirmed "Even as we speak I can tell you that my associates have your good lady wife under close surveillance and she is currently making a cup of tea."

"Tell me" the Commander asked before hanging up "What lies at the end of this particularly peculiar rainbow?"

"Absolution, a little revelation or two and a bit of good old fashioned skulduggery" the caller responded with a wry laugh "Have a pleasant journey."

"Strange fellow" the Commander remarked as he put the telephone into his inside tunic pocket "Fuller, did you get all that."

"We got it" Fuller confirmed "What is the first clue?" he asked.

"Gerald Raffety" the Commander read from the list "That seems like a nice easy one to start off with so I'll get going."

"And in the meantime?" Fuller asked.

"Ask around our usual friends with regards to hired guns, specifically those with close undercover operation experience" the Commander responded as he got up and headed back towards the Underground Station entrance across the concourse "I am willing to bet this chap has hired top class talent from overseas so see who is around and active on the radar at the moment, then you just follow the money."

"I'm on it" Fuller confirmed "Whilst I am about it, I will pull out the list of anyone you upset over the last ten years and see if anyone's name is in the wrong place."

"That could be a pretty long list" the Commander remarked with a knowledgeable smirk

It was one of those annoying early spring like downpours that was soaking the centre of the City just in time for the early evening rush.

In amidst the sea of umbrellas and unnoticed amongst the commuters trying to head home as fast as possible without getting wet was Sir Richard Crowthorne, however for him going home was far from his mind as he had more pressing business to attend to.

"Tooting Broadway is closed due to flooding" the station announcer called over the tannoy as Sir Richard exited Vauxhall station, darting out into the rain beneath a black umbrella.

He made quick work of crossing the road towards the imposing building of his overseas intelligence counterparts at MI6. Inside the reception area, passing the two large heavily built security guards he approached the huge marble reception desk behind which was sat a very small secretary.

"Good afternoon" Sir Richard announced his presence and passed across his card identifying his position "Could I have a word with Sir Edward Stevens please."

"Just one moment Sir" the receptionist responded as she reached for the telephone. After a few moments she was answered "Sir Richard Crowthorne to see Sir Edward?" she enquired.

The receptionist paused a few moments as a response was relayed from somewhere deep inside the building before she hung up and turned to Sir Richard.

"He will be down in a few moments" the receptionist confirmed "Would you care to take a seat?"

"Thank you" Sir Richard responded and left the desk to sit down on one of the plush chairs in the reception area.

As he sat down, he took the opportunity to look all around and admire the building which by its opulence clearly signified that they had a much better budget than the rather meagre allocation the Treasury allocated to his own department.

A ping from the nearby elevator heralded the arrival of Sir Edward, Sir Richard's opposite number in MI6 who greeted him warmly.

"Hello old friend" Sir Edward announced as he reached Sir Richard who stood up and shook hands "This is an expected pleasure."

"Expected pleasure?" Sir Richard remarked "An interesting turn of phrase."

"When the Commander starts wandering around Central London off the grid with certain colleagues of his retiring to old Underground Stations in support" Sir Edward responded "lets just say we sit up and take notice."

"Small world isn't it?" Sir Richard remarked "Somewhere we can talk?"

"Yeah sure" Sir Edward responded "Come through here" he showed Sir Richard into a side room.

"From what I can gather from the information passed to me by Mr Fuller" Sir Richard explained "Apparently Tracy Caverner is being followed around by at least three covert undercover sniper experts of some description."

"Nasty" Sir Edward agreed "Can I assume here you are hoping that I might have an idea who they might be?"

"Basically yes" Sir Richard confirmed "The theory is that whoever is behind this is using overseas talent so basically I was wondering who was active on the local guns for hire scene at the moment."

"Sounds like a job for section H" Sir Edward concluded after a brief moment of thought "Let me take you deeper within this place."

"How soon can you get here?" Fuller asked over the telephone "Great, yes its the same place as last time. See you later."

"Who was that?" Jennifer asked as she came back into the Control Room with two mugs of coffee, one of which she passed to him.

"I am summoning the reinforcements" Fuller explained "In this case Commander Baker."

"That girl with the large sniper rifle and the Olympic shooting medal?" Jennifer responded.

"That's the one" Fuller confirmed "If Tracy is being followed around by the best in the business then I want someone even better keeping an eye on them."

"Evening my dears" Sir Richard announced as he arrived in the room "How are we doing?"

"The Commander is currently heading south from Baker Street via Kings Cross to the 'Gateway to the South' that is sunny Balham" Fuller confirmed as he pointed at a large red dot on the screen that was making its way steadily south along the route of the Northern Line "and so far no major surprises have been encountered."

"Our friends at MI6 gave me some information on who may be on the guest list at this little shindig" Sir Richard retrieved a couple of files from his briefcase "Have a butchers at this little collection of unpleasant people."

"That is one ugly dude" Jennifer commented as she opened the first file and read the contents including the terrible picture of its subject "Edwardo Bulgari."

"Hired gun originally from Brazil" Sir Richard provided the commentary "Does high quality target tracking and elimination work for anyone with a large enough pocket book. Last heard of in Germany about three weeks ago dispensing with the services of a member of the Mafia so naturally he decided not to hang about."

"Sensible boy" Jennifer remarked "This guy rings a bell though" she commented as she opened the second file.

"Jean-Claude Demoi" Sir Richard continued "You would be correct, he shot dead that ambassador's aide in Rome a couple of years back. Not heard of much since but has occasionally popped up in such charming holiday spots as Beirut and North Korea."

"No picture on this guy" Fuller remarked as he picked up and opened the third file.

"Numerous names, none of them his original" Sir Richard explained "No one knows who he really is but reports are that he is very good at what he does."

"How much do these guys charge for their dubious services?" Jennifer asked out of interest.

"Average going rate for a good quality operative these days is two thousand a day plus expenses" Sir Richard responded "Maybe I am in the wrong business."

"That narrows down the field of possible organisers for this little show" Fuller remarked "The number of people on the list of people that the Commander has managed to annoy over the years is a little bit on the long side" he demonstrated his point by dropping a huge pile of continuous print out paper onto the table "however not many have the necessary power, money and influence."

"My top three would be that weird cow that tried to burgle the British Museum a few years back, the Vladisov family and probably that conniving scheming file carrying bastard Renquist" Jennifer responded.

"All three of which are in theory in high security prisons but I will double check as I know what the Prison Service is like on a bad day" Fuller responded "If you will excuse me" he departed for the adjacent Control Room to do some checking.

"Oh by the way" Sir Richard informed Jennifer "Your twin sister is wandering around town and getting suspicious that something is going on."

"She will just have to remain in the dark for the moment" Jennifer admitted with a sigh of resignation "We cannot risk anything at the moment."

"Balham" the Commander announced to himself as he looked around the southbound Northern Line platform "Gateway to the South."

With a resigned step, he walked up the green and white tiled platform towards the exit but he had only just reached it when the fire alarm began to sound throughout the station.

"Now what?" the Commander wondered as he quickened his pace to the escalators and up to the booking hall where in amongst the confused looking passengers who were being ushered towards the exit, was a rather worried looking Station Supervisor.

"Evening" the Commander called as he joined him amidst the crowds "What's all this about then?"

"You tell me mate" the Station Supervisor responded with a shrug of the shoulders "We just got a call from the Line Manager saying sound the fire alarm two minutes after a particular southbound service came in, then evacuate the station."

"And I just happen to arrive on that very train" the Commander added with a not entirely unsurprised tone in his voice "What an amazing coincidence."

"Looks like everyone is out" one of the station staff called to the supervisor as the last passenger was ushered out of the exit and the gates drawn across to seal the doors.

"You lot stay here" the Commander instructed as he retrieved his service issue handgun from his belt holster and checked it "I'll take a look around and see what is occurring."

"Evening Sir" Fuller called over the radio ear piece "What's going on?"

"There is something rotten in the state of Balham" the Commander remarked wryly as with a little apprehension, he headed back down the escalators to the platform level and looked around. As he was standing at the northbound platform however, he was

surprised to see a short four car train of traditionally red painted 1938 design Tube Stock arrive on the platform and come to a halt in front of him.

"It would appear that someone has sent a car for me" the Commander remarked with an eyebrow raised in surprise as he looked at the train "Simon, see if you can find out who is going around borrowing London Transport's museum stock."

"Will do" Fuller confirmed over the radio "I have to check on a few old friends first though so Jennifer will be seeing you through the evening."

"Is Tracy all right?" the Commander asked as the doors of the train opened and the driver appeared from the front cab.

"I think she is beginning to smell a rat" Fuller confirmed "Keeping her in the dark for any longer may prove to be a bit tricky."

"Better get aboard Sir" the driver motioned towards the train.

"You know what any of this is about?" the Commander asked.

"Afraid not Sir" the driver confirmed "I just drive the train where I am told."

"Ok then" the Commander remarked as he boarded the train and the driver returned to the front.

Finding the immaculately restored original late 1940's interior of the tube train car empty, the Commander returned to his covert conversation with Fuller.

"Listen" the Commander called with insistence "If this turns out bad which is what I am fearing, tell Tracy I will always love her please?" he asked sincerely.

"Will do" Fuller responded only for the communication to be abruptly cut short as the train entered the running tunnel, severing the transmission signal.

The Commander sat down in one of the seats but quickly rose to his feet again with his gun drawn when he heard the communicating door from the car behind him open. However his stance of defence soon changed to one of slight surprise when he saw James Garforth enter the car.

"Hello old friend" Garforth announced as he closed the communicating door behind him and walked down the car to join the Commander who in turn lowered and then re-holstered his gun.

"I heard you were in town" the Commander remarked as they slightly tentatively shook hands before both sitting down "Is this business or pleasure."

"Well that is the slightly complicated bit" Garforth responded "You see the guy who has spent most of today sending you on a merry dance has rounded up pretty much everyone you ever went up against that is still breathing."

"Including by some strange irony yourself" the Commander added "I suppose this employer of yours is unaware you are a good guy these days?"

"Exactly" Garforth confirmed "And it would be a great pity if we were to let him think otherwise don't you think?"

"Absolutely" the Commander agreed with a smirk "So what talents are you bringing to this little party and for that matter who is behind all this?"

"Frederick J Renquist the third" Garforth announced "On of the most slimy conniving bastards I have ever met and believe me I have met quite a few in my time so that is saying something."

"He was towards the top of my list of suspects" the Commander admitted "Fond of using information as his prime weapon. Last I heard of he was safely ensconced in jail."

"You may want to check your facts on that" Garforth admitted "He has friends who arranged for him to go on a compassionate leave yesterday from Ford Open Prison to see his sick mother."

"How sick is his mother?" the Commander asked out of curiosity.

"She's been dead for twelve years" Garforth responded "That I would say is pretty sick."

"Indeed" the Commander agreed before looking around the immaculately restored original interior of the tube train carriage "This your idea?"

"My primary task at the moment as set by our friend Mr Renquist is to lead you a merry dance around the City until such a time as he is ready for you" Garforth explained "I arranged this little meeting on board something a bit more appropriate as I thought you might appreciate it."

"Very nice" the Commander agreed "And when Renquist has finished sending me here, there and everywhere?"

"He has some other agenda on the go" Garforth admitted "The particularly efficient hired guns he has brought in are positioned all over the City not only watching your lady but also a number of other targets, unfortunately he is keeping his cards very close to his chest so I don't know who."

"Terrific" the Commander remarked as the train passed slowly through Clapham Common station "What the hell is he up to?" he asked generally.

"I get the impression he has a whole container load of axes in need of grinding and is fully intent on getting them firmly sharpened and wielded before this is over" Garforth responded.

"Doesn't surprise me" the Commander admitted "When he was arrested and slung in jail he suddenly found that all his influential friends in the establishment, Government and Civil Service all suddenly seemed to be in complete denial of his very existence."

"No wonder he is miffed" Garforth commented "To put it mildly."

"Where are we going?" the Commander asked as the train continued its slow journey northwards.

"Bank is your next stop" Garforth confirmed "Then its clue number nine in your list there" he nodded down to the brief case which the Commander was still carrying around."

"No fish today here" the Commander read from the list.

"Oh come on, you should get that one" Garforth remarked with a wry smile.

"St John's Wood" the Commander realised after a short pause for thought "It is the only station on the Underground network that does not contain any letters from the word Mackerel."

"Very good" Garforth confirmed as the train began to slow for its unusual scheduled stop at Bank Station where the passengers on the platform were clearly surprised by the arrival of this elderly vintage stock in the midst of the evening peak instead of the more usual 1995 type tube stock.

"I guess this is my stop" the Commander remarked as he got up "Are we going to meet again later?" he asked.

"I should think so yes" Garforth responded as they headed towards the front of the train so they could alight from the drivers cab "If not, I'll make sure I look you up before I leave."

"Hello darling!" Tracy called as she came in through the front door of the apartment where she and her husband occasionally managed to return to when work allowed, only to be confronted by silence.

"Are you here?" Tracy called again as she looked around but it was quickly apparent she was alone and the Commander had not returned. With a sigh of resignation, Tracy chucked her uniform tunic and gun holster onto the hall table and went through to the kitchen where she was greeted by the grumpy old tabby cat who was poignantly sitting by her bowl demanding her supper.

"I don't suppose you have seen the old man have you?" Tracy asked the cat as she bent down and served her her supper before stroking her "No, I guess not."

Tracy decided to switch the kettle on instead and as she looked at it waiting for it to boil, she thought back through the day to see if there had been any clue she may have overlooked as to where he might be.

It was then that a thought occurred to her and she reached across for the telephone and after looking it up, dialled the number for Jennifer and Fuller's new home. In theory they should be at home redecorating if what she had been told earlier in the week was correct.

She let it ring for the best part of a minute with no answer before hanging up and then looking back down at the cat as if in search of inspiration. The cat however merely responded by finishing her tea and wandering back to her sofa.

Heading back into the hallway, Tracy grabbed her radio and switched it on whereupon various transmissions were heard from it which indicated that the radio system was at last back up and running.

"Lima Mike One to Control" Tracy called over the radio.

"Control, go ahead" came the response.

"When did the radios come back on?" Tracy asked.

"About twenty minutes ago" the Control Room officer responded "The engineers report that it is being held together with duct tape and prayer though."

"Any word from the Chief?" Tracy asked.

"Nothing since lunch time" the officer confirmed "And Gladys next to me has been putting out calls for him every five minutes since we went back on the air."

"All right" Tracy responded "As soon as you hear anything I want to know."

"Yes Maam."

Tracy clipped the radio to her belt and went back into the kitchen just as the kettle boiled and switched off whereupon she poured the water into a mug before realising she had forgotten to put any coffee in it first.

"Pull yourself together" Tracy remarked to herself with a determined tone.

"Evening" the Commander responded as the mobile telephone with which he had been supplied in the briefcase rang and he answered it.

"Good evening Commander" the voice of the caller announced "Are you enjoying your little tour of the City?"

"Well this place is not too bad" the Commander was forced to admit as he looked around the booking hall of St John's Wood station which retained its original albeit restored period 1930's art deco features "A touch of class here."

"Well this" the caller responded "is where it gets complicated."

"I just knew you were going to say that" the Commander remarked.

"Your next destination is Regent's Park" the caller informed him "And as you are no doubt aware it is currently closed for rebuilding of the lifts."

"All trains are non-stopping through there" the Commander remarked.

"I am sure you will find a way" the caller responded "and if you want to keep Tracy alive you will need to find that way very soon."

"Any particular reason just out of curiosity?" the Commander asked.

"By now I am certain that your withdrawal from general circulation has attracted the interest and attentions of not only your colleagues but also that of shall we say, other interested organisations" the caller explained "I already know you had an earpiece until my associate confiscated it."

"That obvious was it?" the Commander asked.

"In your position I would have expected the same" the caller confirmed "Your diversion via Regents Park will however ensure that anyone still following you around that is not authorised by myself will be thrown off the scent and sent spiralling south down the Bakerloo Line."

"A fate second only to be stranded in East Croydon I would have thought" the Commander remarked.

"Indeed" the caller was forced to agree with a low chuckle "Maybe you and I are more alike than you care to think."

"I had better get going" the Commander remarked "We are approaching the time of last trains and I don't want to miss it I think."

"Until later then" the caller responded politely before hanging up.

"Here we go again" the Commander remarked as he turned around smartly on his heels and headed back down the escalators to the platform level where a southbound Jubilee Line train was just arriving onto which he quickly boarded.

Some miles away, Renquist relaxed back in his chair and turned to Barkov and Garforth who were both sat on the other side of the office enjoying a drink of scotch.

"Your turn gentlemen" Renquist announced "Mr Garforth, go and get him and Comrade Barkov, it is time for you to bring your unique talents to this little party."

"Let the fun begin" Barkov announced with enthusiasm as he finished off his drink with a flourish and got up.

"Indeed" Garforth agreed as he duly followed.

The only noise in the front living room of Tracy and the Commander's apartment was the ticking of an old grandfather clock and the cat purring contently on the sofa.

Tracy was reading a book and trying to relax but it was not working. She looked up at the picture of herself and the Commander on the mantelpiece in its antique silver frame and a feeling of fear for his safety came over her.

"Right" Tracy announced which caused the cat to look up "I am going to find out exactly what the hell is going on around here."

The cat merely looked up as though to say anything was fine with her as long as it did not disturb her busy routine of sleeping and eating as Tracy got up from the sofa and went out to the hallway.

There she grabbed her uniform tunic, gun holster and keys before heading out of the door with clear determined purpose.

On the opposite side of the road from the apartment block where Tracy and the Commander lived, an observer in the shadows of the Thames river bridge watched through binoculars as he tracked Tracy walking quickly down the stairs.

"Angels from Hawk" the mysterious observer spoke discretely into a radio "Target one is leaving the nest."

Having changed trains straight across from one platform to another at Baker Street, the Commander was now travelling on a Bakerloo Line service as a passenger in the front cab.

"Are you sure about this Sir?" the driver of this, the last southbound service of the night asked as the dimmed lights of the closed Regent's Park Station appeared in the distance and grew progressively larger as they approached.

"No, but its something that has got to be done" the Commander admitted.

"Maximum speed through is five MPH but I'll try and reduce it to three" the driver confirmed as he pulled back on the power and applied the brake causing the train to slow considerably just as it reached the platform portal.

"Ok" the Commander responded as he took in a deep breath and opened the side door "Wish me luck."

As the platform appeared, the Commander jumped from the side cab door of the slow moving train and rolled onto the platform, only narrowly missing some stored scaffolding that was piled up there.

The driver gave a farewell toot on the train whistle as soon as he was sure the Commander was all right and then accelerated away into the far tunnel.

As the rumbling echo of the departing train died down, the Commander got up off the platform surface and dusted himself down before taking a look around the darkened platform with its original pattern tiled surfaces obscured by a layer of dust from the building works that were in progress there.

"Glad you made it" Garforth called as he emerged from the cross passageway and walked up to the Commander.

"We do meet in the strangest of places" the Commander admitted "I take it you are my chaperone for tonight?"

"Indeed" Garforth confirmed "Shall we?"

"After you" the Commander responded and together they walked through the stored builders material and parts of the lifts that were in the process of replacement.

"I take it we are walking all the way then?" the Commander remarked as they passed through the lift landing where the lifts were all in pieces and clearly out of service.

"Afraid so" Garforth responded as he led the way to the spiral staircase which wound its way up to the surface, only for both of them to stop suddenly not far from the bottom when they heard voices coming from above.

"They your herd?" the Commander asked.

"Not with me" Garforth confirmed with some sense of confusion "Yours?"

"No one evens knows I am here" the Commander responded.

"Well whoever they are" Garforth remarked as the voices and footsteps could be heard getting closer "They sure don't sound friendly, I suggest a tactical retreat."

"Good idea" the Commander agreed as they both headed back to the platform level and looked around for a possible alternative exit "Are you carrying?"

"Service issue revolver" Garforth produced the handgun from a shoulder holster beneath his overcoat.

"Snap" the Commander produced his own weapon "Wait a minute."

"Where are you going?" Garforth asked as the Commander started to pull at the protective hoarding guarding one of the lift portals.

"Diversionary route" the Commander explained "Have your climbing skills improved since we were kids?"

"Probably still better at heights than you ever were" Garforth remarked with a wry smile.

"Lets get out of here" the Commander responded as he managed to open the hoarding and enter the lift shaft whereupon they both looked up to the top, a scaffolding ladder strapped to the mucky insides of the cylinder being their only viable way out of there.

"After you" Garforth indicated upwards and promptly started to follow the Commander as they began to climb.

Behind them, the mysterious gunmen had arrived at the bottom of the staircase and were beginning to fan out throughout the platform level, checking carefully all around. Their voices echoed all throughout the station as they proceeded through it and in turn echoed up the lift shafts where by now, Garforth and the Commander were reaching the half way point.

"Those voices sound Russian" the Commander remarked in a whisper to Garforth just below him.

"Must be some of Barkov's thugs" Garforth remarked with concern.

"Vladisov Dimitriev Barkov?" the Commander asked.

"That's the fellow" Garforth confirmed "A right nutter in my brief experience of the guy. Somewhat over fond of the Bolshevik jungle juice as well."

"He is supposed to be in Belmarsh doing life" the Commander responded "Who the hell invited him to this little party?"

"Your old friend Renquist has managed to bribe, corrupt and generally persuade an awful lot of people to get all sorts of unpleasant types out of jail in the last fortnight" Garforth explained as they kept climbing "And all just for you."

"I'm honoured" the Commander responded with a distinct lack of enthusiasm, not to mention a lack of breath as they approached the lift doors in the shaft that exited out into the booking hall, situated just below street level.

"See anything?" Garforth asked as the Commander cautiously peered over the door ledge into the darkened booking hall only to quickly duck back down when he saw a significant number of armed men lurking in there.

"A welcoming party of the unfriendly persuasion" the Commander responded very quietly "I think you may have been rumbled."

"There goes the pension plan" Garforth remarked with a wry smile "Now what?"

"When they are looking the other way, we climb past the doorway and head towards the machine room up there" the Commander pointed upwards before looking around and finding a discarded bolt near the ledge.

Waiting for his moment, the Commander watched carefully until the men looked away for a moment. This was the moment he was waiting for and he threw the bolt through the air whereupon it clanked loudly when it hit the ground on the far side of the booking hall.

With the men distracted, the Commander and Garforth clambered past the doorway undetected but only just and were soon clambering through the machine room.

"Over there" the Commander indicated quietly after helping Garforth out of the lift shaft and onto the access landing in front of the machinery

"After you" Garforth motioned forward as he joined the Commander in drawing his gun from its holster and checking it.

Carefully, the Commander opened the latch that secured the maintenance access hatch to the machine room and looked outside at the dark centre section of Regent Crescent.

"Seems clear" he whispered back to Garforth "Come on" he encouraged as he moved slowly out.

"All right " Garforth remarked as he too exited the machine room and carefully closed the access hatch behind him "Now what?"

"Where were you supposed to take me?" the Commander asked.

"Waiting car parked in the Crescent" Garforth explained "The accompanying mad Russians with the guns were however not on the guest list as far as I was aware."

"Come on" the Commander urged "Lets make a discreet exit."

With understandable caution, they both moved out of the Crescent area and stepped out into the road, continuously looking around.

"Over there" Garforth motioned towards a dark coloured Mercedes parked nearby.

"Lets go" the Commander suggested and together they crossed the road briskly towards the car, however just as they got there, a group of armed men, darkly dressed in balaclavas appeared from the shadows and completely surrounded them and the vehicle.

"So much for that idea" the Commander remarked as he and Garforth raised their hands in surrender.

"If you will come with us please" the leader of the gunmen announced as he showed them into the back of the car whilst two of his associates got in the front.

"A lovely evening drive in the City then I take it" the Commander remarked as the back doors were firmly closed and the rest of the armed men dispersed to their own discreetly parked vehicles, melting back into the night from whence they had come.

"Pleasant dreams" the front seat passenger announced as he turned around, pointed a dart gun over the seat and shot both of the men in the back seats whereupon they immediately slumped into a state of unconsciousness.

"Hello?" Tracy called as she let herself into Fuller and Jennifer's flat. Aside from a passing woodlouse on the hall table and the flapping of a peeling piece of old 1960's style wallpaper, she was greeted with silence.

"This is getting silly" Tracy remarked to herself as she closed the front door behind her and began to look around, distinctively unimpressed at the general state of the place which was quite clearly a nightmare for any electrician let alone any other building professional who may get lumbered with this mess.

As she walked down the hallway, she did become aware of a glow of light from a side room and peering around the door pillar with curiosity, Tracy saw that the computer was still on so she decided to take a closer look at it.

"All right then" Tracy remarked to herself as she sat down at the computer "Lets see where you are shall we?"

After moving the mouse, the screen saver froze and a password box appeared forcing Tracy to think for a few moments until her eyes alighted on the picture of her twin sister attached to the side of the monitor.

Sure enough, Tracy managed to guess the password correctly first time and the frozen screen saver gave way to the system screen showing various processes in progress apparently being controlled remotely from somewhere else.

Amongst the various processes, Tracy espied one item in particular that caught her specific attention which from the change in her expression, seemed to indicate that she was beginning to understand some of what was going on.

With a determined look, Tracy got up and quickly left the house, ensuring that the door was secured as she went. Once outside, she went straight to her Security Service issue motorbike and started the engine. She paused to think for a moment about her next course of action before putting on her helmet and accelerating away.

Brian Walker was having a quiet restful evening for once, as usually as the Deputy Director of MI5 and second in command to Sir Richard Crowthorne his life was often more than hectic.

As he relaxed back in the easy chair and sipped the glass of fine wine he had selected, it seemed inevitable that the door bell would ring at that point to interrupt a perfect moment.

"You couldn't make it up" he remarked with a wry smile as he put the glass on the table and got up from the easy chair, exited the study and went to the front door.

"It's all right dear" he called to his wife who appeared from the kitchen in response to the door bell "I've got it" he confirmed as he opened the door and then looked on with a slightly surprised expression to find Tracy standing on his doorstep.

"Good evening" Tracy announced "Mind if I come in, I need to ask for one of those interdepartmental favours."

"Please" Walker responded slightly bemused as he let Tracy in and showed her into the study "Glass of wine."

"Very civilised" Tracy remarked "Thank you."

"So what can I do for you Divisional Commander?" Walker enquired as he poured her a drink and then passed her the glass.

"We'll kick off by asking where your boss Sir Richard is at this very moment?" Tracy enquired as they sat down.

"Theory version or more likely version?" Walker responded.

"Given my luck so far today" Tracy remarked "I'll take both."

"In theory he is at home" Walker replied.

"Tried that one" Tracy confirmed "His place is deserted and the maid hasn't seen him since breakfast."

"Well he came in to the office this morning and then rushed out again without saying a word" Walker confirmed "That usually signifies he is up to something."

"And my dear husband. I don't suppose you know where he is either by any chance?" Tracy asked.

"There have been some rumours going around the back channels" Walker confirmed "Nothing concrete mind, just a few whispers that he has got himself mixed up in something and has dropped off the grid."

"And I know the exact two people who will know just what is going on" Tracy confirmed.

"Have you tried asking them?" Walker asked as he offered a fresh glass of wine which Tracy accepted.

"Sir Richard was in my office this morning" Tracy remarked "Evasive doesn't even come close to describing his attitude. It was as if he was just there to read the meter."

"Never a good sign" Walker agreed "He could be out on a poker night though?"

"That's usually Thursdays" Tracy responded.

"Wish I could help" Walker responded.

"Maybe you can" Tracy thought carefully "If I gave you two names, how soon could you rustle up one of your black bag street grabbing teams to wheel them in for a little confidential chat?"

"We have a team constantly on call at the end of a telephone" Walker confirmed "Who did you have in mind?"

"Tracy?" the Commander murmured as he groggily came to.

"Careful" an almost equally groggy sounding Garforth cautioned as he helped the Commander sit up straight on the rough bed on which he had been lying unconscious since they were brought there late the previous night.

"What the hell happened?" the Commander asked as he looked around the small gloomy room that was little more than a rather opulently appointed jail cell.

"Basic version" Garforth responded "We were knocked out with a dart gun and dumped in here, as to exactly where here is though is anyone's guess."

"Not overly keen on the decor" the Commander remarked as he looked around and his eyes readjusted to the dimly lit room, the only illumination coming from a small bulkhead light on the ceiling and a few early morning rays of sunshine coming through the small barred window located high up the side of the end wall.

"Agreed" Garforth responded "Give me some nice calming pastel shades and a dado rail any day."

"What time is it?" the Commander asked as he looked at his own watch that had stopped from having hit something during his rather unusual travels of the last day or two.

"About seven I think" Garforth responded "Sun is just coming up."

"Lousy room service" the Commander commented only to be interrupted by the heavy old iron door opening with a loud creak.

"Good morning gentlemen" Renquist announced as he stepped into the cell room with two large tall heavily built minders standing just behind him to prevent any ideas about escaping or attack.

"This would be the wake up call I ordered" the Commander remarked wryly "Any chance of any breakfast in this place?"

"Of course" Renquist politely responded.

"Mind explaining to me why I am in here as well?" Garforth asked even though deep down inside he already knew the answer.

"It turns out you were not entirely honest with me" Renquist explained "Having said that, its not that surprising given your previous record."

"I told you he was a charming fellow didn't I?" the Commander remarked.

"Anyway" Renquist announced "We will make sure you can wash and freshen up, then a nice breakfast. Then we will get down to business."

"Milk and three sugars in mine" the Commander responded.

"I already know" Renquist smiled knowingly "Remember what I said the last time we met? Knowledge is power and I have a lot of it. Until later then."

With that departing remark and a gesture of farewell, Renquist turned smartly on his heels and left the cell whereupon the door was firmly closed once again behind him and locked securely.

"Charming fellow" the Commander remarked "Still going to have to break his legs at some point though."

"I'll supply the hammer" Garforth remarked.

"This is the service from London Victoria" the slightly tinny old speakers on the westbound platform at Ford station announced as the level crossing barriers lowered accompanied by a rather tired sounding warning bell before the twelve car train of Southern Class 377 Electrostar stock arrived and slowed to a halt.

Only one passenger alighted from that early morning service, the first through service of the morning from London to the Sussex coast, Fuller in his full Security Service uniform who stepped out from the sixth carriage from the front of the train that trailed across the level crossing as the station was shorter than the twelve carriages of the service.

As the train accelerated away, Fuller descended the steps, travelled through the subway beneath the tracks and up out the other side where he could consult a local map on the opposite platform.

With the level crossing gates now raised, he was able to cross the road and took ten minutes to walk the distance to the Open Prison where he knocked on the gatehouse window to attract the attention of the duty guard.

"Morning" Fuller called as he proffered his warrant card in identification "I need to see your duty Governor."

"She's not going to like this you know" the officer on duty warned with reluctance.

"My heart would bleed if it could be bothered" Fuller responded with a distinct lack of sympathy.

"Come on through" the officer responded as he released the door with a buzz allowing Fuller to enter.

He was escorted through the outer grounds of the jail to the Administration Block where he was met by the duty Governor who looked distinctively worried.

"Good morning officer" she responded in a way that indicated that it clearly wasn't.

"Morning" Fuller replied "I need to see the transfer documents on one of your prisoners."

"Come in" she ushered Fuller inside the office "The name of this individual?"

"Frederick Renquist" Fuller confirmed "Apparently not only are their questions to be answered over how he wound up being transferred here but also I would dearly like to know where he is now."

"Renquist..." the Governor pondered as she consulted her computer before going to the filing cabinet behind her and removing a file from the third drawer down.

"Here we are" she confirmed "Frederick Jonas Renquist the third, Earl of Beckenham" no less.

"That's the fella" Fuller confirmed.

"Transferred here two months ago on the request of the medical examiner" the Governor confirmed "Category reduced to a 3C and released on a compassionate pass over the weekend to see his sick mother."

"I'll say she is sick" Fuller remarked.

"I'm sorry?" the Governor enquired.

"She died twelve years ago" Fuller explained.

"Ah" the Governor realised with a suddenly worried look.

"Did he give an address by any chance?" Fuller asked more out of hope than any chance of a possible lead.

"Twenty three Leinster Gardens, Bayswater" the Governor read from the file.

"Thank you" Fuller responded as he made some notes "Did he mingle with anyone in particular whilst he was here?"

"As far as I am aware" the Governor responded "Only that old Russian guy who was taken away by the Russian Intelligence Services yesterday."

"Come again?" it was now Fuller's turn to look worried

"Barkov" the Governor read from her notebook.

"Vladisov Dimitriev Barkov?" Fuller asked with some concern now starting to creep in to his voice.

"Aye" the Governor confirmed as she rechecked the file "That's him."

"Wonderful" Fuller remarked with a distinct lack of cheer "Have you released anyone else while you were at it?"

"That's it from us" the Governor confirmed after a quick check.

"Thank you for your help" Fuller responded as he prepared to leave.

It was a walk back to the station that was full of thoughts for Fuller, indeed his train of thought was so deep he failed to notice that he was being discreetly followed by two gentlemen.

As he approached the station, Fuller paused until the level crossing barriers lifted before crossing the railway line. He paused for a moment outside the elderly station building on the up side of the line opposite the model railway shop to consult his pocket timetable for details of the next train back to London.

It was as he was thumbing through the pages that an unmarked van and two cars suddenly pulled in alongside him. Before he realised what was happening, two men had appeared from the side door of the van, grabbed Fuller, put a black bag over his head and bundled him into the back.

Within moments, the side door of the van was closed and with the two unmarked cars activating sirens and providing escort, the convoy departed at high speed as fast as it had arrived.

As the sound of the sirens died down, Tracy stepped out of the adjacent model railway shop where she had been observing the interception, smiled briefly as she looked up the road before heading to the station to catch the fast express to London that was now approaching the up platform.

"Morning" Commander Elizabeth Baker responded as she exited Kings Cross Station where she was met by Jennifer Caverner with a car to take her to King William Street.

"Hello" Jennifer greeted as she loaded her briefcase and the bag containing her specialist rifle into the back "You brought your faithful friend then?" she referred to Baker's weapon.

"Never leave home without it" Baker grinned as she got in the front passenger seat "So what is this little party about?" she asked as Jennifer joined her in the front and prepared to drive off.

"Some unpleasant party has at least three close quarters surveillance and sniper specialists watching my sister" Jennifer explained as she turned out onto the Euston Road and headed westwards "The Commander's gone AWOL, my fiancé is running this little clandestine operation and generally everything is going very surreal."

"Do we have any i.d. on these snipers?" Baker asked.

"File on the dashboard in front of you" Jennifer indicated "See if you recognise any of these fellas."

"Ah" Baker responded as she went through the file "Overseas talent."

"Just out of interest" Jennifer asked "If they wanted to hire the best sniper in this country, who would they have put a call into?"

"Me most likely" Jennifer responded with a wry grin "Trouble is I only do legal professional work."

"Well if you can find these competitors of yours" Jennifer responded "Feel free to show them some professional courtesy."

"Oh yes, I know this guy" Baker indicated one of them "He shot that Italian Justice Minister in Milan last year. Highly accurate sniper shot in a high cross wind from 300 metres."

"Sounds impressive" Jennifer remarked as the car reached the approaches to Euston Station whereupon she turned off to the right "How many are capable of that kind of shot?"

"Four that I know of" Baker confirmed "Unfortunately for our situation three of them are in this file."

"Oh dear" Jennifer agreed "And the fourth?"

"Pleased to meet you" Baker responded with a wry smile.

"Well at least something is going right for our side then" Jennifer remarked as she slowed to a stop by the vehicle pick up and drop off point at Euston Station.

"Who are we going to collect?" Baker asked out of curiosity.

"Sir Richard Crowthorne" Jennifer explained "He should be around here somewhere."

Both officers got out of the car and looked around the area where numerous people who had just arrived off the early morning services from the Midlands into Euston were milling around, however there was no sign of Sir Richard.

"Where the hell is he?" Jennifer mused.

"I've got friends in this town you know!" Sir Richard called with typically dry humour as he was shown into a dimly lit anonymous room and the door politely but firmly closed behind him.

"Morning" Fuller called from his seat in the corner of the room which was so dimly lit that Sir Richard did not even register his presence until he leaned forward and greeted him.

"Morning" Sir Richard responded "Did you get a somewhat abrupt invitation to this little soiree?"

"If you mean a group of smartly turned out balaclava dressed gentlemen and an unmarked Transit van then I would say yes" Fuller confirmed.

"Least they could do would be to offer breakfast" Sir Richard remarked but their conversation was interrupted by the opening of the door again and the appearance of one of the balaclava dressed men.

"Mr Fuller Sir" he called out "With me please."

"Polite fellow isn't he?" Sir Richard remarked.

"This had better be good" Fuller responded as he got up and went with the man who once they were outside the room, closed the door leaving Sir Richard alone.

Joined by a second escort, Fuller was taken along an anonymous corridor past a row of unmarked window less doorways to a room at the far end where he was duly shown inside and then left alone, the door being firmly closed behind him.

"Definitely a Government agency" Fuller remarked to himself as he looked around the spartan room, a single chair and a small table with a bottle of water and a plastic glass on it being the only furniture, situated in the centre of the bare interior.

"Good morning" a disguised voice boomed out from speakers set into the walls
"Please sit down" the tone being polite but firmly insistent and determined.

"I have some very powerful friends in this town" Fuller responded before realising he had no idea where he actually was "Assuming this isn't Bridlington that is" he added by way of a qualifying after thought.

"Your co-operation will be appreciated" the disguised voice boomed out "Answer all the questions truthfully and you will be freed within the hour."

"Name, rank and serial number?" Fuller asked.

"Where is the Regional Administrator General of the Security Service?" the voice demanded to know.

"Don't you know?" Fuller responded with a raised eyebrow. He had assumed that he had been taken by the same group that was responsible for the Commander's disappearance but it quickly became apparent that this was not the case.

"Where is he?" the voice asked again which despite the electronic disguising, clearly carried a rather more confused but still insistent tone.

"Last I heard of him he was heading towards Regents Park Station but that was last night" Fuller responded "He is under instructions from a loony with an axe or three to grind by the name of Renquist to run around town or else pay the penalty."

"What penalty?" the voice asked.

"Three snipers of apparently reputable quality are watching his wife Tracy with instructions to take her out if he fails to obey every instruction" Fuller continued to explain "Another condition is that under no circumstances is she to be told anything of what is going on."

"Who knows about this?" the voice asked.

"Myself, Jennifer Caverner, Sir Richard Crowthorne, Cassini and a select few others" Fuller confirmed "Oh and yourself now of course" he added, by now having a pretty good idea who was listening to this conversation.

"Thank you" the voice responded after a short pause and then abruptly switched off.

As Fuller was escorted from the room, next door Tracy looked slightly bemused at what she had heard. After a few moments of thought she got up and left, a clear purposeful stride in her step.

"Thanks for the lift!" Sir Richard remarked with irony as he and Fuller were unceremoniously dropped off by the van outside Monument Station. Barely had their feet touched the ground than the van door was firmly shut and it was speeding away.

"Yep" Fuller looked at the registration number of the speeding van and then cross referenced it with a little black notebook he produced from his inside uniform tunic pocket "MI5 special services."

"I think we can safely say that a certain lady officer of our mutual acquaintance has a fairly good idea what's going on now" Sir Richard remarked.

"Now what?" Fuller looked around as a dark coloured saloon car pulled up alongside them.

"Where the hell have you two been?" Jennifer asked after winding down the side window and seeing the slightly battered state the two men were in.

"That's a long story" Fuller remarked.

"You can say that again" Sir Richard agreed.

"Well we have no time to wonder about it now" Jennifer instructed "Get in the back."

As the two men climbed into the back of the car, the mobile telephone on the dashboard rang.

"Hello?" Jennifer called using the hands free facility as she pulled away and drove down the road.

"Jenny?" Tracy's voice called out throughout the car "It's your sister. Can we talk somewhere?"

"Yeah sure" Jennifer responded with a slight concern apparent in her voice as she was unaware of what had happened to the two men in the back at that moment "How about we meet up somewhere for breakfast?"

Baker tapped Jennifer on the shoulder and indicated she wanted to interrupt but not with Tracy overhearing.

"Hang on a minute" Jennifer called to Tracy "I am going to have to put you on hold a second, awkward traffic" she explained evasively before leaning forward and muting the telephone.

"This would be a useful opportunity for me to catch up with her and try and identify our unfriendlies" Baker suggested.

"Somewhere nice and public with a decent overlooking view then?" Jennifer suggested.

"That would be ideal, yes" Baker agreed.

"Right" Jennifer took a few moments to think during which she pulled left into Monument Street and parked right outside the King William Street entrance before returning to the call.

"Tracy?" she called "Are you still there?"

"I was when I last looked" Tracy responded wryly.

"Where are you?" Jennifer asked.

"Marble Arch" Tracy confirmed as she looked around the busy junction at the west end of Oxford Street from her vantage point on the pavement immediately outside Marble Arch Station.

"Err right" Jennifer thought for a moment as Baker passed a note to her that read 'Queensway for Hyde Park' "I tell you what" she responded "Meet me outside Queensway Station in about thirty minutes."

"All right" Tracy confirmed "But its your turn to pay."

"Roger that Sis" Jennifer agreed "See you in a bit."

"I think I should tell you at this juncture" Sir Richard reluctantly cut in after Jennifer had hung up "We think there is a very good chance that Tracy knows some if not all of what is going on."

"And how pray tell has she managed to acquire this information per chance?" Jennifer asked as she turned around to face the two men in the back seat and gave them a hard stare.

"A little incident involving some black balaclavas, an unmarked van and a high security interview room" Fuller explained slightly sheepishly.

"Sir Richard" Jennifer turned to him "That sounds like your sort of work?"

"It tends to be the specialism of my Deputy as a rule" Sir Richard admitted "Nice chap, great taste in wine but lousy poker player, which reminds me, he owes me fifty quid."

"Can I make a suggestion?" Fuller cut in.

"Go on then" Jennifer responded "This had better be good."

"Well actually from my point of view it isn't as the last thing I want is to see any harm come to you" Fuller explained.

"Go on..." Jennifer prompted although she could already sense where this one was going.

"We have one unique advantage on our side" Fuller explained "I am willing to bet that these out of town sniper guys don't know that Tracy has an identical twin and that gives me an idea."

"Swap us over" Jennifer responded "That way we can brief Tracy in full and get her in charge of working out who or what we are dealing with?"

"Exactly" Fuller confirmed "Plus we fit you with a GPS tracking device and we will always know where you as Tracy are all the time."

"Sounds like a plan to me" Baker agreed.

"Right" Jennifer agreed "Simon, sort me out with a GPS tracking unit and one of Tracy's uniforms."

"We can get that down at Holborn" Fuller confirmed.

"Commander Baker" Jennifer turned to her "Warm up that friend of yours, intercept me and Tracy at Queensway and find me at least three bad guys."

"You got it" Baker confirmed as she got out of the car and after being handed her gun case from the back seat, melted away into the pedestrian traffic as if she was never there.

"Sir Richard" Jennifer asked "Return to your office, pour yourself a large stiff drink of the best Scotch you can find and then see if you can follow the money and find our Mr Renquist."

"You can try by starting at 23 Leinster Gardens" Fuller passed the notes he had made back at Ford Open Prison to him "It's the address he gave on his compassionate leave pass."

"That's near Queensway" Sir Richard "Can I hitch a lift?"

"You know" the Commander remarked as he and Garforth were led up a narrow brick built corridor towards a destination as yet unknown "I am sure I have seen this place before."

"Can't say I have" Garforth responded "Any ideas?"

"Not yet" the Commander confirmed as they reached a doorway that led to a set of steps upwards "But I am working on it."

"Welcome!" Renquist declared as the two men emerged into the room which quickly revealed itself to be an old courtroom "It's time to find out exactly who everyone is!"

"Enthusiastic fellow" Garforth commented as he and the Commander were led into the dock which once held the accused.

"Bow Street Magistrates Court" the Commander responded as he recognised the place "As was I should add."

"Welcome to my Earl's Court" Renquist announced from the Judge's chair "I invested in this old place when they closed it down and sold it off. It's sort of my pension plan you see."

"Very nice" the Commander remarked "Been here a few times over the years."

"Ruth Ellis, the great train robbers, the Kray's" Renquist continued to announce.

"Uncle Harry played poker with them once" the Commander remarked as an aside.

"They have all sat in this famous court but now" Renquist continued to eulogise in the Commander's opinion like a lunatic who was off his medication "We have the trail of the century, the day when the mighty Commander came before a jury for crimes against the needs of the greater few."

"Did any of that make any sense to you?" Garforth asked as an aside.

"Not much" the Commander admitted with a wry smile.

"No, me neither" Garforth confirmed.

"Silence in court!" Renquist declared with a bang of his gavel "Usher, bring in the jurors."

One of Renquist's associates by the side entrance opened a door and in progressed a number of people, a fair few of which the Commander quickly recognised from past encounters.

"Oh this has just got interesting" the Commander remarked.

"May I introduce to the accused, your jury" Renquist announced.

"What, no Sharman?" Garforth remarked as he looked along the line of individuals in the jurors benches that read like a who's who f the Commander's past cases.

"He had an argument with the front of a Northern Line train at Mornington Crescent" the Commander reminded him "Oh and lost so I don't think he can make it somehow."

"Pity" Garforth responded "I owed him a punch in the mouth."

"Well there are plenty of candidates sitting over there" the Commander nodded towards the juror's bench which was certainly did not look impartial by any stretch of the imagination.

"Before we begin" Renquist continued to call out as he got up from his seat and stepped down to face the two men in the dock up close "Let us turn the courts attention first to our extra guest at these proceedings."

"I think that would be you" the Commander murmured aside to Garforth.

"Let's start by asking you sir" Renquist enquired "Please state your name and place of birth for the record."

"James Edward Garforth" he announced.

"Objection your honour" one of the flunkies in the court piped.

"Sustained...." Renquist agreed with menace as he leaned forward "Shall I fine you for contempt of court?"

"I rather you didn't" Garforth responded "I'm kind of short of cash at the moment."

"Richard Franklin Regent" Renquist declared as he read the details from a file he produced "One of two identities you have become known by as it would appear that your incarnation of James Garforth commenced when you were fifteen years old."

"Well I fancied a change" Garforth admitted as he tried to deflect Renquist unsuccessfully from the real truth.

"Of course the curious thing is that you changed your name at the exact same time that our friend the Commander here apparently was born" Renquist continued.

"Life is full of funny coincidences" Garforth remarked.

"Well we will come back to that later I think" Renquist responded "For now we must turn the court's attention to our special guest which begs a question" he turned to face the Commander directly "Who are you?"

"Divisional Commander and Regional Administrator General for the National Security, Police and Civil Defence Service in London and the South East" the Commander confirmed.

"An interesting if evasive answer" Renquist responded as he reached across to the desk and picked up an old file "Edward James Stanley Regent" he announced "Born in Lewisham, the son of Eddie Regent senior and up until the age of twelve, a remarkable record indeed not least at some of East London's unofficial poker tournaments."

"Well I don't like to boast" the Commander remarked with a wry smile "Fancy a game?"

"Maybe later" Renquist responded "But let us not get distracted as after a hell of a lot of research I became somewhat bemused when at the age of twelve, your former incarnation disappears and the gentleman we now know as the Commander who stands here before us suddenly comes into the world. Now why is that I wondered?"

"Why don't you tell me" the Commander challenged him.

"You may recall last year we had a little one to one chat you and I" Renquist reminded him "We discussed things such as my fondness for information and how

powerful it can be and how I looked you up when it became clear that we would be meeting at some point."

"It was an interesting conversation I grant you" the Commander admitted.

"Back then I thought that paper files such as these old and dusty things were the most powerful weapon of mass influence there was besides good old fashioned money" Renquist continued "But then thanks largely to your intervention, I found myself incarcerated at Her Majesty's pleasure and separated from my precious resources."

"My heart would bleed if Tracy did not already have it" the Commander remarked wryly.

"Indeed" Renquist responded "However really I should in some strange way be actually thanking you for you opened me up to the power of the Internet, the world's largest source of information."

"You're welcome" the Commander cut in.

"Admittedly the black and white facts are not there of course but when you match up coinciding dates and places, its amazing what falls into place which brings me to my next point" Renquist leaned forward as if to emphasise what was to follow "Lewisham, 1969."

"Yes..." the Commander and Garforth responded in unison.

"Diamonds" Renquist explained "You owe me a not inconsiderable sum in compensation and I do believe you have the means to pay in one way or another."

"How the hell should I know where they are?" the Commander responded.

"Because you were there when three hundred million pounds of high quality cut and uncut diamonds went walkabout one early spring afternoon and your old man was one of those on the team who lifted them" Renquist insisted.

"Well I would love to tell you where they are but unfortunately I haven't a clue" the Commander explained "What about you?" he turned to Garforth.

"Don't look at me bruv" Garforth held his hands up "I was in bed with the flu that day."

"Oh yes" the Commander recalled "So you were."

"Well maybe we can come back to that later because my compensation is just one of the things on my agenda today" Renquist returned back to the centre of the court "And believe me gentlemen it is going to be a long day."

"The next station is Queensway" the in train announcement system called throughout the carriage of the westbound Central Line service as it began to slow down.

At the sound of this announcement, Jennifer Caverner and Sir Richard Crowthorne got up from their seats in the rear most car and headed with a little reluctance towards the doors just as the dark running tunnel changed to the illuminated view of the platform as the train slowed to a stop.

Both alighted without saying a word, exiting along with a small number of other passengers onto the newly refurbished platform at Queensway with its bright modern lighting and very clean yellow wall tiling almost dazzling.

"Looks like they spent a few quid on this place" Sir Richard remarked as he and Jennifer stood on the platform and looked around whilst they waited for the passengers who had also just alighted to move off the platform and away.

"Shall we my dear?" Sir Richard asked.

"After you" Jennifer agreed as she followed him to the exit off the platform which in turn led to the lift landing where already a lift car was just arriving from the surface level.

"There is a bit of luck" Sir Richard remarked as the lights of the lift car were seen through the door windows slowing to a halt "But then again, maybe not" he added as the doors opened to reveal the lift's sole occupant, a somewhat unhappy looking Tracy who simply gave both of them a very hard stare.

"Fancy meeting you here my dear" Sir Richard remarked as he and Jennifer boarded the lift car and the doors closed behind them.

"You are a hard man to find" Tracy remarked as the lift began its ascent to the surface.

"It's been an interesting couple of days all things considered" Sir Richard was forced to admit.

"Yes" Tracy responded "So I gather through the services of two blokes, an unmarked Transit van and some direct questions.

"I thought I recognised the style" Sir Richard admitted.

"Right" Jennifer announced "This is as your husband would say, where the plot thickens, take off your tunic."

"Let me guess" Tracy responded as she unbuttoned her uniform tunic, a move mirrored by her sister "The old Caverner sister double two step?"

"Exactly" Jennifer confirmed as they swapped tunics "As of now you are me and I am you."

"You are putting on weight" Tracy remarked.

"Bullet proof vest" Jennifer explained as they both buttoned up their swapped tunics
"A little insurance policy against what may be about to happen."

"Ground floor" Sir Richard declared as the lift came to a halt at street level in the
booking hall "Domestic consumables, hardware and electrical goods."

"I do hope you are going to tell me what is going on" Tracy responded as they left the
lift car and passed through the booking hall towards the exit.

"That is the idea" Jennifer confirmed.

"If you will excuse me ladies" Sir Richard doffed his forelock like a gentleman of a
bygone era "I have a couple of doors to knock on."

"Keep in touch" Tracy insisted.

"I'll try my best" Sir Richard confirmed "Until later."

The two sisters stood on the entrance steps to Queensway Station and watched as Sir
Richard disappeared off into the distance up the road towards Bayswater before they
turned to their right and headed across the busy main road and into Hyde Park.

Up above them, observing from the top of an adjacent building with an excellent view
of the entire Park, Commander Baker watched through the powerful telescopic sight
of her rifle the two officers enter the park .

"Eagle One to Control" she called into her hands free radio "Tracy and Jennifer just
entered the park at the Queensway Gate."

"Roger that" Fuller responded from his seat in King William Street "I have the CCTV
watching them as best as I can but that place is a bloody rabbit warren, they could
have picked a better spot to meet."

"I heard that" Jennifer responded as she was in on the same channel by way of her
radio piece in her ear.

"Hello dear" Fuller replied.

"This would appear to be turning into a bit of a party" Tracy remarked as they walked
through the park "Who's selling the tickets?"

"Remember that lunatic Renquist?" Jennifer asked.

"Oh yes" Tracy recalled "The well informed nutter with the vault load of files and a
case of explosives for every occasion."

"That would be our scum bag of the week" Jennifer confirmed "He currently has the
Commander banged up somewhere and as long as he dances to Renquist's tune then

any one of at least three well trained and well paid snipers currently following you around won't shoot you."

"I had a suspicion I was being followed" Tracy remarked as she casually glanced around.

"Panic not Sis" Jennifer reassured her "Commander Baker is currently watching over us and hopes to remove said problems whenever you say."

"Does that include the two discretely positioned gentleman with the hidden automatic weapon over by the cluster of trees to the south east of you?" Baker asked over the radio.

"Not ours" Jennifer confirmed as she looked over towards where Baker had indicated "If they move in on us then remove them."

"Will do" Baker confirmed "By the way, I think I have spotted one of our sniper friends on the roof of the building at the corner of Oxford Street and Park Lane."

"From that distance?" Jennifer asked somewhat amazed.

"Oh easily" Baker responded with a wry smile as she adjusted her sight to get a closer look at the target.

"And whilst we are on the subject" Tracy added "Just how am I being tracked across this fair city?"

"My darling fiancé believes that they have some technical genius monitoring all our communications channels, CCTV, etc" Jennifer confirmed "That is except this little channel of course" she indicated her ear.

"What about the ticket barrier system?" Tracy wondered.

"Oh hell" Fuller was heard to say over the radio.

"Something wrong dear?" Jennifer asked.

"The one system I forgot to take into account in all this mess" Fuller responded "The Oyster Card ticketing system, it records every journey made by every pass on every bus, tube and train in the entire City in nauseating detail."

"That would include I assume the Oyster card's issued to all Security Service officers I presume?" Tracy asked.

"Yes" Fuller confirmed "And considering the ease with which I just accessed the database from here" he added as he called up a list of journey details "I would say its highly likely that has been used to work out where both of you are."

"This ends here" Tracy declared "Where is the nearest armed response unit?" she asked.

"I can have Bob and his boys from ARU three there within three minutes" Fuller confirmed "They are just having lunch at Hyde Park Corner."

"Get them up here but don't use the radios" Tracy requested as she and Jennifer continued to maintain their quiet discrete walk southwards through the park "Let's keep this quiet until we are ready as we don't want any more uninvited guests."

"Got it" Fuller confirmed.

"No, that's got to be a three because it can't go there or there" Bob the large and formidable team leader of Armed Response Unit three indicated as he and his three colleagues looked at the Suduko puzzle on the back page of the London Standard.

"Are you sure boss?" one of the officers asked.

"The first rule of ARU three" Bob responded "We work together as a team which means you do exactly what I tell you and I tell you that is a three."

"Ok then boss" the officer confirmed.

"Will Inspector Sands please report to the Station Office" the tannoy at the entrance to Hyde Park Corner station boomed out, a message that was repeated twice more.

"Hello" Bob looked around as he downed the last bit of his huge bacon roll that made up his lunch even though it was still only eleven o'clock "I wonder what that is all about?"

"Shall we take a look boss?" another of the officers in the team asked.

"Why not" Bob responded "Come on" he encouraged whereupon the four officers headed on foot the short distance to the subway entrance to the station and then down into the bowels of the earth to the ticket hall which is located immediately beneath the main road.

"Are you Commander Grainger?" the Station Supervisor asked as the four armed officers arrived in the ticket hall, triggering some understandable nervousness amongst the passing by members of the public.

"Yeah" Bob responded with a slightly surprised expression.

"Message from a Commander Fuller" the Station Supervisor "He asks could both Divisional Commander Caverner's have the pleasure of your company at the Serpentine Bridge in Hyde Park in ten minutes."

"Why didn't he just use the radio?" Bob asked out of curiosity.

"Something about being eavesdropped upon apparently" the Station Supervisor explained "I'm just the messenger."

"Ok" Bob responded "Thanks. All right lads, saddle up."

"Two over there" Jennifer remarked as she continued to discreetly observe the two men who were lurking behind some trees "And another by the looks of it over to the left."

"I think we have at least two behind us as well" Tracy murmured.

"Confirm that" Baker's voice came over the radio from her position as she discreetly followed the two men Tracy suspected were behind them.

"Simon" Jennifer called quietly "Any sign of the cavalry?"

"Just entering the south carriage road now" Fuller confirmed "One minute to intercept."

"I hate this bit" Tracy admitted as she reached for her weapon, a move mirrored by her sister.

"Me too" Jennifer agreed "Baker, take out our two followers, Simon, have Bob and his boys surround the lot and contain them."

"I would prefer it if we could get them safely arrested in good health" Tracy added by way of a request.

"Team Three in position" Bob's voice came over the secure radio "Whenever you ladies are ready."

"On my mark" Tracy confirmed "Three, two, one, NOW!"

"Armed Security Officers!" Bob and his team called as with weapons pointed ahead, they proceeded to surround the men who were between them and the sisters, forcing them to immediately surrender.

"Don't even think about it" Tracy strongly advised the two men behind them as she and Jennifer turned around and brought their weapons to bear on them.

"Everyone down!" Jennifer called out as a rifle shot rang out and impacted into the ground right in front of them.

"Sniper!" Baker called over the radio as she produced her rifle from beneath her overcoat and scanned around the surrounding area until she identified the marksman some distance away on the opposite bank of the Serpentine.

"Take him out!" Tracy confirmed as she and Jennifer leapt upon and restrained the two men they had just apprehended whilst nearby, Bob and his team were giving their arrestees the full treatment.

"Goodnight!" Baker responded as she quickly took aim and fired a single shot that through her scope she could see sent the marksman direct to the ground in a crumpled heap.

"He's down" Baker confirmed.

"Any sign of any other surprises?" Tracy asked as two van loads of Royal Park's Division officers arrived to provide assistance and take away the arrested men.

"Not yet" Baker confirmed as she continued to scan around "But I wouldn't hang around to find out."

"Victor Papa Zero One to Control" Jennifer called into her radio

"Morning Maam" the duty officer at the head office of Jennifer's VIP Protection Division responded "I thought you were on holiday?"

"It's a long story" Jennifer explained "Can I have a bullet proof special to the Serpentine Bridge immediately please."

"Brian should have finished at Buckingham Palace" the duty officer confirmed as he consulted his duty roster "I'll send him over on the old blue lights."

"Thanks" Jennifer responded but was forced to duck as another sniper shot rang out only narrowly missing her.

"This is getting bloody dangerous" Bob remarked as he joined them and helped Tracy to her feet.

"Anyone see where that came from?" Baker asked as she continued to scout around looking through her rifle scope.

"Over there..." Jennifer began but was suddenly sent spiralling to the ground as another shot rang out and struck her bullet proof vest in the back.

"Ah bugger!" she called out as she collapsed to the floor in agony from the force of the impact.

"Here comes our wheels" Tracy announced as the dark coloured high power saloon car approached at high speed and jumped off the road onto the grass before pulling to a halt alongside.

"Time to go" Bob responded as he and Tracy helped Jennifer into the back of the car.

"Get us out of here" Tracy ordered the driver as she got in the back with her sister whilst Bob went into the front.

"Hold on to your hats!" the driver announced as he gunned the engine and accelerated away back onto the Serpentine Road and off into the distance.

"Right" Baker rounded up the officers still on the scene as soon as they were sure the car was well away "Let's find these buggers and nail them."

"Well that was a really dumb idea" Jennifer responded as Tracy helped her off with the bullet proof vest which thankfully revealed little injuring bar a bit of bruising.

"Your idea or Simon's?" Tracy asked.

"Simon's as it happens" Jennifer confirmed.

"No supper for him tonight then I would suggest" Bob remarked from the front seat.

"You always think about food don't you?" Tracy responded wryly.

"First order of business" Bob confirmed "Survival."

"Where to then?" the driver asked.

"23 Leinster Gardens" Jennifer called back "And step on it!"

"Where?" Bob asked from the front seat as the driver accelerated away up Park Lane approaching Marble Arch.

"Sir Richard Crowthorne is following up a lead at that address in Bayswater" Jennifer explained "Chances are he may need some help to kick the door in if what we witnessed back there is typical."

"Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear...." the driver remarked with a chuckle.

"Oh do let us in on the joke please" Tracy enquired.

"Let's just say that I can definitely say he will need a lot of help kicking that particular door in" the driver confirmed.

"Number twenty three" Sir Richard declared as he double checked the address he had written down on the piece of paper in his hand with the painted number on the doorway of the Edwardian style house that made up part of the continuous terrace of Leinster Gardens.

As he ascended the short flight of steps up to the front door, Sir Richard could not help but think something was not entirely right about this place but he continued anyway and was about to knock on the door when he realised that it wasn't a door at all but a concrete wall that had been moulded and painted to look like one.

"What the...?" Sir Richard asked himself as he looked around and upon closer inspection, realised that both number twenty three and the next door number twenty four were fake fronts which had been carefully built to look like the rest of the terrace.

At that point he looked back to the road as the dark saloon car pulled up and Tracy with a slightly gingerly moving Jennifer alighted onto the pavement with Bob looking around providing close protection just in case of any uninvited guests.

"Problem?" Tracy asked Sir Richard as he descended back down the steps and joined them on the pavement.

"It would appear that Renquist's registered address is a front" Sir Richard confirmed "Literally."

"Apparently its a fake front built in the 1870's to hide the gap broken in the terrace by the construction of what is now the Hammersmith & City Line directly below our feet" Tracy explained.

"Sneaky little sod" Sir Richard commented "I would dearly like to meet this Mr Renquist at some point."

"Wouldn't we all" Tracy agreed "Can we offer you a lift?"

"Over the last twenty years" Renquist accused the Commander directly "Even though you think you were upholding the law of this land, you have repeatedly interfered with numerous operations by people of the same thought processes as myself which were intended to support the greater good."

"Define greater good" the Commander responded, still clearly sceptical.

"My purpose has always been one of serving the greater good of my country" Renquist responded as if he was eulogising a religious mission .

"By assassinating Members of Parliament, falsifying evidence, kidnap, assault with deadly weapons, fake bombings, misinformation..." the Commander retorted.

"I will admit that some of our methods have been..."

"Questionable? Illegal?"

"Unorthodox, outside the official rulebook" Renquist admitted.

"Bollocks!" the Commander responded straight back.

"This country and countless Governments would have been the victim of countless avoidable public scandals had it not been for the efforts of people and organisations such as myself and those whom I represent" Renquist explained although it was obvious from the Commander's expression that he was unimpressed by any of this.

"There is such a thing as truth, honesty and justice you know" the Commander replied.

"Three things that are held far more dearly than they should be and become a major obstruction to the objective of achieving the stability, balance and support of the greater good that I and my associates aspire towards" Renquist explained.

"It's getting warm in here" the Commander remarked as he looked around and loosened his uniform collar.

"It must be all the hot air" Garforth commented aside which caused both men in the dock to chuckle in agreement.

"You may mock" Renquist retorted "But the fact remains that your brother here stands accused of interfering in matters of which you have no business with."

"And where exactly is all this leading?" the Commander asked, clearly anxious to get this kangaroo court over with as soon as possible.

"We the conglomerate" Renquist indicated the others seating in the juror's benches "have come together to demand compensation for our unnecessary and unjust incarceration."

"The conglomerate?" the Commander responded "I should warn you I never do business with any organisation I can't spell."

"Well I think you had better reconsider your position or alternatively learn to spell quickly as there are penalties for non payment attached to this little deal" Renquist became noticeably more menacing in tone.

"And this would be?" the Commander asked.

"We want full pardons and our records expunged" Renquist demanded "Compensation in the form of ten million pounds each in sterling and US dollars plus a public apology on live television from the Prime Minister."

"He's in Poland" the Commander remarked "Probably on a golf course somewhere."

"I suggest you pick up the telephone" Renquist passed across a mobile telephone "Make the call and get him on a jet back to London right now because you and your colleagues have until nine o'clock tonight to comply."

"And if we do not comply?" the Commander asked.

"The City, its politicians and various other key people will be given a demonstration in the real use of knowledge and power" Renquist calmly informed the Commander with a menacing smile.

"Bombs, snipers and nasty surprises?" the Commander enquired.

"Crude old fashioned methods I will grant you" Renquist admitted "But the old ones are usually the most effective."

"There are those in the corridors of power who will feel you are just a crackpot who is off his medication" the Commander responded.

"But unlike many of them" Renquist replied "you know me and my associates and are well aware that we have the finance and the conviction to carry out our aims and objectives."

"And you reckon my word will carry the necessary weight?" the Commander asked.

"Exactly" Renquist confirmed before turning to two of his associates "Escort the Commander and his brother to their cell, he has an important telephone call to make."

"Is there anything else I should be told about?" Tracy asked as she, Jennifer and Sir Richard descended in the lift at King William Street.

"Chelsea are playing at home to Fulham tonight" Sir Richard remarked "I was hoping to watch it if I finish on time."

"Somehow I doubt it" Tracy responded as the lift reached the bottom and they all exited out into the corridor "Where are we with tracing this loon?"

"Renquist has a lot of financial interests, investments and so forth" Jennifer confirmed, still clearly grimacing a bit from the earlier incident "Hopefully Simon should have something we can follow up by now."

"Are you all right?" Fuller asked Jennifer having run through the complex to meet her where they hugged each other.

"Bruised and battered love" she confirmed "but still breathing."

"Oh thank God for that" Fuller responded with clear relief "Come on up to the war room, I think we may have something."

"Has Baker found our third sniper yet?" Tracy asked as they entered the Control Room where they all proceeded to sit around the briefing table with the exception of Sir Richard who went to put the kettle on.

"Not yet" Fuller confirmed "She and Bob's guys have been tearing Hyde Park and the surrounding area apart for the last hour."

"And our unfriendly nutters with the guns?" Jennifer enquired "The ones that are still breathing that is."

"Kensington Officers are throwing them in Paddington Green for the night" Fuller responded "Most of the ID's on them though are false mind and they seem to know little more than being paid cash in hand from anonymous sources for their services"

"Figures" Tracy responded as the telephone rang on the Control Room main console behind them whereupon Fuller got up to answer it.

"Bloomsbury Lunatic Asylum" Fuller responded only for his expression of general disinterest to suddenly change to one of surprise at the voice on the other end.

"Simon" the Commander responded on the mobile telephone from inside the cell "Have Jennifer call the Prime Minister's office and insist on his immediate return to Downing Street by the fastest available method."

"Commander?" Fuller responded as he made a note on the pad only for Tracy to suddenly leap up and grab the telephone from him.

"Hello darling" Tracy almost yelled down the telephone "Are you all right?"

"It's been an interesting day love" the Commander admitted as he looked across at the two heavies with guns watching him carefully to ensure he did not impart any critical information.

"Where are you?" Tracy asked as Fuller put the call on speakerphone so all in the room, including Sir Richard who had returned with mugs of tea could hear.

"Can't tell you I am afraid" the Commander responded with some regret "Our genial hosts have us metaphorically tied up in knots at the moment. To tell you where I am would court a rather swift closure on both myself and my brother here"

"Garforth?" Tracy responded as she shot straight up out of her seat with anger.

"Calm, calm, clam" Jennifer suggested as she lowered her sister back into the seat again.

"That was the other thing I was not supposed to mention" Sir Richard admitted sheepishly.

"Got to go" the Commander responded "See you soon, I love you."

Before Tracy could reply, the call was cut off whereupon the silence of the room dominated for a few moments, punctuated only by the hum of electrical equipment and the distant rumble of Northern Line trains a couple of miles away down the connected but long disused running tunnel from there to Borough.

"Echelon" Tracy responded as she turned and looked directly at Sir Richard.

"Err sorry?" he appeared somewhat reluctant in his response.

"That three hundred million pound telephone surveillance system you guys say you don't have" Tracy responded "I believe it went down on your budget sheet submitted to the Commons Committee as paper clips and associated stationery."

"That's a lot of paper clips" Jennifer remarked.

"Well we do use a lot of stationery" Sir Richard admitted "Besides if we were to have such a system, hypothetically of course."

"Of course" Tracy responded.

"I would have thought there would be no way we could access it from here" Sir Richard admitted.

"Ahem" Fuller intervened discreetly with a polite cough and pointed to the screen where he had just called up an interface with a remote programme.

"All right" Sir Richard admitted defeat "How did you do that?"

"The interface and management system for it" Fuller explained "I designed it."

"Well that explains how you managed to afford any property in this town" Tracy remarked.

"Ok" Fuller began as he tapped away on his keyboard "This is the number the call was sent from."

"The number was withheld wasn't it?" Jennifer remarked.

"With this little box of tricks there is no such thing as a withheld number" Fuller responded with a wry smile "Our friends at Sir Richard's gaff just let everyone think there is such a thing!"

Sir Richard said nothing, electing instead to offer just an awkward smile.

"And here we go" Fuller declared as he put up on the screen a large scale map of part of central London with a green circle overlaid upon it "He's in there somewhere."

"Nearest tube Covent Garden" Tracy looked over Fuller's shoulder "Have Bob, Baker and the heavy mob meet us at Covent Garden Station in ten minutes.

"You are not going out there are you?" Jennifer asked as Tracy turned to leave.

"You try and stop me!" Tracy responded.

"All right" Jennifer replied, "I'm coming with you."

"Are you thinking what I am thinking?" the Commander asked as he and Garforth sat in the cell casually playing cards.

"If Sir Richard's resources are up to spec then I should hope that the cavalry will be on the horizon" Garforth remarked.

"Any time now guys" the Commander commented generally.

"Have you seen dad lately?" Garforth asked.

"A few weeks back" the Commander confirmed "Don't tell my colleagues from Witness Protection though, they still think I think he's dead."

"How is he?" Garforth enquired.

"Not great" the Commander admitted "The old ticker is giving him some jip, they are talking about fitting a pacemaker but he's still being his usual stubborn self about it."

"Can you hear something?" Garforth asked as he strained to listen to any background noise.

"No" the Commander responded "Why do you hear something?"

"No" Garforth confirmed "That's what is bothering me."

The Commander got up and went over to the door where he bent down and peered through the small grid of holes in the viewing slot and squinted to see anything happening in the corridor outside.

"I don't want to alarm you" the Commander informed Garforth as he continued to look around "but I think our hosts may have flown the nest."

"And just as I was beginning to enjoy their company" Garforth responded with clear sarcasm.

"This is Covent Garden" the station platform tannoy announced prominently in a very authoritarian and upper class sounding voice that it seemed had been extracted straight from a pre-war BBC Radio news broadcast "The next station is Leicester Square. Please stand clear of the closing doors."

On the rather antique looking platform with its original yellow, orange and white wall tiling still looking presentable despite being over a hundred years old, stood Tracy and Jennifer having alighted from the train and were waiting for the passengers who had also alighted to clear before proceeding.

"Well this is fun" Tracy remarked as they began to head up the now deserted platform before exiting from it up the steps and along the passageway to the lifts where a quick look at the indicator displays revealed that three of them were either on their way up or were at the top and the fourth was out of service.

"Terrific" Jennifer commented as they both looked at each other before heading back towards the spiral staircase, pausing only momentarily for a tall gentleman in a long overcoat and top hat to pass them before setting off up the infamous one hundred and ninety six steps of the staircase up to the booking hall.

"You two all right?" Commander Baker asked as the sisters emerged into the booking hall a couple of minutes later looking somewhat out of breath after having ascended the steps from hell.

"Maybe we should have waited for the lift after all" Tracy admitted.

"What is the state of play with the backup?" Jennifer asked.

"Big Bob and two teams of his best armed support guys are right outside" Baker confirmed as they were allowed through the ticket barriers by the Station Supervisor and headed out of the red tiled entrance to the street outside.

"Now we need somewhere to actually go to" Tracy announced "Fuller" she called over her radio "Point us in the right direction."

"I am cross referencing Renquist's records with the local area to see if anything matches" Fuller confirmed as he looked at his screens and continued to busily tap away on the keyboard "However I have narrowed down the point of origin to somewhere to the east of you."

"Lets go!" Tracy called to the armed support guys and with Jennifer and Baker providing close protection support and a dozen heavily armed officers in tow, they walked briskly through the crowds which cleared quickly at their approach.

"Now where?" Jennifer asked as they reached the bottom of James Street, right in front of the old Covent Garden Market area.

"Left" Tracy confirmed as they turned and headed towards the Royal Opera House side of the piazza area "Towards Bow Street" she added before she suddenly stopped as a thought had occurred to her.

"Something wrong?" Jennifer asked.

"Fuller" Tracy called into her radio "Can you play back the call my husband made?"

"Yeah sure" Fuller confirmed "Hang on a second."

A few seconds later, the conversation was being relayed over the radio where Tracy and Jennifer listened intently.

"There was something he said that did not sound right" Tracy explained "He was trying to tell us something without actually saying it."

"Ribbons" Jennifer picked up on.

"Court" Baker added.

"Bow Street Magistrates Court!" all three women and Bob responded in unison.

"Owned by an investment conglomerate which has amongst its registered addresses, twenty three Leinster Gardens" Fuller confirmed over the radio.

"Come on" Tracy called to the others "Follow me."

It was certain that the old stone edifice of the former Bow Street Magistrates court and the attached former Police Station had not seen this much activity outside since it had closed some time ago.

"The trouble with this place" Bob commented as he and Tracy surveyed the building from behind a patrol car parked on the opposite side of the street "It was designed by some canny Victorians not only to stop people getting out but also to prevent anyone from easily getting in."

"Fuller" Tracy called into her radio "I am going to need an assault team, as much back up as you can muster and a plan of the building all inside a mobile operations unit as soon as possible."

"I'll get Gladys to send out the boys from Holborn" Fuller confirmed as he reached across his desk and picked up the telephone "Should take about three minutes."

"Right" Tracy announced "That's the cavalry sorted, how about you?" she asked Bob.

"I've got the street sealed off at both ends and a team going around the back of the place to see if anyone is at home" Bob confirmed "As soon as I can cast an eye over a building plan, we can come up with a solution to the problem."

"Cavalry is here" Jennifer confirmed as the Holborn based Mobile Operations Unit arrived and pulled to a halt just up the road whereupon Tracy and Bob headed up the road to meet it.

"Afternoon" Tracy called as she boarded the converted single deck bus which was effectively a mobile control room "Did you bring the plans?" she asked the driver.

"On the computer in the back Maam" the officer confirmed as he alighted from the driving seat.

"Thanks" Tracy responded "Go and join the cavalry out there."

"Ok then" Bob announced as he sat down at the briefing table installed at the back of the vehicle and pulled a laptop towards him "Numerous potential entry points all protected by bars and other devices which means this is going to be tricky."

"What about around the back where they used to bring the Black Maria's in?" Tracy asked.

"Aye" Bob agreed "If we can get them gates open I think it should be possible."

"Sounds like we have the beginnings of a plan then" Tracy declared.

"What was that?" the Commander asked as he strained to listen to any background sound.

"Oi!" Garforth responded "You are not distracting me from this hand, are you calling or passing?"

"What?" the Commander turned back to their rather makeshift game of poker which was being achieved with a rather battered set of cards he had found in his pocket and the contents of two packets of chocolate buttons.

"Call" the Commander declared "Let's see what you have got."

"Trip sevens" Garforth declared as he placed his cards on the small table.

"Damm" the Commander responded "Two pair" he announced.

"Well this is an historical moment" Garforth remarked as he gathered up all the chocolate buttons in the pot "When was the last time I beat you in poker?"

"March 4th 1969" the Commander confirmed "I was a little distracted mind."

"Bloody hell!" Garforth suddenly called out, an exclamation echoed by the Commander as the sounds of multiple small explosions suddenly rocked the building.

"Either Al-Qaeda are having a day trip or the cavalry is here" the Commander commented.

"Armed Security Officers!" the various heavily armed officers declared loudly as they entered the various parts of the building by way of several different entry points simultaneously and scouted around.

"Move out!" Bob called to his officers and they duly dispersed throughout the building as Tracy and Jennifer both entered the building.

"Anyone home?" she asked over the radio as the building echoed to the sound of doors being kicked in and the running of heavy boots all over the place.

"All clear so far" Bob confirmed over the radio "But it looks like there was someone here recently."

"I guess we missed the party then" Jennifer commented wryly.

"Maam" one officer's voice called over the radio "I think we have found something in the basement cells."

"Hold at the door" Tracy ordered "We are on our way."

Quickly Tracy and Jennifer made their way down through the building to its lowest level where the former detention cells were located and where one of the Armed Support Unit teams was located at the entrance to the long brick corridor.

"Armed security officers! Is there anybody there?" Bob called down the corridor with his MP7 semi-automatic gun pointed ahead.

"Yes there damm well is!" the Commander called back from the furthest cell.

"Sounds familiar" Tracy remarked as she stepped forward and proceeded down the corridor cautiously with the significantly taller Bob following closely behind providing cover in case of any unpleasant surprises.

"In here!" the Commander called again as Tracy reached the cell door and looked down at the lock with some concern.

"No way that is going to shift in a hurry" Bob remarked as he joined Tracy in examining the old but well built and solidly secured locking mechanism on the cell door.

"Old fashioned way?" Bob suggested as he pointed his gun towards it

"Something a little more subtle I think" Tracy responded as she produced her lock picking set from inside her tunic pocket and once opened, began to work on the lock.

"Building is clear" another officer confirmed as he joined them "Whatever was going on around here we missed it."

"Lift up a bit and.... bingo!" Tracy declared as the lock clicked open and with a flourish of triumph, she opened the door.

"Hello love" the Commander called as he and Tracy met in the middle of the cell and embraced warmly.

"Thank God you are all right" Tracy responded as they kissed.

"Now why the hell does that sort of thing never happen to me?" Garforth remarked with a smirk.

"What the hell are you doing here?" Tracy demanded to know.

"Well my dear" Garforth remarked as he got up "Its a bit of a long story."

"I bet it is" Tracy's tone was defensive as she still retained a grudge against Garforth despite events that had occurred since then.

"I hate to break up this dubious family reunion" the Commander decided to intervene before Tracy decided to punch Garforth just for old times sake "But I need to get to Downing Street rather quickly."

"Team's three and four" Bob called into his radio as they left the cell and headed back along the corridor "We are coming out, have a car waiting by the front door please."

"What about them snipers and other unpleasant guests?" the Commander asked as he and Tracy followed Bob with Jennifer and Garforth bringing up the rear.

"Two of them were safely despatched courtesy of Commander Baker" Bob confirmed "My boys have a van full of unpleasant associates as well probably safely ensconced in Paddington Green by now."

"Anyone we know?" the Commander asked as they reached the top of the steps to ground level.

"The two snipers have been identified as some of the outside talent that Renquist hired" Jennifer confirmed "I've got Simon following the money to see who their contacts were."

"And the others?" the Commander enquired.

"Haven't appeared on the grid yet" Jennifer responded "Assuming they are actually in town that is."

They soon reached the exit from the building and just as they emerged, a gun shot rang out from some distance away, striking the door pillar right next to them.

"You may wish to revise your analysis!" the Commander remarked as he and everyone else threw themselves to the ground behind the car that was parked in front of the court entrance.

"Anyone see where that came from?" Bob asked his men who were quickly scouting around along with Commander Baker who was quickly on the case scanning the surrounding buildings through her rifle scope.

"North west corner" she called over the radio "Behind the parapet."

A second shot rang out striking the car and shattering one of the side windows which caused everyone to duck back down again.

"Someone nail this sod!" the Commander called.

"With pleasure" Baker confirmed as she took aim and as soon as the sniper emerged just a fraction above the parapet of the roof top, she fired one single clean shot. Moments later the sniper collapsed over the parapet and fell six storeys, impacting onto the road surface with a rather loud crunch.

"Ouch!" the Commander remarked as he looked over the top of the car before getting up off the ground and helping Tracy to her feet before they went over to where a large circle of officers were gathering around the body.

"Is he alive?" Tracy asked as they came through the crowd to where a couple of paramedics were hovering over the body to see if there was any signs of life.

"In the interests of my reputation" Baker commented "I sincerely hope not."

"Dead before he even left the roof you will be glad to hear" one of the paramedics informed them.

"I want an ID on this joker" the Commander demanded "Who's paying his bills, past history, contacts in the UK, name of his cat, the works."

"Shall we darling?" Tracy took the Commander by the arm and led him to the car which calmed him down sufficiently.

"Downing Street" the Commander called to the patrol car driver "and make it snappy."

"Well that was quite fun" Renquist commented as he entered the warehouse in which was gathered his associates who were gathered around tables working on various items of equipment "How are my little gadgets coming along?" he asked.

"The lads are just finishing the timers on the last couple of devices now" Barkov confirmed.

"Very impressive" Renquist responded as he looked over the tables on which were various technical looking explosive devices on which a number of technicians were working "Where exactly did you get this stuff from."

"Best Russian technology plus a few household chemicals in carefully measured proportions" Barkov responded "The best that money can buy."

"I should hope so" Renquist remarked "Our sponsors our funding a lot of money for this little project."

"Relax" Barkov confirmed "You will get your money's worth out of this deal and with interest on top assuming they pay of course."

"They will pay" Renquist responded "They have to, the consequences of me releasing some choice files to the popular press would be too much to bear for certain well connected members of the political establishment."

"Interesting" Barkov responded.

"Believe me comrade" Renquist patted Barkov on the back in reassurance "We have all the angles firmly covered."

"Boss!" one of Renquist's men came jogging up to them "The law just raided Bow Street and our last sniper is a goner."

"Exactly as I predicted" Renquist calmly responded "Albeit I must admit" he consulted his pocket watch "a little quicker than I had anticipated."

"The codes Sir?" one of the technicians asked Renquist.

"Oh yes" he suddenly remembered as he extracted a small notebook from his jacket pocket "Here we go" he passed it to the technician.

"Will anyone be able to crack those?" Barkov asked.

"Only one person for certain" Renquist confirmed "I know his file inside and out and when the time is right he will be able to solve the puzzle I have devised for him."

"And if he doesn't?" Barkov asked.

"Then a lot of people will experience a lot of disruption to their evening" Renquist remarked with a wry smile of satisfaction.

"Where the hell is he?" the Commander asked as he paced up and down in the outer office of the Prime Minister at Downing Street with Tracy sat nearby watching him going up and down.

"You'll wear a trough in that floor at the rate you are going" she remarked "Come on over here and sit down.

"Good idea" the Commander agreed and sat down alongside her where they put their arms around each other for comfort.

"You worry too much" Tracy commented "Try and at least take some of the load off your mind?"

"Well so far in the last thirty hours or so" the Commander remarked "I've been nearly blown up by fireworks, sent on a merry go round across the City by a lunatic and his well financed associates, been the lucky recipient of an inquisition at Bow Street Magistrates Court, been shot at and to cap it all I haven't seen you since yesterday morning."

"You need a hug" Tracy suggested "And so do I" she added as they embraced warmly.

"Oh sorry" the Prime Minister responded as he entered the room and interrupted them "I can come back later if you like."

"Oh we can finish this later" the Commander responded with a smile and a wink to Tracy before getting up and meeting the Prime Minister in the middle of the room "First a stiff drink."

"For who?" the Prime Minister asked as he led the way into his office.

"After you have heard what I have had to say" the Commander admitted "Probably all three of us."

"This must be good" the Prime Minister commented with some apprehension as he sat down behind his desk and produced a decanter of Scotch and some glasses from a large drawer "Although probably not in a positive way."

"Correct" the Commander confirmed "Frederick J Renquist the Third."

"Bugger...." the Prime Minister responded and promptly changed his mind about his drink, upgrading it from a single to a double.

"Thanks to a hell of a swindle he's on the loose and has a whole truckload of axes to grind" the Commander explained as he and Tracy took their drinks as they were passed over the desk.

"Anyone we know?" the Prime Minister asked.

"I'm one obviously" the Commander admitted "The political establishment in general is the other."

"Demands?" the Prime Minister asked as he finished his drink and contemplated a second.

"We pay him and his merry men thirty million in loose change, expunge their records and put them on the first plane to a nice warm country with no extradition treaty and they won't simulate a major terrorist attack on the city, leak a lot of highly volatile and fact filled files to the popular press and not shoot either myself, Tracy or anyone else they might fancy taking a pot shot at" the Commander explained.

"Oh is that all?" the Prime Minister remarked "What's MI5's intelligence on all this?"

"Sir Richard is working with us on this" Tracy confirmed "But what leads we do have tend to lead us on a merry dance that goes nowhere."

"You know the Government policy Commander" the Prime Minister explained "We do not..."

"...negotiate with terrorists" the Commander finished the sentence with remorse "Yes I know, however it does at least leave some room for manoeuvre."

"In what way?" the Prime Minister enquired as he decided that the second drink option was a good idea after all and poured it.

"When he calls you with the formal list of demands which he is supposed to in about three minutes time" the Commander consulted his watch "we tell him we agree to his demands on certain conditions."

"Hand over the files or no cash for example?" Tracy suggested.

"Exactly my dear" the Commander confirmed "We have an opportunity here to take all of his collection out of circulation then we lead him on a little merry dance of own."

"There is no guarantee he won't do a runner with the cash the moment he gets his mitts on it" the Prime Minister commented.

"Not if we do it electronically from a fake bank account" the Commander replied "We make an apparently legitimate payment into his account and then when his threat is safely dealt with, the cash disappears again."

The telephone on the desk rang at that point and the Prime Minister reached over to answer it.

"Good afternoon" he announced "How can I be of assistance."

"Prime Minister" Renquist responded "I do hope your last minute flight from Poland went well?" he asked.

"Service was a bit slow but I got here" the Prime Minister admitted.

"And so to business then" Renquist continued "I know you are a busy man. Would I be correct in assuming that you have the Commander seated a short distance away from you at this moment."

"Correct" the Prime Minister confirmed.

"May I speak with him?" Renquist asked politely.

"Certainly" the Prime Minister responded as he put the call on the speaker phone so that everyone in the room could be a part of it.

"Mr Renquist" the Commander responded "To what do I owe this dubious pleasure?"

"Earl Renquist please" he corrected the Commander politely "but let us not get distracted by such niceties when there is business to be done. Are you listening carefully."

"Yes" the Commander confirmed.

"I and my talented associates have by various means placed a number of explosive devices throughout the centre of this great City" Renquist informed them "These are small devices but sufficient powerful to create panic and confusion of an unprecedented scale."

"Are you going to tell us where these are?" the Commander asked.

"All in good time my friend" Renquist responded "There are other parts to this little story of ours to be dealt with first."

"Go on" the Commander responded with some reluctance.

"In return for clues as to the locations of the explosive devices and the means to disarm them" Renquist instructed "the British Government will pay thirty million pounds divided into three currencies, pound sterling, US dollars and Japanese Yen into a Swiss bank account of my choosing. Once payment has been confirmed by my financial advisor and transport arranged for I and my associates to leave the country to a destination specified by us, the details will be handed over."

"Seems fairly straight forward" the Commander responded.

"Any attempt to double cross me will result in an additional penalty" Renquist warned "The release of files and information to the popular press on three continents that will bring this and other Governments along with certain other organisations crashing down around their ears, plus the immediate execution on sight of certain key people including the Prime Minister and your good lady wife."

"I would give you the old flannel about touching a hair on her head" the Commander responded with controlled anger "But I think you may be immune."

"I see we know each other better than I thought" Renquist remarked "You have ten minutes to make your decision. I will call again on this number, goodbye."

"What about hairs on my head?" the Prime Minister asked out of curiosity.

"I am married to those ones" the Commander pointed to Tracy "not yours."

"Just a thought" the Prime Minister remarked "So do we pay up?"

"Isn't that supposed to be your decision?" Tracy responded.

"I'll defer to the two people in the room with the more influential power" the Prime Minister gestured towards the two officers with a knowledgeable smirk.

"Lima...." the Commander called into his radio before realising it wasn't there whereupon Tracy passed him her radio instead.

"Try this love" she suggested.

"Thanks dear" the Commander responded "Lima Alpha Zero One to Control" he called into the radio.

"Control responding" came the swift reply "Good to hear your voice again Sir."

"Thanks" the Commander replied "Round up Commander Fuller, Jennifer Caverner, the Chief of the Thames River Division, the Anti Terrorist boys, the Bomb Squad and the best tea lady in the service and have them in a Emergency Operations Room at Scotland Yard in twenty minutes."

"We'll make the calls Sir" Control confirmed "Anything else Sir?"

"Not yet but you had better put everyone on a level two alert status just in case" the Commander advised.

"Will do Sir, Control out."

"Sir Richard" the Commander called having changed frequency "Have your boys traced that call?"

"It came from a mobile somewhere over in the East End of London" Sir Richard confirmed as he leaned over the shoulders of two of his technicians who were operating the telephone tracing system back at MI5's technical monitoring centre.

"We are having a little soiree over at the Yard in twenty minutes" the Commander advised him "Join the party."

"I'll see you there" Sir Richard confirmed by which time he was already putting his overcoat on and heading for the door.

"Right" the Commander turned back to the Prime Minister "Have your communications unit goons transfer the call to my mobile when he calls."

"Do they know what the number is?" Tracy asked as she got up and took her husband's arm in hers.

"Should do" the Commander remarked as they left the office "MI5 have had me on their constant monitoring list for the last twenty years."

"Oh" Tracy responded with a slightly bemused look "Goodbye Prime Minister" she called back as they left.

"Well I guess that is a nice quiet evening together ruined" the Commander remarked wryly as the officer on duty opened the front door of 10 Downing Street in order to allow them to exit into the street itself where a car was waiting.

"Good evening Sir, Maam" the officer assigned to the job of being their driver greeted them as they got in the back.

"Evening" the Commander responded "Scotland Yard please and don't spare the horses."

As the driver started the car and moved off towards the gates that guard the end of Downing Street where it meets Whitehall, the mobile telephone in the Commander's pocket rang.

"Here we go" Tracy commented as she looked on whilst the Commander extracted the telephone from his inside tunic pocket and managed to answer the call successfully.

"Hello?" he responded, still not entirely sure he was actually connected as technology was still not really the Commander's thing.

"Good evening again" Renquist announced "I take it you explained our little situation to the Prime Minister?"

"I did" the Commander confirmed "The deal on the table we intend to put to you is this. You get your thirty million electronically transferred to the account of your choice upon the handing over and verification of all files you possess, both paper and electronic regarding any and all members of Her Majesty's Government, the Security Services and all related and non related incidents, occurrences individuals, agencies and organisations."

There was a short pause as Renquist apparently considered the offer at the same time that the car turned into Broadway and pulled up outside the main entrance to New Scotland Yard.

"I do hope you have a very large safe" Renquist responded "Otherwise you may have a bit of a storage problem."

"Can I assume from your response we have a deal then?" the Commander asked as he and Tracy got out of the car and headed indoors.

"Assumptions are in my experience extremely overrated and dangerous things" Renquist cautioned "Let us just say that we have reached a point on which we can both agree."

"A deal by any other name" the Commander responded as he and Tracy got in the lift and they proceeded up to the fifth floor "So what about these explosive devices?"

"First things first my old friend" Renquist replied as if he was trying to dictate the pace of events to the split second "A few ground rules."

"I had a feeling that you may say something like that" the Commander remarked as he entered the Operations Room that had been set up for this incident.

"I will deal with you and you alone" Renquist demanded, now being heard over the speakers in the room so that all the Department Heads and other personnel gathered could be in on what was going on.

"Understood" the Commander responded.

"Over the fax machine in the room you are currently standing in" Renquist continued, a comment that had everyone looking around slightly nervously "I am sending the account details and the clues for finding the explosive devices."

"Simon" the Commander called over the desk whereupon Fuller leapt to the fax machine which was already beginning to print its transmission.

"And the handing over of the files?" the Commander enquired.

"Will be accomplished at a location and time of my choosing at which you and I will confirm the payment transfer" Renquist informed them authoritatively "Then my associates will hand over the files and we will go our separate ways. I will call again in two hours at precisely nine o'clock, have a pleasant evening."

The call was abruptly cut off and there followed a tense moment of silence in the room as everyone looked around at each other for a few moments before Fuller laid copies of the fax they had just received in front of everyone.

"Right" the Commander decided to start things off "That is the voice of Frederick J Renquist the Third, Earl of Dunny on the Wold or somewhere and for tonight, our number one lunatic who we are about to discuss."

"I take it we are talking about a verifiable threat here?" the Chief of the Bomb Squad enquired.

"Correct" the Commander confirmed "This guy has the resources and the contacts to pull this off and in the last forty eight hours has been responsible for the explosions at the radio transmitter and Earl's Court Station along with various snipers and other gun toting goons that have been lurking around."

"Well here are the likely location clues" Fuller announced as he put a copy of the fax received on the projector screen for all to see.

"Six of them" Tracy remarked "Moved gateway to the west end may well be Marble Arch."

"Cement's finest moment rested here could be Great Portland Street" the Chief of the Thames River Division added.

"That suggests Central London for the greatest impact I would have thought" the Commander concluded "I want a mobile operations unit set up somewhere central" he responded as he looked at a map "Have the cavalry roll to...."

"What about Tottenham Court Road?" Tracy suggested.

"That'll do nicely" the Commander agreed.

"What's this one?" one of Renquist's associates asked as he looked at the list of location clues on Renquist's desk.

"I can't have every clue easy to solve can I?" Renquist concluded "Besides, they will have plenty to do when they have the disarming clues to process" he added as he looked in his notebook before returning it to his inside jacket pocket.

"So where is the meet going to be then?" the associate asked.

"I have a couple of options I am trying to decide upon" Renquist informed him "I shall however be going alone."

"Bit dangerous isn't it?" Barkov commented as he entered the office and helped himself to a drink from the bottle of whisky on the sideboard.

"Don't worry" Renquist responded "I will be well covered."

"Yeah well" Barkov added with a foreboding tone "I hope to have the Commander well covered as well."

"In what way dare I ask?" Renquist inquired sensing correctly that his Russian associate had a different agenda that may be off message to the rest of the group.

"Lots of blood with any luck" Barkov responded with a satisfied grin.

"Careful" Renquist warned him "The Commander is not to be harmed until our aims and objectives have been achieved."

"Yeah, I know" Barkov responded regretfully.

"In addition" Renquist cautioned "I warn you that harming or worse still killing the Commander will bring the entire Security Service of several countries, not to mention other agencies and interested parties to your door en masse and with interest and I can assure you my Soviet friend that any consideration of the requirements of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act will be low down on their list of priorities."

"I'll be ready for them" Barkov defiantly responded "I've been to some of the toughest hellholes on the planet, Leningrad, Chechnya, Iraq, Beirut, East Croydon, bring them on I say."

"It's your funeral" Renquist remarked wryly as Barkov stomped determinedly out of the office.

"What the hell is going on?" one Security Service officer asked as what appeared to be the entire Service arrived at Tottenham Court Road in numerous vehicles with a full cacophony of sirens and blue flashing lights.

"A very good question lad" the Commander agreed as he alighted from the front door of the Mobile Operations Unit as it pulled up alongside the patrol officer "If you happen to find out, do come and tell me."

"Yes Sir" the officer responded somewhat surprised by what was going on.

"Gather around everyone" the Commander called to the numerous officers alighting from various vehicles as well as the contingent from the Transport Division who were arriving via the adjacent Underground Station.

"We have a number of potential explosive devices scattered around the West End of the City at numerous locations" the Commander announced "So far we have identified the potential location of four of these..."

"Five Sir" Fuller called from the Mobile Operations Unit "Piccadilly Circus is another one."

"...five" the Commander continued "in addition to a potential sniper threat to key people throughout the City who are at this moment being taken care of courtesy of the VIP Protection Division."

"What's our time limit Sir?" one officer asked.

"We have forty minutes before the deadline to pay up expires" the Commander confirmed "What I want from you good ladies and gentlemen is a complete search of all the locations so far identified and to get as many people as possible to safety as quickly and as calmly as possible."

"There goes my quiet evening in front of the telly" one officer commented wryly.

"I know the feeling" the Commander agreed with him "Senior officers form yourselves into teams and spread out in a standard intensive search pattern" he instructed before heading back inside the Mobile Operations Unit.

"Direct line to the wife Sir" Fuller handed across the handset to the Commander.

"Evening Love" the Commander called.

"Hello dear" Tracy responded as she sat back in her seat at the Command console in the Holborn Control Room "What chaos would you like me to cause this evening?"

"Shut down and evacuate every station on the Underground inside the Circle Line" the Commander responded "Better throw in Earl's Court and Aldgate East as well while you are about it."

"Consider it done love" Tracy responded as she reached for the telephone on the desk.

"All of them?" one of the officers in the Control Room asked as Tracy dialled a number.

"Indeed" she confirmed "This will ruin the Line Manager's evening. Hello? Line Manager please."

There was a short pause as Tracy waited rather impatiently if her drumming of her fingers on the desk was anything to go by before she was answered.

"Well get him out of the bloody canteen then!" Tracy demanded "Doesn't he know there is an emergency on?"

"Due to a security alert, will all customers please evacuate the station immediately" the public announcement system throughout Tottenham Court Road station boomed, an announcement that was also being simultaneously made at stations across the centre of the city, sending a tidal wave of people up and out into the streets.

Below ground, service officers and Underground staff worked together to flush the last members of the public out from the various labyrinthine station complexes and up into the streets.

There, understandably confused evacuees were being moved quickly away from station buildings and being loaded onto requisitioned service buses whilst the immediate area was being taped off and sealed.

Seven minutes after the start of the evacuation, confirmations were coming through that the numerous stations throughout the centre of the city, both large and small had completed evacuating the public and the access gates were being closed to prevent any further unauthorized access.

"The trouble is boss" the Chief of the Bomb Squad commented as he and the Commander headed into the lower levels of now deserted Tottenham Court Road Station and towards the Northern Line Platforms "We have no idea what this device even looks like."

"I would reckon it would be fairly small" the Commander replied "Something to attract the attention and create panic and confusion without necessarily causing a huge amount of damage."

"Lima Bravo Zero One from Control" the Bomb Squad Chief's radio blurted out, echoing along the deserted tiled passageways.

"Go ahead" he responded.

"Got something on the north bound Northern Line platform" the officer calling responded.

"On the way" the Bomb Squad Chief replied as he and the Commander quickened their step.

As they arrived on the platform, they could see the only occupants being a group of three officers gathered at the far end of the platform with a member of station staff who were kneeling on the floor and peering underneath a bench.

"I reckon that's our baby" the Bomb Squad Chief confirmed as he too knelt down and looked at the suspect device.

"Nasty" the Commander agreed as he also took a look at the device, a black plastic box approximately one foot cubed with a clear front viewing panel behind which was what appeared to be some kind of small LCD screen and a mini keyboard.

"Right" the Bomb Squad Chief announced to everyone "Get everyone out and get me a disposal crew down here right now."

"We had better get a description of this thing to everyone else" the Commander added.

"You can do that on your way out" the Bomb Squad Chief remarked.

"I'm not going anywhere" the Commander retorted.

"With all due respect Sir" the Bomb Squad Chief responded directly "Get the hell out of here before I have you dragged out!"

"I know when I am not wanted..." the Commander remarked with a wry smile as he departed the platform and headed back up through the station to the ticket hall. He had just reached the top of the escalators when the mobile telephone rang in his pocket.

"Hello?" the Commander answered as he stood aside to allow the passing of the bomb disposal crew down the escalators.

"I do hope you are having a pleasant evening" Renquist announced.

"Bit busy I'll admit" the Commander agreed "But I have always liked to keep busy."

"One hour" Renquist instructed "Shoreditch Station, bring a friend with a laptop to confirm payment of my money and to verify my files."

"How big a van will I be requiring?" the Commander asked.

"Not that big actually" Renquist admitted "I have discovered the world of electronic media."

"One hour then" the Commander responded.

"I take it that was our mysterious man with the explosive file fixation" Fuller asked as he joined the Commander at the south east entrance to the station in the shadow of the Centre Point building.

"Good guess" the Commander confirmed "Have we found all our bombs yet?" he enquired as they crossed the road and boarded the Mobile Operations Unit which was now parked in the bus lane causing problems for a route 73 articulated bus that was trying to get around the corner.

"Six devices found so far and possibly a seventh" Fuller confirmed as she showed the locations of the devices confirmed in the form of red markers on a large electronic map of central London on the main view screen.

"Confirmed seventh at Warren Street" one of the officers monitoring the situation, cut in at that point "There may be another at Hyde Park Corner."

"Have all stations been evacuated?" the Commander asked.

"All clear apart from a slight problem at Green Park" Fuller confirmed "Apparently someone got stuck in the lift from the Jubilee Line again and the Fire Brigade are trying to get them out."

"Where are we with disarming?" the Commander asked.

"Barry from the Bomb Squad reports that they are very tricky devices that need six separate five digit codes entered in the correct order to shut them down."

"We need those clues" the Commander agreed "Lets just hope that Renquist comes up with the goods when I meet with him."

"Has he said where?" Fuller asked.

"The old Shoreditch Station" the Commander responded.

"Oh dear" Fuller commented.

"Something wrong?" the Commander asked.

"You've never been there Sir I take it?" Fuller asked.

"No as it happens" the Commander confirmed "Is there something I should know?"

"Well lets put it this way" Fuller explained hesitantly "If I wanted to pick a location where I was not isolated, overlooked by numerous potential sniper positions and virtually unwatchable then that would be it."

"Terrific" the Commander remarked as he reached for the telephone on the console desk "Get me through to Commander Baker please."

At Oxford Circus, traffic was busy as the West End shops were closing for the night and the last visitors to the area along with shop staff heading home, were forced onto buses with the closure of the Underground throughout the central London area.

Nobody took any notice of the gentlemen with the slightly rough complexion and a Security Service uniform as he placed a fairly innocuous looking cardboard box on the ground alongside some bagged rubbish that was waiting for collection.

The man then casually strolled away, quickly boarding a westbound bus service that pulled up alongside him and disappeared. For two minutes, nothing beyond what would normally pass for an evening in central London occurred but this serenity was abruptly interrupted when that box suddenly exploded with a loud bang which sent its components and the rubbish that was adjacent to it in all directions.

"What the hell was that?" the Bomb Squad officer who was co-ordinating operations in the ticket hall of Oxford Circus Station asked as the echo of the explosion above their heads rocked through followed by the sounds of distant screaming and vehicle brakes being sharply applied.

Quickly he and another half dozen officers headed up the steps and outside to where there was a scene of confusion amid the descending bits of rubbish that had been thrown up by the explosion and were now fluttering down and around in the breeze.

"Lima Bravo Eight Five to Control" the Bomb Squad officer called into his radio "Urgent message."

Over a mile away at Tottenham Court Road, the Commander was just about to alight from the front door of the Mobile Operations Unit when he stopped in his tracks at hearing the distant sound of the explosion echoing between the buildings.

"That didn't sound good" the Commander remarked as he turned back inside to see what had happened.

"Roger that" Fuller confirmed over the radio before turning to the Commander "Boss! We got a problem!"

"I think I just heard it" the Commander admitted "What was it?"

"Small explosive device concealed in rubbish outside Oxford Circus Station" Fuller confirmed.

"That means we have surface bombs as well" the Commander remarked as he saw the magnitude of the evening's task multiply by magic in front of him.

"Good thing the reinforcements are here" Tracy announced as she boarded the vehicle and joined them where she and the Commander kissed. "Having an interesting evening love?" she asked.

"You could say that love" the Commander admitted ruefully before turning back to the desk "Right, give me a cordon right around the west end."

"The whole of it?" Fuller asked.

"Everything south of Euston Road, west of Holborn, east of Marble Arch and north of Trafalgar Square" the Commander explained "Close the area off and get as many people out of there as you can, then grab your box of tricks and join me outside."

"I guess this is where I come in then?" Tracy asked.

"Correct my dear" the Commander confirmed "Sorry, I have an appointment elsewhere."

"What about the Bomb Squad guys?" Tracy asked as the Commander checked his gun in preparation to leave.

"Leave them two technicians with each device ready for when we get the codes" the Commander instructed "Everyone else out."

"Be careful" Tracy insisted, the concern for her husband's safety clearly obvious.

"I will" the Commander admitted with a forced smile before he reluctantly took a last look at Tracy before exiting the vehicle.

Outside he was met by Jennifer with an unmarked bullet proof Ministerial Escort car, the rear door of which she opened and allowed the Commander to get inside, whilst Fuller quickly joined them, getting in the front passenger seat.

"Evening gentlemen" she called back as she got in the drivers seat and started the engine "Where to? I don't go south of the river this time of night though" she joked.

"Shoreditch" the Commander confirmed "The old East London Line station."

"You got it Sir" Jennifer confirmed as with a powerful revving, she pulled away and headed at speed up New Oxford Street.

"Yes" Tracy confirmed on the radio as she looked up Oxford Street from her observation point on the front platform of the Mobile Operations Unit "Get everyone you can find down here right now and start a full evacuation of the central area."

"This should be interesting" one officer commented as he surveyed his screens.

"This is an emergency situation" the tannoy mounted on the patrol car that was moving slowly up Oxford Street announced, its voice booming around the surrounding streets "Will everyone please leave the area immediately."

Despite it being quite late in the evening, it was surprising just how many people there were still in the West End at that time, many of whom were looking around understandably confused as they were being ushered onto buses by Security Service officers with instructions simply to get them out of the area using whatever means were necessary and available.

"Come on" Tracy encouraged the crowds of people who were emerging from Oxford Street at the Tottenham Court Road end "Lets keep it moving along please!"

Overhead, a Security Service helicopter was hovering over the area observing the progress of the evacuation, the streets below full of people as they were marshalled out of the area either on foot or in whatever vehicles that could be commandeered.

"Control" Tracy called into her radio "How are we doing?" she asked.

"The ground teams report that they should have everyone out of the area bar a few stragglers within fifteen minutes" the Control room reported.

"If they make it in ten then there's a drink in it for them" Tracy responded "Any news on my husband?"

"Divisional Commander Caverner reported in that they were approaching the Shoreditch area a few minutes ago" the Control Room officer confirmed.

"And our insurance package?" Tracy inquired.

"Already in place."

"I don't like this" Jennifer commented as she pulled the car to a stop in front of the entrance to the old closed Shoreditch Station which like the surrounding area and the building site alongside, were immersed in darkness.

"What's their to like?" the Commander agreed as he and Fuller got out of the car. Before heading off though he went to the drivers window where Jennifer wound the window down.

"If you don't hear anything in twenty minutes, leave quickly and quietly" the Commander suggested.

"If you hear gunfire, leave immediately" Fuller added as he kissed his fiancé farewell.

"Right..." Jennifer responded apprehensively.

Both Fuller and the Commander took a deep breath before setting off towards the old station building. Upon reaching the door, they discovered it was unlocked and with caution they entered the old ticket hall which apart from the removal of the ticket machines and the presence of some builders materials, was pretty much as it looked when it closed its doors to the last passenger just under a year earlier.

"Is there anybody there? Said the traveller knocking on the moonlit door" the Commander asked quietly in jest. However apart from a few shafts of light coming in from outside and the rustle of a mouse skipping along the bottom of the wall, there appeared to be no one around.

Cautiously, the Commander drew his gun and proceeded through the former ticket office and then out down the steps to the old platform, the track still in situ but with rusty rails and overgrown with weeds. The platform too appeared deserted, even the signs indicating which station this was had long since been removed, just a slightly discoloured rectangle on the wall showing where it once had been.

"Good evening Commander" Renquist's voice suddenly announced causing both Fuller and the Commander to turn around suddenly and see him emerge from the shadows of the over bridge into the limited light.

"I was beginning to think you were going to stand me up" the Commander responded wryly.

"And you might be?" Renquist inquired politely of Fuller.

"Commander Fuller" he responded.

"Ah yes" Renquist recalled from his knowledge of his file research "Commander Simon Fuller, engaged to Divisional Commander Jennifer Caverner."

"Very good" Fuller responded "I don't suppose you know next weeks lottery numbers do you?"

"If I did my friend" Renquist remarked "Then chances are we would not be standing here tonight. Speaking of which, I believe there is the subject of a large sum of money owing."

"Simon" the Commander called aside to Fuller who opened his laptop and placed it on the top of a crate nearby.

"As agreed" Fuller commented as he set about the task of the electronic transfer of funds "Thirty million from the Treasury Special Operations account in the Cayman Islands to...."

"Banque Nationale de Suisse account number 375565212" Renquist confirmed, watching carefully over Fuller's shoulder as he typed in the details.

"And congratulations" Fuller confirmed as he completed the transaction "You are now a rich man."

"Thank you" Renquist responded "So Commander, we have a deal."

"Glad to hear it" the Commander responded.

"As agreed" Renquist reached inside his coat pocket and produced a spiral bound notebook "Here are the clues to defuse the devices."

"And your files?" the Commander asked.

"Here you go" Renquist handed over a little black USB memory stick with the notebook, the former of which the Commander passed over to Fuller to check. "I think you will find that it contains everything anyone could possibly want to know about anything and anyone of any significant importance."

"He's right" Fuller confirmed as he gave the contents of the memory stick a quick look through on the laptop "Blimey, he really did that?" he blurted out as one piece of information caught his eye.

"Well I must take my leave of you gentlemen" Renquist confirmed "It's actually been a pleasure to deal with someone who actually is quite trustworthy for a change. Until we meet again."

The Commander and Fuller watched Renquist turn smartly on his heels and disappear into the shadows as quietly as he had arrived a few minutes earlier.

"Well that went well" Fuller remarked with a sigh of relief.

"Yeah" the Commander with an obvious doubt being echoed "That is what is bothering me."

"Lets get out of here" Fuller suggested as he closed his laptop and returned it to his briefcase.

"Good idea" the Commander agreed as they set off back up the old platform towards the footbridge.

Jennifer looked on from the car as she saw the station door open and the two officers emerge whereupon she started the engine. They were about half way to the car however, out in the open when suddenly two shots rang out, striking the ground in front of them.

"Run!" the Commander urged whereupon they ran quickly to the car and ducked down behind it.

"All right, you were right" Fuller admitted as further shots rang out, shattering the side windows of the car.

"Right about what?" Jennifer asked as she joined them, her gun drawn and looking around for the source of the gunfire.

"It was too easy" the Commander confirmed "Trouble is I don't think this is Renquist's boys."

"Mind running that past me again?" Fuller asked as alongside him Jennifer ducked up above the bonnet, fired off a couple of shots into the darkness and then ducked back down again.

"I am wondering if our Bolshevik barm pot friend has decided to go it alone" the Commander remarked "This has all the hallmarks of his kind of work."

"Victor Pappa X-Ray Zero One to Control" Jennifer called into her radio "I would appreciate it if the insurance package arrived and helped us out here!"

"On the way" the familiar voice of Commander Baker confirmed whereupon the sound of a powerful car approaching filled the air. Within moments a number of vehicles had arrived and numerous armed officers were being deployed including Baker herself.

"Lets get out of here shall we?" Commander Baker suggested wisely as she took up a defensive posture with her rifle and guarded the three officers.

"I'll second that" the Commander agreed as with Baker providing cover by taking a couple of carefully selected shots, they all clambered back into the car.

"Keep down and hold on to your hats" Baker ordered as she got in the drivers seat. Before anyone could respond, she had gunned the engine and slammed the car into reverse before executing a high speed handbrake turn and accelerated away.

"Where did you learn to drive?" the Commander asked as he sat up in the front passenger seat before brushing shattered glass fragments off his lap.

"My Uncle Albert" Baker explained "He was a banger racing champion."

"Never would have guessed" Fuller remarked sarcastically as he extricated himself from beneath Jennifer on the back seat.

"Last ones are out" an officer confirmed to Tracy as she stood on the front steps of the Mobile Operations Unit and watched the last bus containing people from within the cordon area disappear off into the distance.

"Thank you" Tracy responded before heading back inside and picking up the radio headset "Lima One to all units" she called "Confirm area evacuated then anyone not essential is to get the hell out of the area right now."

As various acknowledgements came back over the radio Tracy became aware of the sound of a struggling car approaching which caused her to step back outside to investigate.

"Garage Chief isn't going to like this" she commented to herself as the unmarked high speed saloon car came down New Oxford Street towards her, struggling with one flat tyre, two shattered windows, a broken headlight and bullet holes in the bodywork.

There was also a rather worrying cloud of steam emanating from the radiator as it slowed to a stop, where Baker used the pedestrian railing to bring it to a halt with an abrupt clunk.

"Did I miss anything love?" the Commander asked as he climbed carefully out of the front passenger seat before coming over to join his wife.

"Well you didn't but I guess from the state of this thing that I did" Tracy remarked as she took in the sight of the wrecked vehicle.

"Thank God its insured" Jennifer remarked as she got out of the back only to find the door handle come off in her hand which she then casually tossed over her shoulder.

"Having fun are we?" the voice of Sir Richard Crowthorne asked which caused them all to turn around and see him and Garforth arrive at the scene.

"What have you two been up to?" the Commander asked.

"Trying to trace how our Mr Renquist and his Russian friend are planning to get out of the country" Garforth explained "I think we may have a lead."

"Simon" the Commander turned to Fuller "Go with these two reprobates and find me Renquist and the Bolshevik barm pot, meantime" he added as he reached inside his uniform tunic and retrieved the notebook that Renquist had given him earlier "I have some bombs to diffuse."

"You were right boss" Renquist's aide commented as they sat back in the rear of a luxurious Mercedes saloon car that was transporting them across London "Our Soviet friend did try something."

"If he is that pissed off at the Commander" Renquist mused as he poured himself and his aide a drink "I dread to think how badly annoyed he will be when he finds we have done a midnight flit with his money."

"Indeed" the aide agreed "Cheers."

"Well lets look at it this way" Renquist remarked "If the Commander can keep Barkov and his associates busy then at least they will not notice until way too late that I am suddenly no longer around, and neither is his money."

"Remind me to never get on the wrong side of you" the aide commented.

"Don't worry lad" Renquist responded "Once you have your percentage, you can safely disappear into the crowd never to be seen again."

"I'll drink to that" the aide confirmed as they recharged their glasses.

"Why are we waiting..." the bomb technician commented to himself as he looked around the totally deserted platform at Tottenham Court Road station, only the hum of the lights and electrical equipment and the scurrying of a mouse on the track bed disturbing the peace.

He was about to sit back down on the seat alongside the device when he became aware of footsteps approaching, the echo of hard soled shoes filtering through the deserted station and becoming steadily louder as its unknown owner approached his location.

"Hello?" the technician called out, placing a cautious hand on his holstered weapon just in case the footsteps approaching turned out to be unfriendly.

"Evening" the Commander greeted as he suddenly appeared out of one of the platform wall alcoves and joined him "How many kids do you have?" he asked.

"Err two" the Bomb Technician responded slightly mystified, this was definitely not what he was expecting to be asked that was for certain.

"Right" the Commander concluded "Get out of here then."

"But what about the b..." the Technician began, pointing towards the device.

"Don't worry" the Commander reassured him "It's in safe hands, now stop arguing and get the hell out of here will you?"

"Err yes Sir" the Technician responded as he turned to leave.

"Oh if you see my wife up there" the Commander told him "For gawd's sake don't tell her what I am doing or she will kill me."

"Yes Sir" the Technician confirmed before disappearing from view.

The Commander listened as he followed the sound of the footsteps gradually disappear through the station before the previous near silence was restored and he knelt down to examine the device more closely.

"Control" the Commander called over the radio headset that he had put on in order to attend to the device and still maintain communication hands free "Is there anyone there?"

"Hello dear" Tracy responded from her position on board the Mobile Operations Unit "What the hell are you doing?" she asked pointedly.

"Just admiring the decor" the Commander looked around "Here is how we are going to do this" he declared "Put me on a single dedicated frequency with the other bomb technicians and someone who can read out the clues to the disarming codes."

"Done" Tracy confirmed "Change to channel eight now."

"Can you hear me?" the Commander asked as he checked the channel button display.

"Reading you loud and clear" Tracy confirmed.

"Right" the Commander declared "We are going to decipher these clues in order, then I will input the solution into the device and if it is correct then we pass that solution on down the line to the other bomb technicians."

"And if it is wrong?" Tracy asked even though she was fully aware of the probable result.

"Then this place gets redecorated arterial red unfortunately" the Commander grimly confirmed "Whoever is next in the chain takes over, diagnoses the mistake made and carries on."

"Be bloody careful" Tracy warned.

"I will love" the Commander admitted "Now shall we begin?"

"Ok" Tracy announced as she consulted the notebook with the codes in "Eyes down for the first clue."

"I'm listening" the Commander confirmed.

"Aerial Gaelic heads for the capitals under his married name" Tracy read.

"Do what?" the Commander was understandably taken aback.

"Well you did say these clues were directed to you" Tracy commented "So you must have some inkling surely."

"Aerial" the Commander pondered "Flying something."

"Scotsman?" one of the other officers at a bomb site asked over the radio.

"4472?" the Commander responded "No hang on this is supposed to be a five digit number."

"Simon" Tracy called over the radio to Fuller "Get everything you can find on railway history and facts and get your arse back here" she commanded.

"I'll be there in two minutes" Fuller confirmed amid a background sound of the car he was travelling in being turned around sharply.

"Wait a minute" the Commander announced after some thought "It could be 60103."

"Come again?" Tracy responded, understandably curious as to how he had arrived at this conclusion.

"Class A3 locomotive number 4472 Flying Scotsman was renumbered 60103 under British Railways when nationalisation occurred in 1948" the Commander explained.

"Well of course" Tracy responded, shrugging her shoulders in complete indifference as she had not a clue what her husband was talking about "I'll bow to your superior knowledge on this one."

"That's makes for a nice change" the Commander murmured to himself.

"I heard that" Tracy added with a wry smile.

"Ok ladies and gentlemen" the Commander announced "I am entering the first code now."

There was an almost deadly silence as everyone stood still and listened including Fuller who had just returned to the Mobile Operations Unit as the Commander shuffled forward where he was kneeling on the platform surface and approached the device.

"Six" the Commander called out as he entered the individual digits on the display "Zero, one, zero and three."

"Anything?" Tracy asked after a short silent pause.

"I have yet to press enter" the Commander explained "Here we go, hold your ears everyone."

A bleep emanated from the device as the Commander pressed the enter button to see if his solution to the first code would be accepted. To his and indeed everyone else's relief, the five digit number he had entered immediately turned green and the display changed to a request for the second code.

"Looks like we may be on to a winner here" the Commander announced to a sigh of relief from all concerned "What's the second clue?"

"The hero on tin pins rural southern retreat" Tracy read from the notebook whilst alongside her, Fuller began to furiously work away on his laptop in search of an answer.

"Are we assuming here that we are still talking five digit railway numbers?" the Commander asked.

"Well it would make sense" Tracy agreed before turning to Fuller "You have anything yet Simon?"

"This may be a long shot out of left field" Fuller responded "What about Tangmere?"

"RAF station on the south coast where Douglas Bader, he of the tin legs was based for a time" the Commander responded.

"Yeah" Fuller agreed "I saw the film a few months back."

"34067" the Commander concluded and promptly proceeded to input the number into the device with another successful result "That worked, what's next?"

"On time for his own funeral to annoy de Gaulle" Tracy read "Now this is getting really bizarre."

"Oh that's easy" the Commander responded "Winston Churchill, the locomotive of the same name hauled his funeral train, reportedly by his request despatched from Waterloo to annoy General de Gaulle, trouble is I can not remember the number."

"Hang on a second" Fuller replied as he began searching websites before finding the crucial list which he needed. Scanning down the list of British Railway's Southern Region Bullied Light Pacific's, he soon found the number required.

"The answer you seek is 34051" Fuller announced with triumph which the Commander duly entered, again with success.

"Three down, two to go" the Commander responded but at that moment the device in front of him suddenly beeped and a countdown clock began "Err did I do something wrong?"

"What's wrong?" Tracy asked with concern.

"I am not entirely sure" the Commander admitted cautiously however an explanation was soon forthcoming.

"I think someone just activated a remote detonation control device of some kind" the Chief of the Bomb Squad announced over the radio as he examined his own device at Marble Arch "We have four minutes, hurry up."

"Next clue" the Commander requested with a clear sense of urgency.

"Brush heavy hauler seeks a ticket for the monumental festival" Tracy read out "Bugged if I know."

"Brush built diesel locomotives are probably our best bet" Fuller confirmed as he entered more search terms into his laptop "What about Glastonbury Tor? Class 60 number 60039?"

"Well we don't have time to debate it" the Commander responded "I'll give it a try" he announced as with some trepidation he entered the number into the device.

"It's now or never..." the Commander sung to himself.

"What the?" the Chief of the Bomb Squad remarked hearing this coming over the radio, a reaction shared by everyone else on the same frequency.

"I sing when I'm nervous all right?" the Commander explained.

"Well that explains our wedding night" Tracy mused with a wry grin.

"Six, zero, zero, three, nine and enter" the Commander talked through the keystrokes and then let out a huge sigh of relief when the device recorded a correctly accepted input.

"All right" the Commander announced "Follow my lead and enter 60039" he instructed the other officers with their devices "Tracy, lets hear the last part of this little puzzle."

"Commanding one of a fateful five oscillated its way to a short life" Tracy responded.

"Say that again?" the Commander responded after a short pause of serious thought.

"Commanding one of a fateful five oscillated its way to a short life" she confirmed, clearly as mystified as the rest of them.

"Well that could be anything" Fuller remarked "I tell you what, I'll search for groups of five and see what turns up."

"Something short lived as well by the sounds of it" the Commander added "I would suppose the first one of the batch."

"What about the Commanding reference?" Tracy asked "That seems to have been put in deliberately by the sound of it."

"Classes of five" Fuller announced after examining his search results "Could be a Black Five but there were a hell of a lot of those."

"What's this thing?" Tracy pointed to one result on the screen "Could that be it?"

"Bullied prototype steam locomotive built in 1949" Fuller read from the screen "There was only one though."

"There were supposed to be four more according to this" Tracy read "That in anyone's book makes five."

"Ah!" the Commander recalled "It was called the Leader Class wasn't it?"

"Exactly" Fuller confirmed as he continued to scan down the information on his screen "Which hopefully means the number you need is 36001."

"You are sure about that aren't you?" the Commander asked as he watched the countdown time pass the one minute remaining mark.

"Confirmed" Fuller responded by which time the Commander was already inputting the number into the device.

"Here we go" the Commander commented as he pressed the enter button whereupon with a bleeping noise, the device thankfully shut down.

A few moments of silent relief passed as the Commander fell back on to the platform surface through a combination of relief and tiredness. As he lay there looking up at the platform tunnel ceiling, the mobile telephone in his pocket rang.

"Now who could that be at this time of night?" the Commander remarked as he sat up and fumbled around in his tunic pocket trying to locate the device before finding it in the darkest recesses of the last pocket he looked in.

"Hello?" he answered.

"Well done Commander" Renquist congratulated him "I see you managed to follow my little riddles successfully."

"Fairly straightforward now I come to think about it" the Commander admitted.

"As long as it provided you and your colleagues with a sufficient enough distraction to allow me to make an undisturbed departure" Renquist explained "Then it will have served my purposes most satisfactorily."

"Would have been nicer if you hadn't started the countdown at one point though" the Commander commented.

"What countdown?" Renquist responded with a clear tone of surprise in his voice.

"The one that says this here bomb will blow up in x number of minutes" the Commander explained calmly but with implied anger.

"Not my doing I can assure you" Renquist responded "I fear that my former Soviet colleague may be going independent on us."

"All right" the Commander replied "Tell me where can I find him and his goons?"

There was a long pause as Renquist paced up and down while considering his situation and wondered whether helping the Commander would be of benefit to his current situation before returning to the telephone.

"All right" Renquist gave in "As I have no interest in seeing you being killed or injured at this time, I'll help you as far as I can."

"I'm listening" the Commander responded as he headed back up the platform towards the exit, pausing only to allow the Bomb Squad disposal technicians past so that they could deal with the device.

"He has a base of operations out of a warehouse near Heathrow" Renquist explained "I rented him the space so if your Mr Fuller is up to scratch on his research and checks through my property portfolio then you may be able to locate the gentleman."

"Thank you" the Commander responded determinedly before hanging up and heading back up the escalators to the surface.

"Why can I assume from the look on your face dear that we are not going to have the rest of the night off?" Tracy remarked as she met the Commander in the ticket hall where they embraced.

"Years of experience?" the Commander wryly responded before they kissed.

"Most likely" Tracy agreed.

"Ah Mr Fuller" the Commander greeted Fuller as he joined them "I would dearly like a little one to one chat with our Russian friend and according to Renquist he may well be based at one of his little properties somewhere."

"I'll see what I can turn up Sir" Fuller confirmed as they headed back up the steps to street level where they exited out into the cold night air which with the near deserted streets presented a slightly eerie atmosphere.

"Isn't it peaceful?" Tracy remarked looking around.

"Aye love" the Commander agreed "That it is. Pity we have to spoil it though."

"All right" Tracy responded as she reached for her radio "Control" she called "All clear at ground level, you can let them all back in now."

Within moments, the barriers that had been sealing off the area were lifted and traffic, both vehicular and pedestrian was flooding back in to the heart of the city returning it to something approaching normality for a mid evening in central London.

Sir Richard Crowthorne switched on the antique desk lamp in his office which illuminated the interior just sufficiently enough to be able to see the papers on his desk that he should have sorted through by the day before.

He let out a heavy sigh as he picked up the papers, cast them a cursory glance as he sat down and then tossed them to one side before sitting back and rubbing his tired eyes.

For just a few precious moments Sir Richard thought that he might actually get some peace and quiet but somehow inevitably it was not to be as the telephone rang.

Staring at the ringing telephone for a few moments did not unfortunately achieve his original aim of trying to send a physic message to the caller to go away so Sir Richard was reluctantly forced to answer it.

"Evening" Sir Richard announced down the telephone, his voice tired but as ever helpful to whoever it was calling. As it turned out it was his opposite number from MI6 across the river with a relevant query.

"Sorry to disturb your evening old friend" Sir Edward Stevens called "but have any of your guys or gals booked one of our special operation aircraft for tonight?" he asked.

"Not that I know of" Sir Richard responded "Any reason why? he enquired.

"Oh just a hunch" Sir Edward explained "It's just that our air crew called me ten minutes ago asking me to confirm a covert witness transport flight for midnight out of Duxford and I couldn't find any reference to it in our operation logs so I wondered if it might have been one of you lot or maybe the Commander was up to something."

"Not on my budget I can tell you and the Commander has his plate more than full at the moment" Sir Richard admitted "I doubt it would be him somehow. You couldn't let me have the details could you?"

"Err yes" Sir Edward responded as at both ends of the conversation the two men scabbled around on their respective desks for something to write on and a pen that actually worked "It's one of the RAF Special Flight Unit Tri-Star's scheduled to pick up two non specified individuals and escort from Duxford at midnight."

"Here Eddie do me a favour will you?" Sir Richard asked "Can you keep this to yourself for the moment but make sure the flight does not get interrupted and I will see if I can find out what is going on. By the way is their any destination specified?"

"Not that I can see" Sir Edward checked the notes again "Then again you don't exactly borrow a ruddy great Tri-Star to nip down the shops."

"Very true" Sir Richard agreed "By the way, whilst I have you on the phone old friend, I don't suppose you happen to know who the Russian FSB guy in London is do you?"

"Dimitri Ivanov" Sir Edward confirmed "Officially the trade and commerce relations guy over at the embassy but obviously has other talents."

"Thanks" Sir Richard responded "Keep in touch."

"You're welcome."

After hanging up, Sir Richard looked out into space for a few moments in thought before returning to the telephone. He picked up the receiver but before dialling, consulted his directory before making the call. After a few moments he was answered.

"Russian Consulate, London" a distinctively Russian accent answered.

"Good evening" Sir Richard announced "It's Sir Richard Crowthorne, could I speak to Trade and Commerce Secretary Dimitri Ivanov please?"

"One moment please" the Russian voice responded before putting him on hold.

Sir Richard waited patiently as the Russian Embassy hold music consisting of some traditional Soviet style brass band music played away in his ear. Indeed he found himself humming along to it by the time a human voice returned to the call.

"Good evening Sir Richard" the rich Russian accent of Dimitri Ivanov responded "To what do I owe the pleasure?"

"Is this line secure at your end?" Sir Richard asked.

"Best Soviet technology" Dimitri reassured him "Stolen it should be noted from a British research establishment twenty years ago mind."

"The name Vladisov Barkov raise your antenna by any chance?" Sir Richard enquired.

"Oh yes" Dimitri confirmed "Last I heard of him he was banged up courtesy of your Commander."

"Yeah well" Sir Richard explained "It's a long story but to cut to the chase he's out, about and very trigger happy whenever he and his goons see the Commander or his wife."

"Ah, the shooting in Shoreditch this evening" Dimitri responded.

"You don't miss much do you?" Sir Richard remarked.

"Indeed" Dimitri confirmed "I like to keep an ear to the ground. What are you asking of me?"

"To be blunt the UK Government and its law enforcement agencies would dearly love to see Barkov and his associates out of the country, never to darken our doors again and I was wondering if the Russian Federation would like to offer some of its special accommodation of the bars on the windows and vicious dogs in the ground variety."

"I think that could be arranged" Dimitri agreed "I know of a number of my colleagues who would be very happy to receive the opportunity of a one to one chat with the gentleman."

"That's what I figured" Sir Richard agreed "Stay by a telephone, I may have something for you later tonight."

"Look forward to it old friend" Dimitri confirmed "Dosvidanja."

"I think I may have something Sir" Fuller reported as he worked away on his laptop "Renquist's letting agency recently let out a warehouse on the outskirts of Harrow to a Mr Popov would you believe."

"Could be legit though" Tracy remarked as she nudged the Commander in the ribs to wake him up as he had dozed off in her arms on the bench seat of the Mobile Operations Unit that was proceeding through central London back towards New Scotland Yard.

"What?" the Commander blearily responded as he tried to straighten himself back up.

"Wakey wakey love" Tracy urged him back into life with a kiss on the cheek which appeared to have the desired effect.

"All right sports fans" Fuller declared "Mr Popov apart from being the hirer of the aforementioned Harrow warehouse and the name of a character from Rentaghost..."

"That was Miss Popov" the Commander corrected him.

"Well it would appear that is also a resident of 24 Leinster Gardens, Bayswater" Fuller explained.

"And I take it" the Commander remarked "he is not a registered employee, agent or representative of the London Transport Executive then?"

"Correct Sir" Fuller confirmed "If I were a betting man like yourself Sir, I would wager that is our intended destination."

"Jimmy!" Tracy called to the driver up at the front "Is that patrol car still behind us?" she asked.

"Yes Maam" the driver confirmed as he checked his mirrors.

"Well slam the anchors on" Tracy ordered "We need some faster transport."

With a swift change of direction, the driver brought the Mobile Operations Unit over to the side of the road in Whitehall and halted not far from Downing Street. The vehicle had barely stopped before Fuller, Tracy and the Commander were piling off and flagging down the patrol car.

"Sorry to do this to you lad" Tracy announced to the understandably surprised patrol car driver "Swap motors."

"Are you driving?" the Commander asked slightly nervously as he saw Tracy get into the drivers seat as soon as it was vacated.

"Yes love" Tracy's tone was insistent "You are in no fit state to drive at the moment."

"Oh dear" Fuller murmured quietly as he got in the back whilst the Commander slightly reluctantly sat in the front passenger seat.

Tracy was about to release the handbrake and pull away when a black cab pulled up alongside causing all three occupants in the vehicle to look across where they saw a slightly out of breath Sir Richard Crowthorne in the back.

"Mind if I join you?" he asked.

"Join the party" the Commander responded as Sir Richard got out of the cab and paid the driver before climbing in the back of the patrol car with Fuller.

"Right Simon" Tracy called back "Point us in the right direction."

"Head for the Harrow Road and I'll guide you from there" Fuller responded apprehensively.

"Right" Tracy announced as she released the handbrake, revved the engine and dropped the clutch, sending traffic swerving rapidly out of the way as they responded to the blue lights and screeching siren.

"It could be worse Sir" Fuller remarked as Tracy narrowly missed clipping a traffic island as she rounded Parliament Square, running two red lights in the process.

"How exactly?" Sir Richard asked as he searched around for the seatbelt.

"Erm..." Fuller responded "I'll think of something!"

"Damm it!" Barkov commented with anger as he threw the empty bottle into the corner of the near empty dusty warehouse office, smashing it into numerous pieces.

"Something wrong boss?" one of his associates asked upon hearing the commotion.

"I'm out of vodka" Barkov declared with some resignation as he slumped back down into the easy chair that with the improvised desk made out of old packing crates, consisted of his office furniture.

"I could nip out and get some" the associate informed him.

"I'd appreciate it comrade" Barkov responded.

"Be ten minutes" the associate responded as he grabbed his jacket and left.

Outside in the dark concrete surfaced area of the warehouse yard, a shaft of light momentarily illuminated the deserted semi derelict yard as the man exited the warehouse before returning to darkness with the closing of the door.

Although to the naked eye, the man was invisible as he headed across the yard towards the gate and the main road, he was visible to the two officers from the Undercover Surveillance Section who were observing from an adjacent rooftop through infra red equipped binoculars.

"Control from Eagle Three" one of the observers called into his radio "One male leaving the premises."

"Confirmed" came the response from Commander Cassini who was controlling operations from an unmarked van around the corner "How many do you estimate remain inside."

"Hard to tell" the observer responded as he scanned around "Several vehicles on site though and numerous exits and entrances. Any sign of the reinforcements?"

"Looks like the boss just arrived" Cassini confirmed as a patrol car pulled in behind his van "Hold on there and report any further progress."

"Will do, Eagle Three out."

"Evening" the Commander announced as he, Tracy and Sir Richard entered the back of the van and joined Cassini up the front "What's the S.P.?"

"Not exactly a piece of cake this one" Cassini confirmed as he passed across a map and plan of the area to the Commander "Six possible entry and exit points, hidden alcoves, alleyways and other unpleasant potential traps and an unknown number of bodies on site, most likely given our current run of luck, armed to the teeth."

"Everything you could possibly want for a quiet evening out in Harrow" Tracy commented with a smile.

"I think I need to take a closer look" the Commander announced "Where are your guys?"

"Two in position on this adjacent roof here overlooking the main yard" Cassini indicated the building in the distance "with a further half dozen scattered around the perimeter meaning no one goes in or out of that place without us knowing about it."

"Eagle Three to Eagle One" Cassini's radio crackled into life "The target who left five minutes ago is returning and heading back towards the main gate."

"Grab him" the Commander requested "but discreetly mind."

Within moments of this order, two of Cassini's men appeared from the shadows behind the man and grabbed him, dragging him off the street and into the back of the van where the man immediately stopped struggling when he was faced with half a dozen officers pointing their guns at him.

"Good evening" the Commander announced "Nice of you to join us."

"Oh, the good stuff" Sir Richard commented as he took the bottle of vodka off the man and looked at the label with admiration "Many thanks!"

"You're welcome" the man responded with resignation.

"Right" the Commander announced "Simon, summon the cavalry, Cassini continue to feed as much on site intelligence as you can gather, Sir Richard, show our guest here to comfortable quarters, Tracy keep an eye on things on this side of the fence."

"And just where do you think you are you going?" Tracy asked as the Commander got out of the van, stepping out onto the wet pavement outside before turning back to face her.

"Oh just going for a look around" the Commander evasively replied with a wink "See you later love" he added before closing the van door quickly before Tracy could remonstrate with him about risking his life unnecessarily yet again.

Outside, the Commander found it necessary to pull his uniform overcoat tighter in over himself as it started to rain incessantly before he proceeded down the road and then left into a side alley that ran past the back of the premises under surveillance.

Using a torch, he quickly scanned the rusty chain link fence that defined the boundary of the premises until he noticed that there was a breach where one of the fence posts had collapsed through metal fatigue.

The Commander had to bend and squeeze a bit to get himself through the hole in the fence but soon found himself inside the premises whereupon he proceeded to the old fire exit stairs that ran up the back of the main building.

"This was definitely not a good idea" the Commander pensively commented quietly to himself as he headed up the rusty old steps which creaked gently under his weight. The rain increased in intensity as he approached the top cautiously, his general discomfort with heights being somewhat of a hindrance to his progress but he managed to reach the roof access point where he was able to cross over to the far side of the building to the point from which the two observing officers were training their binoculars down on the yard and buildings below.

"Good evening gentlemen" the Commander greeted as he joined them "Lovely weather for it."

"We always seem to get the jobs that involve being somewhere with no shelter whatsoever and then it tips down with bloody rain" one of the observers commented.

"You have my sympathies believe me" the Commander responded as he wiped some of the rain from his face as best he could with a handkerchief "Any more activity down there?" he asked.

"Someone started a vehicle engine a few moments ago" one of the officers confirmed "sounded like a lorry or something so I would wager there is some sort of workshop facility in there."

"Right" the Commander responded "Keep this channel monitored and send in the cavalry when I give the word."

"Darling, what the hell are you doing?" Tracy demanded to know over the radio upon hearing the Commander's words.

"Just dropping in on an old friend love" the Commander responded as he left the two observation officers and headed across the roof, being careful not to slip on the surface which was becoming increasingly treacherous with the combination of the dark and the hard rain.

"Now what the hell is he doing?" Tracy asked generally from her position in the front passenger seat of the van.

"Search me" Sir Richard commented.

"And who are these guys?" Fuller asked as he observed an anonymous black van pull in on the other side of the road and then flash its headlights.

"Some friends I invited along to the party" Sir Richard explained "If you will excuse me" he added as he made a discrete departure.

"Why do I get the feeling I am being kept in the dark about something?" Tracy remarked.

"Don't ask me Maam" Cassini responded "I just work here."

"Never a locksmiths daughter around when you need one" the Commander remarked as he examined the old lock on the roof access hatch of the main warehouse building. In response he fumbled around in his pocket and retrieved a rather old looking Swiss Army Knife with which he set about trying to release the lock.

As luck would have it, the old age of the lock and its deterioration over the years of having been out on an exposed roof for many years meant it broke off easily and the Commander was able to open the hatch and look inside where he was confronted by a ceiling mounted walkway above the upper level of the interior of the building and overlooking the main warehouse area.

Below him as he carefully stepped down the short ladder onto the walkway, the Commander could see approximately half a dozen men either checking weapons or dozing on various chairs and old sofas over in one corner, indeed to him some appeared to be somewhat hung over, the array of empty beer and vodka bottles strewn around being the most likely source of their condition.

The walkway the Commander found himself on stretched the entire length of the interior of the building right towards the roof section of the office like buildings over on the east side and it was quietly towards this roof area that he proceeded where there was a rusty metal runged ladder leading down to ground level.

As he climbed down the ladder, the Commander stopped when he reached the mid level office balcony when he saw what looked like a person in one of the offices. Instead of his original intention of heading all the way to the ground he elected to draw his gun from its holster and step off the ladder onto the balcony right there.

"Spare me from this mediocrity" Barkov remarked in pure disgruntled Russian with disdain as he watched the television, not being able to believe just how bad British television really was.

"Perhaps this will help" the Commander remarked as he sat down opposite Barkov and placed the bottle of vodka on the table.

Barkov looked up in surprise at his unexpected guest but decided not to offer any resistance as soon as he saw that the Commander already had his gun drawn on him.

"An unexpected pleasure" Barkov responded as he reached for the bottle and opened it "Will you join me?"

"I'm normally a scotch man myself" the Commander admitted "but thank you."

"A man of taste" Barkov commented as he poured both of them a drink "Maybe I underestimated you."

"Thank you" the Commander responded as he took his drink "Are you really watching this crap?" he indicated the television which was still showing a dreadfully inept overnight phone in quiz programme.

"It amazes me how stupid some people are who phone into this thing" Barkov commented as he used the remote to switch off the television "No wonder western civilisation is going down the pan."

"So what shall we talk about" the Commander asked as he relaxed back in the chair but continued to maintain his gun towards Barkov.

"Frederick J Renquist the Third?" Barkov suggested.

"Good choice" the Commander agreed "It looks very much like he's done the dirty on you and run off with the money."

"And how can you be sure of this fact?" Barkov enquired.

"Let's just say I know the type" the Commander admitted.

"Of course he will be well displeased with you when he discovers that the money transfer you paid him with came from the National Bank of Bullshit" Barkov commented which prompted one of those 'How did you know that?' type expressions from the Commander.

"Let's just say I have a good knowledge of how you operate as well" Barkov explained "If I was in your shoes I would have done exactly the same."

"So that brings me to my next problem" the Commander remarked "What the hell do I do with you?"

"Difficult questions are the burden of the highest ranks in life" Barkov was being philosophical this evening although really by now it was early morning.

"You see, its like this" the Commander leaned forward to explain the predicament "I can either throw you back into one of our comfortable but strict high security institutions there to spend a not insignificant part of the rest of your life at Her Majesty's pleasure or alternatively I can just hand you over to the Russian authorities who together with a couple of rather annoyed Chechen army generals, would dearly like a polite word in your shell like."

The Commander could see from Barkov's rather uncomfortable shifting of his position in his seat when he mentioned the latter option that he did not like that possibility so the Commander decided to elaborate.

"You see I had a very interesting telephone call about an hour ago from my opposite number in Moscow" the Commander continued "It appears about ten years ago that you sold a job lot of weapons to the aforementioned two Chechnyan generals except you failed to mention to them that you obtained them by having them stolen from a Russian Army base near Vladivostok with the assistance by the way of your brother in law who just happened to be the base commander."

"Not any more he isn't" Barkov commented.

"Last seen being bundled into the back of an FSB van apparently" the Commander confirmed "Anyway, I digress. Then having sold the weapons to them, you went to the FSB and informed them in return for the not inconsiderable reward that it was your clients who stole the weapons and the exact location of where they could be found so having played each side off against the other to line your own pocket, I can kind of understand why they are so anxious to have a little chat."

"Of course there is one factor you have failed to take into consideration" Barkov responded "You still have to get me out of here and into custody past my men downstairs and when I last looked there was one of you and about three dozen of them."

"I'll think on feet" the Commander responded "I'm quite creative on my feet you know, well at least that is what the wife tells me."

Outside the site in the street, Tracy had been listening into the radio whose channel the Commander had kept open meaning the entire conversation with Barkov was being re-laid back to her and the three van loads of heavily armed reinforcements who had now arrived. All they were needing was information on how many inside they were likely to be facing and now they had it.

"That's it!" Tracy declared as she tossed the radio headset back to Fuller who was now sat in the front of Cassini's van and monitoring developments as they happened "Gather around everyone" she called.

"There is one other thing you failed to overlook as well" Barkov responded as he produced a gun from beneath the desk "Mine is bigger than yours."

"Bugger...." the Commander responded with a grim expression "Just as things were going so nicely as well."

"Much as I would like to discuss the likely result of what may happen when a six shot revolver such as yours meets an AK47 such as mine" Barkov remarked "I think that instead I should take that antique of yours and then we shall go for a walk."

"Right..." the Commander reluctantly responded as he tossed the gun onto the table from where Barkov picked it up.

"Shall we?" Barkov got up and waved his weapon in the direction of the office door.

The Commander duly got up and as instructed headed for the exit with Barkov following closely behind. Outside the office door on the balcony walkway above the warehouse floor, the Commander looked down at the various members of Barkov's gang milling around below, some of whom looked up in some surprise to see their unexpected guest observing them from above.

"Down there" Barkov instructed as the Commander moved towards the far end of the walkway before heading down the steps where a large reception committee of armed men were waiting for him.

"Well this is a nice little gathering" the Commander remarked as he looked around "Anyone bring a pack of cards?"

"Would you show the Commander outside and deal with him please?" Barkov instructed one of his men whereupon with a nod of acknowledgement two of them proceeded to escort the Commander towards a side door and then outside into the pouring rain with Barkov following closely behind.

"Do you have any last requests comrade?" Barkov asked as the Commander had his hands tied behind his back and placed up against a wall facing them.

"Nothing that immediately springs to mind" the Commander responded hesitantly as Barkov's two men produced rifles and proceeded to take aim at him in the form of a rather short staffed firing squad "But give me half an hour and I might think of something."

"Then it is dosvidanja comrade" Barkov declared as he indicated to his men to take aim whereupon the Commander just shut his eyes and thought of Tracy.

He braced himself as a gunshot rang out and to the Commander it seemed like an eternity but was probably no more than a second before he realised he had not actually been shot.

Opening his eyes as a second shot rang out, the Commander was just in time to see the second gunman fall to the ground alongside his already dead colleague courtesy of the long distance sniper rifle of Commander Baker who was positioned on a building top some half a mile away.

Barkov himself was looking around in a panic as he realised that they were being invaded by the authorities before deciding to run for cover just as the main gate to the site came crashing down courtesy of the impact of a Security Service van.

Seeing the site being flooded with officers, the Commander whistled to try and attract someone's attention to his predicament whereupon Tracy emerged from amongst the throng and ran over to him.

"Evening love" the Commander greeted her "Fancy meeting you here."

"I was in the neighbourhood and thought I would drop by" Tracy responded wryly as she went behind her husband and cut the cord that was binding his wrists.

"Ah thank you" the Commander replied before kissing her on the cheek "Lets join the party shall we?"

By now the armed officers were pinned down behind whatever was available for cover as the dozen or so men in the warehouse offered plenty of armed resistance and it was behind an abandoned old van that Tracy and the Commander caught up with the rest of the officers.

"This is fun" the Commander remarked as numerous rounds struck the other side of the van, some passing through the tatty vehicle and narrowly missing them "Someone chuck me a gun please."

"Here you go Sir" one officer passed a semi-automatic hand gun and a spare clip to him.

"Ta very much" the Commander responded "What's the situation with this lot?"

"We are trying to keep them busy whilst two other teams head around the back and try to surround them" Tracy confirmed as she reached for her radio "Team's two and three, current position please?" she asked.

"Team two, we are just heading down the side now" came the first response "Team three in position now" the second team quickly followed.

"Move in as soon as you can" Tracy ordered "Give these buggers hell!"

"Roger that" came the confirmation as amid the din of the exchange of gunfire their came the sound of two doors being blown open somewhere around the back.

Quickly the dynamics of the encounter changed as the men inside the building realised they were being invaded from the rear now and found themselves forced to fight on at least two fronts.

"Move in!" Tracy declared like a General in full battle as she duly led the officers across the yard and to the main building with the Commander following closely behind her.

Reaching the main warehouse building in stages as they had to constantly duck for cover, the few of Barkov's men still offering resistance at the entrance were quickly overpowered or shot allowing them to enter the building where a scene that resembled a wild west bar brawl was in progress.

"Good grief!" the Commander commented as he ducked down behind a crate to avoid being shot before ducking back up and firing a swift reply to the originator.

"Seconded dear" Tracy agreed as she took aim and with a single shot sent another one of Barkov's men collapsing to the ground.

"Stick with this lot" the Commander instructed her as the fighting continued "I'm going after him" he indicated Barkov who was making a rapid exit up the steps to the office level "Give me some cover."

"Go!" Tracy called as she and three officers with her jumped up and commenced a series of rapid firing allowing the Commander to quickly skip across the warehouse floor to the steps and head up.

Half way up, the Commander was forced to shoot one of Barkov's men who met him coming down which sent him tumbling off and into a couple of his associates at ground level below, however as the Commander reloaded his gun upon reaching the top of the stairs, a large plank of wood was brought to bear on the back of his head which sent him collapsing to the floor.

"You know Mr Commander, Administrator General, whatever your title is" Barkov remarked as he looked down at the Commander sprawled on the floor in front of him "You are starting to annoy me."

"Yeah" the Commander groggily responded as he tried to get back to his feet "I tend to have that effect on people, usually politicians mind."

"Will you do me a favour" Barkov requested "Kindly die!"

"Not bloody likely comrade" the Commander responded as he quickly recovered and clambered back up on his feet before turning quickly around and punching Barkov in the stomach.

Realising he had his Russian opponent on the back foot, the Commander quickly followed his first hit with a second strike across the jaw which sent Barkov flying backwards through the doorway into the office, crashing into the desk.

"Get up!" the Commander ordered as he grabbed Barkov by the lapels and pulled him to his feet only for Barkov to return the favour and grab the Commander's shoulder whereupon they struggled to gain the upper hand.

It was Barkov who managed to get his strike in first this time as he threw the Commander through the office window where he landed on the balcony walkway outside with quite a thud.

With the Commander struggling to remain conscious on the floor, Barkov stepped out of the office, crunching his way through the broken glass whereupon seeing the Commander on the floor seemingly defeated, he tugged his forelock in a mock gesture of farewell before heading off down the walkway at quite a pace.

Reaching the end, Barkov looked back to confirm his opponent was still where he had left him and seeing this to be the case, casually removed a hand grenade from his coat

pocket, pulled the pin and then bowled it along the walkway before making a rapid exit into the chaotic throng of the battle down on the ground floor.

"What?" the Commander remarked in a semi-conscious state as he felt something run into his nose and lifted his head to look at the object. Quickly he came to his senses when he realised what that object was which caused him to return to his feet in double quick time, grab the grenade, sling it into the adjacent empty office before hurling himself over the balcony, landing rather hard on a pile of packing crates below.

The first anyone on the ground floor knew of the grenade's existence was when there was an explosion which blew out the windows and fittings of the office above sending debris all over the place including the Commander who was cowering for cover in amongst the packing crates he had just landed in.

"What the hell was that?" Tracy asked amid the dieing echoes of the explosion and breaking glass.

"A little parting gift from our Russian friend" the Commander wearily responded as he rolled off the packing crates and crashed to the ground alongside Tracy whilst around them the fighting resumed after its brief pause when everyone had stopped for the explosion.

"You're a mess love" Tracy commented as she helped her husband to his feet before resuming firing which resulted in another gunman being sent to the ground.

"I need a drink" the Commander remarked as he dusted himself down as best he could.

"It'll have to wait until later love" Tracy responded as she saw that the vast majority of the gunmen had now been either disabled, arrested or restrained and many of them were now being led out of the building.

"Anyone not with a detainee follow me" Tracy called as she rounded up available officers and proceeded on a search of the rest of the building "And you" she turned back to her husband who was about to follow them in "Get yourself to an ambulance now dear."

"Yes dear" the Commander quickly surrendered to his wife's orders and retreated out of the building where he was met in the yard outside by Sir Richard.

"You look like hell" Sir Richard remarked as he conducted the Commander to an ambulance parked in the street outside where two paramedics began to check him over.

"Where the hell is Barkov?" the Commander asked, his thoughts still firmly on his duty despite the best efforts of the paramedics to try and get him to relax.

"Don't worry about him" Sir Richard reassured him "It's taken care of."

Scuttling down the back alleyways which ran like a rabbit warren through the industrial estate, Barkov was making a very rapid exit and just had to hope that where he was running to in the semi-darkness was devoid of any sign of the authorities.

The distant sounds of a dog barking caused him to pause in the shadow of an old building and look around nervously for a few moments but all that he heard was a near silence, only the sound of his own breathing and the distant roar of an aircraft taking off from Heathrow some miles away were audible.

Resuming his escape, Barkov continued to dart along the darkened alleyways until he came out in a semi derelict side street which looked like it had been wrecked in the war and little had been done to it since.

Looking around and seeing it appeared to be clear, he walked slowly down the side street towards the main road in the distance. As he reached the junction Barkov looked up and down the road and was surprised to see a night bus approaching the stop nearby.

Realising this was an opportunity to make good his escape, he retrieved the Commander's warrant card from his pocket and signalled to the bus as he jogged to the stop. With the bus coming to a halt and the door opening, Barkov boarded and discretely passed the warrant card across the Oyster Card reader and then passed into the back of the bus to take a seat.

"Well that's clever" Fuller remarked as an indicator bleeped on his laptop before he got out of the van and went over to the nearby ambulance where the Commander was still being bandaged back together with Tracy now back with him, holding his hand for comfort.

"Sir!" Fuller called as he came running over, hunching his back to try and protect the laptop computer he was carrying from getting wet with the rain that was still drizzling down.

"This has better be good" the Commander responded.

"Oh it is" Fuller confirmed "According to the central computer, you just got on a eastbound night bus service about a mile and half south of here, or rather your combined warrant and Oyster card just did."

"Now that is interesting" the Commander agreed as he patted the pockets of his uniform tunic only to realise his warrant card had vanished at some point during the events of the last few hours "Barkov!" he exclaimed.

Tracy duly reacted by calling the armed support team nearby who were just getting back into their van with thoughts of going home for the night with a shrill whistle "Get over here!" she called.

"Something wrong Maam?" the head of the team asked as he and his officers came jogging over to the ambulance.

"Probable target heading east on a bus approaching..... err where?" Tracy turned to Fuller who was now using the back of the ambulance to shelter against the elements.

"Heading down towards Swiss Cottage by the looks of it" Fuller confirmed
"Metroline operated TPL class Trident double deck."

"Go get him" Tracy ordered.

"I'll come with you" Sir Richard added as he joined the armed support team as they loaded themselves back into their van and within moments amid a wail of sirens and blue flashing lights, they were roaring off.

Barkov sat back in the rear seat on the lower deck of the bus as it continued on its fairly quiet late night journey, just a few passengers were travelling at that time of night with anyone who would have been out on casual journeys having been put off by the awful weather which was now heading back towards incessant heavy rain again which tapped against the window glass.

Checking his rather old but reliable East German made watch, a classic relic from the Cold War era, Barkov noted the time as approaching eleven thirty when the familiar illuminated blue and red roundel signage of an Underground Station appeared on the road ahead.

Quickly sensing an opportunity to speed his exit from the situation by a change of mode of transport, Barkov leaned forward and pressed the bell button to signal he wanted to alight at the next stop.

As the bus sloshed through the collecting rain water and came to a stop by the bus shelter, the middle doors opened allowing Barkov to alight discreetly. With the doors closing behind him and the bus quickly pulling away, he pulled in the lapels of his overcoat in tighter around him before making the short but soggy walk to the north entrance of Swiss Cottage Underground Station.

Taking advantage of the shelter to shake down his overcoat of the surplus rain water, Barkov didn't even register that the station was unusually busy for this time on a wet mid week late evening as he headed for the ticket barriers.

As he discreetly swiped the stolen card over the round yellow reader Barkov naturally expected the barriers to open automatically as he stepped forward only for his progress to come to an abrupt halt when the barrier beeped and the small illuminated 'Seek Assistance' sign lit up.

"Huh?" Barkov commented as he took a step back to look at the barriers.

"Seek assistance" a voice suddenly announced causing Barkov to swivel around to see the Commander and over twenty armed officers all standing in the ticket hall and all pointing their weapons directly at him.

"Can I help you officers?" Barkov asked.

"You could try resisting arrest" the Commander suggested with a wry smile "I'll settle for your unconditional surrender however as I don't want to damage the décor."

Reluctantly Barkov surrendered whereupon two heavily built officers duly grabbed him by the arms and thoroughly searched him before leading him away with the Commander duly following although he was clearly hobbling a bit following injuries suffered during earlier events.

Outside in the pouring rain, an unmarked anonymous black van was waiting patiently by the station entrance and as Barkov was brought to it the side door opened and two trench coat dressed men duly got out, took Barkov from the two officers and bundled him inside.

"Thank you" the passenger in the front seat of the van called in a broad Russian accent to the Commander as the back of the van was firmly closed with Barkov safely ensconced inside.

"You're welcome comrade" the Commander confirmed "Just make sure he never darkens the shores of this country ever again."

"It's a deal" Dimitri, the Russian friend of Sir Richard confirmed "A pleasure doing business with you Commander."

With that the van pulled away into the night for a destination unknown but guaranteed to be extremely uncomfortable for its unwilling occupant which made the Commander smile with satisfaction.

"Can we go home now?" the Commander asked Tracy as he joined her back in the safe shelter of the ticket hall entrance away from the heavy rain.

"If only" Tracy responded regretfully as she and the Commander hugged each other "Small matter of a certain Mr Renquist to nail down."

"There's always something" the Commander responded with a deep sigh "I think I'll take the day off tomorrow."

"Sorry" Sir Richard announced "You and I are supposed to be in the Commons Security Committee meeting tomorrow morning at nine."

"I appreciate you are an old friend and all" the Commander wryly responded "but would you please stop trying to cheer me up?"

"How about I tell you where to find Renquist then?" Sir Richard asked.

"That will do nicely" the Commander agreed "Where is the scumbag?"

"Scheduled to board one of our special witness relocation flights out of Duxford in about" Sir Richard consulted his watch "fifty minutes."

"What's the fastest way we can get there?" the Commander asked around.

"Well even if I drive you at my less than modest speeds" Tracy responded "You would be looking at the thick end of an hour and a half I would have thought."

"All right" the Commander responded extremely reluctantly "Looks like I have no other choice..."

"What time is our flight?" Renquist asked as he got back in the car alongside his aide and passed him a bottle of beer and some chocolate before closing the door.

"Oh cheers boss" the aide responded "Should be wheels up at half midnight."

"Excellent" Renquist responded as he opened his own bottle of beer and took a swig "Lets roll shall we?" he called up to the driver.

In amidst ongoing torrential rain and the rumble of approaching thunder, the black Mercedes saloon with darkened windows pulled out of the service station and back out onto the main road.

"Has anyone got a handkerchief?" Tracy asked the helicopter pilot from the back seat of the Security Service helicopter.

"Why?" the pilot asked back.

"Because my husband just threw up all over my trousers!" Tracy explained.

"Sorry love" the Commander responded as the turbulent air being thrown up by the stormy weather caused the helicopter to pitch and roll like a rowing boat on a rough sea. He never had a good flying stomach being a firm and established land lover and the rough ride just added to his discomfort.

"Should be there in about one minute" the pilot announced much to the Commander's relief.

"Land away from the area where this plane is likely to be" Tracy instructed as the helicopter began its descent towards the illuminated hard surface of the Duxford airfield. A few moments later there was a gentle thud as the helicopter touched the ground before the rotors began to wind down.

As Tracy helped the Commander out of the back of the helicopter, they were met on the concrete by one lone officer from the local office who pulled up in his very small patrol car.

"Lieutenant Ian Gordon" the officer introduced himself "Cambridge office."

"I do hope" the Commander remarked as he greeted the slightly bemused and tired looking Gordon "You are the advance guard and that there are more on the way?"

"Err not exactly" Gordon responded "We have a rock concert and two local derby football matches on this evening so you could say we are a bit stretched Sir."

"Given my run of luck in the last couple of days" the Commander admitted with a wry grin "I am somehow not in the least bit surprised."

"Where is this plane?" Tracy asked as she looked around where apart from an old Dakota DC-3 which formed part of the adjacent military aviation museum, there appeared to be little around.

"The company uses the hangar over on the far side" Gordon indicated over in the distance where lights could be seen coming from behind the silhouette of the various buildings on the site.

"Come on" the Commander motioned whereupon all four officers headed off in the direction indicated.

A few minutes later all four of them were looking around the corner of the main hanger at the scene where the large Trident type aircraft was being wheeled out by a tug.

"If you will excuse me" Baker responded "I'll go and find a nice perch."

"Stay in touch" the Commander advised.

"Will do" Baker confirmed as she gathered her rifle case under her arm and departed.

"This could be our man" Tracy remarked as a dark coloured Mercedes saloon came into view, sloshing through the rain water that was pooling everywhere even though the rain itself had stopped some minutes earlier.

A short distance away, Commander Baker had reached the old control tower and was climbing up the external ladder to the roof when she looked back and also saw the car arriving, pulling in just below the aircraft fuselage.

"I have a shot from up here" Baker confirmed over the radio as she reached the roof and scanned the area through her rifle sights "Do you want me to take it?"

"Not yet" the Commander confirmed quietly only to be interrupted by a garbled message from the radio which was as inaudible as it was useless.

"What was that supposed to be?" Tracy asked.

"Heaven only knows" the Commander responded as they observed Renquist and his aide alight from the car and proceed towards the aircraft where a set of steps had been brought up to the main cabin door.

"I wish the cavalry would hurry up" Tracy remarked.

"Looks like we may have to do this the old fashioned way" the Commander grimly admitted "Did you bring anything to this party lad?" he asked Gordon.

"Just the service issue shotgun and my semi automatic Sir" Gordon confirmed "Being a rural officer means I get a bit more firepower than you City types."

"Just try not to blow up the plane though" Tracy advised.

"Right" the Commander announced seeing that Renquist and his aide were now out of sight having boarded the aircraft, "Lets go."

Skipping quickly across the tarmac surface, the officers reached the back of the aircraft whose engines were still silent as the crew on board were taking their time with the pre flight checks.

"Great" the Commander remarked "More aircraft."

Once again there was a garbled mess announced from the radio which was utterly unintelligible and to which the officers paid no mind, entirely unaware that it was a warning being broadcast about the imminent arrival of unexpected guests.

"What the hell is this?" Tracy asked as the roaring of an approaching vehicle engine preceded the arrival of a battered black cab which proceeded directly to the aircraft and stopped right by the bottom of the access steps.

Before any of them could come up with an answer, it was provided for them as no sooner had the van come to an abrupt halt than its apparent sole occupant, Barkov leapt out of the driver's seat, obviously bloodied and bruised, gathered a gun and proceeded directly to the aircraft steps.

"Who let him out?" the Commander asked in astonishment.

"I am willing to bet that was what the garbled messages were about" Tracy remarked.

"Stay here and make sure no one escapes" the Commander ordered Gordon "Tracy love, you are with me."

With guns drawn and ducking down for cover, Tracy and the Commander headed quickly along the line of the aircraft fuselage before ascending the steps and proceeding with caution into the aircraft.

As they entered the main cabin a gun shot rang out causing the two officers to stop in their tracks before the Commander peered through a gap in the curtains that stood between them and the entrance to the main cabin.

There he saw Renquist's aide collapsed on the floor, blood flowing quite freely from a gunshot wound in his chest. The source of this shot was soon apparent when the

Commander looked around the corner to see Barkov with Renquist firmly in his grip by the lapels and the barrel of his gun pressed up into his jaw.

"You owe me a lot of money!" Barkov demanded, the unique foreboding and determined nature of an angry Russian who had been betrayed on full flow.

"I can assure you Sir" Renquist responded in as best an impression of his usual business like and polite manner as it was possible to do under the circumstances "Any financial reparation owed will be paid in full."

"In other words" the Commander announced as he entered the cabin with Tracy, guns drawn "You stand to get everything you deserve."

"Stay back!" Barkov demanded, rapidly alternating the aim of his gun between Renquist and the Commander "This is between him and me."

"Me and him" the Commander corrected the grammar casually.

"Now" Barkov returned to Renquist "Where is my money!!"

"He's pissed" Tracy remarked wryly.

"That he is" the Commander agreed "I'll tell you what" he addressed the two combatants "You two work something out between you and we'll go and have a cup of tea while we wait."

"Don't even think of leaving us" Barkov responded, re-aiming the gun back at Tracy and the Commander as if to emphasise his point. However this move proved to be a mistake as Renquist made a grab for the gun and leapt on Barkov, knocking him to the cabin floor where they proceeded to fight.

The Commander leapt forward to intervene but just as he reached them a muffled gun shot interrupted the proceedings whereupon both of the men on the floor seemingly froze as if time had been paused for a few moments.

Then gradually they moved again, Renquist slowly rolling over onto his back revealing a large amount of blood soaking through his shirt, revealing it was he who was the unlucky one in this encounter.

"So how do you want to play this then?" Barkov asked as he stood up and faced Tracy and the Commander with his gun aggressively pointed towards them.

"I'd say we have ourselves a bit of a standoff" the Commander remarked "Perhaps we should discuss this outside?"

"Move towards the door" Barkov motioned, an instruction which the Commander duly followed as he had no wish to start a fire fight that would probably see Tracy being shot.

"Come on dear" the Commander called to Tracy who was resolutely standing her ground and refusing to budge.

"I'm not going anywhere" Tracy responded "He needs medical help" she indicated Renquist who was still alive on the floor but obviously fighting off imminent death.

"All right" Barkov conceded "Stay here with him but first your weapon please."

Tracy duly surrendered her weapon by tossing it to Barkov before going over to Renquist and assessing his rapidly deteriorating condition.

"Out!" Barkov ordered the Commander who duly followed the instruction and exited the cabin of the aircraft, stepping out into the incessant rain outside which made visibility across the vast seemingly deserted dark airfield almost impossible.

"Down the steps" Barkov shoved the Commander forwards.

"You know that the cavalry are on the way don't you?" the Commander warned Barkov.

"How many?" Barkov defiantly asked as they reached the bottom of the steps.

"Err all of them I hope" the Commander admitted hopefully "Of course I could just play my ace card. Do you play poker at all?"

"Of course" Barkov responded.

"Of course the secret is never to reveal your hand until the opportune time" the Commander explained as he looked up at the top of the nearby hangar building.

High above them, Commander Baker duly took the cue and aimed her rifle sights at Barkov, within moments, two shots rang out, striking the Russian in either leg and sending him spiralling to the ground.

"I think you will find that is a full house aces and kings" the Commander remarked with a satisfied smile as Officer Gordon ran over and handcuffed the injured Barkov.

"Don't go away" the Commander responded as he turned back to the aircraft and headed back up the steps and into the cabin where he found Tracy administering as best a first aid as she could to the dying Renquist.

"How's it looking?" the Commander asked as he bent down and joined them but avoided looking too closely at the extensive blood that was flowing all over the place.

"It would appear" Renquist admitted "My tenure here is at an end."

"It's only a matter of time now" Tracy admitted.

"Before I shed off this mortal coil Commander" Renquist responded "I'd like to offer something by way of redemption.

"Oh really?" the Commander responded with a raised eyebrow of surprise and intrigue.

"As you know when we first met" Renquist explained as he got weaker by the second "I pulled every file I could find on you and yet there was one I could not find. No name for it or where it is stored, just a number, 9906753."

"9906753" the Commander repeated as he noted it down "Do you know what is in it?"

"No" Renquist responded between coughing fits that were growing worse as the last moments of his life trickled by "But there were enough clues and hints spread across the place to suggest that it is something you should find one day and read carefully. I believe you will find it quite enlightening."

"Thank you" the Commander responded.

"You're welcome" Renquist replied now barely a whisper for a voice "Least I could do..." he added as he finally surrendered to the seriousness of his wounds and slipped away.

Tracy laid Renquist's head carefully back on the floor of the cabin and closed his eyelids in respect as the Commander looked on.

"Fascinating chap" Tracy remarked.

"Indeed" the Commander agreed as he helped Tracy to her feet and together they proceeded out of the cabin of the aircraft.

Stepping outside onto the top of the aircraft steps, they discovered that the rain had now become a torrential downpour that was falling with such a roar that the approach of numerous emergency service vehicles was barely noticeable.

"Come on" the Commander urged as he and Tracy skipped down the steps and ran across the tarmac to the nearby aircraft hanger. Inside they found Gordon with the now firmly arrested Barkov and two paramedics who had just arrived.

Joining them was Sir Richard along with his colleague from the Russian consulate who raised an eyebrow when he saw what state Barkov was in.

"So how come we got this unexpected party crasher then?" the Commander asked.

"Broke free in the back of the van according to my Soviet friend here" Sir Richard explained "The rest you know."

"Is he fit to travel?" the Commander asked the paramedics.

"Well he won't be walking anywhere anytime soon" the lead paramedic confirmed as she stood up "however he can go wherever you want him too within reason."

"Lieutenant Gordon" the Commander turned to the young officer "Round up as many heavily armed officers as you can find and put a ring of guns around our Russian barm pot here and take him away."

"Yes Sir" Gordon confirmed before departing the hangar to arrange Barkov's transport.

"Dimitri" the Commander addressed Sir Richard's colleague "Consider the signing of the extradition paperwork as read if you promise to have this scum bag out of my city within the hour and out of my country before the sun is up."

"Consider it done with the usual old fashioned Russian efficiency" Dimitri confirmed.

"Dosvidanja comrade" the Commander bid farewell to Barkov as he and Tracy turned to depart arm in arm.

"We shall be meeting again" Barkov promised "You have my word on it."

"Do you think he means it?" Tracy asked as they reached the door of the hangar and paused, surveying the awful weather just outside.

"Probably" the Commander confirmed "However it's going to be a fair while before he will have had his fill of enforced Bolshevik hospitality courtesy of our FSB friends."

"Let's go home" Tracy suggested.

"Good idea" the Commander agreed.

"Lima Alpha One" the Commander's radio sparked into life with the voice of Commander Baker.

"Now what?" Tracy wondered.

"Oh hell..." the Commander realised as he looked up at the rain and realised what the call was probably about.

"Can I come down now?" Commander Baker asked from her position still lying on the adjacent roof looking down on the scene below, "I'm soaking wet!"

"Sorry" the Commander admitted "I forgot you were up there...."

"Do you think we have enough doughnuts?" Jennifer asked Fuller as she laid the table of food out for their house warming.

"Plenty" Fuller confirmed as he put a plate of sausage rolls on the table.

"Well we do have the Commander coming in a minute" Jennifer commented.

"Ah..."

"When was the last time we went to a party together?" the Commander asked as he and Tracy crossed the road from the bus stop and headed down the side street towards where Jennifer and Fuller's new house was located.

"Can't remember" Tracy responded "Short of the Divisional Commander's annual conference dinner last year, I have to admit love, I'm stumped."

"Good evening" Sir Richard Crowthorne greeted the couple as he joined them from his car.

"Evening old friend" the Commander responded "I see you came prepared" he nodded towards the bottle Sir Richard was carrying under his arm.

"One of my colleagues busted a whole gang of smugglers down at Dover yesterday and netted a couple of container loads of some of this stuff" Sir Richard explained as he showed them the bottle.

"Ah, the good stuff" the Commander remarked "I suppose that means everyone in the Secret Service is getting finest Scotch for their Christmas bonus this year then?"

"Well it saves on the budget" Sir Richard commented as the three of them turned into the side street and arrived at their destination whereupon the Commander reached for the door bell pull handle which after initially starting to ring, came off in his hand.

"I had a feeling it might be you Sir" Fuller remarked as he opened the door and saw the Commander looking down at the bell handle in his hand with a slightly embarrassed look.

"Sorry about that" the Commander apologised.

"Perhaps this will be of some compensation" Sir Richard suggested as they came inside and he passed the bottle of Scotch to Fuller.

"Thank you" Fuller responded as he shut the door and another section of plaster descended from the ceiling "I see that the Dover seizure stock is starting to filter into circulation."

"Oh hello!" Jennifer greeted them as she arrived in the hall from the kitchen "Go on through to the front room but stay to the left as some of the floorboards are a bit dodgy."

"Oh I believe this is yours my dear" the Commander passed Jennifer the bell handle sheepishly as he passed.

"Thanks" Jennifer responded with a grimace.

"You will be delighted to hear" Sir Richard confirmed to the Commander as they contemplated the doughnuts "that our Russian friend with the double limp is now well on his way to some dark long forgotten corner of old mother Russia."

"I still have this sneaking suspicion he will be back though" the Commander responded "Either him or one of his relatives. they always have relatives."

"Speaking of relatives" Sir Richard remarked "Where is Garforth?"

"Left earlier this morning on a plane to Canada" the Commander explained "He's got a private consultancy job on with our opposite numbers over there."

"That probably means the lucky sod is earning more than you or I combined" Sir Richard responded "Funny old world isn't it?"

"That it is" Tracy agreed as she joined them and looked on not in the least bit surprised that the Commander had decided to avoid the celery and other healthy stuff on offer and go straight to the cakes and doughnuts.

"Err Dickie" the Commander asked Sir Richard "Could I have a word somewhere quiet?"

"Try what we laughably call the patio" Fuller suggested as he handed them both a glass "Through them doors."

"Thanks" the Commander responded as he and Sir Richard made their way outside.

"Damm funniest patio I have ever seen" Sir Richard commented as he looked down at the set of six rather uneven paving slabs with their view of the nearby gasworks which was pretty much the entire external accommodation of the property.

"Before Renquist passed on to the great filing cabinet collection in the sky, he gave me a file number which he was unable to access that according to him may be of interest to me" the Commander explained what was on his mind in a business like manner whilst at the same time keeping a firm look on Sir Richard's expression.

"He could have been lying" Sir Richard tried to dismiss this enquiry as he had a feeling he knew where it was leading.

"I don't think so somehow" the Commander responded "I have a nose for these things."

"I noticed" Sir Richard responded "Did he give you a file number?"

"9906753" the Commander responded as he consulted his notebook but still keeping a close eye on Sir Richard's expression "Now I know ones beginning with a nine are usually special operations and the like so I wondered if it was one of yours?"

"Two nines are usually highly classified ones" Sir Richard responded "But its not one of mine though, never heard of it."

"Just thought I'd ask" the Commander remarked "You never know, it's worth a try."

"Of course" Sir Richard responded "I think I will go and recharge my glass, how about you?"

"Oh I'm fine thanks" the Commander responded before Sir Richard left, heading back inside and passing Tracy who came outside and joined her husband, looking back as the door was closed behind her.

"He's lying" Tracy remarked, admitting that she had been listening in on the entire conversation from the shadow of the doorway.

"I know" the Commander responded as he put his arms around her "The classic uncomfortable evasive expression carefully hidden was writ large the moment I mentioned that double nine series file number."

"Why do I get the feeling you are not going to let this go love?" Tracy asked.

"Oh I'll just put it to one side as a little pet project" the Commander responded "But I *will* get to the bottom of this little mystery."

"Can we have at least have a quiet week of normality first?" Tracy asked "It would be nice not to be shot at for a while."

"I'll see what I can do my dear" the Commander responded reassuringly.

To Be Continued.....

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